A specific learning difficulty (SLD / SpLD) is a neuro-developmental disorder with a biological origin that is the basis for abnormalities at a cognitive level that is associated with the behavioral signs of the disorder. The biological origin includes an interaction of genetic, epigenetic, and environmental factors, which affect the brain’s ability to perceive or process verbal or non-verbal information efficiently and accurately.

Students with learning disabilities usually present persistent difficulties in learning keystone academic skills including the reading of single words accurately and fluently, reading comprehension, written expression and spelling, arithmetic calculation, and mathematical reasoning. They demonstrate a significant discrepancy between their levels of expected achievement and actual performance. Examples of specific learning difficulties include the following:

- **Dyslexia** - a disorder of reading, writing and spelling
- **Dyscalculia** - marked difficulty in making arithmetical calculation or computation, remembering mathematical facts and concept of time
- **Dysgraphia** - inability to write coherently, problems with accurate spelling and organizing ideas, illegible handwriting

Specific learning difficulties commonly co-occur with neuro-developmental (e.g., ADHD, communication disorders, developmental coordination disorder, and autistic spectrum disorder) or other mental disorders (e.g., anxiety disorders, depressive and bipolar disorders). These which may include therapy and medications.

The SEN & Diversability Team (DA) of the Counseling and Wellness Center is the primary contact with students who declare their SEN with the University. DA supports students from the very first step of the SEN declaration through completion of study at HKUST. DA officers meet with each declared student individually to map out a reasonable academic accommodation plan (aka IEP / Individualized Educational Plan) and to assess the needs for available resources and suitable support services.

Personalized and reasonable accommodations are arranged to each declared student based on the individual needs. Confidential data obtained from a student with SEN is used to enhance the coordination work with different parties for providing personal and support services. The data collected will be handled with strict security and confidentiality and in compliance with the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance of Hong Kong. The below lists out some of the possible accommodations to address the special needs of students with SLD / dyslexia:

- early access to course materials for translating to an alternative format
- extended time for reading and writing tests
- library access service for obtaining course materials compatible with a text reader
- verbal instruction/auditory materials to supplement reading materials
DARE is a group of enthusiastic students who want to empower the HKUST campus community to positively impact the support to students with SEN. The role of the ambassadors is to cultivate a campus where everyone’s diverse abilities are appreciated and where everyone feels accepted and nourished.

No matter how much you know about SEN, where you are from, and who you are, you can be a part of DARE if you want to contribute to campus inclusion!

(Special thanks to DARE for the great contribution to the production of this leaflet series!

“DYSLEXIA FONTS”

There are “dyslexia fonts” being claimed as a solution to help people with dyslexia to read easier. Although there is no evidence that these typefaces help read faster and more accurately, it has been suggested that reading text with greater spacing between letters improves reading ability in people with dyslexia.

Dyslexie
http://www.dyslexiefont.com/

OpenDyslexic
http://opendyslexic.org/

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