A simple guide to
SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES in the RAF

Could it be me, or someone I know?
WHY SHOULD I READ THIS BOOKLET?

The simple answer is to raise your awareness of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD).

It doesn’t matter if you think that you may have a SpLD, or if you think that someone you know may have a SpLD. You should be able to find some helpful information in this booklet.

You will find information on:

- Brief description of the four main SpLD
- What is Dyslexia?
- Dyslexia - what are the common signs?
- Could I be dyslexic?
- Dyslexia diagnostic questionnaire
- Workplace Difficulties
- How employers can help
- Tips that can help you
- How to do a Mind Map
- Learning
- Positive aspects of dyslexia and some famous dyslexics
- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- And finally....
- Notes

It is also useful to know that the Royal Air Force does not discriminate against those with SpLD. There is a tri-service JSP (JSP 898 Part 4 Chapter 6) issued that covers specific policy on SpLD.
A brief general description of the four main Specific Learning Difficulties is given below.

**Dyslexia** is a combination of abilities and difficulties. Reading is often a challenge due in part to the inability to skim and scan through written material. It can manifest itself in weakness in short-term and working memory, speed of processing, sequencing skills, auditory and/or visual perception, spoken language, motor skills, poor spelling and handwriting.

**Dyspraxia** is an impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement, often giving the impression of clumsiness. Motor skills relating to balance, co-ordination and manipulation of objects are hard to learn. Writing can be difficult and pronunciation may be affected.

**Dyscalculia** is a difficulty involving arithmetical skills. Students with dyscalculia may have difficulty in understanding simple number concepts, lack an intuitive grasp of numbers and have problems learning number facts and procedures.

**MEARES-IRLEN SYNDROME** it is also known as 'Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome' and is a broadly defined visual perceptual disorder affecting primarily reading and writing based activities. Because of this, it is sometimes categorised as a form of dyslexia. Individuals will experience distortions when they look at certain materials, in particular at texts. The distortion of text includes: blurring; movement of letters; words doubling; shadowy lines; shapes or colours on the page; and flickering. In adults this can cause headaches or eyestrain, when reading. These symptoms are eased, by using individually prescribed coloured filters and coloured lenses. A practitioner, trained by the Institute of Optometrists to use the Intuitive Overlays Test, combined with the Wilkins Rate of Reading Test, can carry out the assessment, and prescribe the coloured overlays or coloured lenses.

It is recognised that there is a considerable overlap between the characteristics of the four conditions and there may be
a combination of more than one. Difficulties will vary in
degree from person to person. Those affected by one, or any
combination of, the above learning difficulties, often under
achieve within the education system unless they receive the
appropriate support enabling them to minimise their weaknesses
and utilise their strengths. Many under perform in examinations.
Both the severity of the impairment and the effectiveness
of compensatory strategies vary widely. Low self-esteem,
often due to past humiliations, may be especially apparent in
mature students.
WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?

The word 'dyslexia' comes from the Greek and means 'difficulty with words'.

Dyslexia is a difference in the brain area that deals with language, dyslexic people process information differently. It affects the under-lying skills that are needed for learning to read, write and spell. Around 4% of the population is severely dyslexic. A further 6% have mild to moderate problems.

Dyslexia occurs in people from all backgrounds and of all abilities, from people who cannot read to those with university degrees. Dyslexic people, of all ages, can learn effectively but often need a different approach.

Dyslexia is a puzzling mix of both difficulties and strengths. Dyslexic people often have distinctive talents as well as typical clusters of difficulties.

Significantly for the RAF, dyslexic people often show strength in practical and technical fields.
WHAT ARE COMMON SIGNS OF DYSLEXIA?

The most common problem faced by dyslexic people is difficulty with reading, writing and spelling.

Other problems can include:

- personal organisation
- forgetting where they put things
- timekeeping
- getting number sequences mixed up
- telephone numbers
- bank codes
- remembering a series of instructions correctly
- difficulty with maintaining concentration when carrying out repetitive tasks
- coping with changes in the workplace

Dyslexia can also lead to low self esteem, lack of confidence and depression.

It can go undiagnosed until a change of job or promotion means that more written work is needed.
COULD I BE DYSLEXIC?

Dyslexia is a lifelong condition that cannot be "cured" like a disease or illness.

It will not go away if it is ignored.

It is more difficult to identify in adults than in children because adults will usually have developed ways of coping with or hiding a reading problem.

Help is available

On the next page is a list of questions for any adult who thinks she/he may be dyslexic.

Many people will say yes to some of these questions. Some people will say yes to many of them.

If you are one of those people in the latter category and you think that you might have a Specific Learning Difficulty/Dyslexia, further help and advice can be obtained from your Learning Centre and the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) website at www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk.

A list of other useful contacts can be found at the end of this booklet.
DYSLEXIA QUESTIONNAIRE

- Do you dislike reading aloud?
- Is reading new material difficult?
- Does it take you a long time to read a book?
- Do you sometimes pronounce words incorrectly?
- Do you have problems with spelling?
- Did you have difficulty at school and did you do less well in written exams than you feel you should have?
- Do you find it hard to write letters, reports, or even to take phone messages clearly?
- Do you have problems with sentence construction and punctuation?
- Do you get phone numbers wrong?
- Do you confuse 'left' and 'right'?
- Is your handwriting hard to read?
- Do you find it hard to see the mistakes you have made in written work?
- Do you have 'good' days and 'bad' days?
- Do you find it hard to remember things in sequence?
- Do you find it hard to remember new facts, names, etc?
- Do you get confused with times and dates?
- Did you find it hard to learn by 'ordinary' teaching methods?
- Do you forget quickly rather than learn slowly?
- Does someone else in your family have similar learning problems?
WORKPLACE DIFFICULTIES

A dyslexic person may find it difficult to:

- Read technical manuals or complex texts
- Produce letters or reports, especially handwritten documents
- Recall telephone numbers and appointments
- File
- Meet deadlines and prioritise tasks
- Manage time effectively
- Follow the thread of discussions

Many dyslexics appear to be under-confident and have low self-esteem.

The majority of adults will have developed many kinds of coping strategies for overcoming the problems caused by dyslexia.
HOW EMPLOYERS CAN HELP

- Have an understanding of Dyslexia
- Give advance notice of tasks whenever possible
- Offer guidance, help and support with new tasks
- Encourage use of a daily planner, keeping notes, asking questions
- Where possible give both audible and written instructions
- Use clear fonts eg Comic Sans or Arial
- Keep instructions short and precise
- Use visual images (eg flowcharts and mind maps)
- Colour code files and documents
- Try providing information on different coloured paper (black on white can be very hard to read). Pastel backgrounds such as cream may help
- Offer help with prioritising and organising tasks and time management skills
- Give praise and show patience

Being identified as having Learning Difficulty can be extremely distressing. Therefore, it is vital that individuals are reassured and briefed by managers at each stage of their support process.
TIPS THAT CAN HELP YOU

Written work:

- allow plenty of time
- keep a dictionary handy
- have a list of technical terms
- use technology - computer, spell checker
- get someone to proof read

Reading difficulties:

- put it on tape
- change background colour of computer screen
- change size and colour of text
- enlarge documents using a photocopier
- try using coloured overlays on printed text
- take it home or allow plenty of time

Remembering information:

- make notes
- draw or visualise key points
- use a flow chart
- ask for it in writing
- learn to "mind map" information (See next page for simple example. The BDA website has a direct link to James Cook University Study Skills site which explains mind mapping)

Problems in the workplace:

- prioritise with coloured labels
- use trays for urgent/routine/pending
- label work with post-it notes
- use a marker to show where you stopped work
- set aside time each day to get organised
How to do a Mind Map

Mind mapping (or concept mapping) involves writing down a central idea and thinking up new and related ideas which radiate out from the centre. By focussing on key ideas written down in your own words, and then looking for branches out and connections between the ideas, you are mapping knowledge in a manner which will help you understand and remember new information.

A further example of mind mapping can be found inside the back cover of this booklet.
LEARNING

Dyslexic people hear and see normally but have difficulty remembering what they hear and see. Brain scan experiments have shown that dyslexic people use different areas of the brain to process information.

Some people learn best through listening, some by seeing and others by doing or by a combination of them. Understanding how you absorb and process information is useful in the workplace or during study.

There are three main learning styles:

- Auditory - using sounds and words
- Visual - using your own images, creating pictures in your mind
- Kinaesthetic - active learning, doing, touching, practising things

It may be helpful if you can identify the learning style that suits you best. A quick guide can be found on the British Dyslexia Association website: www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk

People remember:

- 10% of what they read
- 20% of what they hear
- 30% of what they see
- 50% of what they hear and see
- 70% of what they say and write
- 90% of what they say as they do something
It is not all bad news!

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF DYSLEXIA

- Creative and Imaginative
- Innovative
- Intuitive and Perceptive
- Holistic outlook on tasks - able to see the many dimensions of a problem
- Lateral thinkers
- Determined and persistent
- Able to visualise and think in pictures not words
- Strong practical aptitude - able to learn quickly in practical environments

THESE DYSLEXICS FOUND FAME AND FORTUNE

General George Patton
Thomas Edison
Winston Churchill
Duncan Goodhew
Cher
Eddie Izzard
Henry Ford
Quentin Tarantino
Leonardo da Vinci
Nelson Rockerfeller
Albert Einstein
Jackie Stewart
Tom Cruise
Whoopi Goldberg
Alexander Graham Bell
Agatha Christie
Walt Disney
George Washington
Hans Christian Anderson
DYSPRAXIA

Dyspraxia, also known as Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD) is an impairment or immaturity of movement. It affects the planning of what to do and how to do it and is associated with problems of perception, language and thought. It used to be known as Clumsy Child Syndrome. Problems can include a combination of the following:

- Poor balance and integration of the two sides of the body
- Poor posture and fatigue
- Poor hand-eye co-ordination
- Clumsy gait and movement - tendency to fall, trip, bump into things
- Lack of manual dexterity
- Poor manipulative skills - difficulty writing and drawing
- Difficulty with dressing and grooming - make up, shaving, tying shoelaces
- May use either hand for same task at different times
- May talk continuously and repeat themselves
- Difficulty in following a moving object and looking quickly from one object to another
- Poor visual perception
- Difficulty in distinguishing sounds from background noise
- Over/under-sensitive to touch - smell - taste - temperature and pain
- Little sense of time, speed, distance or weight
- Difficulty distinguishing right from left
- Difficulty planning and organising thought
- Poor short-term memory
Poor sequencing and accuracy problems

Difficulty in following instructions - may be easily distracted

Slow to finish a task

Difficulty with listening - can be tactless and frequently interrupt

Difficulty picking up non verbal signals - tendency to take things literally

Slow to adapt to new situations

Good and bad days - tendency to opt out of things that are too difficult

Low self esteem

Many of these characteristics are not unique to people with dyspraxia and not even the most severe cases will display all of them.

Further information can be found on the Dyspraxia Foundation website at www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk
DYSCALCULIA

Dyscalculia is a specific learning difficulty in mathematics. Like dyslexia it can be caused by a visual perceptual deficit. Dyscalculia refers specifically to the inability to perform operations in maths or arithmetic. There is no single set of signs that characterises dyscalculia, nor is there any single cause.

Symptoms of Dyscalculia may include problems with:

Numbers

- Understanding signs: + - / x
- Adding and subtracting numbers
- Confusing mathematical symbols
- Confusing the words plus, add, add together
- Reversing numbers eg 15 for 51
- Transposing numbers eg 364 - 643
- Times tables
- Mental Arithmetic
- Telling the time
- Inability to follow instructions

Although a search will bring up various web-sites that mention dyscalculia, there is no specific official site that can be recommended.
AND FINALLY........

Do you think that this could be you - or someone that you know - or one of your staff?

IF SO........

The first point of contact for advice is the Unit Learning Centre Staff, either the PLA or Trg Off or equivalent, where your enquiry will be treated in confidence.

For policy issues, advice can be sought from SO2 Accreditation, No 22 (Trg) Gp, on 95751 6510 or the University Liaison Officer on 95751 6888.

Note: All SpLD matters must be treated as "Restricted Staff" and written consent must be obtained from the individual concerned before any information is passed on to a third party.

Could it be me, or someone I know?

A copy of this booklet can be found on the Learning Forces website at www.raf.mod.uk/raflearningforces