On Tuesday 27th March 2007, the Dyscalculia and Dyslexia Interest Group (DDIG) held its third full day conference “Pathways to Progress”. The event was held in Brockington Extension and the Mathematics Education Centre at Loughborough University.

Two keynote presentations were given. The first, entitled “Back to Basics”, was given by Pauline Clayton, Principal Tutor for Mathematics at Dyslexia Action. This opening session of the day was designed to provide an overview, particularly for the non-specialist teacher or lecturer. It focused on the connections between dyslexia and mathematical skills and explained how dyscalculia fits into this profile. It also included an analysis of the skills needed for mental calculation, particularly in the light of a dyslexic individual’s profile, and a summary of the different learning styles that learners employ in mathematics. The presentation also discussed the latest research into dyscalculia.

The second keynote presentation concluded the day’s proceedings and was given by Dr Geraldine Price from the School of Education at the University of Southampton. “Student-led technology: practical solutions to making technology work” explored the need to bridge the gulf between good educational practice and pragmatic and practical solutions to making technology work effectively to support dyslexic writing difficulties. Three case studies from Dr Price’s research provided the voice of the dyslexic student in higher education (HE).

Following the opening keynote presentation, there was a short session giving delegates an update on the dyscalculia screening tool being developed by Clare Trott.
and Nigel Beacham in the Mathematics Education Centre, here at Loughborough. Clare Trott presented an analysis of the data collected during extensive trials conducted during the autumn of 2006. The data provides further evidence of the effectiveness of the screening tool and its ability to screen for dyscalculia.

From postgraduate researchers to nursing students, the conference offered a wide range of optional sessions and delegates were able to select three of their choice. “Going further: the challenge of research study for dyslexic graduates” from Val Farrar, a researcher in diversity and HE at the University of Newcastle, explored the impact of postgraduate research study on dyslexic graduates, drawing on the work of the Premia project.

Optional Session: Val Farrar, Premia Project

Two sessions focused on nursing. The first, “Dyslexia in Nursing Students”, presented by Peter Bentley, Senior Lecturer Applied Biological Sciences, City University, London, discussed issues affecting nursing students around literacy and numeracy both in the University and in clinical practice, while the second, “Student nurses report traits associated with high maths-anxiety during numeracy skills diagnostic testing” by Heather Bull, Lecturer in Biological Science and Maths in Nursing, University of Nottingham, reported on a preliminary study to investigate the extent of maths-anxiety experienced by a group of student nurses during a numeracy programme undertaken within the first four months of the Nursing Diploma course.

Dyslexia in Nursing Students, Peter Bentley

Another optional session “What are the experiences of dyslexic and dyscalculic students when learning mathematics?” by Sarah Parsons, Learning Support Tutor for Mathematics and Senior Lecturer, Harper Adams University College, reported on her research into a variety of difficulties encountered by students, including dyslexic and dyscalculic students. Jane Warren, a Dyslexia Tutor and Assessor from the University of Southampton offered an optional session that sought to answer the question “Why is maths so difficult?” Her presentation and discussion relating to “anxiety, self-esteem and ‘stuck’ thinking” highlighted the apparent prevalence of maths anxiety and avoidance in the dyslexic and general populations, as well as some intervention strategies for students on courses with ‘unexpected’ maths content. Another option from Janette Matthews and Clare Trott, Mathematics Education Centre, Loughborough University, provided delegates with the opportunity to explore the work of the Eureka Centre for Mathematical Confidence. In particular, the student voice was presented via video clips.

The conference was supported by an exhibition of relevant books and other resource materials. The event attracted a total of 105 delegates representing nearly 60 institutions of Higher Education, Further Education and other relevant organisations.

Delegates were very enthusiastic about the outcomes of the day and encouraging feedback was received. One delegate described the day as “helping to fire my enthusiasm”, another delegate said, “sharing experience, expertise and concerns is important and conferences like this give an opportunity to do this”. A third delegate commented, “It was accessible to novices but also reported on the latest research in the area.” The delegate continued:

“I feel the DDIG community… will make an increasing impact to supporting neurodiversity mathematics needs in HE.”

Editorial Comment

Further details about this event are available via:
http://mathstore.ac.uk/workshops/ddig2007/
or directly from the DDIG website at: http://ddig.lboro.ac.uk/pages/2007_conference/2007_conference.html