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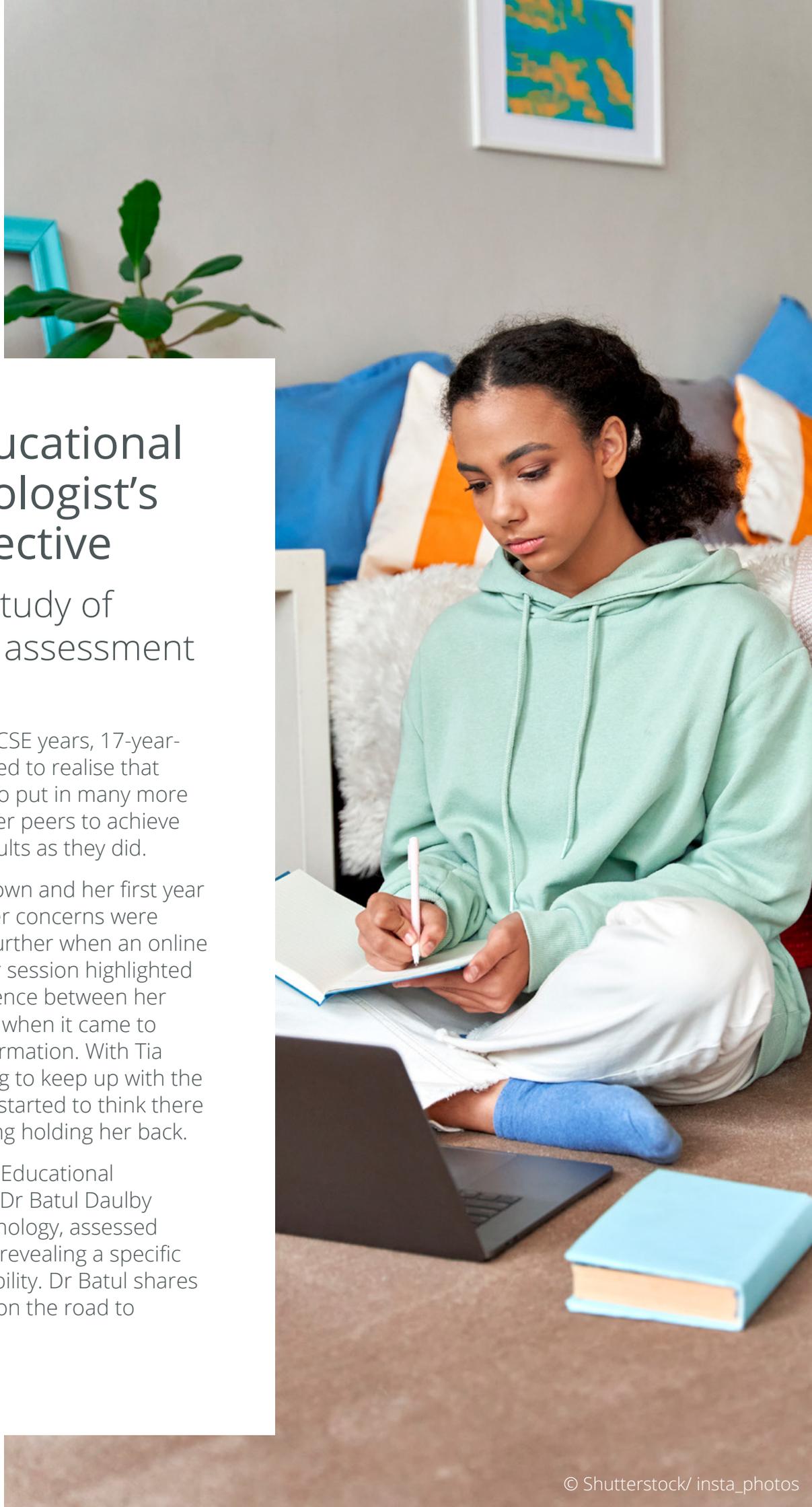
An Educational Psychologist's perspective

A case study of student assessment

During her GCSE years, 17-year-old Tia* started to realise that she needed to put in many more hours than her peers to achieve the same results as they did.

During lockdown and her first year of A levels, her concerns were heightened further when an online study partner session highlighted a stark difference between her and her peer when it came to retaining information. With Tia also struggling to keep up with the syllabus, she started to think there was something holding her back.

Independent Educational Psychologist, Dr Batul Daulby from CF Psychology, assessed Tia remotely, revealing a specific learning disability. Dr Batul shares Tia's journey on the road to diagnosis.

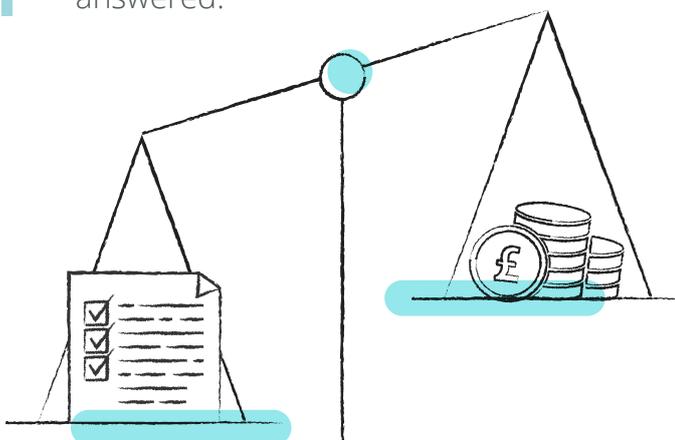


Overcoming the initial hurdle

Investing in higher education qualifications is a huge decision for students, with university fees, living and accommodation fees, and study materials running into tens of thousands of pounds. However, for a person with a specific learning difficulty (SpLD), the costs are likely to be higher still, with support methods and technologies needed to level the playing field.

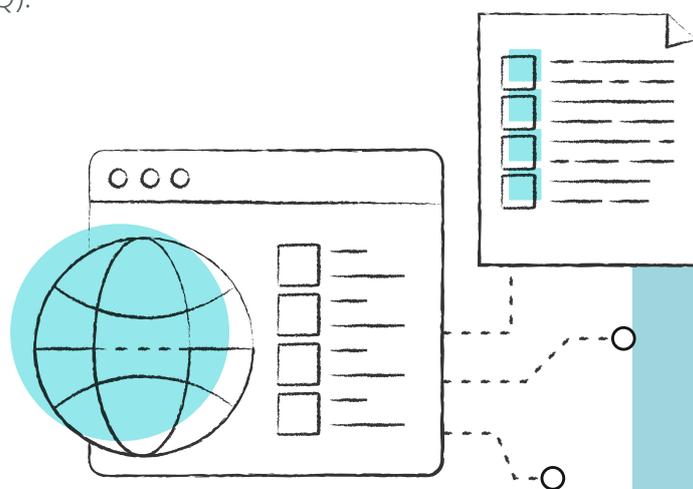
It is for this reason that the **Disabled Student Allowance (DSA)** is available. This is a non-means-tested allowance which contributes to the cost of disability-related study costs. Unfortunately, there are multiple barriers for eligible students to access this help. Firstly, there is very little awareness of DSA in secondary schools and sixth form colleges. A recent government study showed that only two in five students receiving DSA had heard about it before starting university.¹ Secondly, the cost of gathering evidence via a psychologist or specialist teacher assessment, given budgetary constraints, means schools and colleges may be reluctant to fund assessments for specific learning difficulties.

This was Tia's hurdle. She raised her concerns with the SENCO at her college, but the SENCO said that it was unlikely that she had a SpLD. Her grades at GCSE were too good, and the school did not have the budget to have her assessed. It was at this point that Tia and her parents contacted CF Psychology, and decided that they would try a remote diagnostic assessment to get her questions answered.



Remote assessments

Remote diagnostic assessments via **telepractice** were initially an emergency measure in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these have now become established as a legitimate service delivery option in their own right and are widely accepted by the key agencies such as the **British Psychological Society**, the **SASC** (SpLD Assessments Standards Committee) and the **Joint Council for Qualifications** (JCQ).



With remote assessment aiding efficiency savings and accessibility, the cost of diagnostic assessments for DSA applications to schools, universities and private individuals has been greatly reduced. It is allowing more eligible individuals to get access to help and support to fulfil their potential in higher education.

With Tia, we began to gather information that encompassed her physical and mental health, early development, educational history and socio-cultural background prior to carrying out any direct assessment work. This enabled us to build a holistic picture of Tia and identify all the factors that could be contributing to the difficulties she is experiencing.

1. www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/915042/Evaluation_of_disabled_students_allowances.pdf

A session was arranged via a video conference platform, allowing us to see if Tia had all the necessary equipment, that it functioned, and that her working environment was appropriate. It also allowed us to see if she had any anxieties about the process that needed to be anticipated and addressed. Anxieties have the potential to influence performance within, and hence the outcomes of, of assessments. We learned that Tia was managing feelings of guilt and potential embarrassment, asking questions like “What if this turns out to be all in my own head?”

The assessment

Tests were carried out showing stimulus material on Pearson Clinical’s [Q-global](#), and scored on [Q-interactive](#). This included drawing on the [Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale \(WAIS-IV UK\)](#), [Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement KTEA-3](#)) and the [Detailed Assessment of Speed of Handwriting \(DASH\)](#).

These tests explored Tia’s verbal and non-verbal reasoning, working memory, and speed of cognitive processing, as well as her reading, writing and mathematical abilities.

Tia performed very well in certain areas, but in other areas her performance was much weaker. She achieved good results in tests of maths and verbal reasoning. She was able to read accurately when reading very slowly. She also needed more time to translate familiar symbols into language labels: the skills of rapid automatic naming. Her profile was consistent with a specific learning difficulty.

The formulation — a solution-focused explanation of the referral concerns which helps the client to understand their experiences — was shared and discussed with Tia and her parents, providing the opportunity for Tia to gain insights into her own abilities. From here we were able to work out even more effective ways to play to her strengths and compensate for her weaknesses.

Tia’s experience

It is easy after an assessment to feedback to a client about their strengths and shy away from discussing identified weaknesses. However, feedback from Tia highlighted how providing both are so important. Although she had felt trepidation before her assessment, ultimately the experience had been most empowering. By learning more about her own abilities, she has been able to make many positive changes.

Interestingly, one of the main points of focus Tia identified was allowing herself to take extra time and to say to herself “It’s OK for me to take longer,” whereas before she had felt a sense of anxiety around working more slowly.

Tia will now be awarded access arrangements, changes to the conditions under which she will sit her exams (regulated by the [Joint Council for Qualifications](#)). When she is successful at getting a place at university, she will be able to apply for DSA and have access to support with studying. Common access arrangements for SpLD include 25% extra time, a reader and use of a word processor.

** Tia’s name has been changed to protect her identity.*



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Dr Batul Daulby

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Dr Batul Daulby is an independent Educational Psychologist (EP) and Founder and Principal EP of **CF Psychology**. In 2020, she was highly commended by the British Psychological Society for her contribution to the quality of UK-based psychology practice.

For further information, visit: www.cfpsychology.co.uk

'An Educational Psychologist's perspective - A case study of student assessment' has been created by Dr Batul Daulby for Pearson Clinical, 2021.

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