

Diagnostic Assessment: A Quick Guide

What is a diagnostic assessment?

A diagnostic assessment is a formal and detailed evaluation of an individual's pattern of strengths and weaknesses and is conducted by a suitably qualified psychologist or specialist teacher with a practising certificate.

The assessment aims to ascertain whether you have a specific learning difficulty. The assessor may decide that you have dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia or a specific learning difficulty. Although ADHD and an Autistic Spectrum Disorder cannot be diagnosed formally by the assessor, recommendations for further assessment may be made if it is felt that you exhibit signs of these.

Most students find that, although the assessment is rigorous, it provides them with a greater understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. This awareness is empowering and helps them to consider how best to address the challenges that they face

What happens during the assessment?

The assessor will ask informal questions to gain background information and the reasons for undertaking the assessment. These may include your experiences at school, any health issues that may affect learning, challenges that you face at present, strategies you have used/are using and support that you have received in the past. All of this information will be discussed in confidence and you can disclose as much or little as you wish.

The assessor will then carry out a series of tests which will look at your strengths and weakness in the following areas:

- Underlying ability (including verbal and abstract reasoning skills)
- Cognitive skills (including short term and working memory, processing efficiency, phonological skills)
- Attainment (reading, spelling, writing skills)
- Other tests (e.g. tests for hand-eye co-ordination and motor skills or visual stress screening may be included where necessary)

Please do not expect the assessor to give specific details regarding the expectations of the test as this may affect your performance. Certain tests also stipulate that the assessor follows a prescribed process of administration which may include, for example, not informing the student that the test is timed.



How long will it take?

You should allow up to four hours for the assessment.

Although it should be an interesting and enlightening experience for you, the battery of tests can be tiring. Please ensure that you eat breakfast before your appointment and have a good night's sleep, if possible. You will be allowed to take 'comfort breaks' and have a drink if necessary.

Do I need to take anything with me?

If you met with an Adviser at the DRC for an initial screening interview, a report outlining the findings of the screening will be sent to the assessor.

The assessor may also send you a questionnaire to complete before the assessment takes place. The purpose of this is to give the assessor some background detail to inform discussion of areas that you find challenging.

It may also be helpful for you to make a note of difficulties that you face at present.

If you have had any previous assessment or tests for a specific learning difficulty conducted in the past, it would be useful to send a copy to your assessor in advance of your appointment.

When will I find out my diagnosis?

At the end of the assessment, the assessor may be able to indicate if s/he feels that you have a specific learning difficulty, but will not be able, at that stage, to give you a definitive diagnosis. It **may** be possible for you to be given a brief outline of your areas of strength and weakness.

The assessor will write a detailed report of the findings of the assessment which will also include appropriate recommendations (e.g. examination arrangements, application for a Disabled Student's Allowance, institutional support, Study Skills Support, assistive technology). You should receive the report 2 to 3 weeks after the assessment.

What do I do next?

Once you have received the report, contact the DRC. Your Disability Adviser will advise you of the next steps that you should take to ensure that all of the recommendations in the report are in place.

