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The Delphi Study on Dyslexia: Insights and Future Directions (2025)

The start of 2025 saw a significant stride forward in the field of dyslexia with the launch of the much-awaited outcomes from the Delphi Dyslexia Study and the associated updated diagnostic definition.

The Delphi Method is a structured technique used to gather expert opinions and achieve a consensus on a specific issue, often in situations where there is no clear or established solution. It is particularly valuable in complex fields where the available data may be insufficient or inconclusive, and the problem requires expert judgment to resolve.

The Delphi Method involves a series of rounds in which a panel of multidisciplinary experts responds to a series of questions or surveys. Each round refines the responses from the previous one, ultimately reaching a consensus or common understanding among participants. This iterative process allows for anonymous contributions, reducing the influence of group dynamics and promoting more objective and diverse opinions.

The question of ‘what is dyslexia?’ has been debated for nearly 150 years, the Delphi Study brings us closer to shared understanding.

The focus of the Delphi dyslexia study was to create a definition that not only reflected current scientific knowledge of the condition but also was clearly translatable into workable approaches for assessment and identification (Carroll et al., 2025). To capture a broad spectrum of perspectives, the study drew on input

from researchers, academics, specialist teacher assessors, and educational psychologists.

The question of ‘what is dyslexia?’ has been debated for nearly 150 years. Adolph Kussmaul, a German physician, first identified reading difficulties as ‘word blindness’ in 1877. The first recorded case of dyslexia in England occurred in 1896 in Sussex, the home county of Frewen College, when Dr Pringle described a boy named ‘Percy.’ Despite being a bright and able child with normal intelligence, Percy experienced significant difficulties with reading (Kirby and Snowling, 2022). Labelled as having ‘word blindness,’ Percy represents the first documented case in England of what we now call dyslexia.

Dyslexia affects approximately 10% of the UK population, making it one of the most common specific learning difficulties (SpLDs). While the exact cause of dyslexia is not yet known, research suggests a genetic component, as it often runs in families.

Over the decades, recognition of dyslexia has faced several hurdles. Early scepticism in the 1960s and 1970s gave way to formal acknowledgement in the 1993 Education Act, which referenced dyslexia explicitly. Later, the Rose Review of 2009, Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties, provided a working definition and emphasised the importance of effective teaching and early support. Throughout this period, various hypotheses and models of dyslexia have been proposed, ranging from discrepancy-based approaches—where literacy skills are seen as out of line with general IQ (Snowling et al., 2020)—to phonological deficit models.

Today, efforts continue to ensure that children with dyslexia are identified early and receive effective support to help them succeed. Leading these initiatives is the British Dyslexia Association (BDA), a charity that has spent over 50 years improving support for people with dyslexia. The BDA defines dyslexia as ‘a specific learning difficulty which primarily affects reading and writing skills.

Learning to read and spell is a complex process, beginning with accurate grapheme–phoneme (letter–sound) correspondence, progressing to the recognition of sight words, and extending to the ability to manipulate word elements through morphology. Alongside these linguistic skills, cognitive processes such as memory and processing efficiency play a critical role in developing fluency.

While difficulties with literacy are central to dyslexia, its impact often extends beyond reading and spelling. Underlying challenges with processing and memory can affect an individual's ability to retain and recall information, whether seen or heard, which in turn influences wider learning. Many individuals with dyslexia also experience difficulties with organisational skills, further adding to the challenges they face.

Early identification is vital: research shows better outcomes for children when dyslexia is recognised and supported from the start.

Prior to the Delphi Study, many professionals acknowledged the Rose Review of 2009, *Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties*, completed by the late Sir Jim Rose, as being the most recent and most used diagnostic definition by specialist teacher assessors. In his review, Rose proposed a working definition of Dyslexia: a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling was detailed. He described the characteristic features of dyslexia as difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory, and verbal processing speed. Rose was also clear in moving away from previous discrepancy-based models: dyslexia occurs across the full range of intellectual abilities, should be understood as a continuum rather than a distinct category, and does not have clear cut-off points (Rose, 2009).

The Delphi dyslexia study, initially launched in draft form and presented at the BDA's International Dyslexia Conference in 2024, reinforces the importance of phonological processes highlighted in the Rose definition. However, it places greater emphasis on background information, co-occurring difficulties, reading fluency, and orthographic skills.

Co-occurrence between dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) is often high, with conditions such as ADHD and dyscalculia frequently appearing alongside dyslexia (Bergen et al., 2025). Difficulties with memory and processing are central to many SpLDs, with each typically exhibiting at least one weakness in either memory or processing (Patrick, 2020).

The Delphi study also emphasises the value of a hypothesis-testing approach to dyslexia assessment, taking into account risk factors and drawing on multiple sources of information. Additionally, it addresses common misconceptions about dyslexia, clarifies the role of intellectual abilities, and considers the impact of dyslexia across the lifespan.

References

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Implications for schools:

Early identification is vital to effective intervention (Catts and Petscher, 2018), with research showing better outcomes for children where this has taken place (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007). Additionally, children with poor reading are at increased risk of a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties (Snowling et al., 2020).

Screening tools can often play an important part in gathering background information and providing supporting evidence for onward referrals; however, they are purely screeners and do not provide a definitive outcome. Where dyslexia is suspected, and an onward referral made, or recommendations given to parents, it is important that schools ensure that professionals are suitably qualified, either as an educational psychologist or specialist teacher assessor.

As the definition is embedded into policy and practice, the challenge for schools and practitioners will be ensuring that the insights from this research translate into meaningful, effective support for learners with dyslexia across their lifespan.



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Mark is a qualified Specialist Teacher (SpLD) and a Specialist Leader of Education (SLE) – SEND. He also serves as a Board Director and Trustee of a Multi Academy Trust, as well as a Board Director for the national Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) Assessment Standards Committee (SASC). In addition to his leadership roles, Mark regularly delivers training, consults for an educational supplier, and speaks at national conferences and events.