

Student Disability Service



Review of Removal of the Reasonable Adjustments Providing Coursework Stickers to Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)

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Removal of coursework stickers for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) (mainly dyslexia)

Background:

The current status is that coursework stickers were removed as a reasonable adjustment at the start of academic year 2013, meaning that the Student Disability Service (SDS) no longer recommends or provides stickers for dyslexic students to attach to their coursework. This change of practice is in keeping with developing inclusive practice as, instead of the practise of implementing an adjustment for individual students this has been replaced by providing general university marking guidelines: Guidance for academic staff produced at the time of the change:

http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.120006!/fileManager/Marking%20Guidance%20July%202013.pdf

Exam stickers remain, as the exam situation is different and does not allow a student sufficient time to either edit or fully proof read their work using assistive software or to send it to a proof reader.

The removal of coursework stickers was equality impact assessed (see <https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/DisabilityOffIntt/Equality+Impact+Assessments>). It was agreed in the EqIA that monitoring of this change of practice would involve obtaining obtain views from students (in the SDS annual evaluation), academics and staff in the SDS and that the change of practice would subsequently be reviewed in June/July 2014. Due to other demands on the service the review of this change of practice is now being carried out in February 2015 instead.

Previous areas of concern about removal of coursework stickers:

It was deemed possible that without these stickers an uninformed or insensitive marker could now provide insensitive feedback to the student and this could be particularly detrimental to students with specific learning difficulties.

Current review of removal of coursework stickers:

The main focus of this review is to continue (subsequent to the change of practice and the EqIA) to ensure that disabled (primarily dyslexic) students are not in any way disadvantaged or discriminated against by this change and that the change of practice is understood by staff.

Ongoing feedback obtained and collated by SDS since August 2013 until February 2015:

1. Queries from Academic Staff/Coordinator of Adjustments:

The SDS has had a number (4 or 5) queries from academic staff at the University of Edinburgh about the removal of stickers:

- What is done now to support students with SpLDs such as dyslexia?
- Are academics supposed to identify dyslexic students themselves?
- The question of what to do about the take home exams was raised and a new adjustment saying student should receive extra time and not penalised for spelling and grammatical errors on take home exams has been created.
- In October 2014 at a CoA meeting, further guidance was sought on marking and in particular the removal of coursework stickers for dyslexic students
- Some CoAs queried whether poor spelling can be mentioned.

Responses by SDS:

- Questions were discussed at Coordinator of Adjustments meetings and information was given as to the removal of coursework stickers and the supports available to SPLD students and how to refer students to SDS.
- Marking guidance was produced for academic colleagues and the link to this guidance was sent to them via their individual Schools. It is also available on the staff section of the SDS website. CoAs were also sent a set of FAQs compiled by Dr Shereen Benjamin (Director of Quality / Senior Lecturer in Primary Education); giving staff advice on the types of errors they might see on a dyslexic students work.
- Staff have been asked to be sensitive and constructive in the manner in which they provide feedback. Sensitive marking and commenting is encouraged, such as not using red marker pens, avoiding negative comments about spelling and grammar; at the same time it is appropriate to make constructive suggestions in relation to spelling and grammar, and to direct the student to the SDS if they feel more support is required. .
- It was emphasised that students with specific learning difficulties have their needs assessed at the SDS Service and reasonable adjustments continue to be implemented. Common reasonable adjustments for producing written work may include the use of assistive software, with specialist spellcheckers and text to speech software, and/or access to a proof reader.
- Staff have been advised that the wider publication and implementation of the generic University marking guidelines is a key element in ensuring that students with specific learning difficulties are given feedback that is both constructive and sensitive to their disability. CoAs are informed that continued dyslexia awareness training sessions are provided by the Student Disability Service and are open to all staff.

Further queries:

Staff expressed confusion between exam stickers (which were not withdrawn and are provided by Student Administration) and coursework stickers/labels for in-course work.

Response from SDS: it was explained that exam stickers still in place, but coursework stickers are no longer in use.

- **Query from IS about electronic coursework stickers in April 2014:** It was explained that with the removal of coursework stickers and the fact that students have the possibility of getting support - e.g. either using assistive technology or proof readers - before handing in coursework, the marker does not actually need to be aware that a student has dyslexia as the work should be ready for marking without any adjustment. All staff should be referred to the Marking Guidance.

2. Feedback from Advisors:

- SDS Advisors report that they have had a handful of students asking for coursework stickers as they had forgotten that they were not in use anymore. They also report that a few students (possibly up to about 8) have wrongly assumed the exam adjustment covers essays and queried how markers of essays know about their difficulties, but advisors have said that once the facts about the previous stickers and the available supports have been explained they seem to understand.
- There has been only one situation (November 2014) where one student has come in to SDS with an essay covered in red pen comments. The School involved has been advised of the marking guidelines, which include advice on sensitive marking and which include a section on identifying work produced by students with specific learning difficulties. These guidelines should give markers a better ability to identify students who may have specific learning difficulties and refer them to the Student Disability Service, if appropriate.

3. Other avenues for feedback offered by SDS:

- There is a facility on our website for feedback
- A “suggestions box” in the waiting area of our reception.
- We e-mail students in the early part of semester 2 asking them to let us know if they are having any issues with support or implementation of their recommended adjustments.
- We also give clear guidance on our website for students who may wish to complain about this service and we provide links to the University’s appeals and complaints procedures.

Conclusions:

- There has been no evidence that the removal of coursework stickers has led to any increased disadvantage or discrimination for students with specific learning difficulties.
- Any feedback related more to misunderstandings about the previous function of the stickers; confusion as to the question of exam stickers; or concerns about marking styles, which should best be addressed by referring academics to the marking guidelines.
- The only note of caution is that the University of Edinburgh/SDS needs to ensure continued access to assistive technology and to NMPH Proof reading support to students with SpLDs who have been assessed as needing this support to ensure they are not disadvantaged in comparison with students who do not have disability-related difficulties with poor spelling, grammar, punctuation and structure.
- It is also important that SDS continue to ensure academics have access to the Marking Guidelines:
http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.120006!/fileManager/Marking%20Guidance%20July%202013.pdf
- The removal of coursework stickers has been successful and can now be considered to be embedded.