



“Quantifying handwriting challenges in a student with suspected dyslexia; provision of support in further education”.

Kai, aged 17 years

Background

Kai has found all aspects of literacy, including handwriting, challenging throughout his education. Although a formal diagnosis was never made, the pattern of his strengths and difficulties is consistent with the profile of dyslexia. Kai’s cognitive abilities are in the average range, but he has significant weaknesses in phonological awareness and aspects of visual processing, leading to continuing difficulties with reading, writing and spelling.

Although he found many components of the school curriculum challenging, when learning was practically based Kai was motivated to work

hard and responded well to the in-class extra support his teachers were able to provide. His parents reported that from a very young age he had shown great affinity towards animals, much preferring to look after strays than read a book. In his final year of school, he even took on responsibility for a short column about pets in the school’s monthly newspaper.

With extra help from a private tutor, Kai achieved the necessary grades for entry to college on a course in Animal Care. This course includes practical and short handwritten assignments plus a handwritten examination at the end of each year.

Assessment

Upon arrival at college, Kai decided that he would disclose his difficulties and seek help. He made an appointment to see a Student Support Tutor, who initiated a formal assessment that included administration of the DASH-2. On the basis of his scores on the DASH-2, history of challenges in school, and other information gathered, Kai’s eligibility for accommodations in written examinations was considered, alongside the possibility of other ongoing support. His total DASH-2 score was 2 SDs below the mean for his age and his handwriting was very difficult to read, especially when under time constraints. On the Free Writing task, he seemed keen to write about his course and his work with the animals, yet the sentence structure, punctuation and spelling were poor. His letter formation deteriorated over time such that his writing in the last few minutes was very difficult to read.

Interpretation and action

From studying Kai’s DASH-2 profile on the five tasks, Kai’s tutor concluded that his handwriting challenges made it difficult for him to record information fast enough or to write well enough in longer tasks in a way that would reflect his ability, especially in examinations. The support tutor then showed Kai a range of assistive technology to support his writing, which included dictation software, using text-to-speech to check his work, and the careful choice of fonts and colours to assist with reading and writing. How to gain access to these options was explained and support offered. It was also recommended that Kai could use a computer for written assignments as well as for formal examinations.