What are specific learning difficulties?

A specific learning difficulty (SpLD) is a difference or difficulty with some particular aspects of learning. The most common SpLDs are Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder, Dyscalculia and Dysgraphia.

Sometimes there is a diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulties, rather than Dyslexia or Dyspraxia because the individual experiences a unique combination of difficulties which cannot be readily categorised but may include features of one or more recognised SpLDs. Similarly, some people will have an assessment for more than one SpLD; it is very common for there to be an overlap as indicated below:

Many students will already have disclosed their SpLD to the University and will have an ILP which you can view on SDS. This will give details of the reasonable
adjustments that you should make to enable the student to fully access the curriculum.

Sometimes students are not aware that they have a SpLD or they may have been told that they have a SpLD but have never had a full assessment. These students will not have an ILP and should be referred to Student Support and Wellbeing.

How can I recognise if a student has a SpLD?

A student with a SpLD may present with several of the following indicators:

- There may be a marked difference between the student’s written work and their performance in seminars.
- They may use the wrong word i.e. text instead of context/ pacific instead of specific.
- They may mispronounce words.
- They appear to lose focus on what you are saying.
- They may read more slowly than you would expect.
- They may lose their place when reading.
- They may avoid having to read out loud?
- They may mis-read words e.g. stile for still?
- They may have problems with reading new words.
- They may have problems reading multi-syllabic words.
- Their handwriting may be illegible.
- They may lose margins and lines when handwriting.
- Handwriting appears laborious and/or slow.
- Their handwriting looks immature.
- There may be lots of spelling mistakes.
- There may be variant spellings of the same word?
- Words like there, their and they’re may be confused.
- They ‘get lost’ if trying to take notes from a lecture and ask you to repeat things.
- They are often late or very early (more than 10 minutes).
- Their work is disorganised and lacks a coherent structure.
- Their work alludes to relevant theories and concepts but these are largely undeveloped whereas as tangential issues are developed.
There is evidence of research but it’s not applied effectively to the argument.

- Background reading is minimal
- They do not appear to have proof read their work
- Punctuation may not be evident.
- Sentences may be overlong and rely on several conjunctions.
- Tense use may be irregular
- They appear to have answered a slightly different question to the title

Refer them to Student Support and Wellbeing. The student will be offered a short computerised screening test and an interview with a SpLD adviser who will discuss options with the student.

**What adjustments to my teaching should I make?**

The adjustments for each student are detailed in the student’s ILP, however, as a general guide, and whilst a student is working through the assessment process, the following would be helpful.

- Make no assumptions - the student/s can tell you what sort of adjustments they would like you to make.
- Making lecture notes and slides available on Moodle in *advance* of the lecture allows students to annotate the notes rather than trying to keep up with your voice.
- Make sure that anything you post on Moodle is typed or printed rather than handwritten and that you save it in a form that uses Optical Character Recognition so that reading software can access it.
- When you write additional information on the board, allow students to photograph the board or time to write it down.
- If a student has difficulties reading aloud don’t ask them to read in class unless they volunteer.
- Don’t mark down for spelling or grammatical errors where the meaning is clear and the errors do not impede the argument.
- Suggest that they contact SLAS and UELT for additional support.