

Cross Party Group on Dyslexia

Wednesday 23rd February 2022 at 6pm
(via Microsoft Teams)

Minute

Present

MSPs

Oliver Mundell MSP, Stuart McMillan MSP, Rachael Hamilton MSP, Pam Gosal MSP

Invited Guests

David McNeill, David O'Rorke

Non-MSP Group Members

David Jones, Julie Ross, Jennie Guise, Gillian Evans, Liz Roger, Laura Gemmell, Ross Duncan, Cathy McGee, Margaret Crombie, Dean Smith, Fran Foreman, Grace Mair, Sharon Hall, Owen Ferry, Susan Agnew, Martin Taylor, Mo Brown

Apologies

Paul O Kane MSP, Paul Nisbet

1.Minutes of the previous meeting

Approved: Dr. Margaret Crombie

Seconded: Dr. Julie Ross

It was noted that a letter had been sent to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills highlighting a range of concerns raised by the CPG and inviting the Minister or officials to a future meeting. An acknowledgement had been received.

2.Adult Assessments – Assessor Perspective **Dr. Jennie Guise, Practitioner Psychologist**

Dr. Guise gave a brief presentation on the general aims of an adult assessment, an analysis of reasons why adults wished to be assessed, what the process involved,

the challenges in carrying out adult assessment, the costs involved and issues in relation to standards and consistency and quality assurance across the UK.

She specifically highlighted a number of issues including the prohibitive costs (between £300- £500) resulting in a number of adults not being able to afford an assessment and the knock-on effect that could have in terms of employment opportunities and self-esteem.

Although some employers and potential employers do fund assessments, the attitude of many remains very negative and could be interpreted as leading to a form of financial discrimination.

She raised the difficulties in finding appropriately qualified assessors and the significant costs involved. There is no 'gold' standard for assessments although the SpLD Assessments Standards Committee has produced guidelines but there is a risk of different standards across the UK resulting in inconsistencies across borders. She also highlighted concerns about quality control and assurance as some employers may be commissioning or accepting assessments from private organisations undertaken by inappropriately trained or unqualified persons.

3. Adult Assessments – HE Sector Perspective

Dr. Julie Ross, Academic Skill Adviser, Dyslexia and Specific Learning Differences

Dr Ross gave an insightful presentation into the HE sector illustrating the current process which a student has to embark upon to secure appropriate support. The process appeared complex, lengthy and introduced a number of barriers and hurdles which students had to overcome. The process resulted in many students giving up as their dyslexia had an impact on their ability to undertake the process and for some who were away from home for the first time without close family support the process was overwhelming.

She highlighted the important differences between a 'medical' model with an emphasis on providing evidence of an impairment or deficit against the more positive 'social' model which takes a broader approach including avoiding using medical terms such as 'diagnose' and a focus on positive approaches to learning differences.

4. Adult Assessments – A dyslexic's perspective

A number of CPG members gave personal experiences and observations including the difficulties of accessing assessments and the negative attitudes of employers and potential employers. Some had had bad experiences at school and the assessment process caused anxiety and stress. The cost had been a major factor in people not getting an assessment even although the outcome may have led to more positive opportunities and outcomes.

The group had invited David O'Rorke who had recently undertaken an assessment and Paul McNeill, an ambassador for Dyslexia Scotland to share their own observations and comments.

5. Issues, challenges and opportunities

The Convener suggested that given time constraints the subject of adult assessments be continued at the next meeting to enable further experiences to be shared and for the CPG to identify specific actions it may take to address the issues raised and opportunities identified.

6. Additional Business

Stuart McMillan MSP raised an additional item in relation to an item on the ITV This Morning programme broadcast on 7th December 2021. The item was regarding an interview by Philip Schofield and Holly Willoughby with Matt Hancock MP about his own experience of dyslexia and a Private Members Bill he was introducing to Parliament. During the interview Philip Schofield asked Matt Hancock 'Was it your dyslexia that meant you misread the social distancing rules?'

This was a reference to a totally unrelated incident. It was noted that ITV had received significant complaints about the unacceptable and inappropriate question and that a public apology should be made to the thousands of individuals and families impacted by dyslexia.

The CPG agreed to write to the ITV requesting an apology and to extend an invitation to Philip Schofield to attend a future CPG meeting to heighten his awareness of dyslexia and its impact.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held in early May – date to be confirmed.