



Information Sheet: Cognition and learning difficulties (non-specific)

Although many cognitive difficulties are specific, such as dyslexia, some learners have more global difficulties with learning in general.

Learners will learn at a slower pace than their peers even with appropriate differentiation. Learning difficulties cover a wide range, from moderate learning difficulties (MLD) to severe learning difficulties (SLD), where learners are likely to need support in all areas of the curriculum. They may also have associated difficulties with communication and mobility.

Traits of learning difficulties

- Difficulty with reading, writing, spelling and comprehension.
- Difficulty with numeracy.
- Processing difficulties such as sequencing or inference.
- Short-term working memory and verbal memory.
- Difficulties with executive functioning (mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember, and work on multiple tasks).

How can you support learners with learning difficulties?

- Ensure work is differentiated enough that the learner can access the task.
- Praise effort over performance.
- Keep them motivated.
- Give them time to process what you have said.
- Provide resources to support their learning such as maths equipment and simplified word banks.
- Make sure instructions are clear and only give one at a time.
- Find a strength and focus on this to encourage them to be motivated.
- Where possible, change long listening activities for shorter, more practical tasks.
- Once instructions have been given, check for understanding and repeat and break them down further if needed.

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