

Dyslexia in Ireland, North and South: Perspectives on developments since publication of the Dyslexia Reports (2002)

Report on research conducted 2013—2015,
commissioned by the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South



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This report describes a collaborative research study carried out during 2013-2015, with assistance from the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS), by a research team from two colleges in Northern Ireland and two in the Republic of Ireland.

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Acronyms

CPD	Continuing Professional Development
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SCoTENS	Standing Conference on Teacher Education North & South

Roi ***Republic of Ireland***

TFD **Task Force on Dyslexia**

DES	Department of Education and Skills
GAM	General Allocation Model
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
SESS	Special Education Support Service

NI ***Northern Ireland***

TGD **Task Group on Dyslexia**

C-CET	Certificate of Competence in Educational Testing
CoP	Code of Practice
DENI	Department of Education NI
EA	Education Authority
ELB	Education Library Board
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to clarify present policy in the area of dyslexia support, North and South and to identify strategic policy which informs good practice. The aim of the research was to consult with original members of the Northern Ireland (NI) Task Group on Dyslexia (TGD) and the Republic of Ireland (RoI) Task Force on Dyslexia (TFD)¹ and with key stakeholders in the area of dyslexia support, to ascertain their views on support provision for pupils with dyslexia, twelve years on.

The report is in four sections. Chapter One describes the background to the study. Chapter Two overviews NI and RoI legislative and policy frameworks, with particular focus on dyslexia. Chapter Three describes the research methodology: sample, data collection and analysis of the research findings. Chapter Four presents the study findings. Chapter Five provides a summary of findings, and recommendations.

Background to the Study

Special educational provision in the RoI and NI has undergone significant changes in this century. It was an immediate priority for the North-South Ministerial Council: by Ministerial orders in both jurisdictions, an RoI TFD and an NI TGD were established in 2001. To promote cross-border communication and learning about ongoing work on dyslexia provision, TFD/TGD membership overlapped; this is reflected in their Reports.

¹ DENI, 2002; DES, 2002. These documents will be referred to throughout this report simply by the acronyms TGD and TFD.

More than a decade has passed since publication of these Reports, which put forward a range of recommendations for the development of services for students with dyslexia-related learning difficulties. For example, in the DES Report, short and medium term recommendations were grouped to address four levels: system level, teacher education level, classroom level, and local level. It also recommended that a body be appointed to review implementation of these recommendations in three to four years' time. This has not happened.

The full implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004)² was paused due to the recession, so currently some cohorts of pupils are not adequately catered for³. Policy changes in support provision in both jurisdictions⁴ have impacted on schools. In the RoI, support provision for pupils with dyslexia has changed from an individual allocation to a school based General Allocation Model (GAM)⁵ In NI, Education Library Boards (ELB) provide a range of supports for pupils with dyslexia. However, support service models, approaches and access for schools vary across ELBs⁶.

Current renewed focus on efforts to improve literacy attainment North and South—as evidenced by the National Literacy Strategy⁷ and the Count, Read, Succeed Initiative⁸—brings greater urgency to addressing the needs of pupils who continue to struggle with literacy as a result of dyslexia.

² EPSEN (2004) asserts the rights and equality in education of persons with disabilities.

³ Travers, 2012.

⁴ DES, 2003, 2005; NEPS, 2007; NCCA, 2007.

⁵ (DES, 2005, 2012).

⁶ Education and Training Inspectorate, 2012.

⁷ DES, 2011.

⁸ DENI, 2011.

CHAPTER TWO: DYSLEXIA: LEGISLATION, POLICY AND PROVISION

At the time of consultation for this research study, new policy developments and new initiatives were planned in both NI and RoI. The chapter refers to the current context, followed by developments since completion of the SCoTENS study.

Northern Ireland

Since 1972, DENI has been responsible for the development and determination of policy in relation to education; with five ELBs set in place to take responsibility for local administration. The Code of Practice (CoP)⁹ set out a five stage approach to the provision for children with “a learning difficulty”¹⁰. Within this framework, children with English as an additional language (newcomer children) and those with gifts and talents were seen as having additional rather than Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Based upon the five-stage model, children identified as having a learning difficulty are placed on the SEN register in their school. Specific, additional support, beyond regular classroom differentiation, is set in place by the class teacher in consultation with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) (Stage 1) and an individual Education Plan drawn up. If progress is not made, the SENCO takes responsibility for additional measures (Stage 2) until such times as the

⁹ DENI, 1998

¹⁰ “Learning difficulty” means that the child has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of his or her age, and/or has a disability which hinders his or her use of everyday educational facilities (or, where the child is below school age, would hinder such use if the child were of school age)” (DENI, 1.4, 1998).

child either makes improvement and moves down the stages and off the register *or* requires assessment by an educational psychologist.

A pilot study resulting from the review of SEN and Inclusion¹¹ has allowed a group of SENCOs to receive C-CET training.¹² This would allow SENCOs to assess and determine the needs of pupils without the involvement of an educational psychologist, the consequent waiting lists and without the child progressing to Stage 3 of the CoP. Such an assessment, however, would not allow them access to external support or resources. These can only be recommended by psychological services (Stg.3, CoP). If the educational psychologist believes that significant additional support is required to allow the child to access the full curriculum, they will recommend that the child requires a Statement of Educational Need (Stage 5) based upon evidence from all carers and associated professionals. The collation of this evidence (Stage 4) may take some time. At Stage 5 the child will be offered a Special School placement *or*, in line with the *Special Education and Disability (NI) Order (2005)* supported provision in the mainstream setting. This support has varied between Educational Regions/ELBs. Under the new legislation, this will be reduced to a three-stage process.

Provision for children with Dyslexia

In line with TGD recommendations, early identification of a learning difficulty, assessment and appropriate support were advocated by DENI¹³. Within some ELBs (pre-EA), resources have been allocated at Stage 3 as a result of the use of a dyslexia screener rather than a full psychological assessment. Since the Review of SEN and Inclusion there

¹¹ (DENI, 1998).

¹² (Certificate of Competence in Educational Testing - British Psychological Services – Level A).

¹³ DENI, 2005.

has been a drive to empower schools and their SENCOs to assess and support earlier within the school setting and without additional resources.

Developments since 2014

The Education Authority (EA) was established on 1 April 2015 and replaced the ELBs and the Staff Commission for ELBs. This EA, with a headquarters and five regional offices¹⁴, now has responsibility for education, youth and library services throughout NI. The CoP still stands, however, in light of consultation on SEN and Inclusion¹⁵ and the resulting recommendations¹⁶ which are now at the consultation stage at Stormont. It is hoped that legislation will be in place before March 2016 and a new Code of Practice agreed by September 2016. This move towards unification has had implications for policy, practice, assessment, allocation of resources and support for students with special educational needs; alongside implications for continued professional development at postgraduate level, leading to internationally recognised qualifications in the identification of need and development of appropriate interventions.

Various pilot projects involving the upskilling of practising teachers have been underway. The largest government funded project was the SEN CPD Literacy Project (£4 million). This Master's level training, with voluntary enrolment, was delivered by the two teacher training University Colleges, Stranmillis and St. Mary's (Belfast,) and has

¹⁴ At the time when interviews were held the Education and Skills Authority was the favoured option and the ELBs were still in place. These will be referred to throughout. While authority is now centralised (EA) the ELBs still function as Educational Regions with similar staffing until the system is restructured and uniformity established.

¹⁵ DENI, 2009.

¹⁶ DENI, 2012.

equipped participating primary schools with a Master's level dyslexia specialist teacher, a support teacher with a certificate of attendance at Master's level training and online whole staff training.¹⁷

Parallel to this, there has been a review of the Outreach Support Services. Specialist dyslexia schools had seen a decline in numbers from the introduction of the *Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order (2005)*. Full-time special school classes had fallen from 5-1 by 2012 in one ELB and by April 2013 only outreach literacy support was available to children with a statement of SEN. This took the form of individuals or small groups of children supported by a peripatetic teacher visiting their own school. Additional funding for hours of support was given to those with literacy difficulties, but not dyslexia, meaning that schools had to allocate these hours to an appropriate additional teacher which presented a challenge if the allocated hours were few.

A pilot of an intensive programme of support was delivered in all ELBs (now Educational Regions) in 2013-14, in some Boards running in parallel with the old model. This new model involves individual assessment followed by eight weeks of tailored peripatetic support for half an hour, four days per week. The fifth day allows the member of staff to complete paperwork and liaise with staff or parents. At the end of these sessions an eight-week period for skills to be consolidated is given and the child's progress is re-assessed. The child will then be either successfully discontinued or be given another programme of intensive support (up to three programmes).

¹⁷ At the stage when interviews were taking place these pilots were still ongoing.

The Republic of Ireland

In the RoI, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) is responsible for the development and determination of policy in relation to education. Following the implementation of the Education Act 1998¹⁸ the Equal Status Act (2000) and the EPSEN Act 2004, the DES has devolved responsibility to a number of statutory bodies including the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)¹⁹, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE)²⁰ and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)²¹. In recent years, changes in legislation and policy have had an impact on the processes of identification, assessment and support for students with special educational needs (SEN); this has implications for teachers at all levels.

¹⁸ Education Act (1998) obliges the Minister 'to ensure that support services and a level and quality of education is provided as appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person'.

¹⁹ NEPS is a division of the DES. NEPS psychologists offer schools a balance between individual casework and support and development initiatives designed to promote inclusion and teacher/school effectiveness. See the NEPS website at

<http://www.education.ie/en/TheDepartment/Management-Organisaiton/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-.html>

²⁰ The NCSE has a range of functions in relation to supporting students with special educational needs. Its local service is provided through a network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs). The local SENO coordinates the delivery of service between health and education sectors.

²¹ The NCCA is a statutory body with responsibility to advise the minister on curriculum and assessment matters relating to early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools. See NCCA website at http://www.ncca.ie/en/Publications/Syllabuses_and_Guidelines

Learning support provision

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process; the class teacher should be central to the assessment process leading to the identification of specific learning targets for learners, and the monitoring of progress of learners with literacy difficulties. *A Staged Approach to Assessment, Identification and Programme Planning*²² outlines a three stage model of support; this is reflected in the NEPS continuum of *classroom support, school support, and school support plus*²³. Early identification of a learning difficulty, assessment and appropriate support are key principles recommended by the DES²⁴. A phased model of support for students with dyslexic-type difficulties is recommended by the TFD. In schools, students with low achievement levels, high incidence SEN—borderline mild general learning disability, mild general learning disability and specific learning disability (dyslexia)—or other learning difficulties receive support within the GAM²⁵. Under this model, no formal assessment is required; resource posts are allocated on the basis of the number of class teachers in primary schools, and on the basis of school enrolments at second level²⁶. Also factored in are the gender breakdown of students (as generally a higher incidence of SEN is associated with boys) and status under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme. Since 2012/2013, primary and post- primary students who are learning English as an additional language (EAL) are also included in this allocation.

Students with a severe and persistent dyslexia-related learning difficulty, with an IQ in the average range and reading levels at or

²² DES Special Education Circular 02/05.

²³ NEPS, 2007.

²⁴ DES, 2000, 2003 and 2005.

²⁵ DES, 2005.

²⁶ DES, 2012.

below the second percentile as assessed by an educational psychologist, are eligible to enrol in a specialist reading class or reading school for up to two years, after which time they return to mainstream. There are four specialist reading schools in Ireland catering for a total of 250 pupils, and approx. 20 reading classes²⁷.

At post-primary level, additional teaching support is provided for students identified as dyslexic, although the level of support may vary according to each school's resources.

Developments since 2014

As outlined above, the current system allocates Learning support teachers on the basis of enrolment, and Resource teachers on the basis of diagnosis of disability. In response to criticism that this is unfair and leads to unnecessary 'labelling' of children in order to access resources, and also is not linked to improved educational outcomes – the NCSE has consulted with stakeholders and reviewed the current system.

Currently, children with 'low incidence' SEN require formal diagnosis. To avoid the delays and restrictions attending the free national assessment system, many parents pay for costly private assessments.

The old system does not take into account that each category of disability has a continuum of ability. The basis for support allocation under the old model may no longer be available when the HSE moves away from a diagnostic-based model.

A new model is being introduced. A baseline support component will be provided to every mainstream school. Further support will be

allocated to each school based on its social context and educational profile. Each school will construct its educational profile around three factors: incidence of complex special educational needs, standardised test results²⁸, and social context of school. If gradual implementation in 2015 proves successful, full roll-out begins in 2016.

The predicted benefits of this new model are that schools will have greater stability in terms of staffing and be better able to plan for students and put CPD in place. Further consultation is ongoing to ensure that any changes to the current level of teaching supports in individual schools are properly managed. Schools will also need advice on how use their available resources²⁹.

²⁷ for more details see Special Education Support Service [SESS] website: www.sess.ie

²⁸ Standardised tests of Mathematics and English Reading.

²⁹ NCSE, 2014.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

For this small-scale study, semi-structured interviews with stake holders was the appropriate consultation tool, and interviewee selection was through purposive sampling, to ensure comprehensive representation of interests and experience, within a small sample.

Participants

In both jurisdictions, participants were drawn from three groups. Group composition and group code numbers used in interview analysis were a follows:

Table 1: Groups and group codes

Groups	NI	Rol
	Codes	
Original TGD/TFD members	A	1
State bodies, e.g. DENI/DES Inspectorate, NI Educational Library Boards (ELB) ; Rol NEPS, SESS	B	2
Parents, teachers, support staff involved in teaching and learning for pupils with dyslexia at schools level. Mainstream and specialist provision was addressed.	C	3

Two lists of possible interviewees (15 in NI, 16 in the Rol) were drawn up. These were approached, and 10 from NI and 16 from Rol took part.

Group breakdown was as follows:

Table 2: Interviews by group

NI Group	No. interviews	Rol Group	No. interviews
A	4	1	3
B	3	2	5
C	3	3	8*
Total	10	Total	16

**included one group interview with three parents.*

Interviewees are classified above under a single group heading, but many had multiple roles: former TGD/TFD member, and/or professional, and/or parent of child with dyslexia. One had been a member of both TFD and TGD.

Ethical framework

The ethical procedures observed throughout the study are outlined in the Code of Practice governing research in the four colleges, and in the British Educational Research Association Revised Ethical Guidelines (2011).

Throughout the design and implementation of this study, confidentiality was observed. Proper names and other identifying features of persons, places, and institutions were deleted. A code title was given to each interview transcript. In this report, quotations carry their source-transcript code-numbers, formatted as follows:

- A.1: NI Group A, interview no. 1
- 1.3: Rol Group 1, interview no. 3

Potential interviewees were initially contacted by telephone to explain the purpose of the research, and invite them to participate in the study. They were assured that participation was voluntary and participants may withdraw at any stage from the research, and that their involvement and input would be treated confidentially (see above). Those who agreed to participate received a letter explaining the study aims and objectives; it also included a summary of the key findings of the TFD/ TGD Reports. This letter also explained that interviews would take approximately 25 minutes and would be audio taped so that data could be accurately analysed.

Interviewees were informed that recordings would only be reviewed by the research team members who would transcribe and analyse the data; and that the results of the study would be presented to SCOTENS and subsequently published. Data records are securely stored at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin for an appropriate timeframe and will be disposed of by the research team on completion of the study. All electronic files have been password-protected. Two of the interviewees chose to be interviewed without audio-recording. The interviewer took notes during their interviews and these notes were subsequently transcribed into the data set for analysis. There is a slight stylistic difference between the written and the audio records, but it did not impact on the thematic analysis engaged in for this study.

Procedure and interview schedule

Four pilot interviews, two in NI and two in RoI, were conducted. Interviewees included a post-primary teacher (NI), a local authority coordinator of SEN provision (NI), a lecturer in the area of dyslexia from a college of education (RoI), and an academic researcher in SEN (RoI). In feedback on the pilots, one interviewee highlighted some overlap across the five sections of the interview schedule (see Appendix). However no major changes were indicated or made.

Each participant was interviewed once. In the semi-structured Interview schedule, topics and focussed questions were prepared with additional prompts for the interviewer (see Appendix). Participants' views/perspectives were sought on five focus areas:

- Impact of the dyslexia TFD/TGD Reports on policy and practice;
- Current support provision for students with dyslexia;
- Best practice for students with dyslexia;
- Gaps in policy and practice regarding support for students with dyslexia;
- Recommendations to improve support for students with dyslexia.

Questions were open-ended (e.g. "what are your views on current support provision?"), to encourage interviewees to draw on their experience, knowledge and practice. Guided by interviewee responses, the interviewer sequenced topics according to their unique perspective.

Data analysis

Analysis of the data involved transcription of the recorded interviews, reading and re-reading the data which was labelled, coded and re-coded. Each research team collaborated in analysing their own data set; further comparative analysis of data was done during collaborative cross border meetings. Emergent themes were listed, and subsequently reduced with only the principal ones remaining as focus findings of the research.

In this study, interviewees were educationalists and/or had deep experience in the field of dyslexia. Their inputs were knowledgeable critiques in themselves. Below, within the thematic structure, they are allowed as far as possible to speak for themselves.

In the next chapter, findings presented under the following thematic headings that arose from the data:

- Awareness of dyslexia;
- Parental voice;
- Impact of TFD/TGD on policy;
- Assessment of dyslexia;
- Organisation of school support;
- Pressure points;
- Teacher education.

Under each heading, findings from NI and RoI are presented separately, in parallel columns.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Task Group recommends that pupils should have access to a continuum of provision that meets their needs, throughout their education, regardless of age or geographical location (TGD, 3.8, p.47)

The Task Force recommends early and graduated intervention – where possible learning difficulties should be identified in the first years of schooling, and appropriate adjustments based on needs should be made (TFD, 1.2, p.5)

Awareness of dyslexia: experience and theory

One interviewee took a distinctly philosophical approach to questions on the awareness of dyslexia and early literacy development, and suggested that

Policy makers should try to identify in their own notion of schooling and education factors that exacerbate dyslexia, they should try and identify in their own education philosophy, features that are provocative of specific learning difficulties and by that I mean they really need to look at assessment and accountability. (A.4)

NI	RoI
<p>A core feature, discussed by all the interviewees from the NI context, was the role of the TGD in adding credibility to the term “dyslexia”, and raising awareness of the implications of this difficulty within and beyond the education system. It was suggested that the support given at ministerial level raised the profile of this report amongst politicians and promoted an agenda which aimed to “change the climate of opinion” in this area (Lord Laird, in DENI, 2002, p.67).</p> <p>Responses, informed by personal experience of the identification, assessment and intervention process over the past 12 years, support the view that raised “awareness” has impacted policy, practice and attitudes</p>	<p>Interviewees were in broad agreement that the TFD definition was more inclusive in its scope, occurred along a continuum and increased teachers’ awareness of dyslexia in relation to identification and intervention. Interviewees noted that it became acceptable to use the term ‘dyslexia’ as opposed to specific learning disability in ensuing DES policy and guidelines, and that the definition indirectly helped to initiate the staged approach to assessment and intervention in DES policy from 2005 onwards.</p> <p><i>It’s a difficult concept fully to define and I think the definition in the [TGD] is an inclusive definition that allows for a continuum of need across the concept. (1.3)</i></p>

NI

within the education system. However, interviewees agree that the impact is inconsistent across Education and Library Boards (ELBs), across schools and across classes.

While redefining dyslexia may have raised awareness, interviewees explained that this resulted in a duality of diagnostic philosophies within the education system. The existing working definition in CoP, Section 7 (DENI, 1998) was based upon a medical model that was adhered to by the psychological services in their assessment and determination of children's education profiles (DENI, 2002, 2.29-2.31). It used the language of discrepancy which is "measurable" and "bureaucratic" in that children's difficulties can be defined and resources allocated accordingly. The TGD definition, in contrast, defines dyslexia as a continuum of need (2002, 2.48).

The [TGD] was looking towards a different approach to special education that was not itemizing disability. (A.4)

The opinion of some interviewees was that the report was ahead of its time in this respect and laid the foundation for aspects of the *Every School a Good School* Report (DENI, 2009), looking forward to a more inclusive system of education where teachers were trained and empowered to evaluate and meet the needs of all children. However, the majority of interviewees agreed that the definition itself was flawed as,

...it may have made the cognitive dimension stronger in terms of the types of intervention that were then promoted so that in a sense it crystallized intervention around a particular story. (A.1)

Dyslexia as a cognitive problem is very much favoured by people who see education as a production and then see education as the transmission of knowledge ... it is insufficiently child-centred. (A.4)

Other major causes of illiteracy such as motor development, sensory development or psycho-social development, although considered in the

RoI

It did have some effect on practice; I think one thing in particular was a wider acceptance of the word "dyslexia" itself. (1.1)

There was a better understanding that dyslexia wasn't the same as a general learning difficulty and a kind of a "one size fits all" approach to learning support. (2.3)

Maybe one of the best things it did in terms of practice was that it really heightened awareness of what dyslexia was, of the impact on children's learning and also I suppose that there are appropriate interventions.... (2.5)

The difficulties in reading, spelling, writing are unexpected in relation to the individual's other abilities and educational experiences, but it does sometimes mean that if what you're expecting of somebody is what they are going to achieve, then they are more likely to be diagnosed with dyslexia. If what you are expecting of someone is that they are less likely to achieve, traveller children or children from disadvantaged communities then, they are less likely to be identified and I think that is an issue. (2.3)

At the moment you categorize children and sort of go ah "what's his potential" and I.Q. tests are fundamentally problematic...working to one's potential has no basis in pedagogical theory, it just doesn't. (2.2)

The definition was never taken on board by the [DES] and that of course affected assessment and how [it] was done and how dyslexia ... was identified. We're still stuck with this discrepancy model even though it was argued against in the report and I think if they paid more attention to the definition and adopted that and looked at the assessment piece it would make a big difference.(1.1)

Interviewees argued that the definition should be revisited. There was criticism of the use of general ability (full-scale IQ) being in the average range or higher to reflect an individual's learning potential, because it could inadvertently exclude certain groups of students, for instance those from a

NI

TGD, were omitted from the definition. Consequently, the positive impact of increased awareness in terms of advances in teacher training, the development of support strategies and the range of resources created, has been limited.

If you acknowledge that dyslexia is more than what it was defined then you start to broaden out the actual types of intervention... so that you are looking at each child...from a wider perspective. (A.1)

We need a multi-dimensional approach and by that I don't mean a multi-sensory approach...we need to move beyond that. (A.1)

RoI

disadvantaged background, from accessing services especially if their scores fall outside specified cut-off points. By including reference to IQ and discrepancy models, interviewees believed that this may have compounded teachers' views that dyslexia-related difficulties were very different to those of students experiencing difficulty with reading.

I'd prefer if we moved to a system of profiles of strengths and needs in an area without the necessity of having to label.(2.1)

Some interviewees argued that a needs-based model of identification and intervention would be more appropriate than labelling young children. The staged model of assessment and intervention was perceived to be a step in the right direction, encouraging mainstream teachers to be pro-active in their response to students with literacy difficulties. The Response to Intervention Model was also proposed as an alternative to the way students are assessed, circumventing somewhat the issue of labelling at a young age, concentrating alternatively on how students learn best, their individual learning styles and the provision of an appropriate learning environment. However, this would presume a certain level of teacher expertise.

Parental voice

The TGD recommends that the school involves parents as partners in the education of their child through ... provision of information regarding the nature of dyslexia and the difficulties which the child might experience both in and out of school (TGD, 5.7, p.59)

The DES should ensure that information and advice are readily available to parents/guardians of children with specific learning difficulties (TFD, 7.2, p.108)

NI

RoI

The submissions to the TGD by parents provided ample evidence of the difficulties they encountered in attempting to access services for children with dyslexia. It was hoped that implementation of the TGD recommendations would address many of the difficulties and frustrations evident in these submissions. The recommendations stated that, “the involvement of parents is central to meeting the needs of children with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia”.³⁰ Our research findings found that parental voice remains an area of ongoing concern. One educationalist noted that

in terms of information filtering down to [parents] from [DENI] or from the individual Boards, I haven't seen a great change in that.(A.2).

This was borne out by parents' inputs. For example, one parent commented, *Most of the information I had to do was help from the internet ... then when I approached the school I had a fair understanding of what I wanted or what I expected to happen. (C.2)*

What to do with this knowledge however proved to be yet another barrier. Over a period of three years Mrs X approached her daughter's early-years teachers on several occasions with her concerns

The TFD recommended that the DES should ensure that information and advice are readily available to parents/guardians of children with specific learning difficulties (p.108). However, parents reported different experiences of the identification process. Issues included lack of clarity regarding the precise nature of a student's difficulty by the school. They also expressed concerns around the waiting time to access an assessment.

... 3rd Class was so horrible for her, you know she had all these pains in her stomach and it was really like the teacher thought that she was attention-seeking and this was the reason she was putting her forward for the educational psychologist. The assessment was telling me that she had an attention deficit disorder maybe, but it showed up the fact that she was hugely frustrated because she had a very very high IQ and masking this specific learning difficulty and dyslexia.(3.8)

It was reported that a diagnosis of dyslexia, through the process of a psychological assessment, has a positive impact on the mental well-being of students with dyslexia. Generally, parent interviewees reported satisfaction with the support their child received post-identification. Parents were positive about placement of their children in specialised reading units:

They get the language, they learn themselves about dyslexia ...it's a huge

³⁰ DENI, 2002, p.109.

NI

[I] waited it out and [by Primary 3] still no improvement ... I came back down to the school and spoke to the school again. The teacher at the time thought she had no difficulty in her reading and told me that she was ... excellent ... she's holding her own...(C.2)

This parent described the obstacles she met when wishing to voice her concerns.

I do think a lot of it depends on the teacher and their skill base and what their understanding is and [this] probably sounds a little cheeky but their understanding of it[dyslexia] or their ability to pick up on things like this .

Obviously I was persistent but I don't know what training is provided for teachers on picking up on it or things like that

Another teacher's insight marked a turn:

[Teacher] said "can I have a word?" And I said "yes please" and she said to me "I think [daughter] has some difficulty with her literacy" and I actually could've hugged the woman, I actually could've hugged her and I said to her I was crying she'll probably tell you and I said "I've been banging my head against the wall for three years saying this so". (C.2)

This teacher initiated the formal assessment. With this identification and in line with the TGD recommendation [R40], that parents should be involved in all aspects of the response to meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, both child and parent are now receiving the support they need. However, ongoing lack of transparency within the system generates deep uncertainty:

[I'm] very very worried for next year because [T] won't be her teacher ... I'm going to make an appointment to see the SENCO to ask what's happening next year, where we're going? and how far she's on the waiting list? All these kinds of answers I would like to know. (C.2)

This parent's experience was shared by teachers and contrasts with the TGD

RoI

thing to get your head around.(3.6)

They also see that ... "guess what I'm not the only one struggling you know, there are other kids around here you know that need help."(3.7)

Their self-esteem definitely gets a huge boost in here [reading class]... (3.8)

The following interaction among three parents shows vividly how fear of labelling jostles with relief of knowledge and support; and how the child moves from defensiveness to confidence. The emotional impact of system inadequacy is clear:

P1: After the diagnosis you can deal with it but before ... their self-esteem was just rock bottom.... because they know that they're different:...

P2: I heard people turning off going for an assessment because you don't want to have your child labelled for life, do you? And now I think of that thinking how backwards my goodness--

P3: That is a terrible attitude

P2: --I think my goodness it has brought my child to life, it has helped her so much that once the diagnosis and all the help she's got.... and awareness that their self-esteem is fragile and they really need basic encouragement and kindness. I can't stress how important it is for these children.

P3: Now we know what we're dealing with.

P2: Yeah.

P1: But it's like any medical issue ... once it's identified you can sort of deal with it you know.

However, concerns relating to transition to post-primary were articulated:

I don't know what way or how to approach the secondary school without making [daughter] self-conscious... I don't want her stigmatized either, I

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recommendation [R43], that each school should involve parents of students with dyslexia-related learning difficulties in decisions on continuation/ discontinuation of support services. It seems that the difficulties and frustrations evident in parental submissions to the TGD (2002) are still not being adequately addressed.

I believe that there should be a continuation of this report in which parents and teachers play a far greater role in the writing of any future reports. (A.4)

RoI

know but she knows herself and she's no problem telling everybody that she's dyslexia ... but me because the school is so big ... there's an awful lot of reading...you could fall through the cracks, that's why I'm afraid.(3.7)

Parents highlighted the value of assistive technology, particularly for this transition:

I think we have to give more time to assistive technology, in training them and making them ready by the time they go to secondary school—to be able to use things like voice recognition and text-to-speech software.(3.6)

Assessment of dyslexia

...as a matter of urgency, the five ELBs should agree a theoretical perspective and access criteria to inform future provision and support (TGD, 3.8, p.47)

The Task Force notes the difficulties associated with the use of a full scale IQ as a measure of potential in reading and related areas, and the use of discrepancy criteria involving assessed intelligence and reading achievement.... An alternative model is proposed – a four phase model, based on the initial phases of the Learning Support Guidelines (DES, 2000). A multi-disciplinary review is recommended at stage three (TFD, 3.4, p.29).

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RoI

The TGD recommended a move from the discrepancy model (R1.12, 2.38-2.39, 2.48), to a more holistic approach initially based upon informed teacher observation and evaluation (R 2.3). It also considered the implications of dyslexia upon the wider family group, the importance of parental involvement and the impact upon the child’s academic, social and emotional development (R 2.48, 5.4-5.6). These recommendations are not reflected in the following account, reported by a teacher interviewee:

[A parent] said to me “I thought me and my husband would be brought in ... we’d talk to the educational psychologist and be interviewed by her” before her child was looked at and she said all this time being spent they didn’t even look at her they just looked at her scores, they didn’t even talk to her. (C.3)

The TGD also recommended an *urgent* review of the disparity between assessment criteria and consequent access to support and resources across the five ELBs (R 3.3, 3.8). Interviewees noted that, despite agreement being reached regarding the definition of dyslexia and the common criteria to be adopted by educational psychology services, the discrepancy model remains in place. Criteria were described as ‘tight’ and based upon the score rather than the child or the experiences of their parents.

The four-phase model for identification of dyslexia outlined in the TFD has been formalised in the continuum of support model. The aspects of assessment highlighted by interviewees generally correspond to the purposes of assessment indicated in the TFD: to identify the student’s learning needs; make necessary adjustments to teaching; evaluate and record learning outcomes, and determine the need for further assessment and intervention. However, competing understandings of dyslexia can distort the development of policy and practice around its assessment.

How we assess for dyslexia which is linked to what dyslexia is and isn’t, is something that could be tightened up at policy level.(2.2)

Some asserted the value of psychological assessments.

I would personally feel that [psychological] assessment is essential to give an accurate picture of the student’s attainment and probably more importantly, give a profile of their strengths and needs which is essential for the classroom teacher in terms of differentiation, and for the learning support teacher in terms of providing good intervention. (2.4)

However, there was a general concern about the role and impact of these assessments. Their place in the current continuum-of-support model, where

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<p>The validity of this model was questioned. Firstly, assessment instruments do not take into account atypical development which may have motor, sensory, socio-emotional or environmental origin:</p> <p><i>Instruments are chronologically based and have a key-stage relationship. They don't take into account anybody who does not fit. (A.3).</i></p> <p>Secondly, the proliferation of phonic pedagogies has changed the content of teaching so that insecure alphabetic or whole word knowledge may no longer indicate specific literacy difficulties.</p> <p>Finally, waiting lists for psychological assessments can result in under-diagnosis of younger children, impeding early intervention; or later diagnosis when discrepancy may be based upon cumulative, lost learning experiences due to co-occurring rather than dyslexic difficulties. Board policy to reduce these waiting lists through the use of dyslexia screening tests has been effective; however, reductions in the number of teaching staff have created an alternate delay in terms of access to support and resources.</p> <p><i>By timely and early assessment, building teacher's capacity in a school, we can reduce to 2% the number of children needing psychological assessment. This is based on 2% of children assessed using the dyslexia screener. (B.3)</i></p> <p>One interviewee stated</p> <p><i>The very notion of dyslexia as a cognitive problem is very much favoured by people who see education as a production and then see education as the transmission of knowledge (A.4).</i></p> <p>This interviewee believed strongly that the psycho-social dimension of children's development and learning is ignored in the early years of primary school and as a result:</p> <p><i>...the social, the behavioural manifestations of dyslexia are seen as a consequence of cognitive deficit rather than a cause of it....(A.4)</i></p>	<p>responsibility for identifying students with dyslexia is being delegated to schools, was contested:</p> <p><i>I don't think that we should have to have psychological assessments ... to give them access to educational support in schools (3.3)</i></p> <p><i>I think if we can kind of send the message that assessment should be around need and not around labelling. Schools ... have spent more time on getting the label and pursuing the NEPS assessment and getting the resources than they have on actually addressing the child's needs.(1.1)</i></p> <p>Therefore, the needs of an individual student rather than the label should inform access to resources for that student.</p> <p><i>I'd prefer if we moved to a system of profiles of strengths and needs in an area without ... having to label so as a result of diagnostic assessment these are your strengths in relation to reading, ... your needs are on a continuum, ... we'll differentiate support according to the level of your needs and monitor your progress. ... but that presupposes a level of teacher expertise and knowledge and confidence in the area.(2.1)</i></p> <p>Lack of knowledge about assessment, particularly diagnostic assessment, was identified among teachers. Nonetheless, practice in schools was noted as improving:</p> <p><i>I think schools are planning better for children now at individual level, ... a lot of schools are getting on board and producing some kind of educational plan for children with needs whether they have learning support [or] resource teaching hours.(1.1)</i></p> <p>Interviewees reported that among practitioners at school level there is a positive move away from emphasising the label of dyslexia.</p> <p><i>I think there's greater confidence in schools that identifying dyslexia is not the crucial bit, the crucial bit of it is to look at all our struggling readers and</i></p>

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Government funded projects, available after publication of *The Review of SEN and Inclusion*³¹, allowed teachers to receive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training from INSET level to C-CET and AMBDA training. While this allows teachers to identify, intervene and refer suspected cases of dyslexia more quickly, some interviewees raised concerns regarding additional pressure on teachers from parents and the increased risk of litigation. Therefore, while the skills are in place, many are reluctant to use them.

Concern was also expressed regarding the growing confusion amongst parents given the range of assessment pathways, not all of which are accepted as valid in all ELBs. The priority of parents and teachers to have support, resources and access arrangements in place before the transition to Post-Primary School was also evident.

It's not great to label it but I would have preferred to have the diagnosis because that's something that will carry with her through her school years so there's someone who is always aware from the word go ... because it's very, very easy to get left behind. (C.2)

RoI

say what can we do to help them improve? (2.3)

Appropriate assessment to inform intervention was highlighted as an important issue:

The whole area of assessment is very useful in particular for children with dyslexia in forming their learning programmes ... we need to do a bit more on guiding professionals to make recommendations that are useful for teachers in the classroom or maybe equip teachers with greater skills in doing the assessments themselves.(2.5)

However, criticism was levelled at the staged model of assessment:

It's not how the staged assessment intervention is meant to work. [GAM] very quickly moves from Stage 1 to Stage 2 and lingers and sometimes malingers there until Stage 3 is accessed either on a long waiting list or massive financial burden upon the individual parents. (2.2)

It was argued that children have to fail in order to access support as opposed to the school providing preventative programmes. It was felt that the discrepancy model might militate against good practice in early assessment and intervention, as a child has to fail at reading before support is given. Finally, formative assessment, assessment for learning, must be central to teachers' practice:

how would I recognise good practice? ... a teacher ... who is prepared for their class, who understands how they're going to differentiate when they get in there, who is keeping records, who is monitoring how a Student is getting on; and that work is supported by a learning support or resource teacher who has more detailed information about the Student more detail to target. ...For the child with Dyslexia I think the monitoring of their progress is hugely important. (2.5)

³¹ DENI, 2009.

Organisation of school support

It is essential that these interventions include whole school policies within class approaches and individual interventions at Stages 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice, as well as the type of external support available through the various ELB services. (TGD, 2.49, p.31)

An important principle underpinning the phased model of identification and provision is that the level of support provided to a student should match his/her learning needs. This implies that students with the greatest learning needs at a particular time should receive the most intensive levels of support (TFD, 5.3, p.78).

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Some interviewees acknowledged that while the TGD recommendations were positive, good practice already existed in the special school sector. There were concerns that any depletion of this good practice (which is currently under review and a new model of outreach is being piloted) could be a folly. The pilot model involves individual evaluation of need and an intensive programme of support for four days per week over eight to ten weeks duration, after which progress would be re-evaluated. There were mixed views on this. One interviewee believed it to be a positive development in that it would provide a more inclusive approach by not removing the child from their home school and social connections. In contrast, another interviewee commented,

I am worried that there's going to be a huge gap. For example, let's take Primary Seven; ten weeks [support] is up to Christmas, so there are going to be two terms when there's no intervention unless that's taken up by the class teacher. (C.1)

Whole-school policy varied from school to school depending on what Senior Leadership, the Vice Principal and Principal consider to be priorities

Concern was expressed at potential loss of one-to-one support being replaced by the class teacher being required to address the diversity of

Interviewees argued that attention should now be focused on ensuring that resources available to schools are used effectively and efficiently. However, it was felt that good practice was patchy and inconsistent, and concern about cutbacks in resources was often expressed.

There are pockets of excellent practice which again are linked more to particular teacher expertise and a particular school and interest of the principal driving it but I think on the whole, practice is very inequitable across the system.(2.1)

I don't see a lot of good multi-disciplinary practice working, I think there might be some good practice where there's communication between the different disciplines but I don't think the predominant experience with parents is sitting down in a school on a regular basis to review progress or assessment or an IEP with the key players around the table. (2.2)

There was general welcome for the growth of inclusive teaching approaches but caution was expressed regarding the need to protect intensive one-to-one or small-group support provision.

I think when we talk about kids with severe needs, I think there's still a need for provision for intensive one to one there and we just don't have the

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<p>pupils' needs in large, busy classes. Underpinning this view was the fact that pupils' emotional and physical well-being was perceived to be improved by a full year of specialist teaching in a special school where literacy skills could be developed, not only in reading and spelling as discrete areas of learning but across the curriculum.</p> <p>Meeting a child's social and emotional support needs is curtailed by cutbacks:</p> <p><i>Many children...don't have a good attachment or relationship with an adult, and schools can no longer provide that because there is not the time... (A.4)</i></p> <p>Many concerns were voiced in relation to what were perceived as complex organisational arrangements in mainstream schools. There was a perceived lack of transparency within the system:</p> <p><i>parents are not really informed about what's going on ... it's a bit confusing for teachers as well ... and principals are unsure (A.2)</i></p> <p><i>My biggest concern would be what happens at the end of the year or what happens when the money runs out which are what we're faced with at the minute. Is there provision financially for Mrs X to give support long term? Are you at the discretion of funds? (C.2)</i></p> <p>This opacity was viewed as being dependent on human and fiscal resourcing. For example,</p> <p><i>We need to know ... have they made a decision and they're just not sharing it or have they not made it and they are just looking to see how it will all work out. We don't know what the [DENI] development plan is, what's their long term strategy. ... yet they're demanding of schools to know this that and the other and produce what they are going to do in three years' time.(C.3)</i></p> <p><i>There's a [DENI] protocol (2004) governing how schools and Boards must treat a privately obtained education psychologist's assessment and a lot of schools aren't aware of that, parents aren't aware of that, some of the</i></p>	<p><i>resources for it anymore.(1.1)</i></p> <p><i>Well I'm happy with two or three in a group, I'm less happy with five or six or seven of a mixed bag of kids and that happens still and I think there needs to be more attention given to intensive interventions over a short period rather than attending learning support through 4th or through 5th class.(2.3)</i></p> <p><i>I am working at the moment on the Response to Intervention; that's going to be hugely challenging but it will bring the focus on what is the intervention and what are you doing to meet the student's needs? (2.4)</i></p> <p>The issue of support materials in Irish for Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools was raised, and the newer issue of linguistic and ethnic diversity:</p> <p><i>There's still no support materials available in Irish. That was one of the recommendations in the Report. These kids are attending Irish-speaking schools ... yet often the [support] tuition they get ironically is in English ... [but in class] they are learning to read or doing a lot of their reading through Irish and that I think is a real problem area.(1.1)</i></p> <p><i>Is there a good level for material and support for Irish schools for dyslexia? My sense of it maybe there isn't? (3.1)</i></p> <p><i>There's just so many huge demands on [schools] between foreign children and children with no language, children with different languages than English, Traveller children ... and Dyslexics tend to get lost in that mish mash of people I think.(3.2)</i></p> <p>However, improvements were also noted:</p> <p><i>Class teaching has changed, there is much more of an emphasis on differentiation of teaching, different learning styles and using multi-sensory approaches, putting in place different accommodations if necessary, allowing the use of assistive technology, all those kind of things.(3.1)</i></p> <p>One interviewee argued that at this juncture, no more research on dyslexia</p>

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Boards don't follow it. (A.2)

A major problem for the majority of the Schools in Northern Ireland and probably in the Republic as well is our small schools with composite classes and teaching Principals where you don't have the luxury of full time SENCO ... cluster schools because that's the way of dealing with that. (A.3)

Interviewees made a number of suggestions as to how policy purposes and goals in the current system could be enhanced. These included,

- Relaxation of the discrepancy model
- Acceleration of initial assessment by the educational psychology
- Examination of funding processes for specialist teachers within schools
- Early identification coupled with a multi-disciplinary response and wraparound provision
- Creation of a whole school policy and approach
- More dialogue between all parties

A whole school policy and ... approaches need to be adopted. I think that's probably where the [Colleges'] Project has been very good ... [teachers] have ownership of it as well but they're enjoying it because they are saying they had no idea and it explains so much about certain children in their classes. (C.3)

RoI

was required, that priority be given to implementing what we know and evaluating programmes. Other suggested areas for development were

... there's been very little experimental research here...particularly comparing different programmes ...to see how effective or ineffective they are.(1.2)

...to make sure that resources in school are used in the most efficient and effective way ...that requires support for teachers, it requires continuous professional development opportunities for them.(1.3)

Precluding and addressing pressure points

The TGD recommends that practice is efficient and effective in schools where: there is a teacher(s) available within the school who, with a greater level of expertise can advise teachers regarding those pupils with a moderate degree of dyslexic difficulty and who can facilitate further advice and resources from support services when necessary. (TGD, 5.7, p.59))

The DES should examine a range of accommodations that might be offered to all students with specific learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in state examinations, including provision of test papers with enlarged print, and the option of listening to the exam questions on tape (TFD, 7.2, p.110)

Two major themes, united by their focus on the concept of *early* intervention, are discussed in this section:

- the pressures attending transition to post-primary school and concerns about examination systems; and
- the significance of intervention in the child’s early years.

Transitions to and in post-primary schools

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<p>There was considerable variation between interviewees’ views of post-primary provision. Some were confident that it had improved, <i>... provision at post-primary level has certainly improved, provision at lower primary level has become watered down and really lacks precision. (A.4)</i> <i>tracking of a child across subjects seems to have a better outcome than at primary level (B.1).</i></p> <p>However, most voiced concerns. One asserted that– <i>in post-primary mainstream, dyslexia was put to the bottom of the pile ... Post-primary needs intervention; that means training, and that needs a specialist teacher to go around the post-primary schools.(C.1)</i> <i>At post-primary there is a problem ... there are schools that go out of their</i></p>	<p>There was consensus among the interviewees that in recent years, changes in post-primary school practices have impacted positively on support for students with dyslexia in this sector: <i>... the decline in streaming and the push from [DES] to mixed ability has helped a huge amount for children with dyslexia to come and stay at their ability level ... not ending up in the lower stream because ... they performed low on the reading comprehension test ... (1.1).</i></p> <p>The need for transition planning was emphasised: <i>The transition ... is traumatic really for students with dyslexia ... for parents because they may now not have the formal assessment ..., so they are approaching the post-primary school saying that they have had their child suspected of having dyslexia but they actually don’t have the piece of paper</i></p>

NI

way to make provision ... but as a general comment no it's not great. (A.2)

From a parent's point of view, the concern was that,

if [daughter] can slip through the net of [three primary] teachers where does she go in the latter part of her school years? (C.2)

This concern was shared by educationalists particularly regarding the transition from primary school:

At GCSE level where you have 27 subjects on offer and schools team together because they can't offer all the subjects and we have {been} bussing ..., the dyslexic pupil could fall through the cracks. I think that's the big concern particularly in regard to implications for assessment and record keeping. (A.3)

A member of the original TGD Team suggested that:

There is ... a kind of metamorphosis as children go from 10 to 13 years of age ... we need to understand that process and we need to recognise it. ... While there is a huge focus on the early years there almost needs to be a similar focus on the early years of secondary education because there will always be youngsters who fall through any net in the early years. (A.1)

When asked about the impact of the TGD, one interviewee lauded the pre-TGD work of the Reading Centres (since 2013, referral to these has given way to an outreach support for students and families); she framed their closure as an effective defeat ("least impact") of the TGD:

Bringing pupils out of their P7 year for intensive support for one year and moving them on to post-primary with confidence, self-esteem and reading age raised ... pupils were delighted, parents even more delighted; anxieties, well-being and mental health were addressed and to me that's been the least impact [the TGD] has had by closing that provision down. ... (C.1)

It would seem that there is a need to carry out further research into post-

RoI

that says it, so that leaves them a little bit more vulnerable going into secondary. (2.4)

The SESS provide training for schools in managing this transition.

Interviewees identified many challenges for students with dyslexia in this sector. They highlighted particular concerns regarding dissemination of pertinent information about students with dyslexia to all relevant teachers.

Secondary schools are almost designed, with a system which ensures that students with dyslexia struggle with fourteen teachers a week Thrown on top of that there is Junior Cycle, the current assessment methodology, ... almost designed as the antithesis of dyslexia support ... There's a bottleneck in secondary schools where children with dyslexia are squeezed. (2.2)

A major challenge identified by interviewees was the lack of a point of contact for students and parents. The mentoring model was endorsed:

The student has a teacher that they can identify with ... the parents aren't trying to liaise with each teacher, each subject and they know they have one point of contact who understands where they are coming from(2.4)

Dyslexia-friendly schools...Nationally I think something like that would help, you see in the UK schools would have a little plaque on the front to say "We're a Dyslexia-friendly school".(1.1)

The organisation of learning support for SEN in general and dyslexia in particular at post-primary school level was strongly criticised:

Teachers tend to be used to make up hours in various areas so it's not conducive to a teacher building up expertise ... there's exceptions depending on the quality of a particular teacher or ... a particular principal in the area but there's no systematic standards across the area being adhered to.(2.1)

Interviewees also identified exemption from Irish, generally seen as the passport to receiving support in post-primary, as problematic:

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<p>primary provision in detail with a view to providing optimal instructional environments for students with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia.</p>	<p><i>Support [has] to be structured during Irish time. There is a teacher down in the resource room that would take five or six children at that time. (3.8)</i></p> <p><i>... lack of coherence in the system, ... what we say for exemption from Irish is not what we say for eligibility for a laptop, what we say to be eligible for learning support is not the same as being eligible for RACE [Reasonable Accommodations for Certificate Examinations].(2.3)</i></p> <p>The issue of accommodations for state examinations was addressed:</p> <p><i>One of the areas that students felt they needed more support in, was being told in time about their reasonable accommodation and having sufficient time to get used to [it] being able to use that accommodation in schools.(2.5)</i></p> <p><i>The school gives special accommodations for Junior Cycle and then the inspectorate or NEPS people give it at Leaving Cert ... students who got allocations at Junior Cycle ... are not getting them at Senior Cycle which is causing untold frustration among students and parents.(3.1)</i></p>

Early Years: optimal pressure prevention

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<p>Early intervention should target foundational skills sets and neurological development, from birth:</p> <p><i>I think that the work coming from auditory research and from the motor research would really emphasize a lot more targeted sort of play through music, through dance, through specific movement which is now starting to be conceived as learning foundations for abstract common activities. ...</i></p> <p><i>... your neurological system has already been calibrated before you're born which is going to have an impact on how you learn before you even go to</i></p>	<p>Early Years education provision is a setting for noticing the pointers:</p> <p><i>3.7: How early can a child be diagnosed? What is the earliest stage you can recognize Dyslexia?</i></p> <p><i>Interviewer: I know that they recommend that you don't really make the identification until a child starts formal reading but a teacher in Junior Infants should be able to pick it up.</i></p> <p>Interviewees underlined the need for and value of early intervention:</p> <p><i>Dyslexia should and could stay at stage 1 of the model especially if it's picked</i></p>

school ... you discount it at your peril...

... there are a couple of paragraphs in the TGD about that but in truth it never actually came to anything ... (A.1)

early identification ... needs to be in the Health context before the child reaches 24 months when Health lets go of the child because education becomes responsible for the child at 24 months [but] usually doesn't see the child until about 3 ½ years of age, there's a gap in there where intervention can be missed so we need the Health visitor ... Mother and Toddler groups an awful lot more work could be done in helping to identify the children and providing experiences...

There could be a brilliant role in there for occupational therapists. The speech and language service is also going to be important. (A.3)

up early enough we can do something about it and it almost stops looking like Dyslexia—that's clearly the ultimate aim.(2.2)

The things that cause reading difficulties around phonological awareness or visual difficulties or things like that. If those things can be identified early on and addressed before the child fails at reading... (1.1).

... there's insufficient knowledge of ... the stages of development of [children's] identities and their personalities and so there's ... among dyslexic children an insufficient development of independence and identity ... (1.2)

However, the bugbear of competition for resources arises:

... early childhood and Aistear and so forth ...that's where the energy and the funding is going; it needs to shift then from time to time to take other areas into account you know.(1.2)

Undervaluing early years was roundly condemned:

Someone is at least 7 or 8 and then you're put on a waiting list, you start saving up for an assessment there's another delay and the wait ... essentially what it is, is methodologically and morally bankrupt.(2.2)

Teacher education

A Northern Ireland accredited training course on dyslexia should be developed in collaboration with universities, university colleges and ELBs. Where possible, it should be made available through local centres, to maximise uptake. Funded places for SENCOs should be given consideration. (TGD, 4.13, p.52)

In-career development courses for learning support and resource teachers dealing with the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and the planning and implementation of appropriate interventions should be provided as a matter of urgency. (TFD, 7.4, p.113)

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Responses regarding current provision were generally positive. It was felt that there is good practice in both training colleges' pre-service teacher education programmes but that relevant modules should be compulsory. Reflecting on teachers' CPD, one interviewee observed that,

teacher support, advice and CPD haven't been mainstream until now with the [Colleges] Project(C.3).

A number of interviewees concurred that the current CPD/Literacy Project has been a highly positive, welcome development; but as it was introduced in 2012, ten years after the TGD, it wasn't perceived as a direct consequence of the report's recommendations.

The parental view point with regard to current provision was that the quality of teacher knowledge and skill is still inconsistent. One parent commented,

You're laughing if you get a really good teacher who is very tuned in. Mrs X has a really good set of skills ... it was perchance that Y ended up in her class and the support that she's had this year is phenomenal. (C.2)

Others shared this view, for example, one interviewee said, "there are gaps in information for parents and there are certainly gaps in information for teachers."

The issue of teacher education permeated all interviewees' inputs. One interviewee stated that sufficient changes in classroom teaching have not yet materialised and that teachers need practice on how to do things differently. The SESS has worked on up-skilling support teachers with the aim that specialist training can filter into the wider school. The Rose Report (2006) is a model:

The Rose Report ... talks about equipping all teachers with core skills, a few teachers with advanced skills and a smaller number of teachers who have specialist kind of training.(1.1)

The training of mainstream teachers ... we have to realise that the vast majority of children with dyslexia are going to be in mainstream classrooms and so their needs have to be met [there].(2.5)

I think there are still gaps in initial teacher training, for teachers now there's an extra year available. ... ideally, I would like to see some incentive, something that would make teachers go back and do CPD afterwards.(1.1)

Quality CPD needs to be mandatory ... because you want equity across the system, you want all children to have access.(2.1)

Regarding CPD, reference was made to the seven universities and colleges of education, which provide quality Level-Nine special education programmes.

NI

Opinion diverged as regards the most effective model of teacher education. For example, one interviewee felt that there should be more award bearing courses at Masters Level while another felt that the focus needs to be on practice rather than theory.

The theory is nice ... but how do we work in the classroom? ... What kind of strategies can I use to improve their learning? ... I think that's basically what teachers want.(B.1)

For the ordinary class teacher to recognize that [dyslexia] doesn't always necessarily mean somebody being parachuted in as they expect ...trying to raise the confidence of the class teacher to say, 'Hey, I can do this' ...(B.2)

the [Colleges] Project has been very good ... [teachers] have ownership of it as well but they're enjoying it because they are saying they had no idea and it explains so much about certain children in their classes. (C.3)

It was suggested that teachers and in-school specialists need time within their schools to disseminate and embed good practice. This reflected a general consensus that there needs to be specific training for teachers in specialist roles. One interviewee commented,

If it can be done in class even as part of a group then it's not specialist. teachers have to be more aware ... use a variety of strategies while being aware of the difficulties that a child with dyslexia faces. [But] I'm using ... things that cannot be done in class, that need to be ... on a one-to-one ... having them out in groups or even pairs doesn't work as effectively... (C.3)

In line with TGD recommendation [R37] the consensus of opinion among the interviewees was that "the training of teachers is crucial." Though it was generally acknowledged that current CPD provision, e.g., the CPD/ Literacy Project and pre-service courses are providing sound training, all agreed that capacity building in the area of dyslexia continues to be an area for ongoing professional development of teachers across all sectors: professional capital

RoI

Reference was made to supports available to schools from SESS, and to the Professional Development Service for Teachers. Regarding content available to teachers in the Irish context, SESS in particular has been proactive in CPD in the area of dyslexia: it was identified as one of the four core areas of SESS work. It was also noted that the DES has provided specific funding to the Dyslexia Association Ireland in their role as information and support source for parents and teachers.

One interviewee felt it would be beneficial to utilise special reading schools as centres of excellence where mainstream and support teachers might experience good models of practice.

SESS's brief is to provide professional development for all teachers, primary, post-primary, special schools and special classes across all areas of [SEN] ... dyslexia is one area where a considerable amount of support is offered and there is quite a demand from teachers. ... The SESS has found that up-skilling the resource teacher and enabling them to go back to their schools to up-skill their own staff... that model works well.(2.4)

The centre of excellence model where we have a lot of knowledge [in a special reading unit] that we take very much for granted, you know we have teachers who are very committed and who are learning all the time and they are specialist in their fields.(3.5)

However, teachers' confidence with using information and communications technology (ICT) and assistive technology was raised as a concern:

... we can be doing way more with it. ... I don't think it's about resources, ... lack of laptops in school, ... it's teacher confidence and practice, to just get used to doing things differently.(2.3)

One of things that emerged was the need for teacher training and upskilling Most teachers have found [ICT] to be so useful that they are willing to put in that time to up-skill.(3.3)

NI

RoI

is needed to bring about system change.

As part of capacity building it was very evident to me that everyone needs to know strategies and how to cope with dyslexic pupils. (C.1)

We've got to put far more investment into teacher education ... based upon critical reflection on practice and ...good subject knowledge.... The fundamental quality of education depends upon the quality of teachers and the quality of the teacher/pupil relationship. They should start spending more time at that. (A.4).

Impact of TGD and TFD on policy

It is considered essential that steps are taken to ensure that these principles of good practice are actually implemented throughout the school, rather than remain within a written school policy. (TGD, 5.3, p.54)

An important principle underpinning the phased model of identification and provision is that the level of support provided to a student should match his/her learning needs. This implies that students with the greatest learning needs at a particular time should receive the most intensive levels of support (TFD, 5.3, p.78).

NI

RoI

Some initial uncertainty was expressed across the interviewee sectors regarding the impact of the TGD on policy. Changes in perception of SEN in policy and provision flowing from *The Education Order* (1996) and the CoP (DENI, 1998) had resulted in the formation of the TGD itself. Some suggested that the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act* (2001) and the ensuing *Special Educational Needs and Disability Order* (2005) were part of this shift in mindset regarding SEN, impacting pedagogy, curricula, classroom environments and school ethos.

However, there was a feeling that the TGD was a catalyst for more specific change at three levels- understanding of dyslexia, inclusion, and partnership.

Understanding of dyslexia

A majority of NI interviewees agreed that through the TGD's work and Report, a definition of dyslexia as a real learning difficulty has changed the dialogue of government, practitioners and parents. There was a feeling that the Report was a catalyst for more specific change at three levels- inclusion, partnership and policy

It's difficult to say what specific effect the [TFD] had on policy at that time ... a lot of other things happened around that time or in the late 90's, in the first years of the noughties. A ten-year period of extraordinary development and change in education in the South here and particularly in the education of children with learning disabilities ... including children with dyslexia.(1.3)

I think that the alternative model it was proposing is a move away from a discrepancy approach towards the phased model ... in terms of the staged approach, you could see it influencing the [GAM] so that idea of the phased staged approach certainly influenced policy thinking at the time.(2.1)

Following publication of the TFD, the number of special classes for students with dyslexia increased, and the student-teacher ratio in these was reduced to 9:1. Interviewees were critical of DES reliance on psychological reports indicating dyslexia, strict criteria for admission to special reading classes/schools and 'blanket' IQ scores to access same. However, with changes in DES policy, particularly evident in Circulars 24/03 and 02/05, the number of these classes had been reduced in a drive towards more inclusive practices.

Some of the [TFD] recommendations were implemented, for example they reduced the pupil/teacher ratio, ... but in general I feel that it's been shelved

NI	RoI
<p>Inclusion</p> <p>Interviewees in all three sectors agreed that by defining dyslexia as a continuum of need, the TGD placed children with this difficulty at the heart of the mainstream setting and placed an onus upon all schools to train staff to understand, identify and intervene as early as possible in order to reduce the negative legacy that can result from dyslexia-related difficulties (TGD, 4.1-4.4, 5.7).</p> <p><i>It had a global description of children who had difficulties and its approach to this inclusive notion of children was to include them in mainstream schools.(A.4)</i></p> <p>This vision for dyslexia provision pre-dated other government initiatives (<i>Every School a Good School</i>;³² <i>Count, Read: Succeed</i>;³³ and a review of SEN and inclusion³⁴. While the recent government funded SEN CPD Literacy Project (Stranmillis and St. Mary’s University Colleges, Belfast, 2012-15), was commended for meeting many of the TGD recommendations (4.5-4.7) interviewees from the three sectors raised questions regarding the ten-year delay.</p> <p>Partnership</p> <p>The TGD was a not only a cross-border team; it represented all groups.</p> <p><i>Within the TGD you had people from Initial Education, Continuing Professional development, the Departments and Boards all sitting around to come up with a single view about something and that was good. (A.4)</i></p> <p>TGD members collaborated to produce <i>Developing a Dyslexia-Friendly</i></p>	<p><i>really.(3.2)</i></p> <p><i>There is a very kind of blanket of IQ scores and above to access the special classes. Sometimes you may see kids that may be at the upper end of the low average range and still have a huge discrepancy and struggling.(3.3)</i></p> <p>Similarly, in the years preceding and directly after publication of the TFD, students with dyslexia were entitled to 2.5 hours of supplementary support per week. This model was replaced with the GAM in 2005. As a result, many students who had previously received individual support found themselves in large withdrawal groups with students experiencing other diverse needs. Access to other forms of provision such as special reading classes/schools was largely dependent on where a student lived.</p> <p><i>They miss out because of the criteria and ... because there’s going to be less psychological profiling of children ... we are going to be left in this kind of fossilized position of looking for it. (3.5)</i></p> <p><i>... students with dyslexia have suffered greatly with the cutbacksstudents that were getting individual help found themselves in a large group.... schools are left ... at their own discretion to allocate their hours or their teaching facilities and provision as best they can.(3.2)</i></p> <p><i>Location has huge implications for services available. So where you live makes a big difference.(3.2)</i></p> <p>The TFD Report placed emphasis on the idea of the phased model of identification which possibly influenced the “staged approach” to both identification and intervention of learning difficulties including dyslexia. Interviewees generally viewed the staged approach and the whole-school multidisciplinary approach positively but argued that schools had different</p>

³² DENI, 2009.

³³ DENI, 2011.

³⁴ DENI, 2012.

NI

Learning Environment (DENI, 2009), a handbook for schools which included a school audit, whole-school policy guidance and exemplars. This concept of education partnership was a model for school teams and ELBs. In 2009, the ELBs reached agreement regarding Stage 3 assessment criteria (DENI, 2002, 3.2), to pave the way for the new Education and Skills Authority. A unification of the ELBs was anticipated. However:

The whole business of Teacher Action Research and Teacher Professional Development which was in the [TGD] was not carried on much at all. (A.4)

One educationalist questioned the impact of TGD on policy:

I would say [the TGD] articulates and elaborates policy in the area of inclusion, in the area of a policy in terms of a responsibility for development in schools. The School governing body have to have a policy on Dyslexia which then teachers would implement so it was a top down model. (A.4)

RoI

interpretations of the model and as a result, practice suffered in terms of getting a coherent staged approach across the system.

The phased model ... gives responsibility and ownership back to the school. It's a shift from the medical model and relying on external support, thinking that outsiders have this knowledge that is going to suddenly cure, whereas with this approach, the emphasis is on the class teacher, learning support teacher, whole school plan in place for identification and intervention and monitoring that intervention and evaluating the child's response.(2.1)

Is the stage model embedded? There is a lot of variability between schools. ... but we are certainly moving in that direction.(2.3)

Suggestions made by interviewees regarding improvements to policy around dyslexia, included a tightening up of DES circulars. One interviewee expressed disappointment that an opportunity to highlight dyslexia had been missed in the publication of the National Literacy and Numeracy strategy because if the approaches advocated in the National Strategy were implemented, students experiencing dyslexia would enjoy the benefits.

The circulars are so important, circulars drive practice. I don't know why there isn't a collated manual because there are only about six or seven major circulars... One document and give them to NEPS to administer and review them every 2 years and a major review every 5 years and have consultation groups, voluntary organisations, parent groups to see what's working, what's not – relatively simple to do, I think.(2.2)

... I think it's like any organisation, if they have a written policy and it doesn't get reviewed this is an issue ... any document or a process like the [TFD] should ideally have a built in review timetable.(2.2)

DISCUSSION: KEY POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Notwithstanding organisational differences between NI and RoI provision, the level of coherence in interviewees' perspectives across the jurisdictions, groups and roles is remarkably high. This is significant, given the open-endedness of the interview questions. It is a powerful indicator of the potential for shared learning and innovation.

The following key points and recommendations apply equally to both jurisdictions. The issues highlighted in this chapter were interwoven in the interviewees' discourse, and threaded through the themes identified in chapter Four.

Definition of dyslexia: labelling

The broader concept of a 'continuum' of need and the inclusive nature of the TGD/TFD definition, has raised the awareness of dyslexia. The definition reflects a change in the language from a medical model of dyslexia; the 'unexpectedness' aspect of the definition has also made an impact. The usefulness of the current definition however, is questionable as a discrepancy model continues to be used in practice.

Operationalising the definition by implementing a three stage model of support for all children—including those who may have dyslexia—is confusing for both teachers and parents and also hinders timely support for those who need it most.

Teachers use the language of inclusion, 'high incidence' and a 'staged approach' to assessment yet in practice a discrepancy model of identification continues to exist for children who may have dyslexia. There is no doubt that the needs of student rather than the label should inform access to resources.

However, at system level, parents need the label to access support. A system of profiling the strengths and needs of students with dyslexia is more educationally sound and in line with best international practice. A revised definition would move beyond a cognitive dimension to include the social manifestations, and the psycho social dimension.

Recommendations

- At Department level in both jurisdictions, the TGD/TFD definition of dyslexia should be revised to reflect current research, and to ensure its applicability at assessment, programme development and schools practice levels.
- The discrepancy model of dyslexia should be replaced.

Diversity in the student population

Irish society has never been monocultural. Interviewees noted that, despite the TGD/TFD recommendations regarding assessment tools and support materials in Irish for Irish-speaking students with dyslexia, nothing has happened. This also applies to provision for children whose mother tongue is other than English. Ethnic and socio-economic diversity in Irish society are not reflected in currently available assessment tools and support materials and programmes.

Recommendation

- Research should be conducted to identify tools and approaches developed elsewhere, that offer models for development to suit the contemporary context in Ireland.

Pressure points and transitions

The views expressed in this report indicate that the difficulties and frustrations expressed in TFD/TFD submissions by parents are still not adequately addressed, thirteen years on. This is most evident as parents seek information about assessment, and access to individualised support. Uncertainty about the system and lack of transparency about different assessment pathways in NI and in RoI compounds the anxiety for parents.

Times of transition present as further pressure points as a student moves from primary to post primary or from year to year within post primary. Information about access to accommodations at exam time continues to be a cause for anxiety among parents.

Recommendations

- Information regarding exam accommodations, exemption from second language, access to assistive technologies, post-primary exit-point examination accommodations, and access routes to third level, should be communicated to parents in good time in a transparent manner.
- Every school should designate a contact person or ‘mentor’ for students with dyslexia and their parents to provide information, and clarify the optimal route to achieve potential.
- The DES/DENI should clarify and streamline the system-wide information communicated through DES circulars (RoI) or through ELBs (NI) to maintain consistency, coherence and transparency for all.
- The ‘Dyslexia friendly schools’ strategy operant in NI should be adopted in RoI, as it has the potential to improve dyslexia awareness at post primary level.

Early identification

The importance of the early years (from birth to seven years) as a critical period for learning – a time when significant foundational neurological and linguistic development takes place – is well recognised by parents, and by experienced educators. Early intervention—a principle regularly reiterated in policy guidelines, including the TFD/TGD Reports—provides an opportunity to address aspects of language and literacy before independent reading develops. Teachers need to recognise the precursors of literacy development and understand a holistic dimensional model of learning. This contributes to a broader understanding of specific learning difficulties and dyslexia.

Recommendations

- Early identification of a ‘learning difference’ as recommended by TFD/TGD in the early years (3-5yrs) should be prioritised by early years educators and teachers of infant classes.
- Appropriate formative assessment tools should be used when concerns are first raised with the care-giver/early years educator or teacher.

Teacher education

A lack of knowledge on the part of mainstream class teachers with regard to assessment, particularly diagnostic assessment, was identified in this study. Interviewees asserted the importance of the class teacher tracking, monitoring and evaluating the dyslexic student’s learning, but many observed that this practice was inadequate. The assumption still holds power that the key to unlocking resources is the label, rather than the individual student’s needs. However, interviewees highlighted the limitations of a staged model of support (GAM or CoP) for students with dyslexia.

The Rose model of CPD (2006), outlining three levels of teacher expertise in dyslexia support (basic, advanced and specialist knowledge), is a useful framework for a school team approach.

Students with dyslexia, and their parents and schools, urgently need improved support, which is informed by sound research. That research must be grounded in a dialogue between theory and experience. Within NI and RoI and in dialogue between them, this requires a collaborative network of the statutory education bodies, teachers' professional associations, Dyslexia Associations, and teacher education colleges. This would provide a sound, sustainable framework for initial teacher education, CPD and postgraduate programmes for teachers in this area.

The NI Literacy Project is a significant example of CPD with close links to the university colleges, and is credited with positive outcomes in building teacher knowledge, competence and skill with a particular focus on struggling readers and students with dyslexia. This model shows the potential for shared learning North and South.

Building professional learning communities in this area is a vital investment in the future, and requires continuous and uninterrupted investment and support.

Recommendations

- A collaborative network of the relevant bodies should be developed to ensure sustainable initial, CPD and postgraduate teacher education regarding dyslexia.
- The NI Literacy project should be sustained to continue to extend teacher knowledge, and contribute to policy development.
- All mainstream teachers should have regular CPD in assessment-for-learning practices and in programme planning for students with dyslexia.

- Advanced and specialised CPD in dyslexia support should be made available to designated teachers in all schools
- Adequate and reliable funding should be assured for provision for dyslexia support at all levels, from research to practice.

Concluding comment: Impact of TGD/TFD

The findings of this study strongly suggest that a review of the TFD/TGD is long overdue. Despite the inclusive definition of dyslexia outlined in 2002 there are persistent gaps and contradictions in understandings of dyslexia at all levels of the system. Provision for students with dyslexia in NI and RoI continues to be characterised by inadequacies in identification and assessment and precariousness in appropriate support.

The vision and understandings in the TFD/TGD need to be developed further. The need for alertness to indicators of possible learning difficulties in the child's earliest years, recommended in these reports, has been overlooked. Students with dyslexia have been among those most vulnerable to economic cutbacks which have blocked timely and appropriate support, in primary and post-primary schools.

The frustrations, commitment and hope of the interviewees throughout this study were engaging. In the absence of an implementation group or clear time frame to review the 2002 TGD/TFD recommendations to address dyslexia support in Ireland, the interviewees' observations attest to the urgency of establishing such a group and undertaking that review.

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APPENDIX: TEXT OF INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Every interviewee was sent the following explanatory note about the research, and the interview schedule.

Dyslexia in Ireland: Views regarding the provision for pupils with dyslexia since the publication of the Task Force Reports, North and South (2002).

Research aim

The aim of this research is to consider the views held by key stakeholders regarding the current provision of support for pupils with dyslexia and determine if their needs are being met in terms of the Taskforces' recommendations and the implementation of policy.

Objectives

- To consult with members of the Dyslexia Task Force groups, North and South (DENI, DES) and ascertain their views and perspectives on the provision of support for pupils with dyslexia ten years on.
- To consult with key stakeholders, North and South and to ascertain their views and perspectives on the provision of support for pupils with dyslexia.
- To clarify present policy in the area of dyslexia support, North and South, and to identify strategic policy which informs good practice.

Interview schedule

Section 1. Impact of Taskforce(s) on policy and practice

In your opinion, how did the Taskforce(s) influence policy in the area of dyslexia?

In your opinion, how did the Taskforce(s) influence practice in the area of dyslexia?

What do you think were the most influential elements/recommendations of the Taskforce?

What do you think were the elements/recommendations of Taskforce(s) which had least impact?

Section 2. Views/perspectives on the current provision of support for students with dyslexia

What are your views on current provision of support?

Section 3. Views/perspectives on best practice for students with dyslexia

In your view, what is best practice in terms of support for students at school level, classroom level and individual level?

Section 4. Views/perspectives on gaps (policy and practice) in terms of support for students with dyslexia

In your opinion, are there gaps in terms of the support provided for pupils with dyslexia? If so, what are these concerns?

Section 5. Recommendations you would make in terms of support for students with dyslexia

What recommendations would you make at policy level to improve support for students with dyslexia?

What recommendations would you make at practice level, that is, at school or class level to improve support for students with dyslexia?