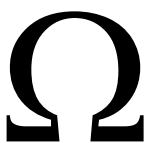


Neurodiversity Guidance



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1.0 Introduction

This guidance is designed to support the Neurodiversity Policy and should be read in conjunction with this document as it provides awareness, supportive information, advice and guidance to employees, workers and managers on topics related to neurodiversity.

2.0 Neurodivergent conditions and traits (this list is not exhaustive)

Neurodivergent people are given labels that diagnose how a person's brain differs from what society defines as 'normal'. Many of these are categorised as 'disorders' however, these are not diseases or illnesses, or something that can be cured, they are conditions or differences and not deficits. An individual's neurology is part of that person's identity.

Most forms of neurodivergence are experienced along a 'spectrum'. Each form of neurodivergence (such as autism and dyslexia) has a range of associated characteristics and these can vary from individual to individual. For example, the effects of dyslexia in one person can be different to another person with dyslexia. The effects on the individual can also change over time. An individual will often have the characteristics of more than one type of neurodivergence. Attention deficit disorders, autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia are often co-occurring and occur across a range of intellectual abilities.

It is useful to have an awareness of some of the types of conditions and indicative traits that each type of neurodivergence can have, **(this list is not exhaustive)**:

Attention deficit (Hyperactivity) disorders ADD or ADHD

Attention deficit disorders (ADD) are a group of conditions involving differences in attention span, activity levels, concentration and/or impulsivity.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition that affects people's behaviour and ability to control attention, impulses and concentration, and can cause inattention, hyperactivity and impulsiveness. Some people have problems with attention but not the hyperactivity or impulsiveness. This is often referred to as ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder).

ADD and ADHD can occur in people of any intellectual ability, although it's more common in people with learning difficulties. People with ADHD can seem restless, may have trouble concentrating and may act on impulse. Symptoms of ADHD usually improve with age, but many adults who were diagnosed with the condition at a young age continue to experience problems. People with ADHD may find they have difficulties with following instructions. People with ADHD can often be good at

completing urgent, or physically demanding tasks, pushing past setbacks, adapting new strategies, moving forward, and showing a passion for their work.

Autism

Autism also now widely known as ASC (Autism Spectrum Condition) is a condition characterised by differences in communication, cognitive processing, sensory sensitivities and with lateral thinking and intense special interests.

Autism is a neurological variant, a difference in how the brain works. It can affect people in the same family. Autism is a spectrum which means everybody with autism is different, some autistic people have average or above average intelligence which means they need little or no support whereas other autistic people may have a learning disability which means they may need more help and support. People with autism may find it hard to communicate and interact with other people, they may find it hard to understand how other people think or feel, they may take longer to understand information and may get anxious or upset about unfamiliar situations, surroundings and social events.

Autistic people like routine and structure; they are often very thorough in their work, punctual and rule observant. They have the ability to focus intensely on a given task, and therefore have good attention to detail. Many autistic people develop special interests and can have a high level of expertise in their chosen field.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a neurology that is not well suited to certain forms of written language, leading to difficulties with reading, writing and spelling, and which may also include differences in concentration and planning. It is also associated with certain strengths, particularly in spatial reasoning.

Dyslexia is a genetic neurological learning difference which affects language processing and is a combination of abilities and difficulties that affect learning processes that can often be identified as difficulty in reading, spelling, and writing. Other difficulties may occur in areas of speed of processing, short-term working memory, organisation, time management, visual perception, sequencing ideas, spoken language, and concentration. Dyslexia is not an intellectual impairment. It affects people of all intelligence levels.

Many dyslexic people have gifts in creativity, lateral thinking, and problem solving, story-telling and verbal communication.

Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia also known as, developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD), a condition associated with difficulties in movement and co-ordination, but also with strong strategic thinking.

Dyspraxia affects a person's co-ordination, balance and movement. It can also affect fine motor skills such as writing, typing or using small objects. Dyspraxia can affect how a person thinks, learns new skills, how they plan, manage their time, and how they remember information.

Dyspraxia does not affect a person's intelligence, in fact, those with dyspraxia are generally more intelligent than the average person, they have very complex minds that excel at innovation and problem-solving. People with dyspraxia often have good literacy skills and are creative. They have a strong sense of empathy and a good awareness of others that make them great team members. They often have high motivation and determination to succeed.

Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is a condition associated with difficulty in understanding number related concepts, symbols or functions for mathematics. Dyscalculia is one of the same family of specific learning difficulties. It is a specific and persistent difficulty in understanding numbers which can lead to a diverse range of difficulties with mathematics. People with dyscalculia find telling the time, planning schedules, staying within a budget, and working out journey times / distances difficult.

People with dyscalculia are fast problem-solvers, have the ability to think outside the box and can reflect on past experiences. Often people with dyscalculia are exceptional at reading, writing and spelling.

Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a condition in which a person has difficulties with fine motor skills such as handwriting, spelling and finger sequencing, which may affect typing. Dysgraphia is a neurological disorder of written expression that impairs writing ability and fine motor skills. It can affect all aspects of the writing process, including spelling, legibility, word spacing, sizing and expression such as issues with translating thoughts into written words.

People with dysgraphia have good listening skills, strong memorisation and recall of details. Like all neurodivergent conditions, dysgraphia is lifelong however, dysgraphic people can develop strategies to succeed at writing and other language based activities.

Obsessive-compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is a disorder related to anxiety. OCD is characterised by two main components: obsessional thoughts and compulsive behaviours.

Obsessional thoughts - which consist of any unwanted thoughts, images, impulses, worries, doubts, and fears that are intrusive and so pervasive that they feel impossible to ignore.

We all have intrusive thoughts from time to time. Random thoughts that pop up out of nowhere and don't follow our intended train of thought. Oftentimes, these thoughts come and go without a second thought, with no emotional attachment to the thought itself. But for those suffering from OCD, these unwanted thoughts can make them feel anxious and fearful, and disgusted with themselves for thinking them. This then leads to compulsive behaviours, which are an attempt to fight the unwanted thoughts and provide relief from their anxiety. However, usually, this relief is only temporary.

On occasion, we all experience compulsions, counting the number of sweets in a packet as you eat them, or avoiding cracks in the pavement while walking. But, in OCD, rather than being enjoyable, a compulsion is a behaviour the sufferer feels compelled to repeatedly perform, either to prevent imagined harm happening to themselves or their loved ones, or until they feel better. Compulsions can include avoiding touching objects, people or places that could trigger the intrusive thoughts. Checking for signs of contamination, that doors and windows are locked, or appliances are switched off, etc. Repeating words or phrases, praying, or counting. These actions are intended to replace the intrusive thoughts or images, or give the appearance that it prevents bad things from happening. Rituals, which include doing something a set number of times or arranging objects in a specific way.

People with OCD are usually very attentive and pay great attention to detail, they want everything to be perfect and consider themselves perfectionists. They are great at meeting deadlines, completing excellent work, and managing time.

3.0 Adjustments for workplace barriers

There are many features of workplaces and working conditions which present potential barriers to neurodivergent people. When considering neurodivergent employees' / workers' needs, we often think about reasonable adjustments for individuals. However, it is better to have a workplace change that will benefit employees / workers generally than a change for just one specific employee / worker. For example, if we produce all written communication in dyslexia-friendly layout, that will benefit all dyslexic employees / workers - present and future, and other

employees / workers too, for example, those with visual impairments. That is much better than an individual dyslexic worker having to negotiate an adjustment where a separate, dyslexia-friendly version of each communication is produced just for them. Positive workplace changes can be supplemented by reasonable adjustments for individual workers, based on their individual needs.

The following adjustments may be considered as part of workplace changes and adjustments to reduce or remove barriers for employees / workers.

Heavy workload

- may be unsuitable for the pace at which a neurodivergent person works
- may create anxiety and stress
- long hours may cause mental, physical or sensory overload.

Workplace **changes**

- manageable workload for all staff
- adequate staffing levels
- flexible working hours
- plenty of time to read and complete tasks.

Workplace **adjustments**

- manageable workload
- reallocation of tasks within a workforce e.g. a dyslexic worker carrying out duties that involve minimal reading / writing
- shorter working hours.

Distressing sensory environment

- fluorescent lights, loud noise, strong smells, uncomfortable uniform or upholstery, poor ventilation
- over-stimulation from excessive sensory input: clutter, over-decorated walls, etc.

Workplace **changes**

- replace fluorescent lights with full-spectrum lighting
- quiet workspaces
- flexible – dress code
- effective and controllable ventilation.

Workplace **adjustments**

- controllable lighting at the person's workstation
- allocation to a work location (e.g. office, meeting room) with natural or full-spectrum lighting

- noise-cancelling headphones
- exemption from (aspects of) the dress code
- a quiet working environment, away from doors, noise, strong smells, etc.

Lack of provision for breaks and quiet

- workplace stress and anxiety become worse without the facility for 'time out' in a quiet space
- people with unusual concentration spans e.g., people with ADHD may find long work duties without breaks very difficult
- people with autism may need the opportunity to 'stim' i.e., to carry out their preferred activity for emotional regulation (a repetitive performance of certain physical movements or vocalizations, such as finger-flicking, hard blinking, repeating noises or words, rocking back and forth while sitting or standing etc.)

Workplace **changes**

- space for and acceptance of stimming
- an accessible quiet room in every workplace
- provision for flexible break times to suit the individual.

Workplace **adjustments**

- space for and acceptance of stimming
- break times to suit the individual.

Changes to working practices, when these are not negotiated or consulted on

- changes in working practices may cause unnecessary stress and anxiety
- neurodivergent workers may have developed working practices that work for them.

Workplace **changes**

- provision for individuals to determine their own working methods
- all changes in working practices to be negotiated and consulted on.

Workplace **adjustments**

- personal mentoring through periods of change
- longer notice periods of any changes to duties
- working methods to suit the individual.

Inappropriate communication styles

- small type and certain fonts are harder for dyslexic people to read
- workplace jargon and unclear instructions create problems for literal thinkers
- information provided in only one format e.g., written, present difficulties to people whose neurology is better suited to other formats.

Workplace **changes**

- all printed material to be in dyslexia-friendly fonts and layout (see British Dyslexia Association guide for details – link on page 13)
- highlight key points in documents
- record meetings, training etc.
- communicate clearly, minimise distractions and check understanding
- provide information in different formats e.g. verbal and/or written, diagrams.

Workplace **adjustments**

- all printed material to be in dyslexia-friendly fonts and layout
- information given in a suitable format (written, verbal, pictorial, audio, video, diagram, flowchart)
- assistive technology such as a screen-reader, scanning pen, text-to-speech or mind-mapping software appropriate coloured paper (or colour overlay)
- additional time for some tasks
- communicate clearly, minimise distractions, check understanding
- use of a digital recorder.

Unpredictably of working arrangements

- ‘hot-desking’ creates barriers for neurodivergent workers who prefer to maintain their own workspace
- anxiety about the journey to work, due to, for example, peak-time public transport or lack of workplace parking
- short notice changes to times and content of work duties.

Workplace **changes**

- provide personal workstations where possible
- the option for working hours to allow travel outside peak hours
- designated parking spaces that can be reserved on the basis of need
- all workplace changes to be negotiated and consulted on.

Workplace **adjustments**

- a reserved parking space
- personal coaching through work changes
- a personal workstation
- adjustments to working hours.

Confusing workplace design

- unclear or insufficient signage

- illogical layout
- jargonistic labelling of work areas e.g. a 'green zone' that isn't green!

Workplace **changes**

- sufficient and clear signage, using both words and symbols
- logical layout
- clear naming of work areas e.g. 'quiet area'
- new buildings to be fully accessible, using universal design principles
- invitations to meetings and events to include clear venue information, route and visible landmarks.

Workplace **adjustments**

- a map of the workplace
- a personal guide around the workplace.

Computer use

- screen glare
- on-screen fonts and layouts that are hard to read.

Workplace **changes**

- provide anti-glare screens
- apply web accessibility guidance to ensure readable fonts and layout

Workplace **adjustments**

- change background colour of screen to suit individual preference
- supply anti-glare screen filter
- allow frequent breaks, according to needs
- alternate computer work with other tasks.

Unsuitable work processes

- alphabetically-based filing systems
- requirement for numerical calculations
- lack of help with organising work.

Workplace **changes**

- non-alphabetically based filing systems e.g. by colour
- work areas to be well-organised, neat and tidy, with important items returned to the same place each time.

Workplace **adjustments**

- calculating devices (including talking calculator)
- calendars, planners, electronic organisers, mnemonic (reminder) devices, etc.

Inappropriate recruitment and promotional practices

- irrelevant personal characteristics included in job specification e.g. ‘team player’, ‘outgoing personality’
- written exams present difficulties to dyslexic applicants
- interviews judging applicants on irrelevant personal characteristics e.g. eye contact.

Workplace **changes**

- job specifications to include only requirements for the job, not irrelevant personal characteristics
- replacing exam like exercises and interviews with job trials and practical tests (where appropriate)
- tests and interviews to take place in a venue with low sensory stimulus
- having exam style papers in dyslexia-friendly layout
- no personality testing e.g. psychometric or ‘situational judgement’ tests
- specific and concrete questions rather than hypothetical questions.

Workplace **adjustments**

- extra time in exams / exercises or tests, and to answer questions in interviews
- a job trial or practical test instead of exams like exercises or interviews
- questions in advance of interviews
- a companion in interviews to explain any unclear questions.

Rigid and/or inflexible working practices

- requirement for all workers to work at the same pace, even though people’s work paces differ
- requirement that all workers carry out the work in exactly the same way, even though different working methods suit different people.

Workplace **changes / adjustments**

- allowing workers to work at a pace that suits them to complete the task
- allowing workers to adopt working methods that suit them.

Hostile workplace culture

- being discriminated against, treated less favourably than others
- being harassed, bullied or excluded socially
- feeling unable to disclose their condition(s)

Workplace **changes**

- serious efforts to eliminate discrimination
- managers and others who discriminate to be held accountable

- education to tackle stereotypes and prejudices.

Workplace **adjustments**

- provide support and confidentiality for workers disclosing their condition(s)
- change of work location where appropriate.

4.0 Self-management for neurodivergent employees / workers

Employees / workers who are or who believe they may be neurodivergent should consider the use of mechanisms and processes available to identify suitable practical adjustments to help them overcome some of the challenges they may face in the workplace. These could include:

- Speaking to your line manager to ensure they are aware and can provide support including considering adjustments if needed including completing a Wellbeing Support Plan - Neurodiversity;
- Adjust the background colour on your PC – some people are affected by different colours so changing the background colour of your computer can help ease tired eyes and headaches;
- Plan your work – to save time and reduce stress, plan and map your tasks for your working day;
- Ask your manager to verbally relay any important information should you have a learning difficulty;
- Make your manager aware of potential triggers that may cause a difficulty in order for these to be addressed;
- Use text-to-speech software – most office-based employees / workers use computers; if it helps, use text-to-speech software allowing you access to an email or message and have it read to you;
- Finding out more about neurodiversity from available sources of information - contacting other support groups / individuals / organisations as detailed in section (Information and support);
- Accessing the Employee Assistance Programme for counselling / wellbeing advice etc.;
- Contacting a Mental Health First Aider and/or Equality Champion;
- Be accountable and responsible for engaging with the process and support offered to you by your manager and the council. This includes utilising any reasonable adjustments, specialist software or equipment, coaching, training or counselling provided.

5.0 Information and support

Internal sources of support can be found on Inside Walsall – HR intranet pages which include:

- **Occupational Health** - a source of specialist health care professionals (e.g. OH Nurses and Physicians) that provides organisational and individual advice on all aspects of health and work.
- **Employee Assistance Programme** – provided by Vivup which offers independent and impartial advice and information: [Vivup support link](#)
- **Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs)** - offer support to anyone experiencing emotional or mental health distress. All of our MHFAs have been competently trained and hold a recognised qualification by Mental Health First Aid England.
- **Equality Champions** – offer support and guidance regarding neurodiversity. Please search for Equality Champions on the [Organisational Development - Home \(sharepoint.com\) link](#) for more information.

The following external organisations can also be contacted for further support on Neurodiversity:

- [Additional Neurodiversity conditions](#) - The British Dyslexia Association is committed to raising awareness and understanding of Neurodiversity conditions by offering a wide range of information to help families, professionals and Neurodiverse individuals.
- [British Dyslexia Association dyslexia style guide 2023](#) – a guide to help ensure written material considers the difficulties experienced by some dyslexic people.
- [Dyslexia Association](#) –The Dyslexia Association helps to raise awareness and provides support and services for dyslexic children and adults of all ages.
- [Dyscalculia](#) – As well as dyslexia, Dyslexia Action UK also provides support and information to help remove the barriers facing individuals who have dyscalculia.
- [Dyspraxia](#) - The Dyspraxia Foundation is a UK wide charity supporting and helping individuals with dyspraxia and providing them with a variety of tools to help themselves.

- [Autism](#) - The National Autistic Society is a UK charity that provides information, guidance and support to people with Autism.
- [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder \(OCD\)](#) – OCD UK is a charity which is run by, and for, people with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. They provide information, advice and guidance with the uniqueness that their workforce share personal experience for people affected by OCD.
- [Access to Work](#) - is a publicly funded employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work.