Pre Budget Submission

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Dyslexia in Ireland

- 450,000 people in Ireland have dyslexia (1 in 10).
- On average, 3 children in every classroom have dyslexia.

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty affecting the acquisition of fluent and accurate reading and spelling skills. This occurs despite access to appropriate learning opportunities. Dyslexic difficulties occur on a continuum from mild to severe and affect approximately 10% of the population. People with dyslexia may experience greater stress and frustration as they endeavour to learn, resulting in heightened anxiety, particularly in relation to literacy acquisition. If their needs are not identified and supported early in their education, the relative gap between pupils with dyslexia and their peers grows over time. While support at any age can help, its impact is greatest in the early years of schooling.

DAI calls for:

1. **Mandatory Teacher Training** on dyslexia identification and support strategies
2. **Equitable Access** to evidence-based assessment and supports

1. **Mandatory Teacher Training**

**Current Problems:**

Only 30% of teachers report getting any pre-service training on dyslexia and 92% report that it did not adequately prepare them for the classroom.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is proposing a new model of Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision which relies heavily on teachers being able to identify and support students. Without a significant commitment to improve teacher training on dyslexia, there is a real risk that dyslexic children’s needs will continue to be unidentified and unmet.

97% of teachers agree that they need and would benefit from further training on dyslexia. Every class teacher needs some knowledge on dyslexia identification and support strategies. Specialist teachers need advanced training to enable them to assess for dyslexia, and provide evidence-based specialist teaching interventions.
Solutions:

- Mandatory pre-service training on dyslexia/specific reading difficulty for all teachers prior to full qualification.
- Mandatory in-service training on dyslexia/specific reading difficulty for all current practising teachers.
- Mandatory training for special education teachers (learning support and resource teachers) on testing for dyslexia, and evidence based specialist interventions.
- The new Inclusion Support Service (ISS) should provide regular CPD opportunities for teachers to share and reflect on the efficacy of their teaching practices for students with dyslexia.

These solutions can be cost neutral – they simply require a commitment to make this specialist training and CPD mandatory within existing training mechanisms.

2. Equitable Access

Current Problems:
Families in Ireland are forced to seek private assessment and supports as the education system is simply not meeting their needs. And what about the countless families who can’t afford private services?

Only 26% of children received a public assessment (NEPS, HSE); 74% had to seek a private assessment. Trained teachers need to be enabled and allowed to identify dyslexia in schools (reducing the current mandatory requirement for students to be assessed by an educational psychologist which is driving inequity). School based assessment can also include regular monitoring of progress to assess students’ responses to interventions, and would naturally be a more staged, contextualised, continuous assessment model.

The average annual family cost associated with dyslexia assessment, tuition and assistive technology is €1,229. For many families it is much higher. 66% of families report that these costs have created significant financial stress.

While there is some public provision for child assessment (NEPS and HSE), there is no equivalent publically accessible assessment service for adults. NALA and the ETBs provide general adult literacy education, but their capacity to address the specialist needs of adults with dyslexia is limited.
Many children have a delayed diagnosis of dyslexia, and a consequent delay in accessing specialist interventions. Research has long shown the benefits of early identification and targeted intervention.

“When the diagnosis of dyslexia was made in the first two grades of school, nearly 82% of students could be brought up to their normal classroom work, while only 46% of the dyslexic problems identified in third were remediated and only 10% to 15% of those observed in grades five to seven could be helped when the diagnosis of learning problems was made at those grade levels” (Strag, 1972).

The impact of support is greatest in the early school years – we should not wait for these children to fail.

86% of teachers report that class size impacts on their ability to identify and support pupils with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Cuts to Resource teaching and SNA hours have also placed additional stresses on classroom and specialist teachers alike.

Access to reasonable accommodations in certificate exams is inequitable due to the significant differences with the application processes and requirements at Junior Cert. and Leaving Cert., combined with the variation in how well individual schools support students in the process. Each year hundreds of pupils who received accommodations at Junior Cert. are refused accommodations at Leaving Cert. which causes huge frustration and anxiety.

Solutions:
- The special educational needs of pupils can be best evidenced by schools. Suitably trained teachers should be enabled and allowed to identify dyslexia in schools.
- The new Trinity Early Screening Test (TEST-2R) which enables earlier recognition of children at risk of reading and writing difficulties (in Junior and Senior Infants) should be mandatory in all schools.
- Specialist teaching support should be accessible to children identified at risk of reading and writing difficulties from Junior Infants through to Leaving Certificate level, as needed.
- Increased recruitment of educational psychologists to the National Educational Psychological Service would enable better support for schools and pupils with special educational needs including dyslexia.
• Access to appropriate accommodations such as exam accommodations, Irish exemptions, etc. could be evidenced by such school based testing, (eliminating the current mandatory requirement for educational psychology assessments which drive inequity of access).

• The application processes for RACE at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate should be unified, and pupils should be informed of the outcome of their application earlier.

• A commitment to reduce class sizes would benefit all pupils, and especially those with special educational needs, alongside a reversal of the cuts to Resource teacher and SNA hours.

• Access to dyslexia assessment and specialist support for adults must be made available.

Partnering for Success
10% of Irish people have dyslexia. Their needs should be integral to government plans and included in the budget to make Ireland a truly inclusive and dyslexia-friendly society.

Mandatory pre-service and in-service training for all teachers, combined with an education system which by design ensures equitable access to assessment and supports, will go a long way to providing the level of support all children and adults with dyslexia deserve.

The Dyslexia Association of Ireland seeks to work in partnership with government and state agencies to assist in the delivery of better outcomes for children and adults with dyslexia.

The Dyslexia Association of Ireland: Founded in 1972, the Dyslexia Association of Ireland (DAI) is a national organisation which seeks to respond to the needs of those dealing with dyslexia. DAI works with and for people affected by dyslexia, by providing information, offering appropriate support services, engaging in advocacy and raising awareness of dyslexia. DAI acts both as a direct provider of services and also advocates on behalf of people affected by dyslexia. Our vision is to work towards the development of a society where all people with dyslexia have access to appropriate assessment and support to reach their full potential through education, training and employment in all aspects of life. As well as a national office in Dublin, and an adult centre in Leixlip, DAI currently has a network of 37 affiliated Branches nationwide offering local community-based services. The figures cited in this paper are from the DAI’s survey of 2015 based on a sample of 787 responses.