

Briefing Paper: SASC and the Delphi Dyslexia Study 2024

The two academic papers are currently available on the Open Science Framework and, pending publication, should be referenced as follows:

Paper 1: Carroll, J., Holden, C., Kirby, P., Snowling, M. J., & Thompson, P.A. (2024) forthcoming. Contemporary concepts of dyslexia: A Delphi study.

<https://osf.io/preprints/osf/tb8mp>

Paper 2: Holden, C., Kirby, P., Snowling, M.J., Carroll, J., & Thompson, P.A. (2024) forthcoming. Towards a consensus for dyslexia practice: Findings of a Delphi study on assessment and identification. <https://osf.io/preprints/edarxiv/g7m8n>

SASC acknowledges and recognises the importance of the Delphi definition in shaping current thinking about the nature of dyslexia. This definition has been informed by three years of research and consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders.

The Rose definition of dyslexia, popularly used by many assessors, is now 15 years old. The advantages of the Delphi definition are that it:

- Addresses the nature and complex causal basis of dyslexia.
- Focuses on a range of underlying processing difficulties and the impact on reading and spelling fluency.
- Is applicable across all age ranges.
- Directs greater attention to co-occurrence and secondary consequences.

SASC therefore recommends that assessors refer to and reference the use of this definition as follows: Carroll, J., Holden, C., Kirby, P., Snowling, M. J., & Thompson, P.A. (2024).

The Delphi papers have been submitted to academic journals for peer review. Minor revisions may be required prior to publication, if accepted by those journals. In the meantime, assessors are free to use the Delphi dyslexia definition but advised to look out for any relevant updates if and when the Delphi papers are accepted for publication.

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The Delphi definition of dyslexia.

The relevant statements from Paper 1 Table 2 pp44-5 have been grouped for clarity.

Nature

- The nature and developmental trajectory of dyslexia depends on multiple genetic and environmental influences.

Manifestation

- Dyslexia is a set of processing difficulties that affect the acquisition of reading and spelling. The most commonly observed cognitive impairment in dyslexia is a difficulty in phonological processing (i.e. in phonological awareness, phonological processing speed or phonological memory). However, phonological difficulties do not fully explain the variability that is observed. Working memory, processing speed and orthographic skills can contribute to the impact of dyslexia.

Impact

- In dyslexia, some or all aspects of literacy attainment are weak in relation to age, standard teaching and instruction, and level of other attainments. Across languages and age groups, difficulties in reading and spelling fluency are a key marker of dyslexia.

Variance and co-occurrence

- Dyslexic difficulties exist on a continuum and can be experienced to various degrees of severity. Dyslexia can affect the acquisition of other skills, such as mathematics, reading comprehension or learning another language. Dyslexia frequently co-occurs with one or more other developmental difficulties, including developmental language disorder, dyscalculia, ADHD, and developmental coordination disorder.

The Delphi Assessment Practice Framework.

The full framework can be found as **Table 4 in Paper 2** on the link above. Here we summarise key pointers from this framework and its rationale.

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- The full 42 consensus statements from the Delphi study are grouped under the core definition statements, providing further elaboration and explanation.
- The assessment framework provides a checklist for all assessors to help reach as accurate conclusions as possible in identifying dyslexia.
- In the framework, dyslexia's key indicators include family risk, persisting difficulties in reading and spelling fluency, poor or unduly effortful response to standard reading instruction and/or additional intervention, and the strong likelihood of a combination of cognitive impairments in working memory, processing speed, phonological and orthographic skills.
- Regarding strict cut-off points for the identification of dyslexia, pointers are provided but assessors need to live with some uncertainty in this field. This is a result of the complex causal basis of dyslexia, the fact it is very often found in association with other learning and developmental difficulties, the dynamic, changing, protective and exacerbating influence of environmental factors and the desire not to exclude individuals with mild presentations of difficulties from support.