

The Westminster
AchieveAbility
Commission for Dyslexia
and Neurodivergence
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AchieveAbility

Supporting the ambitions
of those with dyslexia

Charity number: 1161856

The Westminster

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and Neurodivergence

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Neurodiverse voices: Opening Doors to Employment

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Terminology

Identity-First Language

As neurodivergence is about neurocognitive function, we are using identity-first language in this report. This is preferred by most user-led organisations. This is because our neurocognitive functioning is an intrinsic part of who we are, and we would not be the same person without it. We are therefore neurodivergent, (i.e. dyslexics, dyspraxics, autistics, etc.) or neurodivergent people, rather than people with neurodivergence (dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism, etc.) as if this was somehow added to who we are.

What do we mean by Neurodiversity?

Like the equivalent term 'biodiversity', which refers to the whole biosphere, neurodiversity refers to the whole human race, and the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning that has evolved within our species (with thanks to Nick Walker <http://neurocosmopolitanism.com/neurodiversity-some-basic-terms-definitions>).

Neurodivergent

Sometimes abbreviated as ND, neurodivergent means having a style of neurocognitive functioning that diverges significantly from the dominant societal standards of 'normal'. (Nick Walker). Neurodivergent people include dyslexics, dyspraxics, AD(H)D, autistics (including those with Asperger's), dyscalculics, OCD, dysgraphics, tourettes, etc. (Nick Walker)

Neurotypical

Sometimes abbreviated as NT, neurotypical means having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards of 'normal'. (Nick Walker)

Neurodiverse

Sometimes abbreviated as ND, a group of people is neurodiverse if one or more members of the group differ substantially from other members, in terms of their neurocognitive functioning. (Nick Walker)

Reasonable Adjustments

'Equality law recognises that bringing about equality for disabled people may mean changing the way in which services are delivered, providing extra equipment and/or the removal of physical barriers.....

'The duty to make reasonable adjustments aims to make sure that a disabled person can use a service as close as it is reasonably possible to get to the standard usually offered to non-disabled people.

When the duty arises, a service provider is under a positive and proactive duty to take steps to remove or prevent these obstacles.'

Equality and Human Rights Commission. Equality Act 2010: Summary Guidance on Services, Public Functions and Associations. www.equalityhumanrights.com 2 Last revised 09-2014

Statistical significance

This is the likelihood that a relationship between two or more variables is caused by something other than random chance. Statistical significance is usually considered to be achieved when the random chance of the occurrence happening is less than 5% (or less than 1 in 20 occasions).

Chi Squared test

A chi square statistic is a measurement of how expectations compare to results. The data used in calculating a chi square statistic must be random, raw, mutually exclusive, drawn from independent variables and drawn from a large enough sample.

p-Value

Is calculated to give a measure of the statistical significance, and takes account of group sizes. For example **p<0.05** means that there are less than 5 chances in 100 (or 1 in 20) that the pattern of results could occur by random chance. Similarly, **p<0.001** means there is less than one chance in a 1000 that it could occur by random chance.

Many neurodivergent people are ready and willing to work but find themselves faced by insurmountable barriers: this is the focus of our report.



Contributions to evidence and sessions

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- **Lord Addington** – WAC Advisor and President of BDA
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Foreword

Many neurodivergent people are ready and willing to work but find themselves faced by insurmountable barriers: this is the focus of our report.

An extensive call for evidence has enabled us to learn more about the experiences of living with neurodivergence and seeking employment. We have been encouraged by the examples of good practice, the talents, skills and abilities of neurodivergent adults. These are profiled in our report.

This information, gathered over the course of over a year (2016-2017), has enabled us to build up an evidence base for a set of fundamental and practical recommendations. These should be taken on board by employers and by government so that this differently-able population is recognised to make their unique contributions to our economy and society. Otherwise potential abilities of benefit to the workplace in a wide range of employment settings will remain unrealised. Since dyslexic people and those who are neurodivergent represent the highest percentage of adults who are disabled, this Commission report is vital in order to represent the issues for this community, as well as revealing their value and strengths within the workplace.

Without neurodivergent-friendly approaches to recruitment and selection, the government is missing out on talent and is unlikely to meet the revised target of getting a million people with disabilities into employment over the next ten years.

We would like to thank all those who have responded to our surveys, attended expert witness sessions, provided written submissions and contacted us by email. All these contributions have helped to establish our evidence base. A unique strength of this report is the collective power of the neurodivergent voice.

We strongly urge you to study the information and evidence presented in this report in order to play your part in 'Opening Doors to Employment' for the many millions with dyslexia and other forms of neurodivergence.



Barry Sheerman MP
Chair of the Westminster
AchieveAbility Commission



Lord Addington
Advisor to the Westminster
AchieveAbility Commission

**“A constant feeling
of not fitting in, not
being understood.”**

Executive summary

In response to the government commitment to increasing the number of people with disabilities in employment by one million, the Westminster AchieveAbility Commission recognises that neurodivergent adults represent the highest percentage of those who are disabled. The Commission was set up to give a voice to the issues for this community, as well as reveal their value and strengths within the workplace. This work has provided much needed evidence, building on the research of recent reports.

Our Commission's call for evidence included focus groups, extensive surveys, expert witnesses, employers, written evidence and neurodivergent voice sessions. These triangulated the evidence, throwing a clear light on the experiences of living with neurodivergence and seeking employment. They also allowed us to discover and highlight examples of good practice, along with the talents, skills and abilities of neurodivergent adults.

However it became clear that they face numerous barriers, due to the lack of understanding of their skills and abilities by

- employers
- businesses
- policy makers
- trainers
- networks.

This situation has significant economic repercussions, which track back to the education system: the charity 'Xtraordinary People' estimated that the 'avoidable cost of dyslexia on the economy caused by unnecessary educational underachievement is £1.2 billion a year' (2008). As a result there is a significant gap between the percentage of dyslexic and neurodivergent people in employment, and the rest of the population.

In conclusion, the government commitment to decrease the Disability Employment Gap is at risk of failure unless the talents of neurodivergent adults are taken into account.



Data from the Westminster AchieveAbility Commission

Our data shows that individuals are more likely to identify two or more neurodivergent labels than one. For this reason, although the majority of our respondents and neurodivergent contributors are dyslexic, we are using neurodivergent as a more inclusive term. The majority of respondents to our questionnaire reported that they felt disabled by the application and selection processes. Our data also revealed high levels of discrimination during these processes and within the workplace.

Summary of Key Findings

Our Key Findings are an indictment of the current situation.

They cover ten aspects of recruitment and workplace practices.

Lack of awareness at all levels

There is little awareness or understanding among employers and managers about neurodivergence and its overlapping nature. This is compounded by many neurodivergent people not knowing their own strengths and difficulties and how to operate effectively in the workplace.

The Consequences of disclosure

Disclosure can lead to discrimination and this in turn leads to a spiral of stress, exacerbated, in some cases, by workplace bullying. The stress relates to concerns over performance, contracts, line management and coping with a wide range of tasks. As a result, the neurodivergent individual is left feeling they have to constantly justify their ability to achieve the tasks associated with their post.

Government measures are inadequate

Government schemes such as Access to Work and Disability Confident are under-resourced, inadequately organised, inconsistent, poorly advertised and under-used by the neurodivergent community. This is compounded by JobCentre Plus taking no account of neurodivergence within the system of sanctions.

Reasonable Adjustments are often poorly conceived and focus on 'remediating' the individual rather than on the systematic organisational barriers

Rather than recognising that difficulties arise as a consequence of systemic barriers, the current anomalous approach gives the impression that the law remains linked to a medical model, with the problem located within the individual. This is in contrast to policy based on the **social model of disability** which focuses on removing barriers not 'remediating' perceived 'deficits'.

The Equality Act is not being adequately implemented

The Equality Act provides legal protections that are difficult to secure in practice, since it may require taking the employer to court. This is always stressful, can be expensive and provides no safeguards unless the case is won. Since the barriers to success are similar to those imposed in the workplace, the individual is vulnerable to further discrimination.



Westminster AchieveAbility Commission: Opening doors

Richard Todd, Pierre Marsh, Lord Addington, Alicia Browne, Barry Sheerman MP, Katherine Hewlett, Melanie Jameson, Dr Ross Cooper, Craig Kennady

Psychometric tests disable neurodivergent applicants

Psychometric tests are inaccessible, overly complex, too literacy-based, and intrinsically unreliable measures of neurodivergent skills and abilities. In short, this testing often disables neurodivergent people in recruitment processes and ultimately in the workplace.

Recruitment and Selection Procedures are too literacy-based resulting in working memory overload in paper-based applications

A wide range of literacy demands are built into most application and selection procedures. These include identifying relevant written information, handwritten tasks sprung on applicants, dealing with spelling (particularly with online forms without spellchecks), the incompatibility of online forms with assistive technology and application forms that duplicate CVs

Recruitment and selection procedures are often poorly conceived

Expecting applicants to understand the full inferences of questions, and respond appropriately by describing what they know or can do, disadvantages neurodivergent applicants who are generally better at showing what they know and can do, rather than telling someone about it.

Selection and Progression depends on being neurotypical

Neurodivergent applicants and employees hoping for in-work progression frequently find themselves disadvantaged by the fact that their characteristics are different from what is expected; this can be misinterpreted as inability, incompetence, or 'your face not fitting'.

Performance management that is not applicable for the neurodivergent

A lack of awareness and understanding among managers often leads to treating neurodivergent employees as the problem, rather than recognising the barriers presented by the work systems and culture.

Summary of recommendations:

We have made eight achievable recommendations, in order to help individuals, organisations and government departments to reduce the gap in employment for neurodivergent people.

Recommendation One – Awareness Training Programmes

Training programmes should be devised and delivered to ensure greater awareness of Neurodiversity to organisations and government offices. This should be done in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, HR staff and DWP.

Recommendation Two – DWP Good Practice Recruitment Guide

A good practice Guide on recruitment practices for neurodivergent people should be compiled, in consultation with the Commission. This should be provided and disseminated by the Department for Work & Pensions.

Recommendation Three – JobCentre Plus

There must be an end to sanctioning of neurodivergent customers for failure to submit paperwork/on-line documentation within a short time-frame and without appropriate support. We also recommend staff awareness training of neurodivergence, better assessment processes and support for those choosing self-employment.

Recommendation Four – Access to Work

The government's key programme to support people with disabilities in employment is Access to Work. It is therefore vital that this operates efficiently and provides appropriate support to the large numbers of (potential) employees with Neurodivergence.

Recommendation Five – Disability Confident

The Commission found that Disability Confident is insufficiently promoted to employers and HR staff. Disability Confident should be more widely promoted, across all sectors and monitored robustly.

Recommendation Six – Accessible written employment information

The inaccessibility of much current information relating to employment leads many neurodivergent people to give up before completing applications. Others are eliminated from the shortlist for spurious reasons, leading to their talents and expertise being lost.

Recommendation Seven – Reasonable Adjustments

The requirement to make reasonable adjustments must be taken seriously by employers. Very few of the neurodivergent people interviewed had positive experiences of effective reasonable adjustments or found they were refused. However, when reasonable adjustments were bespoke, they were highly effective, both to the individual and the team.

Recommendation Eight – Psychometric and other tests

Psychometric, and other tests that are inappropriate for a neurodiverse population should not be used in the selection or promotion processes. All test results require skilled interpretation, particularly when an individual has an unusual psychological profile

We hope that this significant piece of work by the Commission, in collaboration with our colleagues, will provide other campaigning groups with a platform from which to push this agenda further, aligned with the government's stated aim of increasing the number of people with disabilities in employment as set out in the **Improving Lives** Green Paper (2016). There could be no better time to highlight the abilities and workplace support needs of the large neurodivergent population and point to better recruitment and retention practices for the benefit of the national economy.

PART ONE

BACKGROUND



Background

Neurodivergent-friendly approaches to job recruitment would make the biggest difference to lives within a society that is neurodiverse. This core issue was identified by a debate convened by AchieveAbility and held in Parliament in March 2016. Participants spoke of a wide range of barriers to employment and urged us to take up this matter.

Following this debate, the Westminster AchieveAbility Commission (WAC) on Recruitment and Dyslexia/Neurodivergence was formed. Formally convened on 17th October 2016, the commission has now run a twelve-month course with the brief of calling expert witnesses, seeking evidence through surveys and written submissions, and questioning government about the key issues as they emerged. Throughout this process the Neurodivergent voice has been central to our investigations.

This project has been championed from within Parliament so as to achieve the maximum impact. Chaired by Barry Sheerman MP, with Lord Addington as Adviser, and led by AchieveAbility, the Commission included representatives from the Dyslexia Adult Network (DAN), the Dyspraxia Foundation, the Autism Commission and a specialist in ethnic minorities/neurodivergence.

Two surveys were circulated: one for the neurodivergent population, and the other designed for employers (which drew many fewer responses). However over 600 people responded to the neurodivergent survey. We could then start to extract data on :

- respondents' experiences of neurodivergence (including whether they reported more than one condition)
- the job application process
- the interview processes
- attitudes to disclosure
- available support
- workplace awareness of neurodivergence.

Our understanding of all these issues has been greatly advanced by this process.

The evidence-gathering process was further informed by expert witnesses from a variety of professional backgrounds, many of whom were also neurodivergent. Some experts made presentations to the Commission in person, others were invited to send in written submissions. The 'Neurodivergent Voice' session enabled 30 invitees to share their experiences and celebrate their achievements. Case studies of good practice were also sought. Our final session was an opportunity to meet with the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), armed with feedback to the question 'What should government do?' All these contributions are reflected in this report.

Key questions considered by the Commission included the following:

- What studies have examined the issue of neurodivergent people and unemployment?
- What are the barriers they encounter when seeking to take up employment, and how do they deal with disclosure?
- What are the recruitment processes that disadvantage neurodivergent applicants and what might be done to improve the situation?
- What can we learn from case studies which demonstrate good practice?
- What should government be doing to facilitate neurodivergent people, both in job recruitment and job retention?

We hope you find this report informative and accessible. Our overall aims are to draw attention to discriminatory practices and highlight positive initiatives in order to formulate clear recommendations (see Part Three).

Our evidence-based report will therefore be able to inform the government's stated aim of increasing numbers of people with disabilities in employment by one million over the next ten years. Further information is available on: www.achieveability.org.uk

Research Methods and Main Factors

Survey Design

We designed two questionnaires to gather data that would help us understand the experience of neurodivergent applicants, and those of employers. These were sent through all our available networks over several months.

The numerous responses tell their own story. Over 600 individuals responded to the employee questionnaire, while only five responded to the employer questionnaire – all of whom had personal experience of neurodivergence. This seemed to confirm the experience of neurodivergent employees, namely that neurodiversity is not usually a consideration for most employers (despite the legal requirements) unless it was related to a personal experience.

Most of the employee respondents are currently employed. Some of the 600 responded as parents of neurodivergent individuals. Many respondents cherry-picked which questions to answer, and which were not relevant to them. While this is entirely legitimate, it makes using statistical factor analysis problematic, because eliminating all those who did not complete all fields reduces the sample to the point of being unrepresentative. We therefore needed to analyse all the factors captured manually, using Chi Squared tests for statistical significance, until overall patterns among the factors emerged. Three main factors were identified.

We designed two questionnaires to gather data that would help us understand the experience of neurodivergent applicants.



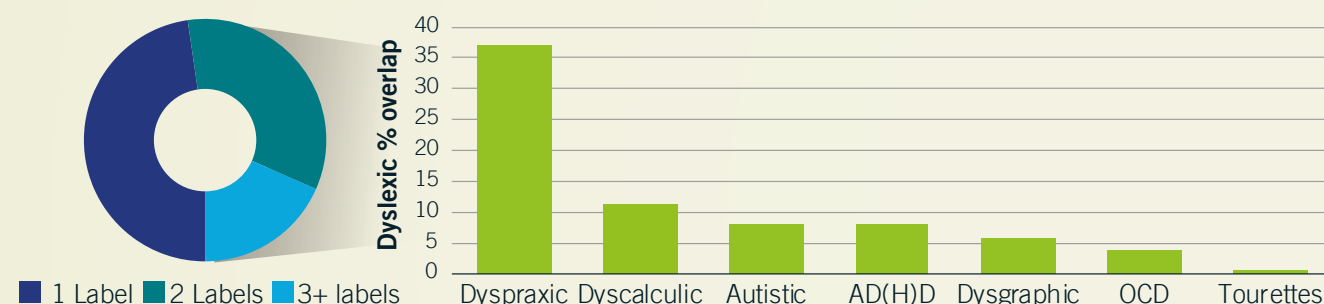
The Main Factors

1. Overlapping neurodiversity

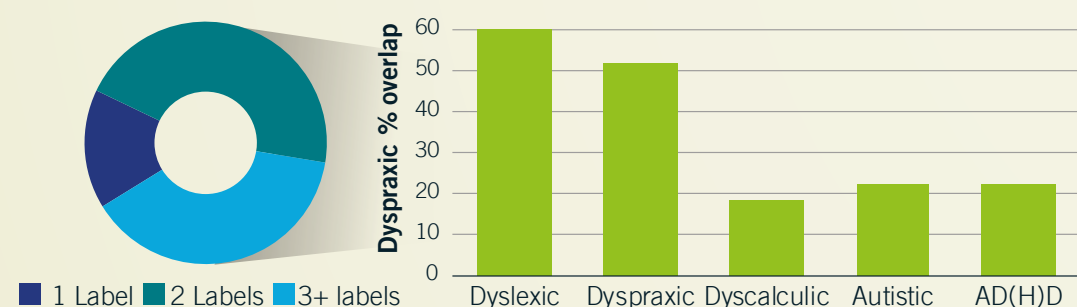
Individuals are more likely to identify two or more neurodivergent labels than one. 17% identify three or more. One individual identified 14 labels. The extent of overlapping neurodiversity may explain why there is little statistically significant difference in how sub-categories of neurodivergence responded to our questionnaire, and why, when challenging discrimination, it is productive to think in terms of neurodivergence rather than single out single categories.

In the following diagrams and charts, we can see this overlap clearly among the three largest subgroups in our survey.

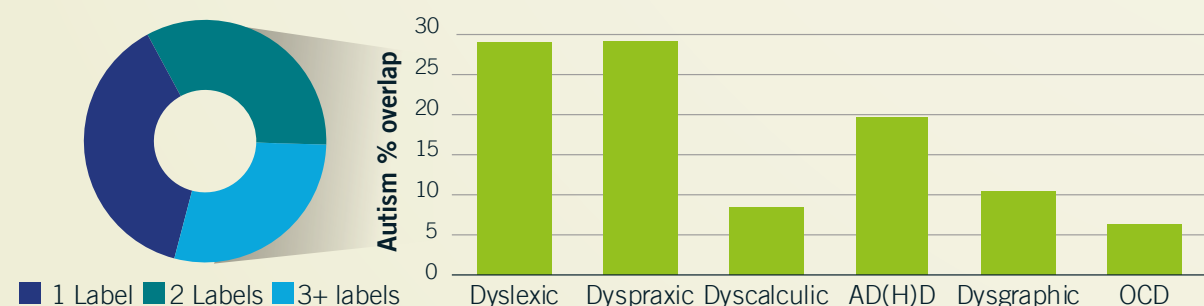
DYSLEXIA



Dyspraxia



Autism



2. INCREASED NEURODIVERGENCE LEADS TO AN INCREASE IN DIFFICULTIES

This finding emerged from almost all issues, and is the strongest factor explaining the patterns of variance.

3. BEING A MEMBER OF A MINORITY ETHNICITY INCREASES THE DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED

This finding was regularly statistically significant across most issues, but not as strong a factor as the degree of neurodivergence experienced by the individual.

OTHER FACTORS

Occasionally, other possible factors such as gender, or being currently employed or unemployed, emerged as potential explanations for some differences in experience. However, in each case, the primary factors of degree of neurodivergence and minority ethnicity provided stronger and more plausible explanations.

On occasion, the specific nature of the neurodivergence produced variance in responses that were largely predictable, such as dyslexic applicants having more difficulty with literacy than autistic applicants. Where these differences were identified, they are shown in the report, along with their statistical significance.

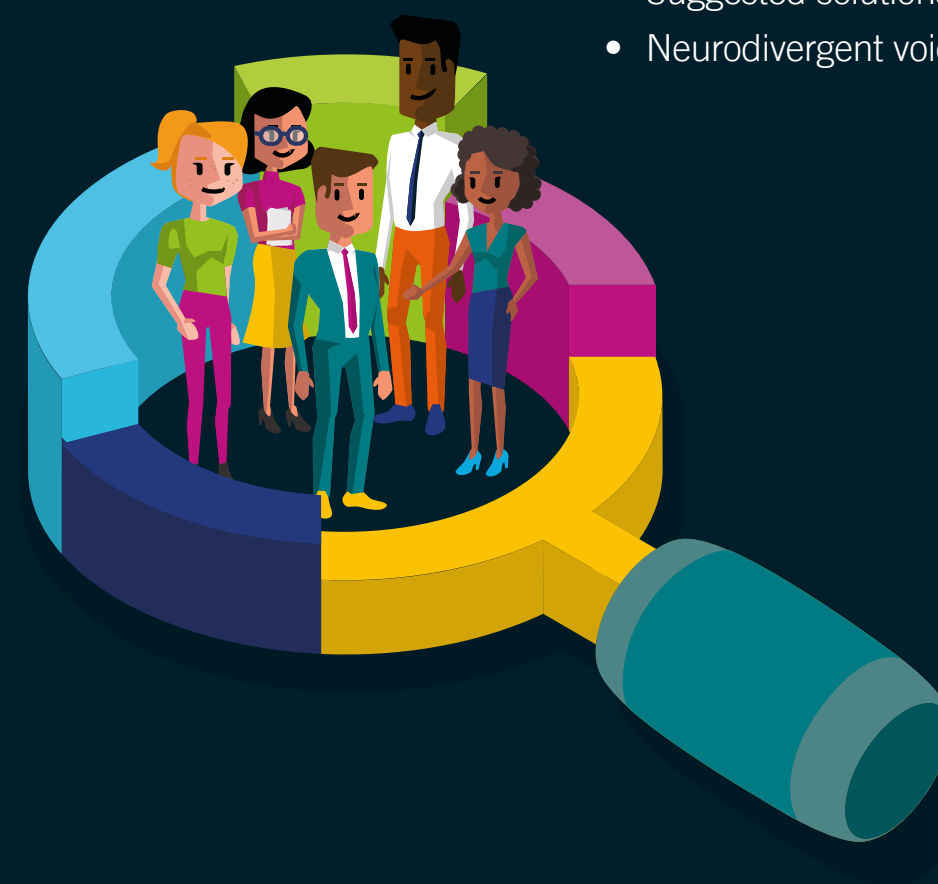
...dyslexic applicants
having more difficulty
with literacy than
autistic applicants...

PART TWO

KEY FINDINGS

This section presents the ten barriers identified by the work of the Commission organised by:

- Each barrier identified
- The evidence for it
- Suggested solutions
- Neurodivergent voices from our survey



BARRIER 1: Lack of awareness at all levels

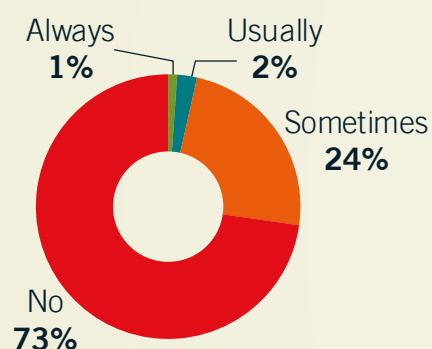
Despite its critical importance, there is little awareness or understanding among employers and managers about the nature of neurodivergence and its overlapping nature. This is compounded by many neurodivergent people not knowing their own strengths and difficulties, or how to operate effectively in the workplace.

Evidence of:

1.1 Low levels of awareness and understanding of neurodivergence by managers and employers

- Our survey found that there is very little understanding of neurodivergence among managers.

Manager understands neurodivergence



- “Recruitment research does not include awareness of neurodivergence – recruitment agencies/ professionals have no training – professionals are target set – income targets are a primary driver with no time set aside to understand adjustments” (Margaret Malpas, expert session).
- “Recruitment professionals have extensive psychological research but not increased awareness of ability” (Margaret Malpas, expert session)
- “There is a lack of knowledge on Specific Learning Difficulties, the new Green paper has no mention of this” (Margaret Malpas, expert session).
- “There is a lack of awareness of co-occurrence between conditions, and the association between neurodivergence and mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).

- “Communication with neurodivergent employees is difficult for managers. That is the challenge for HR and employers” (Matt Boyd, employers session).

1.2. Lack of detailed implementation of equality policies in reality

- “In general there is a lack of policies and procedures put in place by HR, with silo approaches within equality and diversity, e.g. mental health and well-being are separate from supporting people with Dyslexia” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “Interviewing alone has low validity- there is a need for other activities to understand ability” (Margaret Malpas, expert session).
- “There is a need for the line manager to be supportive – this can all change with a change of line manager. The ACAS helpline has evidenced that this can work well for years and then all can change” (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).
- Only five employers responded to our employers survey (cf >600 for the employees survey) and, in each case, the respondent had personal experience of neurodivergence him/herself.

1.3. Problems related to lack of self-awareness by neurodivergent applicants

- “There is a lack of awareness that many adults remain undiagnosed and so may have challenges in specific areas” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “Job hunting skills are not part of training for many dyslexics, also there is a need to know how to handle people in the workplace” (Margaret Malpas, expert session).
- “People do not know their neurodivergent condition and so this means they do not know what they can do” (Jo Todd, employers session).

Suggested solutions

- “Engage with the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) for training of HR staff, because of to the lack of policies and procedures in HR” (Amanda Kirby and WFDA Focus Group).
- “Trainers (should) make use of MP3 file” (Kim Brown TFL, employers session).
- “Ensure that HR and Occupational Health Service providers have training in identifying and supporting dyslexia / SpLD in the workplace” (Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence).
- “Create a system where we present neurodivergence as incentivising, with strategies for employers, is important – assistive technology is also important” (Andrew Hyland, ND session).
- “Disability Networks are needed to promote diversity and disability and appropriate standards in the workplace” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Organisations need to implement initiatives such as the passport system at Fujitsu and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, to increase confidence at recruitment and retention level” (Becki Morris, written evidence)
- “More work around HR and communication, to look at awareness and reasonable adjustments” (Marcia B, ND session).
- “Companies need to demonstrate that they have a positive mindset about dyslexia; highlight case studies on their website and have information and resources on their website to help people leaving university to get into work” (Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence).

Voices from our survey

“A constant feeling of not fitting in, not being understood.”

“My previous employer was not sympathetic to my difficulties and I felt singled out of the team.”

“... was refused support for my condition and allowed to believe I could be sacked for not disclosing at the application stage.”

“They failed to understand my difficulties, making my life hell.”

“Lack of support and understanding from management and colleagues meant that I felt under pressure and very stressed which made me unwell.”

“...company didn’t understand my condition. We’re not willing to make allowance.”

“Not enough support or understanding for dyslexic people.”

“A lack of understanding leading to stressful situations.”

“I was suspended from my normal duties for 2 weeks. My training was held back to half the level of people who started at the same time as me due to the perception that I could not handle the work.”

“I have a line manager who thinks people with dyslexia are pathetic and should get over it.”

“The structural components of employment were far too rigid.”

“Got fired and took legal action against them. Successfully :)”

BARRIER 2: The consequences of disclosure

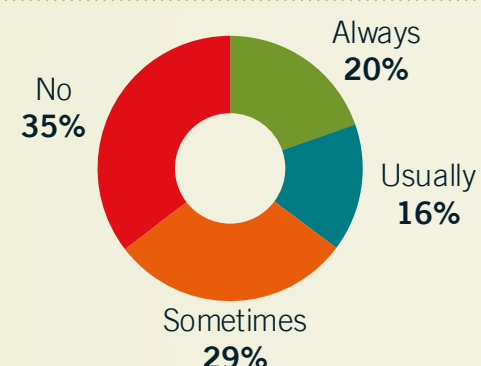
Disclosure can lead to discrimination and this in turn leads to a spiral of stress, and in some cases bullying, related to the workplace. This workplace stress can be around issues and concerns over performance (for example, if the neurodivergent person has to cope with a wide range of tasks), contract concerns and line management worries. This spiral of stress will include the neurodivergent individual feeling they have to constantly justify their ability to achieve the tasks associated with their post.

Evidence of:

2.1 Disclosure leading to discrimination

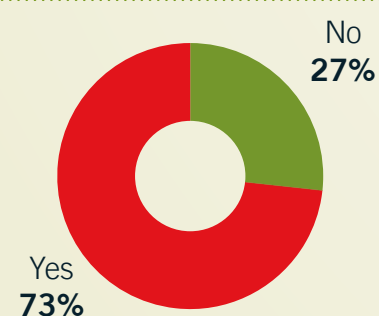
- Our survey showed that most neurodivergent people do not disclose their neurodivergence during selection processes

Disclosure during selection



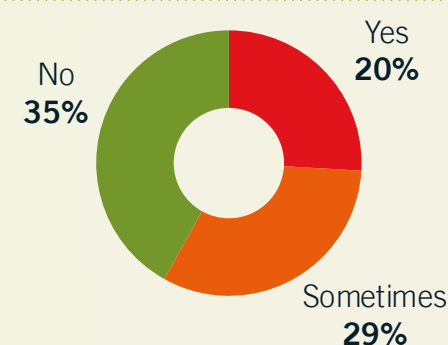
- “It is well known that disclosure can lead to discrimination, non-promotion and a need to self-justify why an individual has and should remain in post” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “There is a reluctance to disclose, as this might prejudice the appointment” (Matt Boyd, employers session).
- Our survey found that 73% did not disclose in order to avoid discrimination

Do not disclose to avoid discrimination



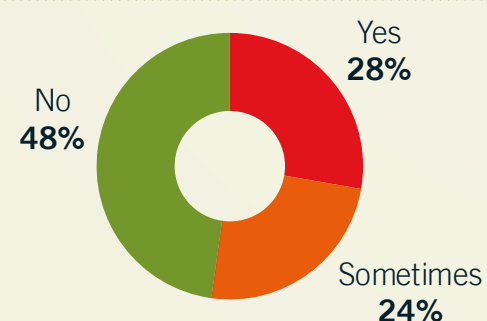
- “With disclosure there are contract concerns for neurodivergent people associated with neurodivergent conditions” (Sean Gilroy BBC, employers session).
- Our survey found that of those who have disclosed during selection processes, most regretted it:

Regret Disclosure



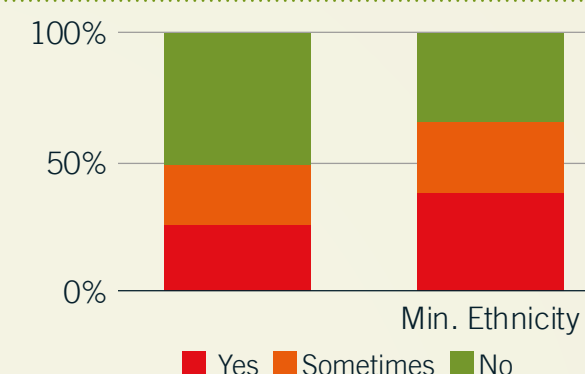
- This is perhaps not surprising when the majority have experienced discrimination during the selection process

Experienced discrimination during selection



- This experience is even more likely for those from minority ethnicities

Experienced discrimination during selection



- “People are struggling to keep their own jobs, when they disclose they are worried about coping” (Matt Davies TFL, employers session).
- Research shows that prisoners have high rates of neurodivergence. When they come to seek work – usually without the skills to compensate for their difficulties – many will have ‘unspent’ convictions which they are obliged to disclose. They are therefore unlikely to volunteer a double disclosure (e.g. of dyslexia) as well as their conviction (Melanie Jameson, Dyslexia Adult Network).



2.2 Problems with the process

- “HR sees disclosure as part of shortlisting. However HR does not trickle down information and so the line manager does not know” (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).
- “There is a reluctance to disclose as this might prejudice the appointment” (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).
- “Companies are not actively encouraging disclosure and thus having a positive stance in supporting it” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “The present systems in place are not functioning at their best, these include Access to Work, management training and processes to report workplace bullying” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Adults with dyslexia can feel extremely isolated and therefore they self-reflect in a negative way. Employers can struggle in identifying what to do and how to identify low cost, coaching and flexible workplace practices” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Poor skills relating to disclosure and are not practised by the person before applying. There is a lack of confidence in receiving support if disclosing” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).

2.3 Problems related to lack of awareness

- “Disclosure is not helpful if people do not understand what it means” (Nasser Siabi OBE, expert session).
- “Stigma was the biggest challenge around disclosure” (Sean Gilroy BBC, employers session).
- “On disclosure people feel afraid to acknowledge difference, so opportunities need to happen from the stakeholder to the adverts” (Jo Todd, employers session).

Suggested Solutions

- “Companies need to actively encourage disclosure by having a positive stance in supporting it” (Amanda Kirby written evidence and Sean Gilroy, employers session).
- “Quality Kitemarking of employers who support disclosure and reasonable adjustments” (Marcia B, ND session).
- “BBC checklist of support to be promoted” (Jo Todd, employers session).
- “We need good stories and case studies, as NDs need to sell themselves. Such as: Shell peer mentor programme with people with Dyslexia; Admiral with Autism Spectrum Cymru; North East Autism Alliance; Ernst and Young programme” (WFDA Focus Group, Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “Cultures need to change to encourage workplace champions at the top of companies where they are and publicise these people” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “Trade Unions need to do more in supporting workers, such as setting up training workshops for line managers” (WFDA Focus Group).
- “Social Media guidance on disclosure, as NDs need to sell themselves” (WFDA Focus Group).
- “We need to teach and practice positive disclosure in colleges and schools, but this will only be done if the person feels confident it leads to support” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “Workplace discrimination needs to be taken seriously, holistically across all sectors and shared in respect to positive mental health as well as neurodiversity. This includes AtW and Disability Confident “(Becki Morris Dyslexia Adult Network).
- “Employers should create a culture of disclosure to encourage employees to seek the right support when they need it. This should include structural elements, for example open data on how employees have been supported” (Nancy Doyle written).
- “Employers can make it easier for their staff to disclose neurodiverse conditions by including it in a tick box format on appropriate employment-related forms that invite people to disclose any disability” (Nancy Doyle).
- “Include a question on adjustments in an annual review as standard to destigmatise the question. The disclosure invitation forms or annual review pro-forma should be accompanied by an indication of potential adjustments that may be provided to reassure employees / applicants that the organisation will be supportive” (Nancy Doyle).
- “Any employee disclosure should be swiftly followed by a workplace needs assessment and implementation of any strategies and equipment that are recommended” (Nancy Doyle).
- “Create safe opportunities for people to talk about their dyslexia, at recruitment and throughout their employment. For example, adapt the HR health screening questionnaire to be more about the employee’s wider world: a holistic assessment of their wellbeing and flexible working needs” (Dyslexia Scotland written).
- “All agencies who prepare (ex-)prisoners for employment should be aware of the high incidence of undisclosed neurodivergence amongst this population and should undertake training on their support needs, in the context of developing employability” (Melanie Jameson, Dyslexia Adult Network).

Voices from our survey

“My last line manager shrugged off my disclosure as “everyone is on a spectrum” and was dismissive about the coping mechanisms I use to manage my work.”

“Having disclosed an autism diagnosis, it’s open season on my social and verbal communication skills if the manager doesn’t like me.”

“Disclosing has brought my work under greater scrutiny than my colleagues despite me being higher performing.”

“My first few staff reports started with the words “this officer will never be suitable for promotion as he is dyslexic.”

“I am concerned that they would not understand once I tell them.”

“I no longer want to share my disability with employers.”

“Shortly after disclosing that I was autistic I was essentially constructively dismissed. I was bullied into leaving by my manager.”

“I had a very negative experience. I was told that my colleagues might not feel comfortable working with someone who was autistic.”

“Employers are very bad at understanding difference. I never want to be disadvantaged in anyway, or thought of as unintelligent and so would never tell them.”

“I was open with a past line manager who meant well but undermined me in meetings and really affected my confidence and ability to perform my job.”

“...if I declare my disability I am either screened out before interview or have a patronising experience and get placed third. I have only succeeded at interview when I have not declared.”

BARRIER 3: Government measures are inadequate

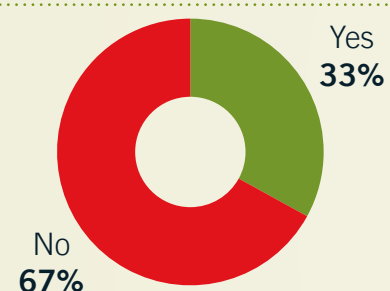
Government schemes such as Access to Work (AtW) and Disability Confident are under-resourced, inadequately organised, inconsistent, poorly advertised and under-used by the neurodivergent community. This is compounded by JobCentre Plus taking no account of neurodivergence.

Evidence of:

3.1 Access to Work being inadequate

- “People find Access to Work frustrating. Business finds it costly and prohibitive” (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).
- Our survey showed that only 1 in 3 respondents had accessed support through DWP

Have you had support through DWP?



- Most of these used Access to Work

Supported by:



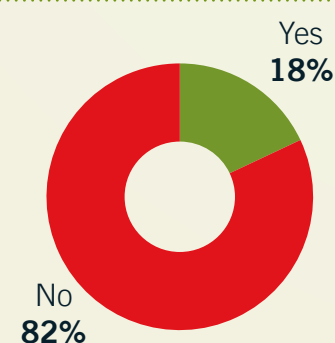
- “Only 2-3000 people have been helped by Access to Work, why so low? When we have over 30,000 dyslexic graduates leaving HE every year. What happens to them?” (Nasser Siabi, expert session).
- “There is limited information from Access to Work. Most common adjustments from Access to Work are for the support workers” (Chris Rossiter, expert session).

- “Access to Work needs to be improved due to issues with tracking – the consistency of process is difficult – finding the advisers and asking about criteria as this keeps changing. Then having to fill in forms again – trying to get facts about support received in the first 6 weeks. This all has an impact on success” (Matt Boyd, employers session).
- “Something needs to be done about informing people what to do when a person discloses and what to do with Access to Work” (Marcia B, ND session).
- “Neither training providers nor employers seem to be aware about support via Access to Work” (Charles Freeman, ND session).

3.2 Systemic problems

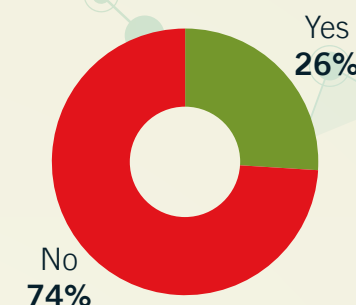
- “Ministers do not stay long enough to make policy and change” (Nasser Siabi, expert session).
- “Disability Confident lacks incentives for employers to engage with it. The lawyers’ disability network have found this is not a robust system and not properly monitored” (Melanie Jameson, expert session).
- Our survey found that few employers are using Disability Confident.

Did your employer use Disability Confident?



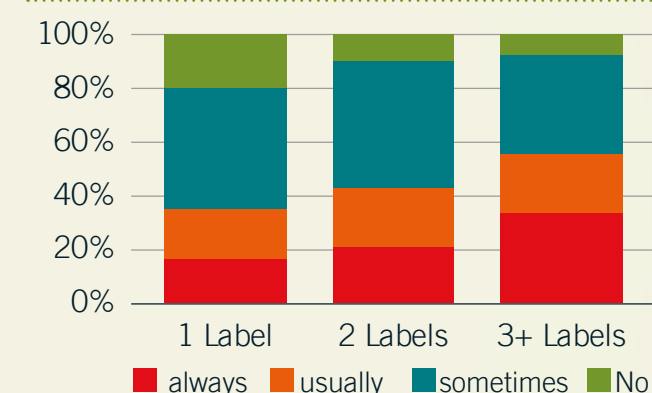
- Few neurodivergent respondents knew what it meant.

Do you know what Disability Confident means?



- Consequently, neurodivergent people do not feel at all confident in applying for jobs. Our survey found that many lacked confidence to apply and this increased with increased neurodivergence ($p < 0.0001$)

Lack of confidence to apply increases with increased neurodivergence



- Lack of confidence also increased with minority ethnicity ($p < 0.01$)



- “Work capacity, when they are assessing, they do not recognise Dyslexia or Autism” (Craig Kennady, ND session).
- “Neurodivergent people often can only get zero hour contracts and they cannot get assessed due to the amount of money for this” (Janet T, ND session).

- “Some neurodivergent people feel almost forced into unsustainable self-employment turning over under £10k (or sometimes £5K) and taking home less than the minimum wage, this can make them very vulnerable as they have the potential to disappear off radar” (Charles Freeman, ND session).
- “A number of employability initiatives I am engaged with in the Solent area e.g. City Limits Southampton, Making Theatre Gaining Skills Bognor Regis are supported by DWP. Evaluations show very high incidence of suspected neurodivergence and poor mental health. However very little formal assessment occurs frequently due to cost. This makes gaining appropriate support, or accessing fair treatment from JobCentre Plus much harder” (Charles Freeman, ND session).
- “Low levels of literacy make it harder to find employment. One study found 4 out of 10 unemployed people using JobCentre Plus were dyslexic” (Ref: Baroness Walmsley, House of Lords. Hansard Lords: 28 Jun 2012: Column 385) (Dyslexia Scotland written).

3.3 Problems with JobCentre Plus

- “JobCentre Plus (JCP) staff will sanction people on benefits due to JCP staff’s lack of awareness. There is no diagnosis so people are sanctioned” (Janet T, ND session).
- “Reluctance to engage with JobCentre Plus as the ‘system’ is too hard to navigate and manage. As a result, they are less likely to receive support or access job vacancies” (Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence).
- “At JobCentre Plus they (ND people) do not have to do the 35 steps to employment, ND people can say how many hours they want work and how many steps but they have to do 25 steps” (Janet T, ND session).
- “However even with 25 steps there is the anxiety and much energy is taken in doing this – plus the deadlines for applications forms. This is wasting time when we need to be working to our capabilities” (Janet T, ND session).
- “Online support services replacing face to face support, this is the case now with JobCentre Plus and some employability providers” (Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence).

Suggested solutions

- “Have dyslexia specialists in JobCentre Plus. Train all Work Coaches in recognising and supporting dyslexia. JobCentre Plus staff frequently disclose to us that they don’t know whether to believe someone has dyslexia”. (Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence).
- “Stop the process of sanctions for ND people by JobCentre Plus” (Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence).
- “Proper assessment processes to gain support in JobCentre Plus and Access to Work” (Matt Boyd, employers session).
- “Offer of Access to Work support for interview if required” (Becki Morris written evidence).
- “Need Access to Work to be faster as there is a gap between support and Access to Work at times” (Matt Boyd, employers session).
- “Have some means of checking that Access to Work is put in place and is maintained by the employer”(Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “HR and training providers need to know about Access to Work – better promotion” (Amanda Kirby).
- “The government should actively promote its Access to Work Scheme in an audience-friendly way that explains what support is available in easy to understand language, as it has with the Workplace Pension campaign”. (Nancy Doyle, written evidence).
- “A relaunch of a functional, easy to obtain Access to Work with clear information and briefed staff who process applications quickly, effectively via trained, knowledgeable assessors” (Becki Morris, Dyslexia Adult Network).
- “An effective Access to Work reporting structural procedure when things go wrong to DWP” (Becki Morris, Dyslexia Adult Network).
- “Employers needs to keep up to date with Access to Work processes and report to appropriate authorities about any issues” (Becki Morris, written evidence)
- “Make Disability Confident a continuous programme of improvement” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “Trade Unions need to do more with more education for employers and Government offices” (Prospect TU, written evidence).
- “In the next 5 years, Education and the Work Place need to be together” (Nasser Siabi, expert session).
- “We are not aware of any particular guidance relating to employing people with disabilities such as dyslexia/ND, their likely strengths and weaknesses and the help that may be available to them such as through Access to Work. It should be a priority for DWP to address” (Prospect TU, written evidence).
- “Better provision of relevant information by government/DWP on dyslexia/ND, focused on employment and the workplace should be a priority” (Prospect TU, written evidence).
- “Adequate resources must be provided – economic growth facilitated by well-targeted investment – in particular in education, libraries, social provision and also employment rights” (Prospect TU, written evidence).

Voices from our survey

“I think they should be clear what the minimum criteria are and stand up for employees who complain about not receiving guaranteed interviews where they should have been.”

“Despite the Equality Act there is a lot of discrimination and stigma in general about disabilities in the work place and people are just afraid in coming forward.”

“My so-called friendly to disabled Governmental employer is discriminatory. HR couldn’t care less.”

“In my experience any request for adjustments basically says to employers “don’t hire me - I’m an inconvenience.”

“I have also not had interviews for jobs which were advertised under the ‘two ticks’ scheme and for which I met all of the essential criteria.”

“Government fail employers. Government need to create a description of what dyslexia, autism, etc. is and create a training programme for the whole country.”

“If an employer signs up to a ‘positive about discrimination’ scheme, they should..., be required to give written feedback (a reason!) why an applicant, who has ticked the box and declared their disability, was not successful in getting an interview, or was not offered a job after an interview.”

BARRIER 4: Reasonable adjustments are often poorly conceived, and focus on the individual rather than on the systematic barriers presented by the organization

Policy based on the **social model of disability** would logically focus on removing social barriers, rather than ‘remediation’ of perceived ‘deficit’ in the individual. Consequently, this anomalous approach gives the impression that the law remains linked to a medical model with the problem located within the individual, rather than recognising difficulties experienced as a consequence of systemic barriers. This is not to deny individual difficulties or solutions, but to provide a social, rather than a medical, explanation for them.

Evidence of:

4.1 Reasonable adjustments focused on the individual rather than the barriers, which tend to be ignored

- “The issue with reasonable adjustments is that they are always individual based, but by fixing the problem with the person this does not fix the issues in the organisation” (Chris Rossiter, expert session).
- “Typically employers would look for the best fit between the person and the job. There needs to be an understanding of this before reasonable adjustments can be applied” (Chris Rossiter, expert session).
- “Attitudinal barriers by employers in lack of understanding and choosing to ‘opt out’ on the importance of reasonable adjustments in respect to job performance” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Travel is the biggest hurdle – sensory overload – this presented challenges for managers and their teams because of working hours – we are interested in other perspectives – open conversation – encouraging people” (Mandy Maskell, employers session).

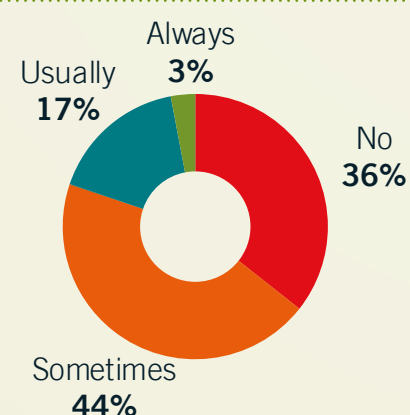
4.2 Poorly researched and applied concepts of ‘reasonable adjustments’

- “There is no robust evidence for adjustments in the Work Place” (Chris Rossiter, expert session).
- “No evidence to say one reasonable adjustment is better than another – issue is the need to be specific to be able to do the job” (Chris Rossiter, expert session).
- “The probationary trial period does not take into account the profile of the individual, as there is a generalization of job description, this means that during the probation a person can be entrenched into what they cannot do” (Jo Todd, employers session).

4.3 Employers being reluctant to make reasonable adjustments

- Our survey found that most neurodivergent applicants find that employers are rarely happy to make reasonable adjustments

Are employers happy to make reasonable adjustments during the selection process?



Suggested solutions

- “Evidence-based policy is needed on reasonable adjustments” (Chris Rossiter, expert session).
- “Quality Kitemarking of employers who support disclosure and reasonable adjustments” (Marcia B, ND session).
- “Procedures that take account of diversity generally, and facilitate some flexibility so that employees’ strengths can be recognised and as far as possible job roles tailored to make best use of these strengths” (Prospect TU, written evidence).
- “Employees can support their employer to implement adjustments by being clear about needs, and keeping records of coaching, assessment and adjustments that have worked well before” (Nancy Doyle, written evidence).
- “4-7 coaching sessions are shown to be effective, also group coaching. This is an on-going process of organisational support i.e. line manager or co workers” (Chris Rossiter, expert session).
- “Up-to-date information on practical aspects of supporting people in different sectors so we gain examples of reasonable adjustments that are contextually appropriate” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “Probation periods which are adjusted to ND abilities and conditions, such as 3 months longer as an adjustment” (Jo Todd, employers session).
- “Proactive measures such as providing quieter workspaces to minimise distractions and ensuring that written and verbal communications are clear and concise. These are measures that are relevant to the overall recruitment process, since the process includes a new employee successfully completing their trial period, not just the initial selection and appointment” (Prospect).
- “More tailored reasonable adjustments implemented once a Workplace Needs Assessment has been carried out: including specialist one-to-one training for the individual, taking account of gaps identified by the diagnostic and workplace assessments, provision of appropriate software and recognition that overworking is a common compensatory strategy that in the longer-term can lead to stress and burnout. So reasonable adjustments should be put in place promptly even if an individual’s performance is good” (Prospect TU, written evidence).

Voices from our survey

“People see me as defective, they don’t see why they should change the way they do things in order to enable me to work. It can be hard to ask for reasonable adjustments without sounding like I’m accusing the company of something, this does not go down well.”

“Adjustments are pretty half hearted.”

“Those who know they need to make adjustment are so stressful themselves that they make me stressed and create a dreadful interview.”

“I don’t believe people understand what a reasonable adjustment is because sometimes it could be as simple as giving a bit more time in explaining.”

“I’m afraid to ask for adjustments as I don’t know what is considered ‘reasonable’ and am afraid that it would be used against me.”

“HR team told me they had no way of making a reasonable adjustment for an interview.”

“I think we need an appropriate checklist of NT support available - so it’s easier to ask for what we need without fear of discrimination.”

“I do say in advance that I have Dyspraxia that means my handwriting is very difficult to read, in the past I’ve been told that there’s nothing to hand write during the interview then the first thing I’m asked to do is complete a handwritten test.”

“Usually told they don’t have the time to ‘understand my problem’ – most employers think I’m lying or making it up. Usually told they can’t make reasonable adjustments.”

“For my job they only offered coloured paper and extra time. When I asked for other adjustments they were ignored.”

“I’ve had bad experiences with asking for reasonable adjustment. It flags up my disability and weakness in their minds.”

“Employers cannot make reasonable adjustments if they do not begin from the premise of acceptance.”

BARRIER 5: The Equality Act is not being adequately implemented

The Equality Act provides legal protections that are difficult to secure in practice, since it requires taking employers to court which can be expensive and provides no safeguards unless the case is won. Moreover, winning is difficult because the barriers to success are similar to those imposed in the workplace. This can make the individual vulnerable to further discrimination.

Evidence of:

5.1 The implementation of the Act feeling risky

- “The system is failing - they want people to take cases to court to test the Equality Act. What chance do people have?” (Paul Milton, ND session).

5.2 Legal processes assuming high levels of literacy

- “In the courts people are suddenly being denied the use of technology when they routinely use it for everything. When I was commissioned to write – then update – the Specific Learning Differences (SpLD) part of judicial guidance, I said this was discriminatory” (Melanie Jameson, employers session).
- “Another barrier is health and safety concerns, if it assumed that ND people may be unable to read notices” (Melanie Jameson, employers session).

5.3 Going to court being too expensive

- “In July 2013, the then Lord Chancellor, Chris Grayling, introduced employment tribunal fees of up to £1,200, which became a direct barrier to challenging discrimination in the workplace for four years. However, the Supreme Court overturned this practice declaring it unlawful and unconstitutional in July 2017, following a legal challenge by UNISON.” (Melanie Jameson, employers session).

Suggested solutions

- “We need to be proactive and lobby on the Equality Act. This needs to be similar to the Canadian model around reasonable adjustments. HR would then understand the need for awareness” (WFDA Focus Group).
- “Adequate resources must be provided for economic growth to be facilitated by well-targeted investment. In particular within education, libraries, social provision and also employment rights. Employment Tribunals have in the past provided some protection and a means of redress for working people including those more vulnerable, such as those with hidden disabilities” (Prospect TU, written evidence).
- We need to ensure the ruling stays in place on tribunal costs (WFDA Focus Group).
- Ensure neurodivergent people who attend courts for tribunals are able to access technology, particularly when they have used it for everything before (Melanie Jameson, employers evidence session)

Voices from our survey

“I had to get a lawyer involved who was able to highlight just how much of the Equality Act they were in breach of. They settled out of court and I had to leave, as by that point, I was suicidal.”

“I have been fired due to motor difficulties, difficulties using a printer, emotional difficulties.”

“I had a research post that required me to have an NVQ in management - I could not cope with the paperwork demanded of it with the files and cross referencing - despite having a PhD.”

“My employer attempted to demote me in my role as inclusive manager while denying the existence of dyslexia.”

“I was repeatedly asked to step into a lower level job and when I asked to do so, they said there was no lower level vacancy for me, so I had a choice to stay and be fired, or resign.”

“I was once sacked for not going out for a drink with a team, and not having the same sense of humour as them.”

“Employer dismissed me for requesting a reasonable adjustment to allow me to carry out part of my post (a portable typewriter to allow me to write up end of shift reports).”

“Disability discrimination - refused to buy Read and Write although A2W had agreed to fund it. Received out of court settlement.”

“I have had to be involved with employment tribunal and won on indirect discrimination for dyslexia and endometriosis.”

BARRIER 6: Psychometric tests disable neurodivergent applicants

Psychometric tests are inaccessible, overly complex, too literacy-based, and intrinsically unreliable measures of neurodivergent skills and abilities. In short, psychometric tests often disable neurodivergent people in the workplace. Neurodivergent people often advocate practical assessment of actual work skills rather than abstract standardised tests.

Evidence of:

6.1 Psychometric tests being poorly constructed for an inclusive work environment

- “Psychometric tests do not give reliable information and are expensive to develop. This is not realistic” (Margaret Malpas, expert session).
- “There are design issues and in the content i.e. examples in the test that might be difficult to comprehend due to neurodivergent conditions. This type of test is not explicitly testing ability” (Chris Rossiter, expert session).
- “Most are overly complex in the way they are written” (Kim Brown, employers session).
- “Psychometric tests during the selection process? These tests miss out on talents” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).

6.2 Psychometric tests being inaccessible

- “Psychometric tests are not accessible and do not cater to the individual” (Nasser Siabi, expert session).
- “Not good readability, we need better practice that does reflect the job they will be doing. Now tests are just too complex, testing how people can read rather than the knowledge they have” (Kim Brown, employers session).

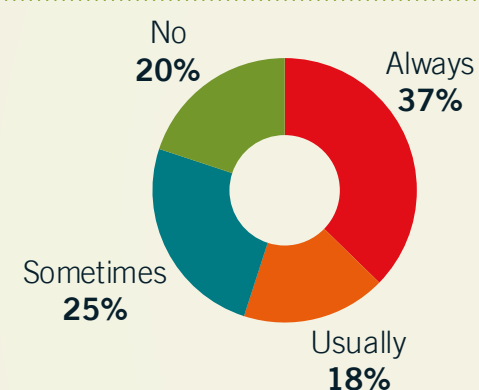
6.3 Psychometric tests disabling neurodivergent people

- “Psychometric tests are biased against the neurodivergent as they are not sampled to specifically include neurodivergent people” (Margaret Malpas expert session).
- “Psychometric tests represent only one element. For example, motivation can bypass the difficulties. The line manager’s approach to supporting the person, if they are

motivated, can bypass some ‘weaknesses’ if support has been put in place and the person has the skills and aptitude to do the job” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).

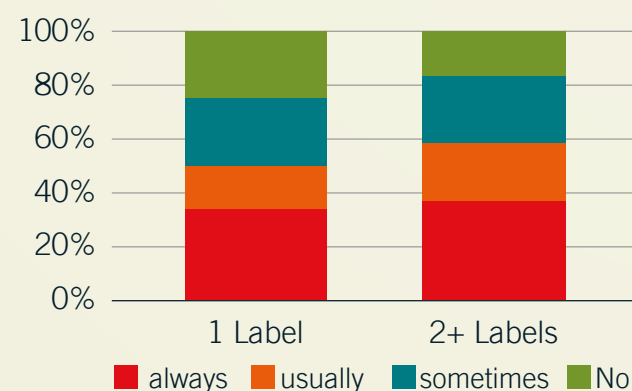
- Our survey found that most neurodivergent people who have experienced psychometric tests have felt disabled by them.

Feel disabled by psychometric tests



- This increases with increased neurodivergence - the graphic below compares those with one label of neurodivergence with those with 2 or more ($p < 0.0001$)

Feeling disabled by psychometric tests increases with increased neurodivergence



Suggested solutions

- “There needs to be a clear question of whether psychometric tests should be used in an interview process, if it means discriminating against performance of someone with neurodiversity. If this is the case, then it should not be used and an alternative with suggestions should be sought” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “There should be no tests for recruitment but practical activities instead. Hands on workplace tests for candidates to do a range of tasks. Work sampling tests need to be used more” (Nasser Siabi and Margaret Malpas, expert session).
- “Verbal tests and forms that are in software. Change is in focus and procedure so give verbal tests, extra time and use a laptop” (Kim Brown, employers session).
- “Candidates should be provided with a computer if required” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Hard copy of documents could be provided as an option, instead of consistently needing to read from a computer screen” (Becki Morris written evidence).
- “Test papers in appropriate dyslexia friendly format such as cream paper and font size” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Questions need to be clear and relevant to the position applied for” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Extra time (suggestion of 25%) should be allowed to complete the test” (Becki Morris written evidence).
- “Create safe opportunities for people to talk about their dyslexia, at recruitment and throughout their employment. For example, adapt the HR health screening questionnaire to be more about the employee’s wider world; a holistic assessment of their wellbeing and flexible working needs” (Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence and Sean Gilroy, expert session).
- “Assessment procedures that take account of the characteristics of people with different neurodiverse conditions and are designed to test for requirements which are actually essential for the job, rather than those that are not fundamental to it” (Prospect TU, written evidence).
- “Recruitment managers should have a clear understanding of the abilities and skills that are actually required for a particular job role and devise tests and selection procedures that test for these and not for other attributes that are not relevant to the job in question” (Prospect TU, written evidence).
- “DWP, MoJ, DoH deliver services to people with neurodiversity and must cultivate a balanced approach to assessment that focuses on strengths and skills as well as considering barriers. This requires the use of positive, balanced assessments that have been proven to be valid and reliable by psychologists; administered by trained psychologists, occupational health and health professionals at the diagnostic and needs assessment stages.” (Nancy Doyle, written evidence).

Voices from our survey

“Some employers have online tests that have to be done against the clock. This is unacceptable if you have any difficulties in filling in the test.”

“Psychometric tests... confuse me.”

“ I found it very hard to complete the online exercises as they were time dependent and for reading tasks I have no text to speech software.”

“Recruit and promote on proven past performance, not on highly artificial interviews and tests.”

“Other options than psychometric tests or blind presentations.”

“Extra time given is not enough when lots of text is on a screen in psychometric tests in particular.”

“All psychometric tests are impossible for me, however in many cases I know I would be very good at the job and that these test don't reflect my capabilities.”

“Actually ask you to explain and demonstrate or apply those skills they think are the most essential for the job – competency based interviews and psychometric testing does not always allow this to happen.”

“Less reliance on a Competency based approach with less paperwork and more observations and more task or role focus would help more neurodiverse people and would allow organisations to tap into a wide range of talent.”

“I have just applied to government grad scheme and I found it very hard to complete the online exercises as they were time dependent and for reading tasks I have no text to speech software.”



BARRIER 7: Recruitment and selection procedures require literacy and other generic skills that prove more difficult than the demands of the job.

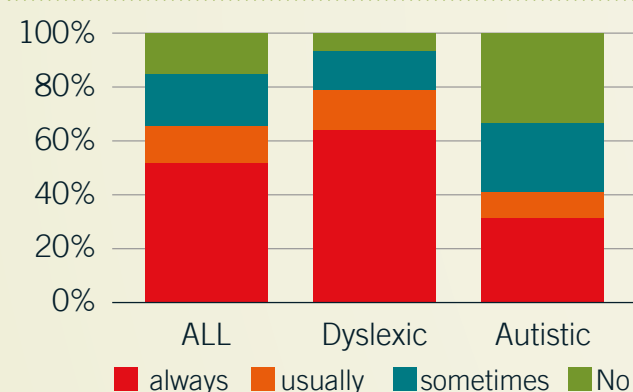
A wide range of literacy demands are built into most application and selection procedures, including selecting relevant written information, handwritten tasks sprung on applicants, dealing with spelling (particularly online forms without spellchecks), a lack of assistive technology working with online forms, and application forms that duplicate CVs. In addition, generic job skills are expected when these rarely reflect the needs of the job. Navigating these challenges can be more stressful and challenging than the demands of the job.

Evidence of:

7.1 Difficulties presented by online forms and information

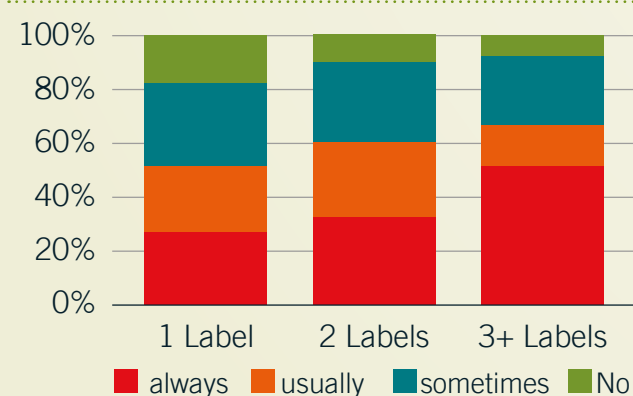
- “Online forms that do not have spell checkers” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- Our survey found that disabling spellcheckers for online forms created significant difficulties, although this was more pronounced with dyslexics ($p < 0.0001$), and less so with autistic applicants ($p < 0.0001$)

Difficulty with online forms with disabled spellcheck



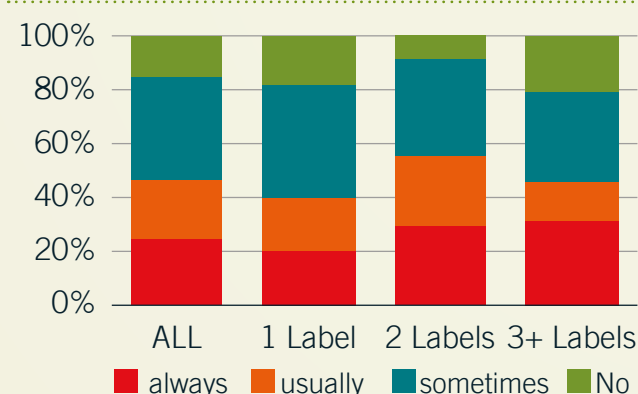
- Nevertheless, difficulty increases with increased neurodivergence ($p < 0.0001$):

Difficulty with application forms increases with Increased neurodivergence



- “Online application forms that time out, or don’t allow you to move back and forth between pages, don’t work with assistive technology, that are not “accessible” in terms of font size and colour, can’t be printed etc” (Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence).
- “Some online forms can be difficult to negotiate particularly if they are timed in responding to questions/information. Some have formatting which can cause difficulties in completing information, therefore information and momentum is quickly lost” (Becki Morris, written evidence)
- Our survey showed that online forms create difficulties that increase with increased neurodivergence ($p < 0.002$)

Difficulty with online forms increases with increased neurodivergence



- “Job adverts online that are not accessible for text read software – as ND people often have low memory and therefore they can get stressed” (Margaret Malpas, expert session).

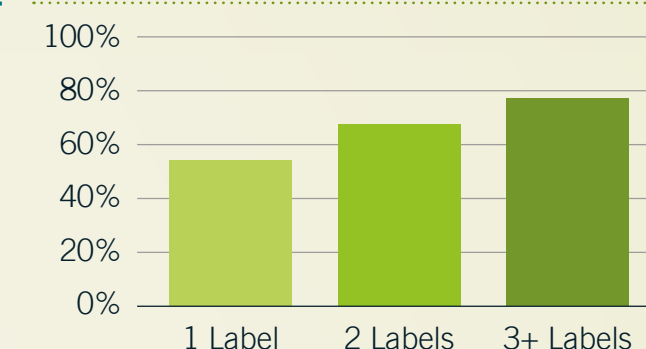
7.2 Skills being required that are inappropriate for the job

- “Jobs were often advertised for a general range of skills and this is off-putting to the ND people and in reality the organisation does not need this range of skills” (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).
- “There is ambiguity in job descriptions- such as unnecessary tasks. There is a drift towards all round general competencies – need to avoid hypothetical questions and be explicit in feedback” (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).
- “Changes in the labour market means less specific technical jobs and more generic skills required i.e. team work – basic admin – line management responsibility” (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).
- “Employers are looking for generic skills, this is not a good business case for people who are ND. Over the past 30 years Personnel Managers have been trained to be compliant with the law so business does not suffer. So there is a business case for recruitment. The problem is that there is a conflict of match for those who are neurodivergent” (Margaret Malpas, expert session).

7.3 Poorly organised and constructed text

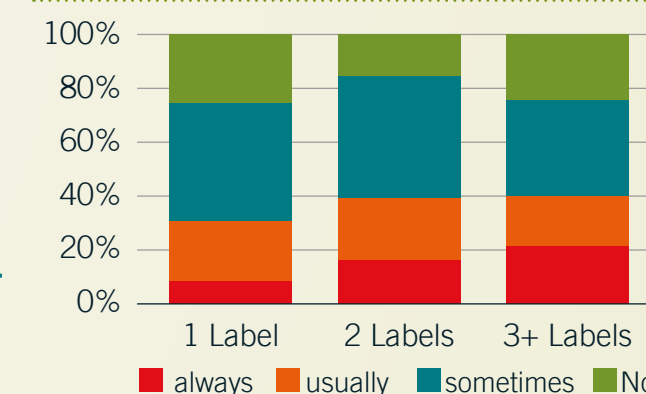
- “Unnecessary jargon and lack of specificity in job descriptions” (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).
- Our survey found that most would prefer Easy Read information, although this varied from 50% for autistics to 72% for dyspraxics. These preferences increased with increased neurodiversity ($p < 0.001$)

Preferring ‘Easy Read’ materials increases with increased neurodivergence



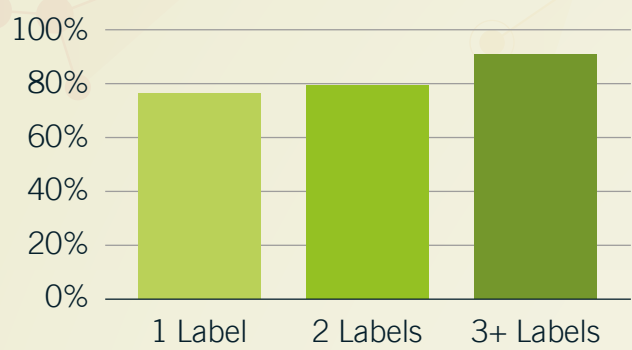
- Our survey found that neurodivergent applicants feel overwhelmed with written information. This is particularly the case with those with AD(H)D ($p < 0.005$), OCD ($p < 0.04$), dyscalculics ($p < 0.004$) and compounded by minority ethnicity ($p < 0.003$). Significantly this feeling increased with increased neurodivergence ($p < 0.002$)

Difficulty with ‘too much information’ increases with increased neurodivergence



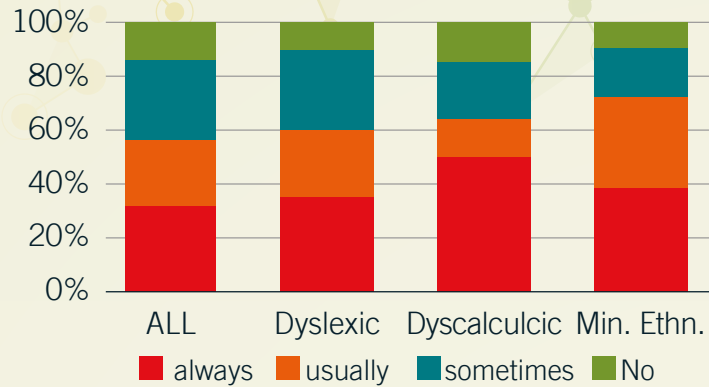
- Our survey found that the preference for bullet points over text was pronounced (at 80%), although more pronounced with dyslexics (85%) than autistics (70%). The preference increases with increased neurodiversity from 78% to 93% ($p < 0.001$)

Preferring bullet points increases with increased neurodivergence



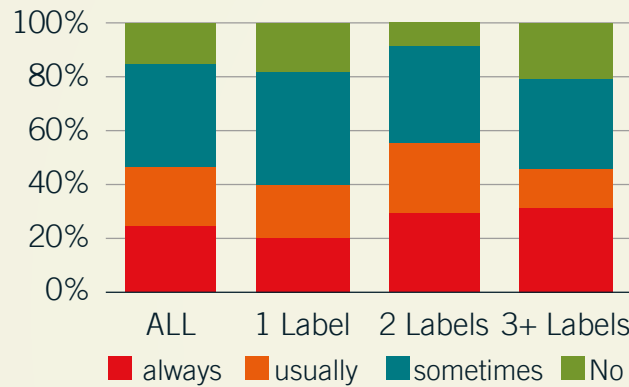
- “Employment adverts: the job is already difficult to access through online questions – components are discriminatory” (Jo Todd, employers session).
- Our survey found that application forms caused significant difficulties among the neurodivergent, this was particularly the case for dyscalculics ($p < 0.04$) and was compounded by minority ethnicity ($p < 0.05$)

Finding application forms difficult



- This is confirmed by the increasing difficulty with increasing neurodivergence ($p < 0.0001$)

Difficulty with online forms increases with increased neurodivergence



Suggested solutions

- “Encourage HR that this (accessibility of information) is not just a process, but a legal requirement” (Prospect TU, written evidence).
- “Offering Access to Work arrangements at the recruitment stage” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “Ensure that knowledge of the panel is known for clarity at point of interview. As it can be unclear for candidates if they will be judged on their disability or their talent” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Ensure questions are provided before the interview as ND people find it difficult to “fit” answers to questions; not knowing what the questions will be in advance leads to stress and anxiety when searching for answers in their mind” (Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence).
- “Employers should be looking to recruit the person most motivated to do the job and to learn” (Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence).
- “Train the trainers with any verbal test so that when they see someone is stumbling the trainer will look at physical cues. Also prompting, as this is about adjustments. Trainers need to use discretion” (Kim Brown, employers session).
- “Diversity of offer at the application stage is important in these ways:
 1. There is benefit in online accommodations
 2. Ensuring accessibility of online applications benefits everyone
 3. Jobs were often advertising for a general range of skills and this is off-putting to the neurodivergent. In reality the organisation does not need this range of skills” (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).

Voices from our survey

“Because I find the application process so stressful, by the time the interview comes I’m usually exhausted.”

“The questions are sometimes difficult to interpret on application forms.”

“Once I’m passed the paper stage then I’m usually talking to an IT professional who’s more interested in successfully filling a job than worrying about spelling.”

“Online forms are discriminatory and block a dyslexic. A visual thinker cannot be drip fed by filling in one page and only moving on when it is completed. Why are we squashing the creative brain of a dyslexic to fit inside a non dyslexic box?”

“Some employers have asked me if I could read when I told them!”

“If I can get as far as the interview I usually get the job, the problem is in getting to the interview in the first place.”

“An interview ... sprung a proof reading and financial test on me. Even though these were activities I did regularly, and well I panicked and could not finish. I left the room without telling anyone.”

“I get very nervous and feel a lot of pressure to try provide a better account of my skills than that I have provided in my form.”

“Self Employment is a way of avoiding the issue.”

“Wish I had a mentor to help me fill the form.”

“Most job specs also state that they require excellent writing skills. I have a degree and have written a scientific paper, management reports, successful funding applications and funders reports and TV and radio scripts but I know that I have dyslexia and dysgraphia so I could never call myself an excellent writer.”

BARRIER 8: Recruitment and selection procedures are often poorly conceived, unexplained and too language-based, leading to working memory overload and anxiety.

Language requirements, hidden assumptions and neurotypical bias are usually experienced as more challenging than the expected demands of the job.

Expecting applicants to understand the full inferences of questions, and respond appropriately by describing what they know, or can do, disadvantages neurodivergent applicants who are generally better at showing what they know and can do in context.

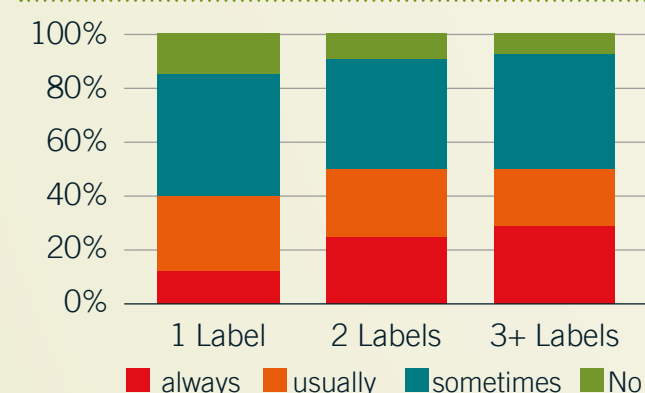
The applicant is often incapacitated when attempting to hold onto the threads of arguments, particularly when dealing with multi-part questions, while anxious to do well – leading to working memory overload.

Evidence of

8.1 Poor interview practice that overloads working memory

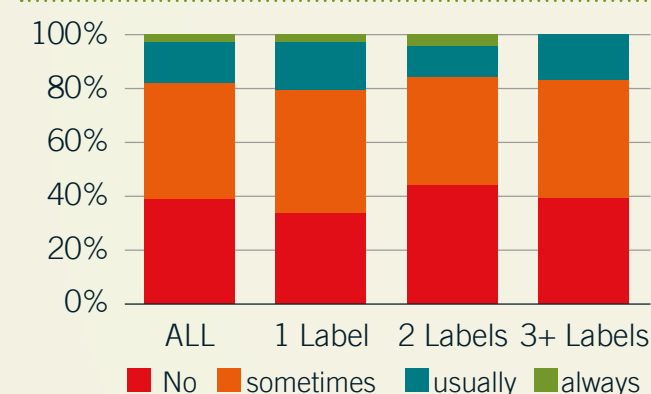
- “Many organisations use telephone interviews, this is not helpful for those who need visual cues in interviews” (Margaret Malpas, expert session).
- Our survey found that 20% always have difficulty remembering the interview questions asked, and a further 26% usually did. While there was no significant difference in difficulty across the neurodivergent categories, the difficulty increased with increased neurodivergence ($p < 0.001$)

Have difficulty remembering the questions



- Our survey found that neurodivergent applicants were very rarely able to demonstrate their skills in interviews, and this difficulty increased with increased neurodivergence ($p < 0.06$)

Feeling unable to demonstrate skills in interviews increases with neurodivergence



8.2 Standardised activities and processes inappropriately and/or inflexibly applied

- “Assessment centres do not deal with neurodivergent people effectively, because they use standardised activities. There are no reasonable adjustments, and methods often involve observation; this is stressful” (Margaret Malpas, expert session).
- “Then there are assessment centres, these can create scenarios, set patterns and this can be quite stifling. For example, 25% extra time, larger font; that is not flexible enough” (Jo Todd, employers session).
- “Not being given feedback on their application or interview leaves dyslexic people feeling especially despondent, given the inordinate amount of time spent completing the forms “

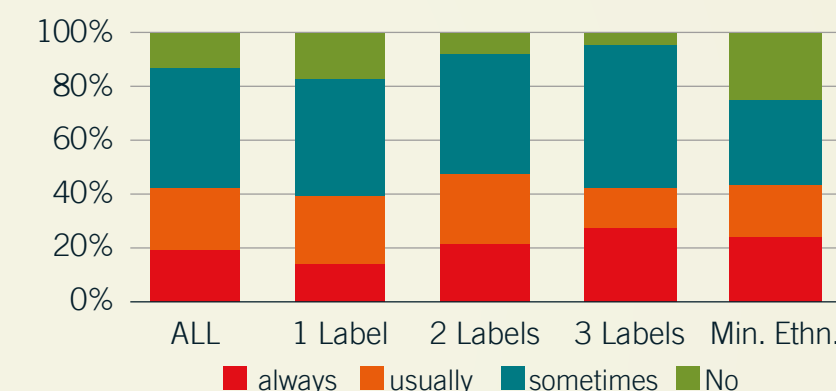
(Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence).

- “Recruitment processes that are specifically formatted for performance and are not adjustable for neurodiversity” (Becki Morris, written evidence).

8.3 Poorly communicated expectations

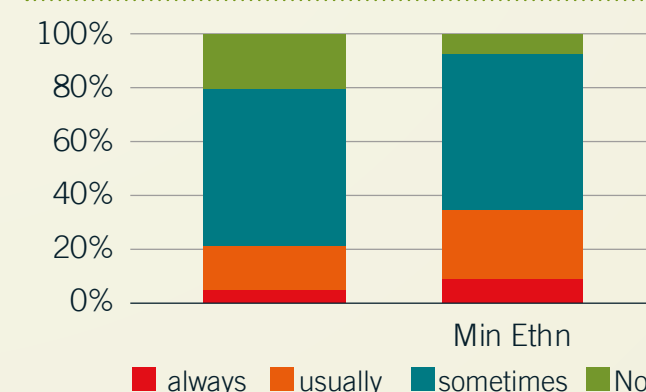
- Our survey found that neurodivergent applicants often struggle to understand the interview questions they are asked, and this difficulty increased with neurodivergence ($p < 0.0004$), and was compounded by minority ethnicity ($p < 0.01$).

Difficulty with understanding interview questions



- Our survey found that many neurodivergent applicants failed to get the job despite believing they were the best fit to the job. This experience is compounded by minority ethnicity ($p < 0.02$)

Feeling the best person for the job despite failing the interview is greater for ethnic minorities



...neurodivergent applicants were very rarely able to demonstrate their skills in interviews...

Suggested solutions

- “Agencies can offer assistance regarding how jobs were advertised and how this is linked with low esteem” (Andre Sutherland, expert session).
- “Interview processes need to be changed. For example, presentations that can be shared online” (Jo Todd, employers session).
- “Neurodivergent people should be given questions in advance” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “For alternative interviews they should be using films and video so people can be more verbal” (Matt Boyd, employers session).
- “Stop the timed-out feature of online forms as this can be difficult to negotiate, particularly if they are timed in responding to questions/ information. Some forms have formatting which can cause difficulties in completing information, therefore information and momentum is quickly lost” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Focusing on strengths – awareness of challenges. The video inspired by Lena at the BBC is an example of this” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Working with colleges and universities to prepare people earlier and practice skills” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “Employers actively showing they are confident in supporting someone at the recruitment/ advertisement stage (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- Offering visits beforehand and work placements, as a work trial alternative to make sure it is right for both parties (Amanda Kirby).
- Short, direct questions should be used and multiple part questions should be avoided (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Clear questions, not long complex questions should be used. Avoid jargon, acronyms and initials if necessary” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Questions may need to be repeated if the person is struggling to process them” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Employers need to create ‘portals’ for communication about dyslexia. A good practice example: when recruiting someone with dyslexia, ask them what their dyslexia means to them, what their difficulties are, and how they get past them. It’s best to be solution-focused, not prejudiced. Employers should be looking to recruit the person most motivated to do the job and to learn” (Dyslexia Scotland, written evidence).

“The interview process puts me under an extreme... pressure. You don’t know what someone is going to ask you and I need extra time to process language. In interviews I come across as really nervous and start to stutter and jumble my words up, sometimes not being able to think fast enough to provide the answer that I know that I am capable of giving.”

Voices from our survey

“A lot of jobs list requirements such as skill working in a team, people skills, peppy attitude, etc, even when you will be working alone and those skills are irrelevant.”

“I often struggle to understand the questions asked by the interviewers and because of this I work myself into a panic”.

“It is unfair that I am judged on a formal structured interview. I don’t understand questions because of the way they are structured, and the concepts are too abstract for me. I asked for the questions in advance once so that I had time to process their meaning. I was told that would be ‘unreasonable’. I asked if I could have the questions a few minutes before my interview time, but they still said no. I didn’t get the job.”

“Interviews are difficult due to the recall of information, and the need to structure your thoughts and ideas on the spot.”

“I particularly struggle in interview situations trying to hold on to information under stressful conditions. It evokes feelings of anxiety like those when teachers singled me out for failure.”

“ I NEVER feel that being interviewed is the most effective way if me demonstrating my ability to do a job.”

“Being asked two questions at once can put pressure on my memory.”

“I hate them (interviews) - I don’t feel that I represent myself well as my brain goes to pieces and I can’t hear/ answer the question they are asking.”

“Interviews are terribly confusing. And I struggle with phone calls.”

“Biggest challenge has been when I have been asked to do presentation with no notes or slides. Not appropriate for Dyslexic with short term memory loss.”

“The interview process is difficult for me. I experience slow processing so can’t always think of answers to questions in the time allowed. I often forget what I’m talking about mid-sentence.”

Recall memory in pressured environments looks to the interviewer as though you are unable to provide examples.”

BARRIER 9: Selection and Progression depend on being neurotypical

Neurodivergent applicants and employees hoping for in-work progression frequently find themselves disadvantaged by being different from the expected employee characteristics; this difference is misinterpreted as inability, incompetence, or 'your face not fitting'.

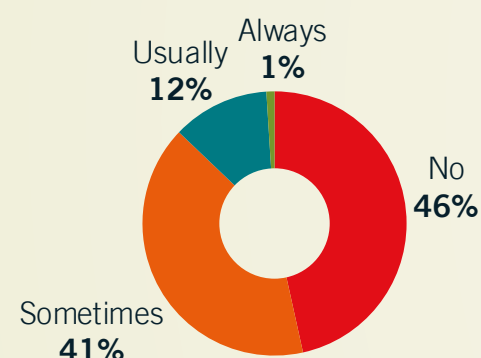
Despite having many strengths that could be ideal for the job, neurodivergent applicants and workers frequently experience exclusion based on assumptions about 'neurotypical superiority' that are taken for granted.

Evidence of:

9.1 The false assumption that neurotypical is superior

- Our survey found that few neurodivergent applicants felt that selection processes were fair and provided equal opportunities

Do you feel that selection processes are fair and provide equal opportunities?



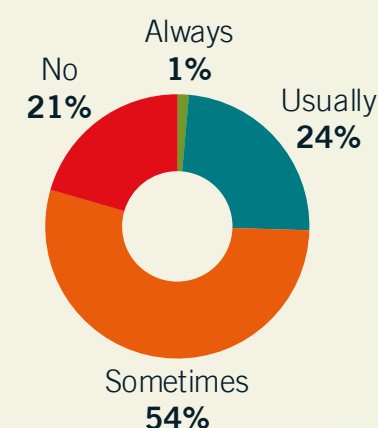
- "There is much evidence that, given the right conditions, neurodivergent people can be extremely successful in the workplace. 35% of successful entrepreneurs are neurodivergent. The neurodivergent are free thinkers but not understood and we need to celebrate us" (Clive, ND session).
- "I think there is a lack of understanding so when they are presented with a candidate with a disability they don't understand – this could cause them to need to make adjustment in the work places vs a candidate with no special requirement they would chose them" (WAC survey respondent: dyslexic, dyspraxic and AD(H)D).

- "Disabilities like dyslexia and dyspraxia take the headline of bad spelling and grammar and clumsy, instead of all the positives like having a different approach to problem-solving, creative and other traits. They think that the work will not be at the same level as other candidates." (WAC survey respondent: dyslexic and dyspraxic).
- "If I was to be interviewed for promotion I wouldn't be allowed any assistance nor allowance I must conform to the golden standards." (WAC survey respondent: dyslexic, dyspraxic and AD(H)D).
- "Employment should become person-centred if we want everyone to achieve their potential. It is currently a standardised tick box process in which many of us cannot achieve our potential because people fear we may lack basic skills which are sometimes not even required for the role" (WAC survey respondent: dyslexic and dyspraxic).
- "Neurodivergent people need to have the ability to keep up with peers. What can be done to make sure this carries on? I in 5 might have ND and mental health issues/peer issues" (Nasser Siabi, expert session).

9.2 Failure to match the selection criteria to the needs of the job

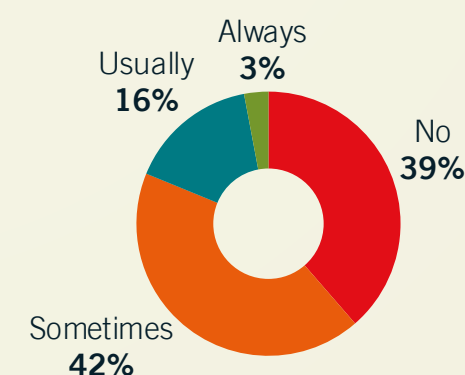
- "The competency framework is rigid where people do not have the time to expand work to skill" (Jo Todd, employers session)..
- Our survey found that very few neurodivergent applicants felt that the selection criteria matched the needs of the job

Do you feel selection criteria match the needs of the job?



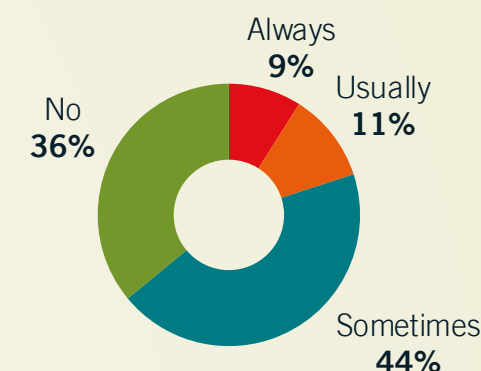
- Our survey found that few neurodivergent applicants are able to demonstrate their skills in the selection process.

Do you feel able to demonstrate your skills in the selection process?



- In contrast, many neurodivergent applicants feel that employers are looking for reasons to exclude them.

Do you feel that Employers are Looking for Reasons to Exclude you?



9.3 Lack of awareness among neurodivergent applicants about their own strengths

- "People do not know their own neurodivergent condition and so this means they do not know what they can do" (Janet T, ND session).
- "I haven't asked for reasonable adjustments as I didn't know I was dyspraxic until recently" (WAC respondent to survey).
- "Constraints of this sole study (ACAS report) cannot generalise, this study is more about progression internally. If job descriptions include reference to all round skills, that can be offputting and give a misimpression. Neurodivergent people think they lack skills but they might have the skills. These generalised competencies frameworks mean Neurodivergent people feel it is impossible to excel" (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).

Suggested solutions

- “Encourage workplace champions at the top of companies where they are and publicised – but also champions throughout the company. Share this”. (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “Clear processes such as the passport scheme in respect to supporting the neurodiverse person throughout their career and enabling promotion” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Develop trained peer mentor networks e.g. sharing peer mentors across small companies” (Amanda Kirby, written evidence).
- “Self-advocacy on neurodivergent strengths” (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).
- “Case study stories told through films. Showcase talent and ability through exhibitions” (Sean Gilroy, employers session).
- “Neurodiversity networking to be part of support system” (Kelly K DEFA, ND session).
- “Demonstrate inclusive leadership by showcasing your story and helping to build disability confidence” (Kelly K DEFA, ND session).
- “Gear profiles and expertise to creative thinking style. There are clusters of ND people in departments and because those people are good you have to get your recruitment policies up to speed to get those people in” (Jo Todd, employers session).
- “Provide an opportunity for members to make best use of information and resources available to better understand dyslexia” (Kelly K DEFA, ND session).
- “Promote the sharing of knowledge and best practice in improving accessibility amongst participating organisations” (Kelly K DEFA, ND session).
- “Assistive technology available to support retention in the workplace- as part of probation and adjustment” (Craig Kennady, ND Session).
- “Sustainability and progression - flexibility at all stages” (Jo Todd, employers session).

“The company weren’t prepared to make adjustments although I was getting outcomes they concentrated on the way I presented rather than my outcomes.”

“I am only very recently diagnosed. I have therefore had years of experience of stress, overload, and confusion because of being unaware of the reasons behind my difficulties with certain work situations.”

Voices from our survey

“Interviewers should focus on what I can do and my achievements. I am disappointed with no progress over 7 years, while my managers kept telling me that I am ready for a promotions every year.”

“Adjusted work environment and access to work claim have been made due to an amazing manager willing to do battle on my behalf.”

“Did not fit in. Bullying.”

“They can’t/won’t see how someone who is not a clone of themselves can be any good.”

“A constant feeling of not fitting in, not being understood.”

“Inflexible office culture, forced me out.”

“I left a software development job when the stress of trying to fit in made me very ill.”

“Only recently diagnose.”

“There are so many people who do not have a diagnosis and how can this help them to tell a potential employer anything?”

“... they just want to cut down the number of candidates and dyslexic people are often collateral damage.”

“For non-Disabled applicants, it’s all about what you can do. For Disabled applicants, it’s all about what you can’t do.”

Barrier 10: Performance Management that is not applicable for the Neurodivergent

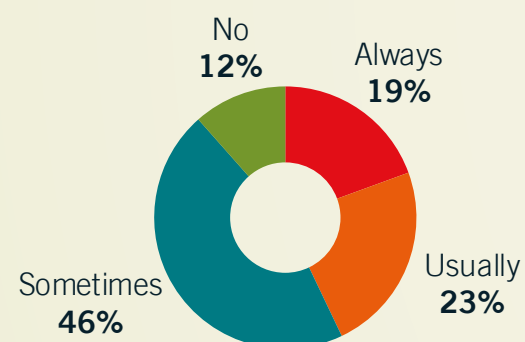
A lack of awareness and understanding among managers often leads to treating neurodivergent employees as the problem, rather than recognising the barriers presented by the work systems and culture. This in turn leads to individual competency and disciplinary procedures, rather than a solution-focused approach, which starts by looking at strengths and how to circumnavigate any difficulties by removing barriers. However WAC case studies have shown some good practice from which lessons can be learnt.

Evidence of

10.1 Managers' lack of understanding of neurodivergence (see Barrier 1)

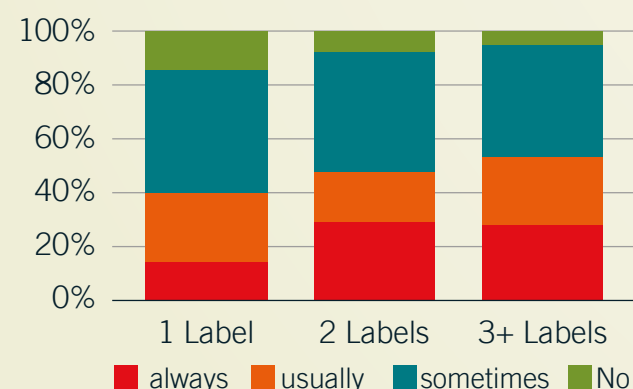
- “Lack of understanding that affects progression/development and promotion of ND people. There is a need to change attitude” (Sean Gilroy BBC, employers session).
- Our survey found that many neurodivergent applicants feel disabled from applying in the context of misconceptions of employers.

Disabled from applying



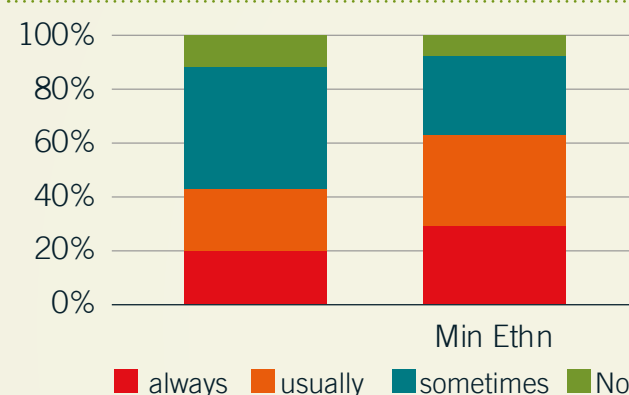
- And that this experience increases with increased neurodivergence ($p < 0.00001$)

Disabled from applying increases with increased neurodivergence



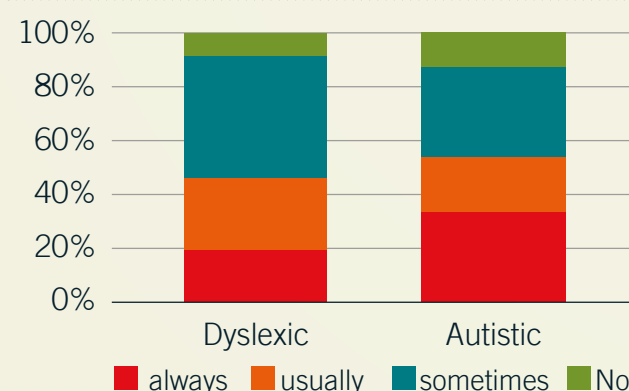
- And is compounded by minority ethnicity ($p < 0.005$)

Disabled from applying increases with minority ethnicity



- There is also a statistically significant increase in difficulty for autistic applicants ($p < 0.002$)

Disabled from applying is greater for autistic applicants



- “Employers can fixate on diagnosis, however, there is a lot that can be put in place that does not need a diagnosis. Just good employer relations can put in place a broad range of offers” (Andrew Sutherland, expert session).

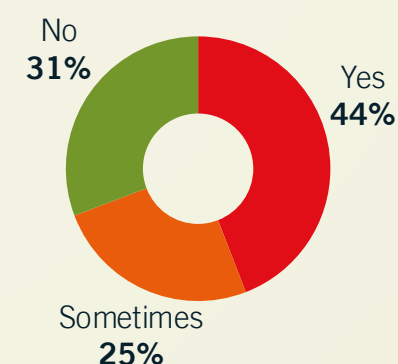
10.2 Pushing employees towards inappropriate career paths

- “Line managers often push them into tests in which they fail. There is an issue over performance management. Often with failure the ND person will get another job. This can be linked to mental health and depression in the Workplace” (Nasser Siabi, expert session).

10.3 Inappropriate competency procedures

- As reported above, our survey found that
 - 73% of neurodivergent applicants chose not to disclose their neurodivergence during the selection process, in order to avoid discrimination
 - Only 42% have **not** experienced discrimination following disclosure in the form of competency procedures
 - This is worse for those from minority ethnic backgrounds - only 34% have not experienced discrimination following disclosure ($p < 0.04$)
- The experience of discrimination is even worse once employed

Experienced discrimination in work



- “Employers want flexibility otherwise they do not want to employ – they want a workforce who can do anything” (Nasser Siabi, expert session).

Only 42% have not experienced discrimination following disclosure in the form of competency procedures.

Suggested solutions

- “A probationary period is really important. This needs to be longer time for ND people. Access to Work needs to be faster as there is a gap between support and Access to Work at times” (Matt Boyd and Jo Todd, employers session).
- “There needs to be a triad of responsibility: the individuals, the line managers and HR for effective management” (Jo Todd, employers session).
- “Allowing movement between job roles can, for instance, ensure that the strengths of a neurodiverse employee are utilised in a role that suits them rather than focusing unduly on weaknesses and pursuing inappropriate performance management actions which become increasingly counter-productive” (Prospect TU, written evidence).
- “Coaching that helps dyslexic people develop compensating strategies to overcome their underlying inefficient short-term memories and other cognitive differences can be of crucial assistance” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “There needs to be awareness and formalised protocol for signposting for support if a relationship between manager and employee is starting to break down” (Becki Morris, written evidence).
- “Instigate transformational leadership this has been found to have a positive impact via employees’ perceptions of features of the work environment” (Nielsen et al., 2008 cited by Nancy Doyle)
- “Senior managers should regularly discuss employee health and wellbeing at board level to ensure a proactive approach to mental well-being at work, and include employees in a collaborative way to find solutions” (Nancy Doyle, written evidence).
- “Businesses should obtain a corporate licence for assistive software to support employees” (Kim Brown, employers session).

“Businesses should obtain a corporate licence for assistive software to support employees.”

Kim Brown, employers session

Voices from our survey

“Boss’s general lack of understanding makes them think I am careless when checking my work for errors.”

“For the Civil Service Fast Stream, they held a half day event for disabled applicants to explain the rest of the process. That was really helpful. They also discussed my adjustments for the assessment centre.”

“I was told by an individual that I should not use my disability as an excuse for my writing style and that I was allowed to leave at any time.”

“The way in which a previous employer measured performance was based on speed of processing. There were no adjustments made to the process of assessment. “

“Had the occasional manager who was happy to use my problem solving skills and people skills, but make life hell over unprofessional paperwork.”

“I have been asked to quit or be fired because of neurodivergent behaviour.”

“I have lost more than one job due to my dyslexia.”

“Suffered years of bad reports before formal diagnosis. Didn’t stop bad results starting disciplinary process.”

“Told there were “no more hours” for me after my dyscalculia came to light. Subsequently left the position.”

“Had a manager who told me she did not understand my disability, I sent her information, and she went on to discipline me.”



PART THREE

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendation 1

Awareness Training

Training programmes should be devised and delivered to ensure greater awareness of neurodivergence within organisations and government offices. This should be done in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Human Resources (HR) staff and the Department for Work & Pensions.

Throughout the year of the Westminster AchieveAbility Commission's evidence gathering, there was a consistent call for training to increase the awareness of organisations about the barriers neurodivergent people face when applying for work and in the workplace. In addition, neurodivergent people themselves recognised how important it is to be aware of the attributes of being neurodivergent in order to work to their strengths. Therefore it became clear that there should be a range of training to include:

- policy makers
 - within organisations
 - within government
- senior managers
- HR staff.

Training for line managers was considered key to this awareness of neurodivergence, as often the lack of progression, or job fit, was due to limited understanding by line managers of their neurodivergent staff.

The Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association focus group, set up to discuss our findings, were clear that working with HR staff and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) was a way forward – both to devise and to disseminate this practice. Interestingly, the CIPD have recently produced a research report called 'Human capital analytics and reporting: exploring theory and evidence' (2017), which makes the case for a more humanist value-based approach to management of the workforce.

The report outlines a focus on more 'person-shaped' jobs and proposes that this approach be initiated by encouraging organisations to develop the professional capability to design ways of working that develop the potential of everyone involved.

'The profession should look to build a positive language of mutual value-creation through the people-related capitals, and work with practitioners to educate and inform business colleagues as to the importance of investments in HR Management and people management.'

(CIPD research report 2017 p. 32).'

In several of the evidence sessions, employers, experts and neurodivergent people spoke about the absence of awareness of neurodivergence in most recruitment practices. This was due to a lack of training for recruitment agencies and professionals, who tended to be target-driven with income targets as the primary driver. Research also lacked a neurodivergent dimension.

"We need to raise awareness with the public sector and employers about what it (neurodivergence) actually is. We need innovation to try to engage with a lot more people – there are so many benefits for the economics of this country in employing us"

(Clive, ND evidence session)

“People do not know their neurodivergent condition, and so this means they do not know what they can do. They often can only get zero hour contracts and they cannot get assessed due to the amount of money for this”

(Janet, ND evidence session)

WAC is calling for:

- The CIPD to devise and deliver, in collaboration with WAC, a set of training programmes that can be delivered to managers, policy makers, HR professionals, JobCentre Plus and Access to Work staff and neurodivergent people themselves.
- Mentoring and training schemes to build in awareness of neurodivergence
- Neurodivergent champions as role models to inspire and celebrate our abilities and successes.

...neurodivergent champions as role models to inspire...

Recommendation 2

A DWP Good Practice Guide

A good practice guide should be compiled on employment practices for neurodivergent people, in consultation with WAC. This should be provided and disseminated by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP).

The Commission identified a lack of coherent information to signpost, to support and to encourage take-up of DWP programmes and initiatives and to guide organisations in recruiting and employing neurodivergent people. WAC are asking for greater engagement from the DWP regarding the availability of **accurate and relevant information about neurodivergence. This information should be**

- **easily available to those who need it**
- **specifically linked to DWP initiatives.**

WAC is not aware of any DWP guidance relating to recruiting people with disabilities such as neurodivergence, which would include their likely strengths and weaknesses and the help that may be available to them. The Trade Union Prospect, in particular, in its submission to the Commission, noted this to be a priority for DWP to address.

Prospect and a number of other organisations have undertaken to provide relevant information about neurodivergence in the context of the workplace. For example there is a hidden impairment toolkit to support employers **for neurodivergent people already in the workplace.** This toolkit assembled by the Hidden Impairment National Group (HING 2015) and supported by the DWP, offers hints, tips and guidance on how to best support individuals with hidden impairments.

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) found that information for employers was lacking. Data from the ACAS helpline showed unmet needs, particularly during disputes, where the conciliation process broke down between employee and employer, leading to an employment tribunal.

ACAS found there was more than anecdotal evidence that neurodivergent people were being mis-performance managed because of a lack of awareness and clear information. Calls to the helpline also provided evidence of the importance of a supportive line manager, and that the employee's situation can deteriorate with a change of line manager. A good practice guide would inform line managers and assist in changing work cultures.

“Recently it took me 10 months to get employed. Usually it takes 3 months to get employed. For many years I have been on fixed term contracts – it is harder this time with many barriers. Now I get work as sessional worker so the barriers are socio-economic. This means there is a benefits trap linked to poverty”

(Janet, ND session)



“There is sometimes a feeling that neurodiverse people should be overly grateful for unpaid opportunities (or happy to drop everything for cash-strapped organisations trying to help vulnerable people “like us”) when we’re also trying to earn our own living. Some neurodiverse people themselves have been conditioned into thinking we should all work for free and they automatically expect it of themselves and others”.

(Maxine F, ND session)

WAC is calling for:

- A DWP good practice guide across a broad spectrum of conditions on the recruitment and selection of neurodivergent people. The guide should focus on the strengths and abilities of neurodivergent people, in addition to their support needs. In this way, employers and employees would be inspired by positive messages.
- The guide should be solution-focused: for example, when recruiting someone with dyslexia
 - ask them what their dyslexia means to them
 - what their difficulties are
 - how they compensate.
- The guide would also provide appropriate signposting to support for both employer and employee.
- A good practice guide would assist with the wider promotion of DWP initiatives such as Access to Work and Disability Confident. The DWP needs to create ‘portals’ for communication about neurodivergence.

The DWP needs to create ‘portals’ for communication about neurodivergence.



Recommendation 3

JobCentre Plus

A major culture change is needed inside the DWP and JobCentre Plus so that they operate within the social model of disability. The accepted definition of the social model highlights the barriers that disable someone with an impairment, bringing out the effects that this has on their functioning.

This would bring them in line with the Equality Act 2010 in which the focus is on promoting equality for groups that can experience discrimination by seeking to remove the barriers they face – in the same way that businesses and organisations have a legal responsibility to ensure that a disabled person is not further hindered by their ‘practices, policies and procedures’ (Equality Act 2010).

The Commission has heard that neurodivergent people have a reluctance to engage with JobCentre Plus as they experience the ‘system’ as too hard to navigate and manage. As a result, they are less likely to receive support or access job vacancies. Some struggle to engage with **online services** which are increasingly replacing face to face support within Job Centres and with some employability providers. This difficulty may be due to lack of digital skills, lack of a suitable device or both.

Another issue is that job seekers on low incomes struggle with the cost of travel to attend interviews.

We also found that **neurodivergent people were being sanctioned** as part of a quota-driven approach by JobCentre Plus to lay down mandatory actions by job seekers. Neurodivergent customers should NEVER be sanctioned for failure to submit paperwork/on-line documentation within a short time-frame and without appropriate support

WAC is calling for:

- A properly funded programme of training on neurodivergence for
 - JobCentre Plus staff
 - work coaches.
- Neurodivergence Advisers to be available to JobCentre Plus staff, given the high numbers of people with neurodivergence seeking work.
- Better assessment processes to be in place for neurodivergent customers.
- Guidance to be drawn up for JobCentre Plus staff when advising neurodivergent people considering self-employment (who are frequently not formally assessed).
- An end to the quota system of work search activity for neurodivergent people leading to sanctions when not completed.
- JobCentre Plus to provide financial support for neurodivergent people travelling to interviews.



Recommendation 4

Access to Work

It is vital that the government's key programme to support people with disabilities in employment, Access to Work, operates more efficiently and provides appropriate support to the large numbers of (potential) employees with neurodivergence.

During the WAC evidence gathering, some of the issues raised concerned the overall operation of Access to Work (AtW), including

- the short time-frame
- regional variations
- limited information available
- requests for (costly) diagnostic assessments.

In addition, we noted

- the lack of awareness of neurodivergence amongst AtW Advisers,
- difficulties getting back to the same Adviser
- form-filling challenges
- the poor standard of many workplace assessments
- a lack of quality assurance of AtW workplace assessments.

One expert witness drew attention to the mismatch between 30,000 dyslexic graduates leaving university every year yet only 2-3,000 individuals have been helped by Access to Work.

The WAC evidence sessions showed that:

- Neither training providers nor employers seem to be aware about support via Access to Work.
- Contact centre staff and AtW Advisers are unaware of official guidance relating to people with dyslexia that states they should NOT be asked for diagnostic assessments before proceeding with their claim.
- Contracts for delivering the service are awarded at low cost which drives out many of the more specialist providers.
- Timeframes are tight, leading to a rushed service, with insufficient time to consider individually tailored recommendations.
- Quality Assurance relates to these timeframes rather than quality of assessments.

WAC is calling for:

- Better promotion of Access to Work so that employers, HR and training providers are aware of it.
- Monitoring systems to cover the quality of assessments – at present assessment processes for neurodivergent customers are often inadequate.
- A robust process to be implemented to check that Access to Work recommendations are put in place and are maintained by the employer.
- Claimants to be allocated a named AtW Adviser, whom they can contact as necessary.
- AtW assessment reports to be signed by the assessor, rather than anonymously as 'Employment Solutions'
- An offer of support from Access to Work for interviews, if required.

Recommendation 5

Disability Confident

Disability Confident needs to be better promoted and monitored and is another area that concerned witnesses and respondents. This government initiative has replaced the 'Two Ticks' scheme and is intended to encourage employers to be disability-friendly. www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign

Our surveys showed that few neurodivergent respondents knew what Disability Confident meant or implied. Moreover, many employers seemed unaware of the scheme.

Monitoring of the standards applying to the three levels was found to be poor, leading to the conclusion that the system is not robust.

Disability Confident is organised into three 'tiers of commitment':

Level 1:

to be a Disability Confident committed employer

Level 2:

to be a Disability Confident employer

Level 3:

to achieve Disability Confident leader status.

WAC found that Disability Confident is insufficiently promoted to employers and HR staff (only 124 organisations had signed up almost three years after the initial launch in July 2013). Evidence from Professor Kim Hoque (in his submission to the Taylor Review on Modern Employment Practices) revealed that few employers outside public organisations, charities and social enterprises had engaged with it – and most of these private companies provided disability services.

This lack of awareness and involvement was borne out by WAC surveys.

WAC is calling for:

- Disability Confident to be more widely promoted, across all sectors.
- The levels of Disability Confident to be robustly monitored to ensure standards are adhered to; this must be a transparent process with the data made available.
- Disability Confident employers to sign up to a continuous programme of improvement.
- The consideration of a range of incentives and publicity awards.



Recommendation 6

Accessibility written employment information

Written employment information needs to be re-evaluated and redesigned for accessibility. Evidence from both experts and neurodivergent people highlighted the barriers imposed by inaccessible written information.

Many examples were produced which form part of the process of getting a job; these included:

- job information
- application forms
- job activity tests.

This material was found to be:

- overly complex
- text- and jargon-heavy
- written in inaccessible fonts
- causing visual stress
- more difficult to manage than the demands of the job for many neurodivergent applicants.

Inaccessible written information results in many neurodivergent people giving up before completing applications or being eliminated from the shortlist for spurious reasons, leading to their talents and expertise being lost.

These problems can be compounded by poorly designed online forms that do not allow assistive technology which would be available for the job itself; this is particularly pernicious when spell checkers are disabled.

WAC is calling for all written information relating to employment to be produced with the following standards:

- In plain English
- Written in at least a 12 point font, sans serif
- Avoiding black print on bleached white paper
- Jargon-free
- Bullet-pointed.

Online information and application forms need to include the following features:

- Spell checkers
- Easy changes of colour and contrast
- Assistive technology such as screen readers.

Recommendation 7

Reasonable Adjustments

Better 'reasonable adjustments' are needed. Very few of the Neurodivergent people interviewed had positive experience of effective reasonable adjustments.

In most cases these adjustments appear to have been refused. Where they were provided, they were often

- ill thought through
- ineffective
- rarely individualised to meet the needs of:
 - the person,
 - or the employer.

However, when they were bespoke, reasonable adjustments were highly effective and praised very positively.

Many employers seem reluctant to engage with the positive possibilities of reasonable adjustments, apparently preferring to risk prosecution. However, those that do go down this route usually find these adjustments are:

- not costly
- uncomplicated
- suit the team as well as the neurodivergent employee
- very effective for resolving workplace difficulties.

A lack of reasonable adjustments during the selection process gives the appearance that the employer is only looking for neurotypical employees. Furthermore, processes that overload working memory, in what is usually a stressful situation, disable neurodivergent applicants, exaggerating their weaknesses and reducing, if not eliminating, their strengths.

Working memory overload can occur, for example, when:

- asking over-complicated questions with multiple parts
- springing unexpected tests
- expecting applicants to respond to written information with insufficient time
- holding interviews in noisy, or visually distracting, environments
- trying to work in noisy and visually distracting open offices.

WAC is calling for:

- Support for employers to design reasonable adjustments, and engagement with neurodivergent staff so that these can be a good fit.
- Clear processes, such as the passport scheme, in order to support the neurodivergent employee throughout their career and to enable promotion.
- The end of a tick list of 'disabilities' for applicants to disclose, replaced by a menu of 'reasonable adjustments' to select.
- Redesigning interview procedures so that they find the best person for the job, rather than the most neurotypical.



Recommendation 8

Psychometric, and other tests.

Psychometric, and other tests that are inappropriate for a neurodivergent population should not be used in selection or promotion processes.

The British Psychological Society (BPS) has a clear position on the misuse of psychometric tests, namely that tests that do not publish their reliability and validity scores should never be used, and those that do should only be used by qualified assessors.

‘The use of psychometric assessments should be based on published technical data, describing the statistical levels of its reliability and validity, and be used only by appropriately qualified assessors.’

Psychology at Work: Improving wellbeing and productivity in the workplace, A. Weinberg and N. Doyle, October 2017, p79.

Further difficulties arise when psychometric tests used in the diagnostic assessment process for neurodivergence focus only on identifying difficulties rather than evaluating strengths.

‘The overwhelming use of the medical, problem focused, model to diagnose conditions, results in neurodiverse (sic) people being held back by their weaknesses and not playing to their strengths in education and employment. This prevents individuals from achieving their career potential.’

Psychology at Work p56.

As Professor Amanda Kirby argued in her written evidence,

‘...(psychometric) tests miss out on talents.’

All test results require skilled interpretation, particularly when an individual has an unusual psychological profile. Simply accepting the test results at face value leads to significant disadvantages for neurodivergent people. In addition, it is well known that anyone’s scores on any psychometric test will vary over time.

‘...it is important to recognise that there is no such thing as a perfect assessment tool – individual responses may vary across time for a range of reasons...’

Psychology at Work p72.

This Commission report argues for a radical shift towards recognising and valuing strengths; this position is informed by many of our expert witnesses and confirmed by our survey.

Nancy Doyle refers to: ‘...designing assessments which start from a strengths-based approach whilst recognising individual needs – rather than fitting people into work’ Psychology at Work p75

Margaret Malpas stated in an expert session,

“Psychometric tests are biased against the Neurodivergent as they are not sampled to specifically include Neurodivergent people.”

Consequently the use of psychometric and other work-based abstract tests can give the illusion of ‘objectivity’ while disabling and discriminating against the neurodivergent population

WAC is calling for:

- The end of the misuse of ‘psychometric’ tests in all selection processes.
- The end of arbitrary and often abstract tests in selection processes unless their validity and reliability is proven, and then only administered by suitably qualified assessors capable of interpreting them without discriminating against neurodivergent people.
- A move towards selection processes designed to recognise and evaluate strengths, rather than focus on weaknesses and reasons to exclude individuals.
- A move towards practical assessments of those skills and abilities actually required by the job.

It is important to recognise that there is no such thing as a perfect assessment tool.



The Role of Government

Our Commission on Recruitment has come at a time when the government has committed itself to increasing the number of people with disabilities in employment and has published Improving Lives: The Work, Health & Disability Green Paper. But specific government actions are required to include people with neurodivergence in its aspirations.

Disability leads to disadvantage in the workplace: **‘Disability and employment statistics are very clear: people with disabilities are less likely to be gainfully employed, less likely to fulfill their potential and more likely to be discriminated against’** (Doyle, N and Weinberg, A 2017, p57). In addition, researchers have noted insufficient focus on ensuring that this group received **access to services they needed** and that **their progress was tracked**.

Problem areas include:

- the adverse effects of welfare reforms on claimants for Jobseekers Allowance – in particular the work capacity assessment process
- the increased number of job applications required of individuals seeking work and sanctioning if this has not been fulfilled.
- job seekers on low incomes being unable to afford to travel to job interviews and appointments.

Furthermore, it had been established that low levels of literacy obviously make it harder to find employment. One study found 4 out of 10 unemployed people using Jobcentre Plus were dyslexic (Baroness Walmsley, House of Lords. Hansard Lords: 28 Jun 2012: Column 385)

There is a widespread lack of information on people with dyslexia and other forms of neurodivergence evidenced by helpline calls to ACAS. This leads to insufficient promotion of ‘reasonable adjustments’ (i.e. disability-related accommodations) to help resolve workplace difficulties for neurodivergent employees.

Although the talents associated with neurodivergence are often better expressed in self-employment, some respondents, during the evidence gathering, related that they felt almost forced into self-employment because they could no longer cope with job search requirements – this was often low-paid work. Several experts, including Professors Melanie Jones and Victoria Wass, have pointed to gaps in disability employment data, especially regarding self-employment.

(These factors also came out in the All Party Parliamentary Group on Disabilities evidence session on 12th August 2017.)

Members of our commission have engaged with government consultations on employment, but have been led, as a Commission, to focus on the issue of recruitment. We posed a number of key questions, one of which was: **What should government be doing to facilitate neurodivergent people both in job recruitment and job retention?**

This led to the identification of a number of core barriers and further findings, identified by witnesses, survey respondents and in written submissions. Issues raised related to government initiatives such as:

- Access to Work
- JobCentre Plus,
- Disability Confident

Together with:

- self-employment
- the implementation of the Equality Act 2010
- and a lack of awareness.

All these matters are addressed within our recommendations.

In the Commission’s final evidence gathering session, a representative from the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) was invited to respond to the issues that had been raised.

Government Responses

The DWP representative provided the following information:

- 300 new Disability Employment Advisers are being employed
- A ‘one-stop-shop approach’ is being trialled
- Advice should be available from the Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Financial support should be available from the New Enterprise Allowance, for those on benefits
- The DWP cannot police the Equality Act, only engage with employers regarding reasonable adjustments – this was in response to the point: **it is too easy for employers to ‘opt’ out of reasonable adjustments, which are not enforceable**

The following view was expressed by Stuart Edwards on behalf of DWP:

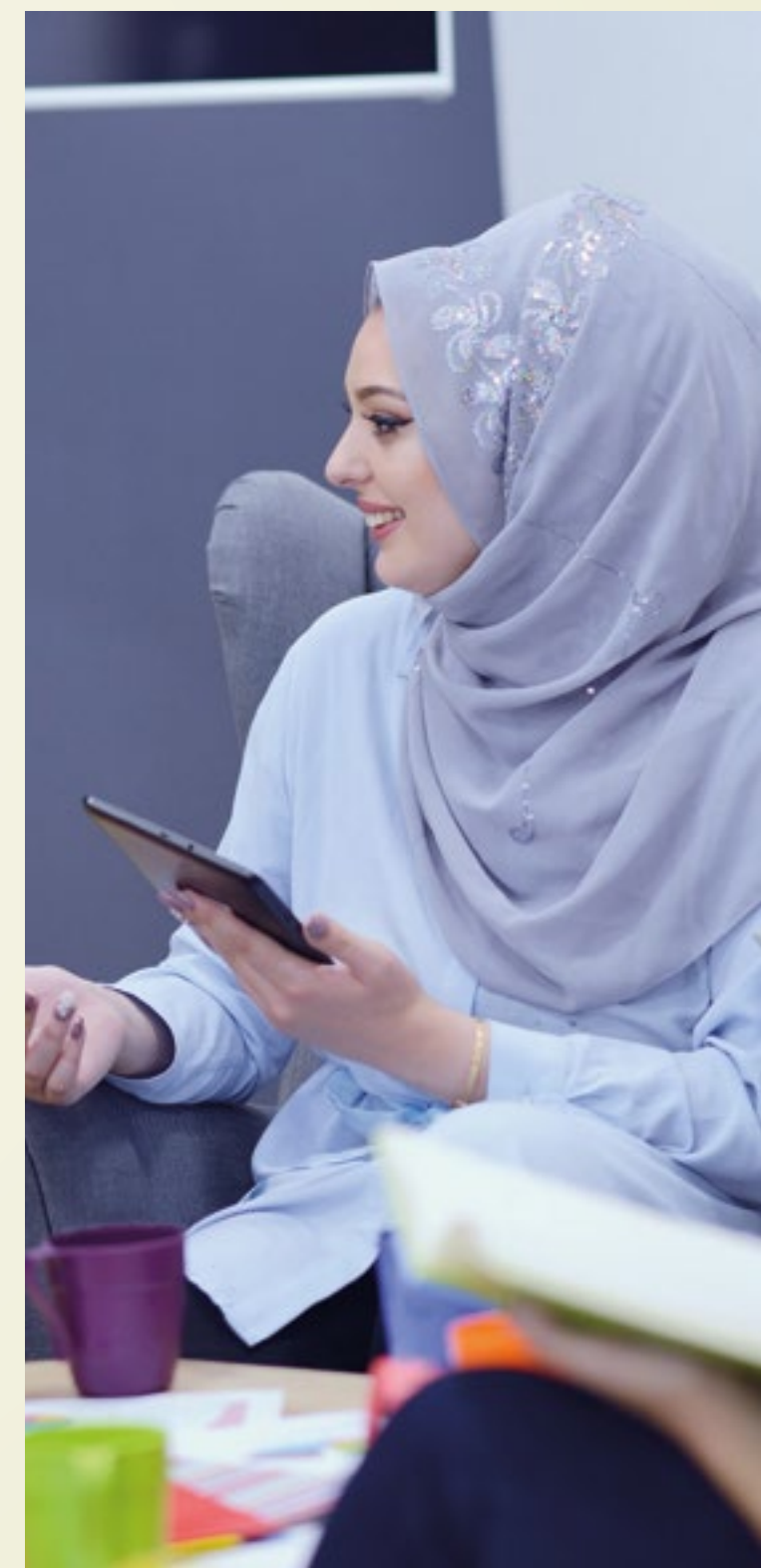
“We are very keen to ensure all those who can benefit do so”.

Further information has since been supplied on take-up of Access to Work

- Access to Work (AtW) stats have recently been published which point to an increase in the number of people with Dyslexia being supported.
- People with Dyslexia are now the third largest group of people supported by AtW: 3,150 had some type of AtW provision approved in 2016/17 – a record number and increase of nearly 15% from 2015/16.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/access-to-work-statistics> Table 3

The Commission requested contact details of staff responsible for the various areas covered during the government evidence session and have made an immediate start on following them up.



CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1

PASSPORT SCHEMES

Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) have a passport scheme to support staff with disabilities and neurodiversity as well as the employers. There is support for a disability network and awareness drives, to celebrate diversity and disabled talent.

Fujitsu SEED have an active disability network. They have produced films about their disabled employees that profile the positivity of difference and talent. This company also has a passport scheme very similar to DCMS.

“The guaranteed interview scheme is brilliant and really helps to enable me. It also means that I’m able to get more interview practice and a chance to present myself to the employer”.

Autistic Job seeker

“Adjustments were made when applying for Civil Service Fast Stream (e.g. additional time to complete written assessment).”

Employee, Dyslexic/ADHD

“Any company I have interviewed with and I have made aware of my Dyslexia and interview adjustments, they have been happy to put these in place. These adjustments have usually been extra time in an assessment situation and/or interview questions written and verbally given.”

Respondent, Dyslexic

CASE STUDY 2

NETWORK CHAMPIONS

Disability Co-operative Network (DCN) (www.musedcn.org.uk) champions neurodiversity and disabled talent in the workplace + service delivery in the UK’s heritage and cultural sector. This includes creating active signposting via links to resources and case studies, developing partnerships with different sectors to enable more people with disabilities, chronic conditions and neurodiversity to work in museums etc. with appropriate adjustments and awareness.

CASE STUDY 3

POSITIVE RETENTION

The BBC CAPE Project has developed a questionnaire, offered to all staff which has led to an overall BBC strategy on the recruitment and retention of neurodiverse staff and, in particular, managers. They are a friend of DCN and there is an article regarding this and their findings here:

<https://www.musedcn.org.uk/2015/09/14/neurodiversity-in-employment>.

CASE STUDY 4

POSITIVE POLICY and HR

Warwickshire County Council has produced a policy for Human Resources and other council departments on the recruitment and retention of dyslexic people. This was in consultation with Becki Morris, Lead Volunteer and Julie Cappleman-Morgan with the Dig-It Adult Group based in Tamworth <http://dig-itam.weebly.com/>. The Council Officer met with the group and listened to their experiences about recruitment and employment with neurodivergence specifically dyslexia and dyspraxia. These experiences, knowledge and training fed into their policy.

CASE STUDY 5

POSITIVE RECRUITMENT IN SCOTLAND

The Scotland Employment Service, in consultation with participants, has highlighted the **BT Disability Passport** as a resource that worked in connection with line managers in preventing frustration for neurodivergent staff (see the Dyslexia Scotland Guide to Dyslexia and Work)

Additionally, they work with the West Lothian Dyslexia Network, which proactively delivers dyslexia awareness to employers in the area. In parallel, the network delivers direct support to dyslexic job seekers in Bathgate Job Centre, supporting them in developing literacy skills and practical job search skills. Dyslexia Scotland is working with JobCentre Plus both nationally and a local level to develop this model in other areas.



Glossary of Acronyms

ACAS:	The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service is a Crown non-departmental public body of the UK Government.
AchieveAbility:	A charity for dyslexic adults which promotes the social model of disability and the talents of neurodivergence.
ADO:	Adult Dyslexia Organisation.
ADD:	Attention Deficit Disorder – a neurodivergent condition typified by difficulties with focus and concentration often known as inattentive ADHD.
ADDIS:	A UK Charity supporting individuals with ADHD, their families and employers.
ADHD:	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder – an ND condition typified by difficulties with focus, concentration and inattentiveness.
APPG:	All-Party Parliamentary Group – a cross-party committee of interested members of both Houses of Parliament.
ASD:	Autistic spectrum disorder – a neurodivergent condition typified by difficulties with communication and heightened sensory sensitivity.
Asperger's Syndrome:	An ASD condition, typified by intellectual ability often reflected in academic success.
AtW:	Access to Work - a government scheme to support the employment of individuals with disabilities.
BDA:	British Dyslexia Association, a UK Charity supporting individuals with dyslexia, their families and employers.
CIPD:	The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development is a professional association for human resource management professionals.
DAN:	Dyslexia Adult Network, a group of charities and experts set up to support adults with dyslexia and neurodivergence.
DCD:	Developmental Coordination Disorder – a medical term describing a group of coordination difficulties that includes dyspraxia.
DMCS:	Department of Media Culture and Sport.

DoH:	Department of Health, a government department.
DSM IV & V:	The suite of psychological tests that are most commonly used to identify neurodivergent profiles.
DWP:	Department for Work and Pensions, a government department.
Dyscalculia:	A neurodivergent condition identified by substantial difficulty with all aspects of numbers and calculation, compared to other skills.
Dyslexia:	A neurodivergent condition typified by relative difficulties in acquiring literacy and (usually) difficulties with short-term working memory, compared to other skills.
Dyspraxia:	A neurodivergent condition typified by difficulties with coordination, organisation, sequencing and memory.
Dyspraxia Foundation:	A charity supporting individuals with dyspraxia/DCD, their families and employers.
JCP:	Jobcentre Plus is a Department of DWP responsible for management of the Access to Work and Disability Confident schemes.
HE:	Higher Education: institutions where study is at degree level and above.
HR:	Human Resources: department dealing with staff in organisations.
MoJ:	Ministry of Justice, a government department.
NAS:	National Autistic Society – a UK Charity supporting individuals with ASD, their families and employers.
OCD:	Obsessive-compulsive disorder, where people need to check things repeatedly.
SpLD:	Specific Learning Difficulty – an educational term describing neurodivergent conditions.
TFL:	Transport for London.
WAC:	Westminster AchieveAbility Commission, set up to report on employment for dyslexic/ neurodivergent adults' experience of recruitment and selection to employment.
WFDA:	Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association, an East London charity.

Resources

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- Nancy Doyle: www.geniuswithin.co.uk/about/the-company/
- Nick Walker: <http://neurocosmopolitanism.com/neurodiversity-some-basic-terms-definitions/>
- Nicola James' Skills Rocket www.skillsrocket.com
- Prospect: <https://www.prospect.org.uk/resources/guides-factcards/index>
- Reasonable Adjustments: www.gov.uk/rights-disabled-person/employment
- Xtraordinary People (2008) *Spelling it out: The costs of delaying comprehensive dyslexia training for teachers* [online] available at: www.xtraordinarypeople.com/media/downloads/news/Spelling%20It%20Out%20report%20-%20May%202008.pdf