

## PRESS RELEASE

### THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH, THE TELECOM ITALIA FOUNDATION AND THE ITALIAN DYSLEXIA ASSOCIATION: PROTOCOL OF UNDERSTANDING SIGNED TO RECOGNISE AND COMBAT DYSLEXIA IN ITALIAN SCHOOLS

The agreement envisages the creation of two operational projects, “It’s never too early,” for the timely recognition of dyslexia, and “At dyslexia school,” for the specific training of teachers

Today’s understanding falls within the framework of a wider programme of interventions already launched by the Telecom Italia Foundation and the Italian Dyslexia Association in 2009, to run for a period of three scholastic years, and an investment, by the Telecom Italia Foundation, of 1.5 million euros.

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The **Minister for Education, Universities and Research**, Mariastella Gelmini, the President of the **Telecom Italia Foundation**, Joaquín Navarro-Valls, and the President of the **Italian Dyslexia Association**, Rosabianca Leo, today signed a Protocol of Understanding aimed at creating two operational programmes for the early recognition and effective combatting of dyslexia in Italian schools. The agreement is part of a wider programme of interventions already launched by the Telecom Italia Foundation and the Italian Dyslexia Association in 2009, to run for a period of three scholastic years, and an investment, by the Telecom Italia Foundation, of 1.5 million euros.

The main objective of the initiative is to tackle, on several fronts and in an effective and decisive manner, the problem of dyslexia. Although well known in Italy from the scientific perspective, adequate strategies have not yet been marshalled to combat this affliction. Around **350,000** Italian students between the ages of 6 and 19 are estimated to be affected by dyslexia, a figure that represents between **4-5%** of the scholastic population (on average, one student in every class of 20 pupils).

The Protocol of Understanding signed today by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research, the Telecom Italia Foundation and the Italian Dyslexia Association envisages the creation of **two operational projects**: “It’s never too early,” for the timely recognition of dyslexia, and “At dyslexia school,” for the specific training of teachers.

#### **“It’s never too early” – the importance of timely recognition**

The project is aimed at the early recognition of specific learning disorders. Scientific research confirms that a timely diagnosis is crucial in the recovery from these disorders: correct intervention during the second year of primary school, indeed, allows a significantly greater reduction of the extent of the disorder than would be possible in later years. The project, which will last three years, proposes therefore to **define and test a scientifically reliable screening protocol** that can be reproduced uniformly throughout the country, in order to

identify the most noticeable indicators of risk and ensure the effectiveness of targeted and timely educational interventions. Therefore, the development of the reading and writing abilities of around **7,000 children** will be analysed over **three years**, involving 300 classes and their teachers in public and private schools.

### **“At Dyslexia School” – specific training for teachers**

The project is aimed at providing specific training for teachers and experimentation with inclusive teaching methods, based on the use of personal computers. A **network of 6,000 “key” teachers** will be activated, involving scholastic institutions at all levels in every Italian region for a period of three years. The teachers will receive specific training, both theoretical and practical, in the handling of pupils with specific learning disorders, aimed also at introducing and stimulating the use of personal computers in the classes concerned.

Today's understanding falls within the framework of a **wider programme of interventions** already launched by the Telecom Italia Foundation and the Italian Dyslexia Association in 2009, to run for a period of three scholastic years, and an investment, by the Telecom Italia Foundation, of **1.5 million euros**. The broader programme includes, in addition to the aforementioned “It's never too late” and “At dyslexia school,” another two operational projects: “Digital Campus” and “The multimedia backpack.”

### **“Digital Campus” – new technologies are the best allies of dyslexic children**

The main aim of the project is to train dyslexic children in the use of the computer tools that can help them study and learn, through a group residential course, where they can examine issues and engage in stimulating and motivating discussions that will allow them **to try out active, creative and effective learning methods**. The Campus will be run as residential weeks, during the summer months, for groups of around 15 young people, subdivided by classes, where educational activities will be supplemented with opportunities for personal evaluation; each group will be guided by educational and computer experts, and organisers with specific knowledge of these disorders. Each year, the project will involve 60 children from various Italian regions within the age band from 12 to 15 years.

### **“The multimedia backpack” – a digital library on the web**

The project, which will last for three years, will provide school books in easily accessible, digital format to every dyslexic pupil. Indeed, this format makes it possible to read a book on a PC with a voice synthesis programme, or through an e-book reader, and is one of the most effective aids for the full integration of the dyslexic student. The final objective of the project is to make available a proper digital library on the web ([www.biblioaid.it](http://www.biblioaid.it)), which every student can access, subject to registration, and download scholastic texts. During the three years, a substantial rise is expected in the number of people helped to **16,000 registered uses** and **40,000 books distributed** through previous methods of distribution (by post and CDs containing pdf files).

The four operational projects described above will be rolled out across the entire country, with particular attention to those situations where specific learning disorders are still little recognised or acted upon. In addition to attaining the immediate objectives, **the projects have been assembled in a way that will serve as a model** for the implementation, by scholastic institutions, of measures to support children who suffer from these problems in the classroom.

“My Ministry,” said **Mariastella Gelmini, the Minister of Education, Universities and Research**, “cannot remain indifferent in the face of a problem that impacts negatively on the learning ability of students, and is one of the most common reasons for abandoning studies. Today is an important day for schools, families and students who struggle against dyslexia every day, and who for years have sought solutions to this problem from the institutions. At last, a concrete, effective project has been drawn up which will be carried out in the entire country to combat the abandonment of schooling and help those children who, while being no less intelligent than other pupils, need real help in overcoming their learning difficulties.”

“Dyslexia is a type of difficulty that is often undervalued, but which can negatively influence the growth of young people and their full integration in school and in society. Telecom Italia Foundation,” said **President Joaquín Navarro-Valls**, “has committed itself to combatting dyslexia, entirely consistent with its mission to concentrate activities and resources on social needs that have not yet emerged, or are little known, and on the promotion of the right to study and knowledge as fundamental factors of enablement and social inclusion.”

“Today is a really important moment for the Italian Dyslexia Association and for hundreds of thousands of dyslexic children in Italy, children who are just as intelligent as their fellows, but who are often mistakenly labelled as lazy and stupid,” said **Rosabianca Leo, President of the Italian Dyslexia Association and the mother of two dyslexic children.** “After years of difficulties, when our children’s right to study was by no means ensured, finally the scholastic institutions are responding to the cries for help from families with children suffering from specific learning disorders. The impetus has come from the corporate world, that is, the Telecom Italia Foundation, which has joined with us to give concrete help to our children. But the real acknowledgement will come from our children, and in the scholastic success that would otherwise have eluded them. As a parent and national President of the Italian Dyslexia Association, I consider the understanding between the Telecom Italia Foundation, the Italian Dyslexia Association and the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research to be a fundamental step on the road to the institutional recognition of the needs of children and young people with specific learning disorders in schools, which has been underway for some years. It is, moreover, an important signal from Italy to the European Community: the scholastic world from now on will take responsibility for the problems and rights of children and young people with specific learning disorders, in compliance with the European Directives and the Conventions on the rights of the child. I hope that the next step will be the rapid approval of a national law that establishes rules and instruments to help these children in all schools at all levels in the entire country.”

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