

GLOSSARY: DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

Understanding the diagnostic assessment process can be complex and confusing. The assessment must be conducted in a standardised way in order to make appropriate deductions and conclusions. The Report is a formal document which is written in a specific way to meet the requirements set out in the Code of Practice and in order to be used as evidence of need for application for access arrangements in formal examination.

Here are the most common terms which you will come across.

Ability:

What an individual can do; usually referred to as their underlying ability or general ability.

Achievement:

The process of attaining information; it is the ability to demonstrate accomplishment, for example, an individual can achieve good grades.

Acquired difficulty:

Difficulty that arises after birth as a result of an illness, accident or incident.

Acute:

Short term crisis phase of an illness.

Aptitude:

Sometimes referred to as general ability this is the measure of what an individual is capable of achieving, i.e. a measure of potential.

Articulation:

The production of sounds that make up speech.

Assessment:

The difference between a test and an assessment is that a test usually provides a final score which provides quantitative information only. The assessment process is more analytical, interpreting the data from tests and therefore providing a greater depth of information. It not only analyses the results of the tests, but the engagement of the child/young person and observations of how they interact with the test material.



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Auditory Processing/Perception:

How sound/auditory information is *interpreted*. A delay or difficulty in auditory processing is not a result of hearing impairment (which is usually due to a physical condition associated with the ear) but with interpreting what is heard. It is a complex operation which involves a number of skills:

Auditory Blending or Synthesis:

The ability to pull together individual sounds to form words.

Auditory closure:

The ability to fill in any missing sounds to decode a word.

Auditory sequencing:

The ability to properly order language sounds in words or sentences. For example, a young child might reverse sounds in the word 'animal' and say 'aminal'.

Auditory discrimination:

The ability to recognise differences between sounds. For example a young child might struggle to hear the difference between the 'u' and 'a' sounds or 'th' and 'f'.

Auditory segmenting:

The ability to break words down into their component sounds.

Auditory sequential memory:

The ability to remember a sequence of verbal information, essential for building sounds to make words; words to make sentences which make sense. A difficulty impacts upon the development of speech and language which will subsequently impact upon the development of reading and writing.

Centiles (Percentile):

Percentile or centile scores provide a ranking when compared to peers. They can be viewed as steps on a ladder from 1 to 100 where 85 per cent would be within the top 15 and 15 per cent would be in the lowest 15. 50 per cent would be viewed as average.

Cognition:

Term used to describe the process of thought for processing information, applying knowledge and changing preferences.

Co-occurring Difficulties:

More than one difficulty occurring together, which are not necessarily associated.



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Decoding:

The ability to apply your knowledge of letter-sound relationships, including knowledge of letter patterns, to correctly pronounce written words. Understanding these relationships gives children the ability to recognize familiar words quickly and to figure out words they haven't seen before. Although children may sometimes work out some of these relationships on their own, most children benefit from explicit instruction in this area.

Executive Functioning:

The executive functions are a set of processes that all have to do with managing oneself and one's resources in order to achieve a goal. It is an umbrella term for the neurologically-based skills involving mental control and self-regulation. An individual with executive functioning deficits has difficulty in self-regulation of responses to stimuli and may appear to struggle to control their emotions or behaviour.

Expressive difficulties:

Difficulty conveying thoughts and messages through language.

Fluency:

Being able to deliver information quickly, efficiently and accurately.

Fragile-X:

The most common form of inheritable learning disability which is easily identifiable due to the chromosomal abnormality on the tip of chromosome X.

General Ability/Full-scale IQ:

The general ability of an individual is viewed as their innate ability and is calculated from the results of the individual's verbal and non-verbal reasoning performance. General ability is a measure of reasoning and metacognition and the ability to use higher order cognitive skills.

Global Developmental Delay:

General developmental delay is characterised by delayed milestones in many areas such as speech, movement and cognition.

Grammatical Structures:

The system of rules governing a language which provide meaning.

Grapheme:

The written representation of a sound. A grapheme can be made up of one or more letters, e.g. 'p', 'ph' or 'igh'.



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Gross motor skills development:

Movements of the large muscles of the body, which control aspects such as running, kicking a ball, catching and striking.

Inference:

The process of deriving and arriving at a conclusion, based upon the logical and assumed information provided. It relies upon a degree of probability and prior experience. It is required for composing sentences, successful reading fluency and reading into information which is not necessarily explicit.

Intonation:

The changing pitch, pace and volume of sound to convey meaning in spoken language.

Language Delay:

Usually used to describe a situation where the child has specific difficulties in the development of language where all other skills are developing at the normal developmental rate.

Learning Difficulty

A general term used to describe a wide range of problems experienced by children who find it significantly harder to learn than other children the same age. It can be used to describe difficulties in learning, memory, concentration, behaviour, reading, number work or speech and language.

Learning Disability:

Is a lifelong condition and is the most common form of childhood impairment with 1 in 20 having a learning disability of some kind. It encompasses any development which is significantly behind the expected level for their age. LD may occur on its own or may co-occur with other difficulties or medical conditions such as epilepsy. For some children there is a genetic basis for the LD e.g. Down's Syndrome. However, for a significant number of children the causes are never known.

Local Authority:

The implementation of SEND provision is coordinated through Local Authorities across the UK. They receive devolved SEND funding from central government and support schools in their administration of it. Applications for a statutory assessment or additional top-up-funding is made through the LA.

Long Term Memory:

Indefinite storage of information.

Metacognition:

This is the ability to evaluate and understand what the individual actually knows and understands. It is a knowledge of oneself, knowing what you know.

Modelling:

A teaching strategy where teachers/TAs provides an example of the correct way of working/learning/speaking.

Multi-disciplinary Assessment:

The assessment carried out by a range of professionals of different disciplines to provide a holistic and complete overview of the individual's areas of development, strengths and difficulties. It is an essential feature of the **statutory assessment process**.

Multi-sensory impairments:

The term used to describe individuals with impairments in both hearing and vision. Other difficulties or impairments may also be experienced in certain rare medical or genetic conditions.

Non-Verbal Ability:

The ability to interpret information which is presented in a non-verbal format such as through diagrams, patterns and so on. It is a useful measure for determining underlying ability in individuals with language and communication difficulties.

Non-Word Reading:

The ability to decode sounds within unknown words is assessed through providing a range of 'nonwords'. These are made up words, which have no meaning and are not in general use within the English language. For example: zod, blick.

Oral Expression:

Ability to express oneself through words.

Performance:

When a child or young person is assessed, their performance is the engagement and how they interact with the test material. It also measures their final result. Hence an individual's performance can be sound (i.e. average), secure (i.e. higher than mean average), superior (i.e. well above average), poor (i.e. below average).

Phonics:

Speech sounds; systematic phonics is one approach to reading instruction that teaches students the principles of letter-sound relationships, how to sound out words, and provides exceptions to the principles.



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Phonology:

The range of sounds that are used for speech.

Phonological Awareness/Difficulties:

Phonological awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate sounds in words. It is a foundation skill for reading and spelling development. Phonological Difficulty is a difficulty in selecting, creating, discriminating or using correct speech sounds when speaking. This may affect the development of Literacy skills such as reading and spelling.

Phoneme-grapheme correspondence:

Is the ability to interpret written information with accuracy. It is the process of assigning an oral sound (phoneme) to the letter or groups of letters presented on a page, to be able to read it. It does not involve interpretation of the text or the ability to comprehend it, but merely to mechanically make the sound-print connection. A difficulty in this area leads to reading accuracy and spelling difficulties.

Pragmatic Difficulties:

Difficulty using language and in understanding meaning and context. An individual with a pragmatic difficulty may not understand other people's language, may interpret it literally and may use inappropriate language within different situations, not understanding the contextualised nature of language.

Primary Difficulty:

This is the most predominantly presenting feature or difficulty and may result in secondary difficulties or may be a result of an underlying or hidden difficulty.

Processing speed:

The rate at which an individual processes information presented either verbally (orally) or visually.

Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD):

General learning Difficulties with a substantial delay in ability resulting in the need for intensive specialist support and instruction. Indicated through assessment which results in a developmental age well below the lowest 1 percentile. Most individuals with PMLD have an underlying condition, such as cerebral palsy, and require full-time care and support.

Prognosis:

A prediction of what is likely to happen following an injury, disease or other diagnosed condition.



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Psychometric assessment:

A test which assesses hidden and behavioural traits such as knowledge, abilities, attitudes and personality, cognitive and emotional functioning.

Raw Score:

The actual score obtained from the test.

Reading Comprehension:

The ability to read for meaning and being able to provide an accurate interpretation of reading material.

Reading Rate:

The speed of reading text.

Reading accuracy/sight-word recognition/ single word reading:

The ability to read words with accuracy upon sight either within a sentence or on their own. It does not measure the understanding of these words.

Reading Fluency:

The ability to read with accuracy and at an appropriate rate. It can be impacted by either inaccurate reading or slow reading and it is important that a report distinguishes the difference.

Reasoning:

A cognitive process which looks for reasons, deductions, beliefs, conclusions and feelings. For the purposes of assessment, how individuals reason and their ability to be able to reason is assessed.

Receptive Language Difficulty:

A difficulty in understanding spoken language in their first language.

Regressive:

Tending to revert to an earlier stage of development.

Reliability:

The reliability of a test is how consistent it is at measuring what it sets out to measure, when administered by different people to different individuals. For instance, if a test was administered to an individual 5 times, by 5 different people, the more reliable the test, the more similar the results should be. Reliability is affected by random error, such as fatigue, boredom or external influences (sudden noise, light etc).



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Secondary Difficulty:

A Primary difficulty can sometimes cause the effect of a consequential or secondary difficulty, particularly if not redressed. For instance, a student may experience Receptive Language difficulties (Primary difficulty) which causes them to experience reading comprehension difficulties (secondary difficulty). A secondary speech and language difficulty is associated with other conditions or learning difficulties that may be experienced, such as Autism.

It is essential for an assessment to identify all difficulties experienced by the individual, including the primary and secondary (consequential) difficulties in order for strategies to be developed to support these difficulties holistically.

Semantics:

Associated with the branch of linguistics which is associated with logic and meaning. Logical semantics is concerned with matters related to sense, reference and implication, whilst lexical semantics is concerned with the analysis of word meanings and relationship between them. Semantics connotes meaning and the way a sentence is formed, and the type of language used, can place meaning and emphasis in a different way to create a desired effect.

Semantic Links:

When children begin to learn to speak, they string words together in groups which have meaning. Categories of words aid learning vocabulary and develop links between units of information. For instance, the word 'fruit' triggers a memory of other words, such as: 'banana, apple or orange'.

Developing semantic links is an extremely powerful tool for developing vocabulary in addition to remembering information, where one word triggers the brain to bring to the forefront of memory other words or ideas. For instance, the word 'photosynthesis', might trigger the memory of the word 'respiration', or the word 'volcano' triggers the memory of the word 'lava' or 'explosion'. Semantic links can be developed within mind maps.

Sensory Defensiveness:

This is a condition resulting in a tendency to react negatively or with alarm to sensory input which is generally considered harmless or non-irritating to a normally developing individual.

It is not uncommon for individuals to have a few mild sensory defensive traits. However, when multiple defensive traits impact the person's day-to-day life, that person is considered to be Sensory Defensive.



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Sensory Integration Therapy (SI):

Sensory integration is the ability to organise sensory information for use by the brain. An individual with Sensory Integration Dysfunction will have a difficulty in organising and interpreting information as it is received by the brain from the individual senses.

SI Therapy is used by Occupational Therapists to stimulate and integrate more than one of the senses through special intervention programmes. Interventions include activities such as spinning, sensory stimulation or applying firm or deep pressure.

Sensorimotor Development:

The development of the area within the brain which leads to the integration and co-ordination of sensory information leading to an appropriate motor response.

Sensorimotor development theory was pioneered by Jean Piaget who determined that sensorimotor development played a key role in the development of cognition.

Short-term Memory:

Capacity for holding a small amount of information in an active and readily available state for a short period of time. The capacity of the short-term memory is said to be 7 units of information +/- 2 units and can be held for just a few seconds, and it can be easily diverted by external factors.

Spatial skills:

The ability to visualise and mentally manipulate 2-D and 3-D shapes. It is associated with the ability to locate objects in a 3-dimensional world.

Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD):

A specific difficulty in a specific area such as Literacy or Numeracy. Dyslexia is often used interchangeably with SpLD. The difficulty is life-long and persists despite appropriate teaching and support.

Speech and Language Delay:

A child with a speech and language delay develops speech and language normally, but at a slower rate than normal development. They tend to use language in a way that a younger child would use it.

Standardised assessment:

A test or battery of tests administered and scored in a consistent way. They are designed in such a way that the questions, conditions for administering, scoring and interpretations are consistent allowing for comparison between scores. It provides a method for assessing and diagnosing individuals by comparing their individual performance to the 'normal' population. No test is 100% accurate, as it will not have been trialled upon the entire population. Most tests are reliable to within 90 or 95%.

Standard Score:

Once a standardised test has been administered, the raw score can be translated into a standard score, which allows for individuals to be compared with one another.

Statutory Assessment:

Detailed assessment required for an EHC Plan to be issued by the LA. This is a statutory duty and involves a multidisciplinary approach to assessment and diagnosis. There is a right of appeal to any decision made by the Statutory Assessment process.

Parents can request a Statutory Assessment from the LA under 7.21 of the SEN Code of Practice. If the LA refuse to provide the assessment, parents have a right of appeal to an independent Tribunal. This right of appeal must be provided by the LA.

Syntax:

The arrangement of words and phrases to create meaningful and sentences in a language. It is related to grammatical structures, where the arrangement of the words follow a grammatical code or rules.

Underlying ability:

Often referred to as general ability or IQ, the true ability of an individual is their underlying ability and is usually measured using non-verbal scores. Low nonverbal and verbal scores may indicate a low underlying and general ability.

Verbal (phonological) Memory:

The ability to retain an ordered sequence of verbal material for a short period of time.

Verbal (phonological) Processing Speed:

The time taken to process familiar verbal information such as letters and digits.

Verbal reasoning:

The ability to process information to make judgments and conclusions based upon a thorough understanding of language and vocabulary. It is related to understanding the issues of cause and effect and requires cognitive elements of understanding, considering, explaining, making deductions and rationality.

Visuospatial processing:

Ability to understand visual representations and their spatial relationships. For instance, an individual may be able to match a 3D object with another 3D object, but may have difficulty in interpreting a 2D representation of a 3D object. They may also have difficulty in interpreting the 3D object from a different position or angle.



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Visual memory:

The ability to remember information provide only visually.

Visual discrimination:

The ability to discern and perceive differences between shapes and patterns.

Visual Closure:

The identification of forms or objects from incomplete presentations. Impairments in this area of **visual** perception may interfere with the child's ability to perceive the entire presentation of what is to be viewed and hence impact upon reading accuracy or fluency.

Visual Figure-ground:

Refers to the tendency of the visual system to simplify a scene into the main object that we are looking at (the figure) and everything else that forms the background (or ground). Some individuals perceive different colours or shades differently when placed against different backgrounds and hence interpret visual information differently. It can impact upon the ability to interpret information when colours are not contrasted fully and may be improved by changing background colour. It can also impact the interpretation of a 2D representation of a 3D shape.

Visual acuity:

The perception of detail in visual information. It can impact upon reading accuracy.

Visual Stress:

This is a term used to describe the experience of eye strain, difficulty in focussing, headaches and illusions of colour or movement in written text.

Visual-motor perceptual skills:

Ability to process information visually and make an appropriate motor (movement) response.

Working Memory

This is the memory used to hold temporarily, process, manipulate and retrieve information. It is the executive and attentional aspect of short-term memory and can be a major influence upon concentration and attention.