

Skills and Training Services (STS)

Local Operating Procedure

Learner Support Policy

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Introduction

The term “learner,” within this policy, is used to describe all learners and apprentices involved with Skills and Training Services, this also includes those learners enrolled with subcontractors.

Skills and Training Services believes that all programmes of study must be accessible to all learners. Where learners have additional support needs, Skills and Training Services will ensure that the learner is fully supported and adjustments are implemented so as not to disadvantage them, giving them the same opportunities as all other learners.

This policy must be read in conjunction with the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy.

Skills and Training Services Commitments

Skills and Training Services will:

- monitor the flexibility of programmes to ensure that learners with any type of need are not excluded unnecessarily.
 - review teaching styles and practices to ensure that provision is accessible and that reasonable adjustments are built in to anticipate support needs.
 - ensure that recruitment, assessment, and examination arrangements are flexible to the needs of learners and anticipate the need for adjustments.
 - encourage learners to disclose any additional needs and/or learning differences whilst maintaining confidentiality to the level requested by the learner, wherever possible.
 - ensure that learners complete a full and thorough enrolment/induction to identify any support needs and individualise the learning plan to meet the learners needs.
 - ensure all staff receive training on their responsibilities around learner support needs.
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Learner Entitlements

All learners are entitled to study and progress in an environment where they can expect the following:

- to be fully respected and feel welcomed.
- to be treated fairly.
- have equality of opportunity for learning and training.
- to be free from threat, oppression, abuse, bullying and harassment.
- to be able to raise concerns with any member of staff and be confident concerns will be dealt with promptly and fairly.
- have full access, wherever possible, to the range of facilities and services and feel confident that action will be taken to readdress any perceived discrimination.
- to have access to specialist/one to one support (where possible).
- to be offered extra workshops and /or drop-in sessions.
- to be offered special arrangements for exams (where applicable).
- to receive regular progress review meetings (frequency depends on contract requirements and needs of the learner), which provides the opportunity to discuss and resolve any barriers to learning and identify any additional learning support needs.

Skills and Training Services will ensure all learners are supported and have a zero-tolerance stance against any form of discrimination. Where learners have any concerns, this can be raised through the processes outlined in the Complaints and Appeals Policy.

During the enrolment/induction stage of the programme all learners are required to complete the following, which will enable Skills and Training Services to individualise the learners learning plan to meet their needs:

- detailed discussion with delivery team representative regarding career aspirations, learning aspirations and any barriers to learning
- complete a medical questionnaire where the learner will have the opportunity to declare and detail any disability, medical condition, or additional learning need
- discuss any learning difficulties or impairment and any strategies the learner has in place already to manage these in a learning environment, and discuss any additional support needs they may have.
- complete initial assessments in Maths, English and Digital IT (where appropriate)
- complete diagnostics in Maths, English and Digital IT (where appropriate)
- complete a skills scan relating to the programme of study

At any point within the learner's programme, they can be referred for additional learning support, this can come in various forms including reasonable adjustments or special considerations. It is important to recognise that reasonable adjustments are not always required as the learner has already adapted and has their own coping strategies that work for them.

The aim of providing the additional learning support is to provide the learners with the tools for them to be able to self-manage and become independent, confident, ambitious, and resilient learners in the future.

Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations

Reasonable adjustments can be put in place to reduce the effect of a learning difference that places the learner at a substantial disadvantage to other learners. Reasonable adjustments can include:

- changing usual assessment arrangements
- adapting assessment materials
- providing assistance during assessment
- re-organising the assessment physical environment
- changing or adapting the assessment method
- using assistive technology

When reasonable adjustments are put in place they must not:

- affect the validity or reliability of any assessment
- influence the outcome of an assessment
- give the learner an unfair advantage

Any reasonable adjustments must be approved by the Programme Lead and put in place before the assessment takes place. To gain this approval, the Learner Support – Assessment Form must be completed and sent to the Programme Lead, as well as a copy being stored on the management information system (MIS). The Programme Lead will approve, or otherwise, and inform the delivery team of the decision prior to assessments taking place.

Reasonable adjustments may also fall in scope for Additional Learner Support funding to be claimed. Please see the section further on in this policy.

Special considerations can be put in place to ensure that learners who were not able to fully demonstrate their abilities at the time of an assessment, due to extenuating circumstances, illness,

or injury. Special considerations are implemented so as not to place the learner at a disadvantage compared to other learners whose performance had not been compromised. All special considerations will be time bound.

Special considerations are separate to reasonable adjustments and must not be used for permanent impairment or learning difference. Special considerations are a post-assessment adjustment, rather than pre-assessment. All special considerations must be initially sent to the Programme Lead by completing the Special Considerations Form, who may also need to gain approval from the awarding body before final approval takes place. The Programme Lead must ensure that the awarding body policies are followed when considering special considerations.

Additional Learning Support Funding

Note: claiming additional learning support payments is not available on all contracts. Please refer to the contracts individual funding rules for regulations.

There is additional funding available that Skills and Training Services can claim to provide the additional support and reasonable adjustments learners require to achieve their programme.

This funding must only be used where the learner meets the following definition:

“The person has significant greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of the same age or the person has a disability which either prevents or hinders the person from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided”.

Additional Learning Support cannot be claimed in the following situations:

- learner having a lot to learn, for example they are new to industry or a low level of existing knowledge, without an impairment or learning difference
- learner is busy at work and other environmental factors
- learner is falling behind in their work
- issues that are not related to needs that have been identified by the learner

To claim Additional Learning Support, the following must be in place:

- learners must take a screening exercise/assessment to determine the reason for the additional funding being claimed.
- where the screening exercise/assessment identifies a learning difference present then further assessments must be taken to demonstrate that without the additional support the learner will not be able to achieve their programme.
- the Learner Support – Assessment Form must be completed and sent to the Programme Lead for approval. A copy will also be stored on the management information system (MIS).
- the Learner Support – Assessment Form must clearly document the following:
 - identify whether a learning difference exists.
 - defines the difficulties faced and how these impact on participation in learning whilst on programme.
 - explains the impact the identified learning difference has on the learners learning.
 - explains the consequences if the additional learning support is not put in place, for example they will be unable to achieve the programme. This must be clearly documented in relation to their need and no other factors.
 - must ensure that assumptions are not in place, for example the learner thinks they have a learning difficulty, without it being clinically diagnosed.
 - include a learner signature and declaration.
 - include the approval, or otherwise, from the Programme Lead.

Self-declarations from learners are not compliant, so this alone will not be sufficient to claim the additional learning support funding.

Where additional learning support funding has been approved by the Programme Lead, then a support plan must be put in place. This must be signed by the learner, employer (permission must be obtained from the learner first, however without this signature from the employer the additional funding would not be claimable), and delivery team representative as appropriate. The support plan must be in place prior to the additional support funding being claimed, it must be individualised to the learner, as well as being user friendly (it will be used as a live document and will be updated accordingly) and must include:

- a month-by-month breakdown of the support that is planned to be provided, for the duration of the additional learning support funding claim
- a clear description of the additional learning support that will be provided, this can include:
 - additional staff/specialist support
 - extended or more frequent sessions
 - specialist resources
 - additional time during exams
- a clear demonstration of how the additional costs have occurred (as above)
- details of the additional content, methods, techniques required each month (where required)
- details of the additional resources to be used in the interventions (where required)
- details of the named individuals/organisations who are delivering the additional interventions
- a clear record of achievable milestones

A copy of the support plan must be stored on the management information system (MIS) and discussed within progress reviews (minimum of every 12 weeks or more frequent as required).

At each intervention of additional learning support documented evidence must be in place. This must be documented on the Additional Learning Support – Activity Record. This must be signed by the learner and the delivery staff representative delivering the intervention. A copy of the activity record must also be stored on the management information system (MIS) and discussed within progress reviews (minimum of every 12 weeks or more frequent as required).

The Additional Learning Support – Activity Record must clearly document the following:

- the date of the support taking place
- details of the support provided, including the method of delivery
- details of the additional time, resources, specialist support provided
- details of the staff involved in the support
- a clear description of the outcome of the session and the impact this is having on the learner, in terms of ability to complete the programme
- an evaluation of the learners needs and whether the additional support funding is still required to be claimed:
 - Is the additional support still **necessary**: without the support will result in a negative impact on the learner to complete the programme. At times, the support may have been claimed against a certain element of the course, so once this element has been achieved then the additional learning support funding claim must be stopped.
 - Is the additional support still **appropriate**: is the support being provided appropriate and effective i.e., are they on track, if not needs to be reviewed.

Additional learning support funding claims must stop once the interventions are no longer required and when no support has been provided in the given month. Evidence of the Additional Learning Support – Activity Record must be in place for every month the funding is being claimed.

Dyslexia Support for Learners

Additional support options are available to learners with dyslexia which include:

- automatic one-week extensions for assignments
 - materials and handouts on coloured paper available ahead of taught sessions
 - considerate marking guidelines for assessment tasks – see Appendix 1
 - alternative assessments arrangements (where appropriate)
 - access to loans (a formal diagnostic assessment would be required) for specific support, such as IT, for example, voice recorders
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Fit-to-Sit Policy

Serco STS implements a 'fit-to-sit' policy. This means that if a learner sits/submits an assessment they are declaring, through the submission process, that they are fit to do so. If a learner considers that their personal circumstances are seriously affecting their ability to prepare for or sit an assessment, they should not take the assessment and should submit an extension or deferral claim.

Learners who submit assessments or sit an examination/test cannot later claim that their performance was affected by extenuating circumstances unless there is strong, independent medical evidence that establishes that the student was incapable of determining whether or not they were fit to undertake the assessment.

If a learner has been granted an extension or deferral for an assessment, they should not submit or sit that assessment. If the learner chooses to submit or sit the assessment, this will normally be taken as a declaration that they consider themselves fit to do so. In these circumstances any extension or deferral will be made void and no additional attempt at the assessment will be provided outside of the normal resit and retake provision.

The policy does not apply where a learner sits an examination, test or practical element but becomes ill during the course of that examination, test or practical element. Where this occurs, the learner should inform the invigilator, leave the exam room and submit an extension or deferral claim. The exam will not be marked, and feedback will not be given.

Appendix 1: Dyslexia – Considerate Marking

Difficulties with the accuracy of grammar, spelling and punctuation are related to the impairments associated with dyslexia and place the learner at a substantial disadvantage. Guidelines for considerate marking for learners with dyslexia are conducive to offering these learners' equality of opportunity.

This guidance is not intended to deliver favourable treatment to learners with dyslexia in comparison to their non-dyslexic peers, but its purpose is to offer a reasonable adjustment to assessment procedures to take account of the reality of their disability. The rationale for the introduction of this guidance is to maintain equality of opportunity for learners with dyslexia in respect to the assessment of assignments.

It is the responsibility of the learner to inform the Skills and Training Services delivery team that they have dyslexia at the start of the programme or at any time throughout the programme. This will be reflected within the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data stored within the management information system (MIS), if this has been consented by the learner to do so. This data will enable all delivery staff and management (as required) to identify the learners with Dyslexia.

The learner can state, at the top of each assignment submitted, that the considerate marking principles should be applied. The note will state, '**Please refer to the Dyslexia Guidelines when marking this work.**'

Confidentiality

It is the responsibility of the person receiving the information from a learner, under Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act, to act upon the knowledge of the learner's needs. This information can only be shared with tutors, facilitators, and coaches if the learner gives permission for this to happen. If the learner objects to the sharing of this information, they should be asked for a statement in writing, including a signature, for the legal protection of staff. It will then be permissible to treat the information in confidence.

The fact that a learner has dyslexia must not be revealed to any other learner, assessor, or facilitator. Nor should facts about special provision for the learner be mentioned in any situation where other learners are present (for example, informing a learner with dyslexia during a WebEx that s/he can have extra time to complete a submission), as this will effectively reveal the special needs to others.

Always inform and wherever possible, involve the learner with any discussions staff have about support and provision and inform the learner when this will happen and confirm that they agree with it. If the learner is not in agreement, then confidentiality can only be broken if a health and safety issue is at stake. Where circumstances allow, it may be appropriate to discuss the issue without revealing the learner's identity.

Common Errors Related to Dyslexia

Although the primary aim of these guidelines is to avoid penalising learners for mistakes made with spelling, punctuation and grammar, other dyslexia-related errors can also impair the quality of a learner's written work. Some of the main difficulties are presented below:

- Spelling errors are often evident and may include:
 - erratic and inconsistent spelling where words can be spelt in several ways in the same document.
 - inappropriate use of phonetic spelling choices (eny/any, ordeance/audience).

- misuse of spell check facility leading to incorrectly selected words (sublimely perception instead of subliminal perception).
- misspelling proper names such as the names of researchers.
- telescoping polysyllabic words (rembered/remembered).
- misuse of homophones (to/too) and letter reversals (dose/does).
- Punctuation and grammatical mistakes can be present in written work and may include:
 - misuse or omission of punctuation marks.
 - failure to identify sentence boundaries with overuse of conjunctions.
 - short, unsophisticated sentences lacking in complexity, and inappropriate grammatical constructions.
- General presentation skills may be poor even when submitting work electronically.
- There may be difficulties in expressing ideas in a conventional academic style of writing and written constructions may be unsophisticated.
- Learners with dyslexia may digress from the assignment topic by either including information that is irrelevant or expanding unnecessarily on points of minor importance. Sometimes unusual links between topics are made that reflect a learner's lateral and creative thinking skills but do not meet the learning outcomes. Even though it will not be possible to award marks for such digressions, it can be supportive to acknowledge the learner's research attempts when providing written feedback.
- Written work can lack structure at the level of both sentences and paragraphs leading to a repetition of information in various parts of the work and a failure to develop a sustained and detailed discussion.
- A learner with dyslexia may find it difficult to express their ideas in a conventional academic written format and may find it difficult to attain the recommended word limit.
- Learners with dyslexia often spend more time on assignment production than their non-dyslexic peers, but this effort is not always reflected in their assignment response. Sometimes there may be a marked difference between the learner's abilities as demonstrated in oral discussions and that indicated by written expression.
- Learners with dyslexia can have speech and language difficulties that affect the pronunciation of words. Some experience a stammer when under pressure and this can cause elevated levels of anxiety in formal speaking situations, such as oral presentations.

Marking Written Assignments

The purpose of considerate marking is to avoid penalising learners for mistakes made with grammar, spelling, and punctuation, especially if such mistakes do not hinder the reader's ability to understand the content of the work to be assessed.

Mark the work with the intention of giving credit for the learner's achievements in meeting the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit by focusing on the content and understanding of the topic rather than concentrating on written expression. Reading the learner's work quickly can sometimes increase the ability to focus on content rather than errors.

It is not necessary to correct the learner's work. However, if the spelling, punctuation, and grammatical mistakes detract significantly from the content of the work, it may be appropriate to identify some of these as examples, taking care not to over emphasise the issue. It is recognised that in some instances, the grammatical construction or written style of expression may obscure the clarity of the learner's ideas. In these cases, decide whether the intended content can be understood and give credit accordingly for this aspect of the work.

If a learner with dyslexia is still experiencing a significant disadvantage in completing their assignments, despite the above concessions, an alternative assignment method may be appropriate for the unit assessment.

A learner can discuss this issue with the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) tutor or the appropriate delivery staff representative/Programme Lead, who will liaise with the learner’s tutor and assessor to discuss suitable arrangements. This will take account of the programme level and allow consideration for the maintenance of academic standards.

The following considerations should be made when marking the work of a learner with dyslexia:

Considerate Marking Guidelines	Difficulties experienced	Good practice for marker
<p>Spelling, punctuation and grammar</p>	<p>Spelling errors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single words misspelled in different ways • Parts of polysyllables in incorrect order • Letters within words out of sequence • Tendency of use phonetic spelling • Use of capital letters in the wrong place • Misuse of spellcheck leading to incorrectly selected word • Misspelling proper names • Homophone substitution e.g., to / too, their/there, effect/affect • Letter reversal (does / dose) <p>Punctuation and grammatical errors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misuse or omission of punctuation Marks • Failure to identify sentence boundaries – overuse of conjunctions • Inappropriate grammatical Constructions • Excessive use of or misplaced Punctuation <p>Syntax errors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbs used in all forms • Use of question forms • Use of negative forms • Use of pronouns • Use of plurals • Use of the definite, indefinite and zero articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore any spelling, grammar, punctuation, or syntax errors • If correcting, do not point out every error: select and state the significant issues • Mark the content of the learner’s work using a different colour (Excluding red) without penalising for any corrections. • If you have not made any comments on spelling, punctuation, or grammar, inform the learner • Provide guidance using simple sentences or models to help explain corrections / how to improve errors • Do not say “please use the spell checker.” The learner is probably using it a lot, and choosing the wrong options.
<p>Use and application of numbers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent difficulties with arithmetic, confusing signs, for example, + - X • Difficulties with multiplication and mental arithmetic • Difficulties with sequential processing, which can mean difficulties with using a calculator • Problems organising budgets and keeping tracks of finances • Mixing up times of scheduled appointments • Difficulties relating to basic number concepts such as telling the time, calculating prices, estimating and measuring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore difficulties with manipulating numbers and focus on marking content • For parts of a course which have numerical content, learners may need additional support and feedback • Offer support with timetables, such as sending a reminder when the next lecture is happening

General presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor presentation of work even when produced using a computer package • Work may appear careless or rushed • Difficulty in presenting work in a standard academic format • Difficulties with sequencing or wordfinding may produce a stilted style of writing which may not match the learner’s oral communication in class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore presentation of work and focus on marking content • Offer support for structure and presentation, such as a writing frame.
Structure and academic style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of sentence and/or paragraph structure leading to a repetition of information and a failure to develop a sustained and detailed discussion • Lack a ‘polished finish that their peers demonstrate • Short sentences, repeated sentence construction or simple words and terminology does not necessarily indicate poor understanding or unsophisticated concept development but may reflect difficulties with word retrieval and sentence construction • Writing digresses from the assessment task by either including information that is irrelevant or expanding unnecessarily on points of minor importance • Unusual links between topics are made that reflect a learners’ lateral and creative thinking skills but do not meet the learning outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on what the learner is trying to argue rather than on the errors • Even though it is not possible to award marks for digressions from the assessment task it can be supportive to acknowledge the learners research attempts when providing feedback • Provide a list of key words with definitions if these are essential for the task

Assessing Oral Presentations

When assessing oral presentations by learners with dyslexia, avoid penalising mistakes made with grammar or with speech production. Mark the work with the intention of giving credit or the learner’s achievements in meeting the unit’s learning outcomes by focusing on the content and understanding of the topic. Avoid penalising the learner for mistakes with the pronunciation of words, for misreading from any visual aids or for basic skills errors on visual aids or handouts.

Although some learners with dyslexia favour oral presentations as an assessment method, others experience anxiety or even phobic reactions. Where these negative feelings occur, they can sometimes be linked to humiliating experiences of reading aloud at school.

Where a learner with dyslexia has a significantly elevated level of anxiety over oral presentations, offer support and reassurance where possible. In extreme cases of anxiety or phobia, alternative methods can be explored, such as allowing the learner to submit a video recording of the presentation. This can be considered an interim measure if the learner is willing to participate fully as their confidence increases.

Providing Feedback

Feedback should be provided considerately to avoid damaging the learner’s self-esteem. Learners with dyslexia can sometimes perceive any criticism of their written work as disparaging and negative feedback provided for assignments can be more distressing to these learners than the actual mark awarded for the work. Comment as far as possible on the strengths of the learner’s work and try the ‘sandwich technique’ when providing feedback (Positive comments/constructive advice for improvement/positive comments).

Certain symbols used for marking can be perceived as critical and can confuse learners with dyslexia, for example, question marks and exclamation marks when used without sufficient explanations to establish the reason for their use.

If any core requirements have been established that conflict with the ability to fully apply these marking guidelines, this should be stated in the feedback.

Some marking guidelines include:

- Make it clear to the learner that the marking is about the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and for ideas, knowledge and understanding of the subject content and analytical, critical, and evaluative or other skills and not the technicalities of spelling, grammar, and punctuation (unless specified as a learning outcome).
- Make the marking criteria for the module explicit in the module guide and/or in the virtual learning environment.
- Read the work quickly looking for ideas, understanding, knowledge and content rather than errors.
- When commenting on spelling, grammar, and punctuation, select a sample section rather than correcting the entire assessment work and inform the learner that this is your approach.
- Make positive and constructive comments about what is good as well as how the work can be improved.
- Make your comments brief, clear and concise and explain improvements in a straightforward and accessible way using simple sentences. For example, “You are not clear at this point” followed by “Do you mean...?” is more helpful than a vague comment such as “Does not make sense.”
- Written feedback should be word processed as learners struggle to read handwritten comments.
- Comment as far as possible on the strengths of the learner’s work and try the ‘sandwich technique’ when providing feedback (positive comment, then constructive advice for improvements, followed by a positive comment).
- Avoid using certain symbols such as crosses, question marks or exclamation marks when marking as these can be perceived as critical without adequate explanations to establish the reasons for use.

Assignment Extensions

Learners with dyslexia are granted an automatic one-week extension on deadlines set. Learners requesting an additional extension for the submission of an assignment should contact their tutor in the first instance. The Extensions/Deferral, Break in Learning, Withdrawal and PPED Policy must be followed.

The general difficulties with time management and study skills that are characteristic of dyslexia may be considered a sufficient reason to grant an extension if the learner has demonstrated that he or she has made reasonable efforts towards completing the assignment.

Any supporting evidence from other individuals such as the learner’s head teacher can be considered. However, an extension can be refused if there does not appear to be a justifiable reason for missing the deadline.

Complaints and Appeals

If a learner with dyslexia does not believe this guidance was followed, they can appeal. All complaints and appeals must follow the process outlined in the Complaints and Appeals Policy.