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Neurodiversity guidance for Employers and Employees in Primary Care

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the variations in the way the brain functions; it can manifest in mood, behaviour and other cognitive functions.

For this guidance, we are including those with Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) as neurodiverse but this is not an exhaustive list. Often those who are neurodiverse have more than one of these conditions.

The term 'Specific Learning Difference' (SpLD) refers to a difference/difficulty that an individual has with a particular aspect of learning. The most common SpLDs are dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia.

At the heart of neurodiversity is the idea that individual differences are not weaknesses, but that society imposes expectations based on a majority neurotypical population. When not met, this can lead to challenges.

By applying a social model approach, we can appreciate that individual differences are not the problem but rather external barriers. By removing these barriers, we build a more inclusive society that values individual strengths and differences.

Neurodivergence is experienced differently by different people and experiences are influenced by other factors such as race, cultural background, and gender (this interplay of factors is referred to as intersectionality).

Neurodiversity in the workplace

10% of the population are neurodivergent (British Dyslexia Association 2012, 2021), with this figure thought to be higher in healthcare organisations. Neurodivergent individuals think differently yet this uniqueness can be overlooked through a lack of understanding in the workplace. Workplaces are mainly designed to suit the 90% of the population who are neurotypical. Rather than attempting to change neurodivergent individuals to fit with the workplace, we need to be supporting them to be the best they can be.

How it feels to have Dyslexia
Written (in their own words) by a health professional working in general practice

This is me

Dyslexia

All my life I have had to fight for ME that I am not slow learning, thick, unwilling to learn finds reading and the English language hard.

The school systems did not have time for me to see I see things differently, that I am creative, problem solving, loving caring person it just I take a little longer to work out how to do the same as others.

I cant spell I cant use full stops or commers, I will go around the houses and write a stenance to mean one word that I cant spell

I don't always read every word on the page and I can miss words out that I don't know or can say Homework with the children is one of my nemaus the deep panic that I can not do what they are doing or mummy how do you spell this word. (Alexa is great now alexa how do you spell this) is this making me lazy by not working it out my self sometimes picking the battle and if it makes my world a little essayer then iam all for it.

I am intellect but takes a little longer for my brain to work it out sometimes that's days months years I still working out phonics or other language not my strong point.

As a child I would remember the story of the book I was reading so I could tell the story but not read every word a coping systems. been asked to read out loud in class or Sunday school with my family the thought I would get it wrong or it would take me longer was crippling.

My letters were mixed up from a young age or a word would have the right letters but in the wrong order.

I cant follow maps very well I see a road and think I need to stay on this road. I used to come home from uni a different way and then call my dad and say iam lost why are you lost I saw a sign and thought the place was near home. Or I can be on the right road but going the wrong way, funny in sum ways but over time its not great.

Sat navs help so the use of tech is helping

I am a Swan swimming clam on top and not looking like much is working but in my brain is the same as the swans feet swimming like crazy to get small distances always two steps forward 3 steps back all because my brain is wired differently.

I was always a child that would fall over fall off horses or my bike step the wrong way in dance classes (I do this now move to the left instead to the right)

There are words I can not say pronouncing even now at 44 and not always remembering the right word to put in to sentences to make it flo.

I have difficulty in expressing knowledge in writing and short term memory .

There are two things in my life I want to to change

1 is my weight a battle I have been fighting all my life

2 Dyslexia

A word that is so hard to spell explaining that my brain is a little different from others , it is about information processing.

(there are positives to thinking differently)

Dyslexia affects my visual and auditory processing but gives me creative skills interactive skills and oral skills.

I was lately denoised with dyslexia 16 yrs old up to that point I was seen as a slow learner.

I came out of school with 4 GCSE at c but 2 of them were a high % of course work.

I got maths and English at d level but this ment I could not do the course I wanted to do, so to get on to the course the new school did a test on me

It showed I was dyslexic (who would of quested all the way thro school my parents fought for me to make me the best I could be extra lessons extra help the nights if sitting up with me making notes for the exam the next day just in case my brain would get t before the sun came up.

I got on the course if I re took my math and English GCSE which I got a c level grade and GNVQ in advanced health and social care.

I pass my driving test but took 3 times to get my theory but I did it took time but I did it.

The diagnosis was hard for me I did nt what to be seen as different from others but I was I am Pauline a nurse who has dyslexia.

I got in to uni to do my adult nursing a job that I have wanted to do since I did a project on Florence knighting gale at school age 6.

I had extra help at uni extra time in exams a reader and a scrip but refused a scrip as I wanted to prof I can do .

Lectures were hard no laptops then and writing all the bits of the white board with no and outs was hard to make sure I was not missing what I was writing to make spelling right so I could understand later on I had new assessments and a reading age ot an 11 yr old when I was on DIP HE nursing course but I would read daily

And read again to get in now I love the time to sit down and read a book to be taken off to a different world a different story,

I got there I pass I then had a Dip HE in adult nursing the world was my oyster so I thought, deep down I think it felt like a dream it was not my world had I really done it did my dyslexia stop me no just hindered me, like a buzzing bee.

Work life working as a new qualified nurse on a surgical ward lots to learn but did not feel supported , but learned as much as a I could

I was happy with pass never a A grade student but every course I did I would then again walk two steps forward and then essays would hold be back

Knocking my self confidence making me feel I could not to the job write an essay in pen and paper re write it 5 times cutting and pasting sticking on big sheets of paper and adding in extra bits along the way, to others this was a back wards step for going forwards but my brain worked on spier charts and sticking and gluing. I would then get friends family to check it over correcting spelling my grammar then I would type up and start the process again till I would have 30 different essays all at different steps along the way, this takes time so essays have ben hard.

Move forward many years family and work I now am a practice nurse in a small surgery I love my job, two days a week specialising in diabetes and two days a week as a legacy nurse helping to mentor new nurses in general practice.

I have support from my employer extra time for diabetic reviews admin times I have a yellow screen on my pc to help define the letters on the page.

There was talk about a Dictaphone that types up what I say in to the pc on emis but not happened yet, so this is me a nurse with a learning disability and the one thing I cant change is I cant do my prescribing course as I know my limitation and this course is one step out of my limitations.

I am a nurse

I have dyslexia

I fight for me I have come this far this is me

Benefits of a diverse workforce

There are many reasons that inclusive and diverse workforces are something to strive for. We all have different skills and experiences that can enrich workplaces. Employment practices ensure we can access their talents.

Neurodivergent individuals are often attracted to nursing and other healthcare professions because of their inherent qualities like being good team workers, care and compassion, creativity & different perspectives, resilience, determination.

A diverse workforce helps us better reflect and serve our communities and those with lived experience of neurodivergence can better appreciate the patient perspective.

Responsibilities of the line Manager

As a line manager, you are responsible for the health and wellbeing of those you manage when they are at work. This includes ensuring that health and safety and equality legislation is met and escalating when it is not so that your employer can make necessary changes.

It is not about the normalisation of a neurodivergent individual. Major (2021) discusses the reluctance of registered nurses to disclose dyslexia due to the stigma attached. Oliver (1996) refers to a person being disabled not by their impairment but by the failure of their environment to accommodate their needs. In respect of any neurodivergent individuals who you manage, a big part of the support you offer them will be in agreeing, implementing, and maintaining reasonable adjustments.

As employers we must also support them should they face discrimination or bullying.

We should avoid perpetuating differences between neurodivergent staff and their peers.

We should be informed about the ways they can use their lived experience to shape a more inclusive workforce and support them to engage in these processes.

The British Dyslexia Association advise that celebrating an individual's potential gifts and talents can help to remove barriers and stigma.

Finally, as employers, we should ensure that we have the skills needed to support those we manage and seek development, recognising the value of equality and inclusion related learning.

Reasonable adjustments

Under the [Equality Act 2010](#), adjustments are needed to help neurodivergent individuals fit workplace roles. Reasonable adjustments that support the diverse needs of all staff are both practical and feasible.

The Equality Act 2010 is the legislation in England, Wales, and Scotland that details employer's duties to make "reasonable adjustments" for people who are disabled.

In legislations, someone is disabled when they have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities – this is a legal, rather than a medical, definition. Many neurodivergent individuals do not identify as disabled. However, they are still protected by this legislation.

Anyone meeting this legal definition is entitled to reasonable adjustments by law. We should consider what support to offer staff.

Is the request reasonable and will it benefit the staff member at work?

Can it be fulfilled, even if the legal definition is not met?

Under the Equality Act 2010, positive effects of treatment are not considered. For example, someone with ADHD should still be considered as disabled for the purposes of making adjustments, even if they take medication that helps them manage their symptoms.

Reasonable adjustments are anything that removes barriers to allow disabled people the best opportunity to do their jobs.

However, when deciding what adjustments you make, as line manager you should objectively consider what is “reasonable” in terms of the role, length of contract, cost of implementation, size and resources of the organisation.

The adjustments themselves are not always physical and can fall into the following areas:

- Equipment - such as a Dictaphone to take notes, coloured overlays.
- Changes to working patterns - such as shift patterns, working from home, working nearer home.
- Changes to the workplace - such as automatic doors, altered lighting.
- Training - to educate colleagues and change attitudes, to help the individual develop coping techniques.
- Redeployment - which means moving to another more suited role that becomes available, when the employee can't continue in their current role.
- Employer policy – such as disability leave in addition to sick leave (to avoid triggering sickness reviews due to regular disability related activity such as attending hospital appointments)

A collaborative approach to establishing reasonable adjustments is required.

The RCN offers [Health Ability Passport guidance](#) which is a step-by-step guide to putting in adjustments in place.

Employer responsibilities

As an employer, probably the most important thing we can do to support neurodivergent staff is to ensure line managers are skilled and knowledgeable about inclusion. This includes making sure they are supported to explore creative options to retain staff as well as access to training.

Ensure that staff with disabilities and/or neurodiversity have equal access to training and professional development and can themselves progress to management roles.

Share and celebrate your successes in diverse recruitment processes and the retention and progression of neurodivergent staff so these precedents can be drawn on to improve staff experience. Evaluate and learn from staff experience (good and bad).

A staff network for neurodivergent staff (potentially as part of a broader disability network) can amplify voice if it is recognised and harnessed by the organisation.

There should be a mechanism to allow neurodivergent staff to influence policies and processes to ensure they are inclusive. Ideally co-design enables lived experience to influence change from the beginning. A staff network is one way to achieve this.

Example of how to support a clinician with neurodiversity working in general practice

Dyslexia

Effects / Difficulties

- Difficulties with spelling and fluent word reading
- Slower verbal processing speed
- Slower reading
- Reduced verbal memory and working memory.

Strengths

- Can view things from a different perspective.
- Problem solving skills.
- Empathy
- Creativity
- Visual/ good pattern recognition

Employees

- Quiet area to write notes.
- Use of software such as text to speech and speech to text, Grammarly, spellcheckers
- Digital voice recorder for note taking (encryption for GDPR)

Helpful strategies

- Use of a notebook
- A list of commonly drugs and how to pronounce common terms.
- Allow time for processing of questions, don't just repeat it or rephrase.
- Coloured paper and overlays/coloured lens in glasses may be useful for those with stereoscopic sensitivity/ Irlens syndrome.
- May need to be told several times to remember something or need to practice multiple times to complete a skill but once embedded will usually achieve successfully.
- Give clear notes of meetings to help with memory and not having to listen and write at the same time.

Poem

Dyslexia

- by [sin-jin](#) on deviantart

The words before me
Just don't work
I look at them
And feel like a jerk
What comes so easy to others
Escapes so from me
(Even though I stare and stare)
It remains a mystery
The kids at school
Don't understand or care
That I don't see what they do
It's just not fair!
The parents' fight
"You're smart"—the teachers try
To give me feelings of self worth
But sometimes I think they lie
What's wrong with me?
Why don't I see?
What everyone else can.....
What everyone else can see?
They give my problem a name
There're millions of us out there

Fighting the same fight
Do I join them, if I dare?
The words come slow
But with each battle won
The words before me
Become more fun
One leap forward
And three steps back
I'm eating words
Like a long awaited snack
I still can't spell
Names kill me
And I hate to read aloud
But I am finally free
Those out there with this problem
Hear these words and know
That you ARE Smart!
And you have so far to go!

Further resources

The [British Dyslexia Association](#)

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/Get-Help/Member-support-services/Peer-support-servicPaules/Neurodiversity-Guidance/Support-for-ND-nursing-staff>

Paula Messenger

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