

## SASC CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Welcome to this 2021 AGM. I would like to begin by reviewing who we are and what we do. SASC and its subcommittees are a collaborative group of professionals working in a similar field to agree standards of practice. No single organisation or individual dominates. SASC represents multiple professional organisations and training organisations across the UK and includes representatives from these organisations as well as expert independent assessors on its decision-making Board. Members of the SASC board, STEC and other subcommittees contribute their time voluntarily.

STEC, the SASC Test Evaluation Committee, a key sub-committee, reviews and pilots tests, produces guidance on the standardisation, reliability, validity, advantages and disadvantages of those tests, and consults with publishers, academics and practitioners:

- To ensure that use and selection of tests is evidence based and follows best practice.
- To promote quality and consistency in assessment across all age groups.

Rachel Simpson, our STEC chair, will present the STEC annual report later in this AGM.

SASC and STEC strive to bring about change through consensus. Decisions and guidance go through a consultation process with the organisations involved in SASC and where possible with a wider audience of individual practitioners, academics and tutors.

SASC works closely with the Department for Education, as it has from the outset, the relationship being established through the 2005 Working Party and continuing liaison. The DfES 2005 Working Party recommended a new framework for assessment to be gradually introduced. SASC was founded as a not-for-profit company in February 2008 to underpin this work going forward. SASC's work has involved **four key elements**:

- **First**, to maintain a publicly accessible **list of qualified assessors**.
- **Second, to identify a selection of tests** that can be used by appropriately trained and qualified professionals, **alongside guidelines for practice and training**.
- **Third**, to propose **standards and a code of practice** for all those involved in assessments including the production of **reports in an agreed and accessible format**.
- As one of the DfES' Working Group's 'overall aims' was to establish evidential requirements that (organisations) could confidently regard as providing a reliable professional judgement that a student has a SpLD(s),

- the **fourth** area of work was to support **the implementation of updated guidance around the assessment of SpLDs**, providing advice about identifying, assessing and referring students with any of the named SpLDs.

The fourteen (14) current Directors include senior members of four different professional bodies for Specialist Teacher Assessors the British Dyslexia Association (BDA), The Dyslexia Guild and The Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (PATOSS,) the Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education ADSHE, psychologists, assessors and trainers. Representatives from the British Psychological Society and ACHIPP [association of child psychologists in private practice] also attend meetings, contributing to discussions and liaising with their organisations. In the past year Anwen Jones and Katherine Plowden-Roberts have stood down from the board and we thank them for their contributions over the years. Joining the board this year is Gillian Ashley [replacing Karen Mace for the BDA] and Kate Blundell as an independent member, with experience of managing diagnostic assessment, exam access and a range of support services in schools and post-16 settings in both the maintained and independent sectors.

SASC continues its core remit by working in a highly collegiate way to ensure that best assessment practice is available and maintained.

Diagnostic assessments provide a reliable confirmation of a disability, making life-long changes to the individual's perception of themselves and enabling access to public money. Assuring and maintaining the reliability of this evidence and underpinning practice is therefore paramount.

This past year has seen a focus on supporting access to assessment and through that to resource in the face of restrictions imposed by the COVID pandemic. Through that work, in consultation with test publishers, other professional organisations and practitioners we have produced regularly updated guidance and advice to recognise opportunities and developing practice.

- Since March 2020 SASC has been engaged in extensive discussion and consultation with the professional bodies represented on its Board, other professional organisations, agencies and individuals providing assessments and its own membership, concerning the viability of assessment for suspected SpLDs by remote video platform.
- Assessors working remotely have had to make rapid adjustments to their working practices. They have been highly resourceful in acquiring new skills in a relatively short time period. Some organisations and individuals offering assessment have been working very hard to formulate policies and procedures for offering assessment online. Some have reported positive feedback from students and some interesting, unexpected, and useful observations.

- Evaluations of Need (EoNs), produced up to and including **30th June 2021** will continue to be acceptable evidence in support of an application for the Disabled Students' Allowance. This extended period is intended to provide assessors the time to acquire appropriate training, test materials and technological equipment to support diagnostic assessment via remote online platform.
- From **1st March 2021**, diagnostic assessments, carried out in person (face-to-face), by remote video platform (remote assessment<sup>1</sup>) or a combination of both methods, and which **follow the recommended SASC report formats to reach diagnostic conclusions regarding the evidence for a specific learning difficulty** will be accepted as evidence for application for the Disabled Students' Allowance.
- Assessors using modified procedures for test administration via remote online platform or face to face assessment following COVID secure procedures, should detail any and all modified procedures in their report, and make professional judgements about the reliability and validity of obtained assessment information. Assessment practices that most closely follow how the test was standardised are preferred.
- Given that assessments carried out in person (face-to-face), by remote video platform (remote assessment) or a combination of both methods are acceptable, a revised statement should now be used as part of the signed declaration.

We continue to review and update this guidance and our webinar following this AGM will look at the challenges and opportunities provided through assessment via remote video platform.

### **COVID and ramifications**

COVID -19 continued to be an enormous obstacle for young people and those who support them. We have constantly been reviewing the changing situation and working with colleagues across practices to provide best practice guidance.

### **Resumption of face-to-face assessments:**

As children and young people come back to school opportunities will be opening to provide face-to-face assessments. However,

COVID restrictions have differed in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland so practitioners have faced differing rules and timeframes. So we continue to advise all to take heed of their relevant current government guidance to schools and education settings, carefully consider risks and risk

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<sup>1</sup> Also referred to as *telepractice* by some test publishers.

mitigation for themselves and their clients and make their own evaluation on that basis.

SASC continues to review its range of guidance to keep it up to date and has just issued updated guidance on ADHD. Professor Philip Asherson's webinar last week introduced this guidance and the recording of that webinar along with our other presentations from the Conference programme this year will be available to members free of charge through the end of June. Details will be sent to members.

### **DYSLEXIA / SPLDS UPDATED GUIDANCE WORKING GROUP**

In 2021 SASC formed a working group aiming to produce new guidance for assessors and other related professionals in the assessment of dyslexia as well as the debates around the use of the term specific learning difficulty, exploring the current landscape regarding labels, 'diagnosis' and the relationship to intervention and support at all ages and educational stages.

This SASC working group will examine the current systems of support for all struggling readers, and aims to identify tiered, dynamic processes for assessment and intervention, responsive to individual need, as a context for the following:

1. To work with academic and professional partners to produce a consensus working definition of dyslexia relevant to all stages of development that reflects the most reliable key current research and has practical value for practitioners in the assessment process.
2. To ascertain key diagnostic criteria for the identification of dyslexia and/or a SpLD in children and adults based on a critical review of the most up-to-date research into the aetiology of dyslexia /a SpLD.
3. At the same time, to consider briefly the history and current varied usage of the term specific learning difficulty. Is this an umbrella term for a range of neurodevelopmental profiles or a set of characteristics which can be defined more precisely? The diagnostic usefulness of labels and classifications should be discussed.
4. To describe common 'confounding' factors e.g. other linguistic, developmental and/or socio-cultural difficulties, that may affect the identification, at assessment, of dyslexia /a SpLD.
5. To describe briefly the key information that a range of tests can contribute to the identification of dyslexia/a SpLD. This should include a critical look at common misconceptions and beliefs about the diagnostic potential of tests held by assessment practitioners.
6. To list the range of potential interventions and reasonable adjustments most commonly and likely to be required following an identification of a learner as dyslexic or with a SpLD.
7. To describe briefly the qualifications and experience necessary to reach a diagnostic decision regarding the identification of a child or adult as dyslexic /with a SpLD.
8. To provide a list of key up-to-date references and resources that underpin current research into the identification of dyslexia/a SpLD.

There is no doubt at all that this kind of guidance is eagerly awaited and anticipated as there are many long-standing debates and differences in

outlook and professional practice in this area. The working group may not be able to put all these to rest but some greater consensus and clarity would certainly give assessors more confidence in their assessment decisions. SASC's leadership role is highly regarded and new guidance for the assessment of dyslexia would have an undoubted 'reach' throughout the professions working in this area, giving recipients of assessment reports greater clarity on effective support.

### **Members of the group**

#### **From SASC Board:**

Co-ordinator: Caroline Holden Independent Board member SASC, with role as Assessment Issues Coordinator

Nicola James British Psychological Society (BPS) Observer SASC

Rachael McMullen Helen Arkell Dyslexia Centre (HADC) Board member SASC

Jane Warren Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education (ADSHE)

Board member SASC

Gillian Ashley British Dyslexia Association (BDA) Board member SASC

#### **Academic and professional partners:**

**Professor Dorothy Bishop**, Professor of Developmental Neuropsychology, University of Oxford

**Professor Julian Elliott**, Professor & Principal of Collingwood College in the School of Education, Durham University

**Vivian Hill**, Programme Director at University College London Institute of Education EP training programme. Chair of BPS Division of Educational and Child Psychology.

**Professor Brian Lamb**, Visiting Professor of Special Educational Needs and Disability, Derby University

**Professor Brahm Norwich**, Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter

**Gavin Reid** independent educational psychologist and author.

**Professor John Stein** Emeritus Professor of Physiology, University of Oxford

**Professor Joel Talcott** Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, Aston Brain Centre, Aston University

**Professor Richard Wagner**, Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Associate Director, Florida Center for Reading Research, Department of Psychology, Florida State University

Also contributing to discussions are **Jo Ward** and **Sarah Crawford**, lead educational psychologists in Staffordshire and Warwickshire, regarding the Response to Intervention/ Assessment Through Teaching strategies they have developed in those counties. Janet Goring, who leads the Literacy & Numeracy Support Service to primary and secondary schools in the London Borough of Wandsworth has given a talk to the group around her experiences of a further commonly found model for literacy support and assessment in UK schools, i.e. the contracted-in service.

One of the key issues the group has identified to date is some tension between the purpose of assessment in identifying children with a SpLD such as dyslexia and that of supporting the needs of all struggling readers. What might distinguish someone assessed with a 'specific learning difficulty' such as 'dyslexia' from other 'poor readers' remains an issue that deserves serious consideration, since it should inform effective assessment of and intervention for a sub-set of children and adults with significant and persistent literacy-

related difficulties. However, it remains important to examine critically both the scientific basis for these labels and their effectiveness in raising levels of literacy attainment. There is a wide range of views represented within the group and discussion to date has been reflective, thoughtful and helpful.

The group has met online five times, has worked on an outline framework for the written guidance, will begin writing first drafts of some sections over the summer months and will meet again in September, when the group plans to prepare some of the key issues raised by its discussions for wider consultation. Please look out in autumn 2021 for opportunities to take part in this wider consultation.

Over the last 3 years SASC has improved its financial position as a result of increased income from the APC listing fee, increased fees for CPD event listings on the website and the success of our previous conference. We are aiming to use these funds to improve our website and support more consultations. With the current improved position we have been able to provide this Conference programme free of charge to members.

### **Planned work for 2021-2022**

- Bring the SASC website more up-to-date and more accessible, making information easier to find.
- Advance the work of the SpLD Updated Guidance Working Group
- Continue to review current guidances to keep them in

I would like to thank all members of the SASC board, STEC and our Cross-Standardisation committee as well as all the advisors who have contributed to our consultations and policy development. They have given so generously of their time, and expertise. And you, our members, who through your communications bring issues to be explored. Working together we strengthen guidance and standards in assessment practice and training.

Once again, I want to invite others to join in supporting our consultations and developing practice. Please write to us with your interests.