Language and literacy skills of international students, home students and home students with dyslexia in UK higher education: How different are they, and does it matter?

A) RATIONALE FOR THE PROJECT
Recent research shows that international students who speak English as a foreign language pursue their university education with a systematic disadvantage: despite arriving with required language qualifications, they know fewer words, are much slower readers and understand less of what they read than home students. They also experience lower academic success. Yet few UK universities make any assessment adjustments for students who speak English as a foreign language (EFL). In contrast, language comprehension and writing difficulties of home students disadvantaged by dyslexia are normally accommodated for, e.g. by extra time in exams. Should similar provision be in place for EFL students? This study aims to investigate whether language-related difficulties experienced by international EFL students are bigger or smaller than those experienced by home students with dyslexia.

B) REFERENCES THAT SHOULD BE READ (NB if you do not have access to these, please email me)

C) RESEARCH AIMS / QUESTIONS
RQ1: How much do English language and literacy skills differ at university between international students who speak English as a foreign language, home students who speak English as their first language, and home students with a diagnosis of dyslexia.

RQ2: Do initial differences persist or disappear over the course of an academic year?

RQ3: How critical are language and literacy skills on arrival for academic success?

D) METHODS
The study will compare international students in the UK and British students with and without dyslexia on a number of cognitive, language and literacy measures, including general intelligence, speed of processing in English, vocabulary size, reading comprehension and academic writing. The tests will be administered at the beginning and at the end of an academic year. Participants will be tested individually. Their performance will be compared via mixed-design ANOVAs, with time as a within-subject and group as a between-subject factor. Bivariate correlations and linear regression will be used to explore the effect of language and literacy measures at the point of entry on academic outcomes at the end of the year, expressed as participants’ credit-weighted average mark.