

Suitable Qualifications & Training for those Assessing Specific Learning Difficulties in Higher Education

The brief of this Working Group was to respond to two related needs:

- 1) The demand for diagnostic assessments of specific learning difficulties for the purposes of determining eligibility for the Disabled Student Allowances has grown considerably in recent years. There are not enough suitably qualified assessors able to meet this demand.
- 2) Awards Officers in LEAs find it difficult to evaluate the quality of assessments from existing assessors and are in need of clearer guidance as to what constitutes good professional practice.

The current situation, following on from the report of the National Working Party on Dyslexia in Higher Education (1999) *Dyslexia in Higher Education: Policy, Provision and Practice*, is that diagnostic assessments should be carried out by psychologists or by specialist teachers holding a BDA recognised qualification. However, in practice, many LEAs do not accept reports from specialist teachers. They find that the quality of assessments and reports from both psychologists and specialist teachers is highly variable.

This Working Group was asked to make recommendations in relation to:

- a) appropriate tests
- b) appropriate report format
- c) appropriate training and qualifications for specialist assessors.

The central role of training

The Working Group was clear in emphasising that the quality of an assessment and subsequent report depends primarily on the knowledge and skills of the assessor, rather than the selection of tests used. A recurrent theme in our discussions was that assessments require **interpretation** of test results and integration of this with other relevant information in order to reach a conclusion. The choice of tests and the results are critical, but they do not tell the whole story. Thus, it is our view that LEA officers, in the long term, will be better served if they could find some means of determining that a suitably trained person had conducted the assessment, rather than having to determine the suitability of the report on a case-by-case basis by scrutinising the test choice and results. Our starting point was that the current system needed strengthening since LEA officers do not have confidence in all assessors at the present time. It was also clear that many teachers trained to conduct assessments felt that they lacked knowledge and skills in some areas and that additional training and support would be required. We therefore considered what elements would need to be added to existing training courses and began this process by reviewing courses available from several training providers. From this emerged the framework that

is described later. It will be seen that this framework embodies the following principles and recommendations:

- 1) Existing post-graduate level training courses could be suitable with relatively small changes to ensure:
 - a) a minimum input on psychometric testing principles and practice and
 - b) more extensive practical case-work experience involving assessments.
- 2) Training should include a cycle of training, learning and discussion followed by practical, supported experience which, in turn, would be followed by opportunities for reflection, clarification and further learning.
- 3) Assessors should be required to continually up-date their skills through Continuing Professional Development (CPD).
- 4) Assessors should hold a Practising Certificate, issued by their relevant professional body, which will only be renewed on production of evidence of continuing good practice and CPD.
- 5) Assessors need, particularly when they are newly trained, to have access to peers and those with more experience who can provide advice and act as 'mentors'.
- 6) Reports should contain a statement from the assessor to confirm that s/he holds the relevant qualification (see above) and current Practising Certificate and that his/her work conforms to relevant guidance, including the guidance given by this Working Group.

Transitional Period and Procedures

It is recognised that there will be a transitional period during which training providers may wish to update their courses and those previously trained may seek to have their prior qualifications and experience recognised as meeting the new standards. A key feature of the training standards is access to a mentor both for training and CPD purposes, identification of people suitable for this role will also take place during the transitional period.

The Working Group has asked a subgroup of the BDA Accreditation Board to produce further guidelines for training providers, based on the standards presented here, and set up procedures for accrediting courses. Training providers would be expected to identify suitable tutors and practitioners who could act as mentors, who should have been recognised under the Practising Certificate system or working towards recognition.

Individuals wishing to have their qualifications recognised should approach their professional organisation to obtain an assessment practising certificate.

Currently, the only professional associations offering such certificates are Dyslexia Action and Patoss, for specialist teachers and the BPS for psychologists. Other teaching and training organisations may wish to offer that feature, either as part of initial training or CPD, but any training so provided will have to be accredited by the BDA/Patoss CPD Committee as meeting the standards of the SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines.

To ensure consistency of standards, the Working Group has asked a small committee, lead by Patoss, Dyslexia Action, the BPS and the BDA to take a lead in developing guidelines for the evaluation of applications for certificates from specialist teachers. This committee will be augmented by other professionals who will also process applications from those wishing to become recognised as assessors or mentors via this route.

Scope of Certificates

These standards for training in SpLD assessment are designed to address the training needs of SpLD assessors at all age ranges thus insuring the production of clear reports for other professionals to use as a basis for determining Disabled Student Allowances (DSA), Access Arrangements for Examinations and other forms of special educational provision for individuals with SpLD.

Those providing diagnostic assessments for DSA will have to:

- 1) sign a self monitoring statement that their assessment has been conducted and the report written in accordance with the SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines for Assessment of SpLDs in Higher Education
- 2) be a suitably qualified member of a relevant professional body (e.g. BPS, Dyslexia Action or Patoss)
- 3) hold a current Practising Certificate issued by their relevant professional body, from 2007/2008
- 4) update, every 3 years, their Practising Certificate through CPD.

This outline is to give guidance for trainers in the content and range of provision leading to developing an appropriate level of knowledge and expertise to fulfil this role. These standards will be formalised through QCA.

It is expected that all those conducting these assessments, both psychologists and specialist teachers, will conform to these standards and the recommendations of this Working Group.

SpLD/Dyslexia Assessment Training and Practising Certificates - Standards for Specialist Teachers

The role of the assessor in establishing individual learning needs and informing or designing appropriate approaches to address an individual's SpLD is fundamental to the development of a successful learning programme.

In recognition of the increased depth of knowledge and range of experience required by specialist teachers most existing training programmes provide for the candidate to concentrate on the specific age ranges relevant to their areas of expertise. This enables the training to be much more focused.

To train successfully for an Assessment Practising Certificate candidates must produce evidence from within the age group(s) where they have qualified as specialist teachers and demonstrate relevant experience in working within an institution or with individuals of the relevant age(s).

It is understood that, at present, courses meeting requirements for Associate Membership of BDA (AMBDA), in large part, train candidates at post-graduate level to meet the requisite practical skills outcomes. It is hoped that they will be extended, by 2008, to meet the following standards by incorporating the more extensive use of simulations and multiple supervised assessments with concentration on relevant age ranges.

Courses meeting these Assessment Practising Certificate standards, at postgraduate level, could be delivered by university departments, awarding bodies [e.g., OCR, AQA], LEAs and independent organisations [e.g. training consultancies, Dyslexia Action, HADC].

It is understood that Assessment Practising Certificates will have a currency of 3 years. After that time practitioners will need to update their Certificates by providing evidence of CPD in the skills of assessment which are practical and relevant to their work situation. To be considered adequate for this purpose, such evidence should include records of a minimum of 20 hours training or **equivalent** recorded CPD activities, which have taken place during the 3 years since prior registration for a Practising Certificate (see table of possible CPD activities).

Training for the renewal of a Practising Certificate will encompass changes in regulations and legislation, and include practical opportunities for exploring new assessment methods and materials. Understanding and application of these same issues will need to be demonstrated by all those seeking renewal.

A portfolio of evidence of CPD will therefore be required, including, for example, records of training, relevant study, evaluation of current practice, professional dialogue and INSET, logs of assessments with accompanying reports.

SpLD/Dyslexia Assessment Training Practical Skills Outcomes

■ Outcomes:

It is expected that an accredited course, approved by the BDA, Patoss, Dyslexia Action or the BPS will enable the candidate to

- understand the nature of specific learning difficulties and identify learners with specific learning difficulties
- demonstrate an understanding of the affective issues observed in learners with specific learning difficulties
- understand the theory and application of psychometric and educational assessment [The BPS Checklist of Competence in Educational Testing – Level A is a good model.]
- identify appropriate methods and materials both for screening learners and for assessing their individual needs
- select appropriate assessment materials, administer tests correctly and interpret resulting data accurately
- produce professional reports written in a language easily accessible to non-specialists
- make teaching and learning and assessment recommendations that are directly linked to assessment findings and subject's needs
- understand current legal and professional issues, rules and regulations relating to or affecting SpLD individuals
- complete relevant forms and reports to meet varied individual needs
- understand all aspects of processing documentation and managing special arrangements for SpLD learners
- communicate effectively findings and implications of any assessments to relevant individuals both orally and in writing as required, with due regard for building a positive framework.

■ Evidence Requirements:

- evidence of practical application of above skills
- assessment reports stemming from 3 different scenarios, demonstrating the ability to assess students/pupils from different learning situations who present different patterns of ability and difficulty
- tutors' or mentors' reports on 3 assessments carried out under supervision, one of which is observed (video/dvd evidence acceptable)
- logs of assessments.

■ Recommendations for training

- practical exercises in data analysis including use of previously videoed sessions performed by others
- inclusion of simulation exercises making use of:
 - video/dvd evidence covering appropriate age ranges
 - genuine raw data
- practice in writing specific objectives linked to subject's needs
- opportunities for tutor-led and peer discussions of genuine case studies relating to special arrangements, Disabled Student Allowances, examination access arrangements, other assessment requirements as may be relevant
- training in the skills of observing pupils'/students' strategies and listening to their explanations of strengths and difficulties; using these to expand the process of exploration
- training in highlighting the difficulties in identifying learners who have developed compensatory strategies, but which might not be sufficient for the increased demands of their next level of studies
- candidates should generate reports on evidence found within the age groups where they are qualified as a specialist teacher and in their own place of work where possible
- practitioners must recognise that proper liaison and co-operation with learners/ teachers/ tutors and examination personnel is necessary and that it is wholly inappropriate to produce reports without this
- candidates wishing to qualify across the age range should have a minimum of 3 assessments carried out under supervision, one of which is observed in the adult range and one in each of the other two, one of which is observed
- candidates wishing to qualify in one age range should have a minimum of 3 assessments carried out under supervision, one of which is observed
- training should include the writing of reports of a professional standard which are accessible to the intended audience.

As part of CPD practitioners will be expected to extend their skills by making use of post-qualification mentoring.

The assessment award can be earned within the provisions of a AMBDA approved course as long as certain criteria are met:

- a. assessments actual and simulated must be carried out with subjects in age ranges appropriate to the candidate's area of work
- b. a minimum of 3 assessments must be carried out under supervision, one of which must be observed.

Such training could be pursued with top-up courses of 60 hours, for Route 2 candidates who have other SpLD qualifications, or possibly SEN qualifications, wanting and needing to move into this field. SENCOs might fit into this category as well as candidates with Approved Teacher Status of the British Dyslexia Association (BDA ATS) or other SpLD Certificate Level qualifications.

We wish to enable those who are already doing satisfactory assessments and reports to continue doing so. Assessors are needed to continue to carry out assessments for DSA. Mentors are needed to train specialist assessors and to give guidance in practical assessment in the period following initial training. Course tutors would be obvious candidates for this role. Practising assessors who are not course tutors could also be mentors. Therefore, in the initial stages of this system, assessors can apply to have their qualifications and skills recognised as suitable without the need for further training.

Assessors must:

- a. have an approved qualification as a psychologist or specialist teacher. For specialist teachers, those qualifications approved for AMBDA or for Full Membership of Patoss are suitable.
- b. be a member of an appropriate professional body which requires a relevant qualification in SpLD assessment, (e.g. British Psychological Society [BPS], the Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties [Patoss], Dyslexia Guild)
- c. hold a current Practising Certificate issued by their professional body
- d. after 3 years assessors will need to show evidence of relevant CPD to update their current Practising Certificate.

It is anticipated that from 2007/08 assessors should have an appropriate current Practising Certificate. Assessors will be able to apply on the basis of their current qualifications. Those qualified as psychologists or specialist teachers (for specialist teachers, those qualifications approved for AMBDA are suitable for this purpose) will be eligible for a current Practising Certificate from their relevant professional body. Individuals who do not hold such qualifications may apply to their professional body to have their qualifications and experience considered based on Accreditation of Prior Learning and/or Experience (APL/APE) or pursue further training as noted below.

From 2007/08, Patoss, Dyslexia Action and the BPS will maintain registers of individuals holding current Practising Certificates. Patoss and BDA websites will hold information on courses accredited as meeting the requirements of training in SpLD assessment as recommended by the SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines for the Assessment of SpLD in Higher Education.

Routes to SpLD Practising Certificate

The following routes to achieving an SpLD assessment Practising Certificate will be recognised (also see Flow Chart attached):

- **Route 1: Applicants holding membership of a relevant professional body or a post-graduate qualification entitling them to membership of their relevant professional body**

Applicants via Route 1 should include:

- a) a personal statement supporting the application, specifying:
 - i) relevant qualifications and experience. The qualification must have been obtained within the last five years.
 - ii) confirmation of membership of a professional body which requires a relevant qualification in SpLD assessment (e.g. Patoss, BPS, Dyslexia Guild)
 - iii) a signed statement that the applicant agrees to work within current legislation and guidance relating to SpLD which is relevant to the particular phase of education in which s/he is involved.

- b) copy of certificate(s) of relevant qualification(s) as a specialist teacher or psychologist. For specialist teachers, those qualifications approved for AMBDA are suitable for this purpose (e.g. post-graduate qualification with practical elements in teaching and assessment such as the OCR/RSA Diploma (SpLD), or those meeting requirements for AMBDA (Associate Membership of the British Dyslexia Association)).

- **From 2008**

It is understood that, at present, courses meeting requirements for AMBDA, in large part, train candidates at post-graduate level to meet the requisite practical skills outcomes. It is hoped that they will be extended, by 2008, to meet the following standards by incorporating the more extensive use of simulations, multiple supervised assessments with concentration on relevant age ranges.

Training should include the following:

- 90 hours of lectures, seminars and guided learning hours plus private study time
- 12 hours of lectures and seminars to be devoted to study of psychometric testing
- 18 hours evaluated specialist teaching
- 1 hour teaching observed and assessed by course tutor
- training in writing assessment reports
- 3 diagnostic assessments carried out under supervision, one of which is observed

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

Evidence must demonstrate current practical application of skills in diagnostic assessment and reporting specific to one or more age ranges. It must include records related to 3 separate diagnostic assessments, demonstrating the ability to assess students/pupils from different learning situations who present different patterns of ability and difficulty. These records should comprise:

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS

- logs related to each assessment showing the ability to plan an assessment, liaise with others as appropriate and choose appropriate assessment materials
- evidence of one hour of an observed assessment session (video/dvd evidence acceptable) and tutor reports on supervised assessments
- diagnostic assessment reports (linked to each assessment carried out) showing the ability to present a professional report; score tests correctly; interpret data from tests used; give an overview of pupils'/students' strengths and difficulties; suggest relevant learning support
- supporting documentation for each report such as score sheets, records of observations.

▪ **Route 2: Applicants via Accreditation of Prior Learning/Accreditation of Prior Experience (APL/APE) for individuals who do not hold membership of a relevant professional body (see b above) and who do not hold one of the approved qualifications**

Applications via Route 2 should include:

- a) a personal statement supporting the application:
 - reviewing the applicant's current responsibilities for assessment for SpLD
 - specifying the assessment materials which the applicant currently uses and is familiar with
- b) a full CV detailing:
 - relevant experience and qualifications (e.g. first degree, PGCE, specialist teacher training, postgraduate diploma or Master's degree),
 - training and experience within the past five years which was directly relevant to SpLD assessment.

NB. Training must have included the use of psychometric tests to be considered acceptable

- c) copies of certificates of relevant qualifications detailed in CV

d) evidence of current practical application of skills in diagnostic assessment and reporting specific to one or more age ranges. This evidence must demonstrate:

- i) the ability to administer, score and interpret cognitive and attainment tests, including standardised tests
- ii) the ability to make appropriate recommendations based on the assessment
- iii) the ability to write a report on assessment which is appropriate for purpose.

EVIDENCE
REQUIREMENTS

It must include records related to 3 separate diagnostic assessments, demonstrating the ability to assess students/pupils from different learning situations who present different patterns of ability and difficulty. These records should comprise:

- logs related to each assessment showing the ability to plan an assessment, liaise with others as appropriate and choose appropriate assessment materials
- diagnostic assessment reports (linked to each assessment carried out) showing the ability to present a professional report; score tests correctly; interpret data from tests used; give an overview of pupils'/students' strengths and difficulties; suggest relevant learning support (see assessment report checklist, attached)
- video/dvd evidence of one of the 3 assessments conducted by the applicant, with supporting documentation such as score sheets, records of observations.

- e) a statement of support from two relevant professionals with recognised standing and experience in the area of assessment (e.g. SENCo, Learning Support Manager, Educational Psychologist)
- f) a signed statement that the applicant agrees to work within current legislation and guidance relating to SpLD which is relevant to the particular phase of education in which s/he is involved
- g) a signed statement that the applicant has read the professional body's Code of Ethics and agrees to abide by it.

▪ **Route 3: Applicants who have SpLD specialist teacher training to BDA/ATS level obtained within the last five years but no training in the use of psychometric tests.**

- Applicants should seek further training that will provide:
 - 60 hours lectures, seminars and guided learning hours plus private study time

MINIMUM
REQUIREMENTS

- 12 hours of lectures and seminars to be devoted to study of psychometric testing
- training in writing assessment reports
- 3 diagnostic assessments carried out under supervision, one of which is observed.

Evidence must demonstrate current practical application of skills in diagnostic assessment and reporting specific to one or more age ranges. It must include records related to 3 separate diagnostic assessments, demonstrating the ability to assess students/pupils from different learning situations who present different patterns of ability and difficulty. These records should comprise:

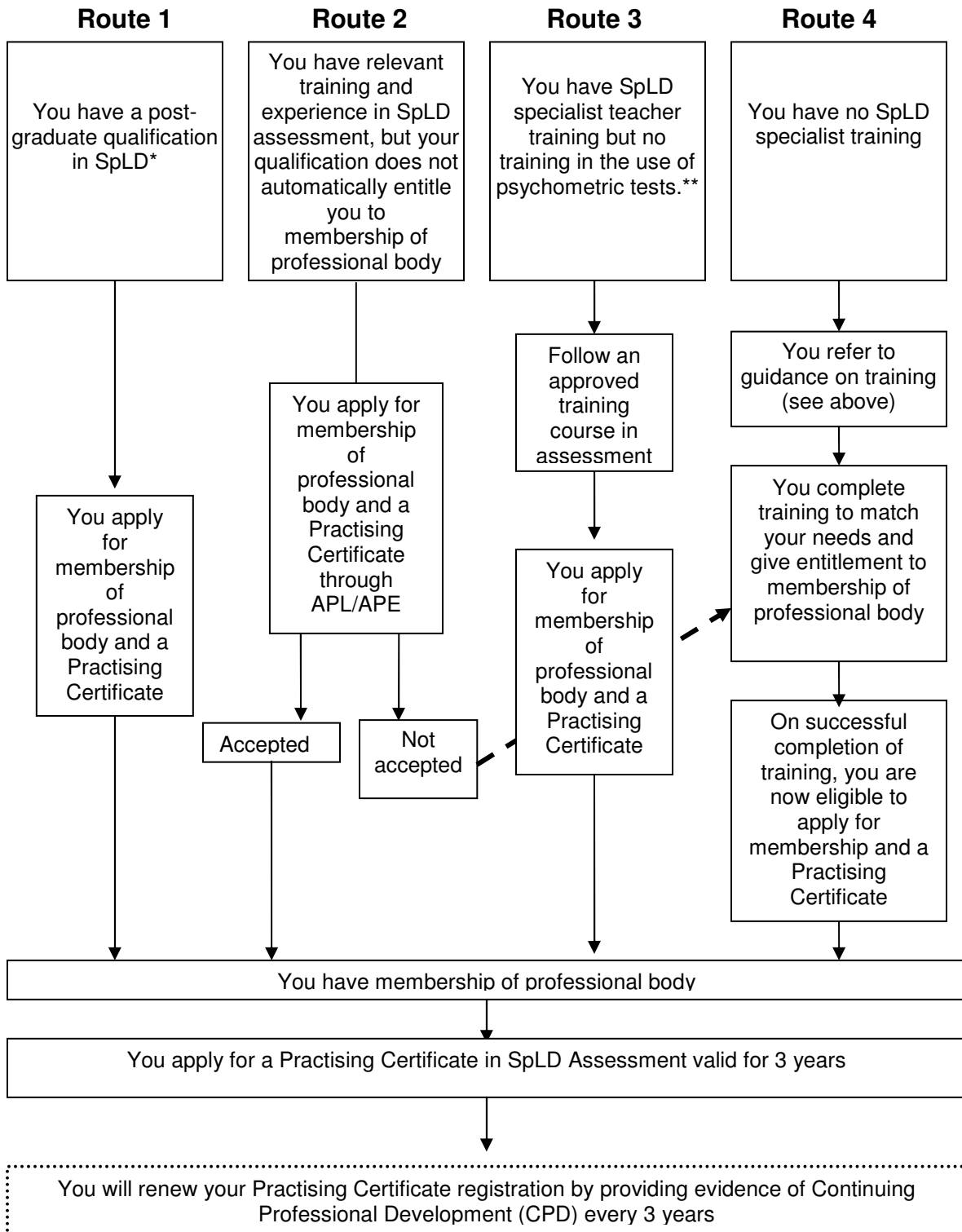
EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS

- logs related to each assessment showing the ability to plan an assessment, liaise with others as appropriate and choose appropriate assessment materials
- evidence of one hour of an observed assessment session (video/dvd evidence acceptable) and tutor reports on supervised assessments.
- diagnostic assessment reports (linked to each assessment carried out) showing the ability to present a professional report; score tests correctly; interpret data from tests used; give an overview of pupils'/students' strengths and difficulties; suggest relevant learning support. (see assessment report checklist, attached)
- supporting documentation for each report such as score sheets, records of observations.

▪ **Route 4: Applicants who have no SpLD specialist training**

- Applicants should seek training that will provide qualifications as noted in Route 1. It is suggested that teachers contact their initial specialist training provider who could advise on
 - i) needs for additional training and production of evidence
 - ii) options for obtaining a practicing certificate

Flow Diagram – Specialist Teacher Routes to achieving an SpLD assessment Practising Certificate



*Post-graduate qualification with practical elements in teaching and assessment such as the OCR/RSA Diploma (SpLD), or equivalent qualification, e.g. qualifications meeting requirements for AMBDA (Associate Membership of the British Dyslexia Association) are suitable for this purpose.

**Qualification with practical elements in teaching such as the OCR/RSA Certificate (SpLD), or equivalent qualification. Qualifications meeting requirements for BDA ATS (Approved Teacher Status of the British Dyslexia Association) are suitable for this purpose.

