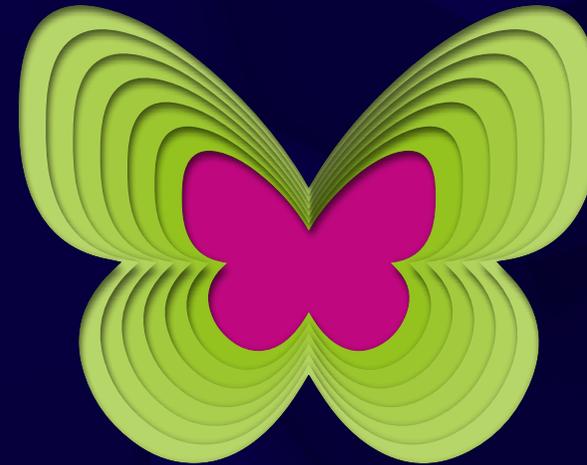


AchieveAbility E-Journal | **Issue 2** | Autumn 2021 | ISSN 2634-0798

Neurodiverse Voices: **Good Practice in the Workplace in a time of Covid**

Edited by Dr Ross Cooper, Professor Debra Kelly,
David Hermanstein, Dr Katherine Hewlett

Peer Reviewers: Becki Morris, Dr Melanie Thorley





Aims of the Journal

The **AchieveAbility E-Journal** is the research journal of AchieveAbility and shares the organisation's overall commitment to **promoting policy** and **delivering practice** for **successful educational, employment** and **training opportunities** for people who are neurodivergent and dyslexic.

In addition, the journal aims to:

- To provide a forum for exchange and debate that informs policy, strategy and practice on Neurodiversity within our society
- To support, promote and publish research-informed work of established and new academics and practitioners in the fields of education, training, employment, social justice and cultural change
- To foster interdisciplinary work of Neurodivergent authors to find new audiences in the journal fields

Editorial Policy

While maintaining the research and editorial standards expected by more formal research-based journals, the *AchieveAbility E-Journal* takes an inclusive editorial policy to encourage the particular experience, original thinking and preferred communication styles, formats and media of contributors.

Peer Review and Editorial Process

The **AchieveAbility E-Journal** operates an Open Peer Review process with a panel composed of specialists in the field in accordance with the theme of each particular journal issue. All articles are peer-reviewed independently by those reviewers. Contributions selected for review receive a set of comments collated by the Editors to address before publication. The Editors reserve the right to exercise final editorial control in the interests of the overall coherence of each issue, while respecting the journal's policy of encouraging originality and preference in the forms of expression and format in the contributions submitted to the journal. All web link references supplied by authors have been published in good faith and we apologise if following publication in a few instances these may no longer be available

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Publication Schedule

The **AchieveAbility E-Journal** is published annually in response to the issues and work being undertaken by AchieveAbility and its partner organisations. Its aim is to be timely and to intervene in current debates.

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Foreword from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

Welcome to the 2nd edition of the AchieveAbility E-Journal. The pandemic and lockdown have been an extraordinary experience, and we have all had to make significant adjustments to our ‘new normal’. It is in times of social and economic challenge that marginalisation of peripheral communities increases, so it is now more important than ever that we as a neurodivergent community support each other.

One of the positives that has come out of this time has been a real amplification of the Neurodivergent voice online, people talking about their own understanding and experiences. Understanding always needs to be based on sound research and this journal is one of the brilliant contributions to a better awareness.

I was asked to write this foreword, in part, because the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD) are now hosting the AchieveAbility E-Journal, and I am part of the award-winning Specialist Support Team that has the privilege of facilitating the brilliant creative neurodivergent students that study there. Now that the Journal has a home it will be able to get on with the great work of centring inclusivity through good policy and practice founded on an understanding that is informed by the research concerns of the Neurodivergent community itself.

If the understanding comes out of real experiences, it can offer the neurodivergent person and the wider community a language and understanding to articulate the experience and offer practical solutions to some of the barriers. I know this because it has been part of my own journey as a neurodivergent person myself. I was not expected to complete high school let alone go on to degree level, but with a growing realization of the impact of a learning difference on both opportunities and outcomes I have been able to confound those expectations. It is through insight underpinned by informed research that changes like these are possible.

My perception of the positives and negatives of neurodivergence has changed profoundly over the duration of my lifetime and it is my ardent wish that this reframing, based on sound research, will continue to evolve and empower all Neurodivergent people. It is through innovative publications like the AchieveAbility E-Journal that we are able to develop the knowledge that can facilitate the change we need to see in the world. Research is important, but what we find is dependent on the questions we ask.

Cheri Shone (RCSSD)

‘What we find changes who we become.’

Peter Morville 2005

(Ambient Findability: What We Find Changes Who We Become , 6 Oct. 2005)

Neurodiversity in the shadow of COVID-19: flexibility and trust

Tom Neil, ACAS Policy and Content Adviser

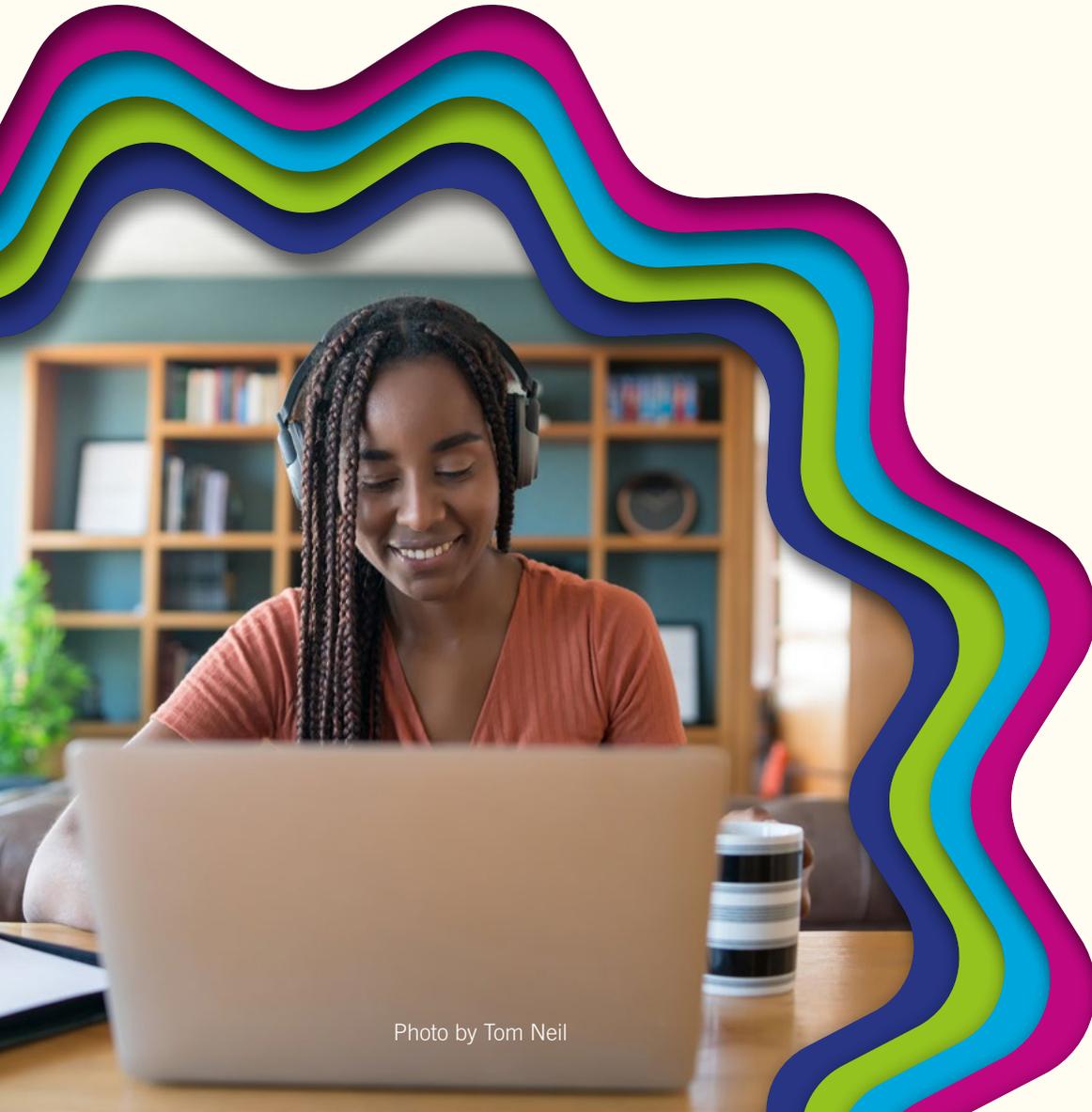


Photo by Tom Neil

The last year has presented huge challenges and difficulties for the whole of the UK workforce. While everyone has been affected by the coronavirus pandemic, it has had a differential impact on sectors and demographics. On a basic level front line workers have typically faced more difficulties than knowledge workers. Knowledge workers and those in secure work who have been better shielded than those in insecure working arrangements.

Research suggests that disabled workers are being disproportionately affected, both in terms of the impact on their health and wellbeing, and also on their chances of finding employment or staying in employment.

Looking more closely at neurodiversity, recent research from the Institute of Leadership and Management (2020) suggests we still need to explain and highlight the benefits of truly inclusive workplaces. They found that **50% of people would not employ someone from one of the neuro-minorities.**

Neurodiversity in the shadow of COVID-19: flexibility and trust

Tom Neil, ACAS Policy and Content Adviser

Their research called “ Workplace Neurodiversity: The Power of Difference” (2020) also found that very few workplace policies and procedures include any reference to neurodiversity. Only 27% of Inclusion policies mention this and only 19% in bullying and harassment policies. Additionally, only 21% of employers offered any sort of training for managers and leaders on neurodiversity and only 18% offered any sort of relevant training for staff. All this highlights there is more work to do to raise awareness and dispel the misunderstanding and stigma that persists. To then help employers and managers become more confident and able to support and best utilise a neurodiverse workforce.

A key tenet of any inclusive workplace is flexibility.

Recruitment is one key area where flexibility is important, and while most of 2020 has been focussed on redundancy, the annual Confederation of British Industry survey (CBI September 2020) revealed that 51% of firms were expecting to maintain or increase their permanent recruitment in the next 12 months. So it is not all negative but as Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS 2016) research found, recruitment processes are typically inflexible and often unfairly disadvantage neurodivergent applicants. It has become common for employers to seek to recruit ‘generalists’ over ‘specialists’, using a standard set of criteria of behaviours for most roles within the business, no matter what skills are actually required to do the specific job.

Employers should endeavour to be more flexible around who they employ. A neurodiverse workforce containing both generalists and specialists is likely to be more resilient and potentially a greater competitive advantage due to having staff that approach problems in different ways.

Employers also need to be more flexible in how applicants can apply for the role, offering different ways to complete the application, such as online, by email and post. This approach will usually require minimal extra effort but can make it much easier for neurodivergent applicants. Providing sample answers so that all applicants know how they should respond to questions posed also requires a small amount of extra effort but can make the recruitment more inclusive. Employers should even consider if they need to wait until the actual interview before applicants know the questions, or they could allow applicants to know the questions to be asked before the interview; allowing them to prepare their answer.



Neurodiversity in the shadow of COVID-19: flexibility and trust

Tom Neil, ACAS Policy and Content Adviser

Moving on to performance management, ACAS research (2016) found that neurodivergent staff were no more likely than other staff to have performance issues if they were given the appropriate support. Yet getting that support can be lacking and this has been exacerbated by Covid-19. For example, one particular challenge presented by the homeworking environment includes isolation, and the absence of one-to-one mentorship, so often required for certain neurodivergent conditions, such as dyslexia or Asperger's syndrome (Meredith Hurst HR Magazine, 2020).

Yet good practice is consistent no matter the circumstances. A fundamental starting point is managers needing to have the skills to be adaptable and tailor their management style to meet individual needs and preferences. ACAS has previously done a lot of work around managers and leadership. Emotional intelligence is key to being self and socially aware; and for many managers to improve in this area requires training.

It is easy to forget that a key part of performance management is also around developing staff and enabling them to progress. However for neurodivergent team members, managers again need to be more flexible in what support they provide. ACAS research found a key problem was neurodivergent staff often do not apply for jobs they would be good at due to a lack of confidence, not recognising their achievements and not knowing how best to promote themselves and their skills. So managers where appropriate should be willing to help identify suitable vacancies and offering a mentor to support them into roles that best fit their skills.

While neurodivergence will often amount to a disability, I have always found it troubling that when reasonable adjustments are provided this is often focussed on whether the individual actually meets the definition of having a disability under the Equality Act (2010), rather than focussing on whether the adjustment will make it easier for the individual to perform as the employer requires; particularly as these adjustments are relatively easy to implement and affordable.

Reasonable adjustments are of course a key part of an employer meeting their duty of care. Yet with the pandemic changing the world of work for many, it is important to think again about the adjustments and support processes in place and how they continue to work as required. For example while a dyslexic worker may have software or a colleague at work to help with dictating work, do they have the same access to this support at home?

Ad hoc support and regular catch-ups are important. People can feel more self-conscious in the current climate and may not want to ask for help and so again having that emotional intelligence is so important.

Neurodiversity in the shadow of COVID-19: **ACAS** Being flexible

'Duty of care'

- Acas advocates 'reasonable adjustments' becoming the norm rather than the exception: why wait for the 'disability prompt' provided by the Equality Act?
- During all the upheaval, check the practical stuff still works, eg having the software that helps staff with dyslexia
- Keep up the ad hoc support (checking emails etc): people feel more self-conscious in the current climate and may not want to ask for help
- Critical role of managers and the need for emotional intelligence

*Slide from ACAS presentation
at the AchieveAbility seminar - November 2020*

One of the challenges for many organisations with the move to home-working, this year, has been around trust when managers cannot see their staff at work. It is important to also briefly discuss the importance of trust and having trustworthy leaders in an inclusive workplace.

Neurodiversity in the shadow of COVID-19: flexibility and trust

Tom Neil, ACAS Policy and Content Adviser

An interesting and informative paper by Bath University and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development ‘Experiencing trustworthy leaders’ (Bath University, CIPD 2014), highlighted there are:

Four qualities of trustworthy leaders...

Ability, Benevolence, Integrity, Predictability

- **Ability:** requires managers to use the knowledge and skills they have to get the best out of all your staff. As we have discussed already, it is about being able to adapt their personal style to meet the individual needs of their team members.
- **Benevolence:** requires showing that you care. This is not about making assumptions, but about being approachable. Our research found that, even with an employer who was actively seeking to support neurodiversity, employees typically took 2 years to disclose. So how would you consider implementing an adjustment even if there does not appear to be a disability obligation to do so?
- **Integrity:** is essentially about being fair. There is so much possibility of an ‘us and them’ culture at the moment: those not working versus those on furlough. Those on reduced hours versus those working full time. Those working from home versus those working at the office. It is essential that within workplaces there is not another ‘us and them’ of neurodivergent versus other employees! In the end we are all different with different needs and motivations and actually everyone benefits from an inclusive workplace.

In addition, unexplained change can be difficult for anyone but can be especially stressful for neurodivergent colleagues.

The immediate upheaval of lockdown (furlough, working from home, new and strict workplace measures) can result in a large volume of change with little time/process to adapt to it. There is also the “evolution” of mass working from home cultures. For example everybody holds lots of video conferencing but then people get fed up with the overexposure and can avoid it at all costs.

As a recent personnel article explained, many individuals, especially autistic people, have routines in place, which provide structure, safety, security and help to make sense of the world. Not being able to do things in the same way, or finding it difficult to establish new routines while restrictions are in place, could have a significant impact on someone’s ability to work; their general wellbeing and mental health” (Personnel Today, May 2020).

Can managers therefore take steps to mitigate as much as this as possible and can they create a more dependable new normal?

Hopefully, in regards to coronavirus, we are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. So what will be interesting is what happens next? At ACAS we are keen to support and encourage employers to ‘build back better’.

While it is perhaps tempting to just go back to what work was like in 2020, there is an opportunity to relook at the world of work and what can be done to provide better working lives. Flexibility to better meet individual needs and trustworthy leaders would seem key elements to this.

Just to reiterate this last point, most organisations will already employ a neurodiverse workforce, whether they aware of it or not, and actively supporting it or not. As we do seek to return to a new normal, what changes to the workplace and employment would we like to see?

Neurodiversity in the shadow of COVID-19: flexibility and trust

Tom Neil, ACAS Policy and Content Adviser

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Higher Education Think Tank (HETT) Manifesto and Framework of Entitlement

Dr Katherine Hewlett, Founder of AchieveAbility, Liz Gentilcore



This paper is the result of discussions by the HETT group set up to highlight that dyslexic and neurodivergent students in Higher Education (HE) are at a substantial disadvantage compared to other students, particularly in these times of Covid-19.

That is the reason for the publication, by AchieveAbility, of this manifesto, and proposed action for a framework of entitlement. There are two areas of concern: the effectiveness of the Disability Student Allowance (DSA) process, and the teaching and learning experience of neurodivergent students in HE.

The purpose of this manifesto is to promote more effective learning. The vision includes the application of certain principles:

- Relationships Enhance Learning
- Communication that is clear and maintained
- Learner Perspectives
- Collaborative Learning and Collaborative Teaching
- Forming Learning Communities

Higher Education Think Tank (HETT) Manifesto and Framework of Entitlement

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For neurodivergent and dyslexic adults, the success of the learning experience is measured by how successfully information can be meaningfully understood. How the learning is imparted is part of the social interactions and expectations. Metacognitive strategies play an important role in this teaching and learning (T&L) environment. In his Bagatelle Model, Ross Cooper (2011: .5) states 'that social interactions are part of a very large and complex pattern of information'. He notes that all of us are part of neurodiversity and entitled to be different and learn differently.

As a community of neurodivergent adults, we recognise that all of us are of value to society, cultural capital and global economies. Therefore, it only makes sense that teaching and learning values these differences. It is now well understood that to be a neurodivergent adult means it is likely there are a variety of overlapping conditions (WAC, 2018). These are all differences to be valued as having the potential to contribute to our neurodiverse society. In the paper 'Studying during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic' (Martin & Cannon, 2020), the authors note teaching and learning in HE needs to consider ways of optimising the university experience for all neurodivergent students.

Furthermore, Martin and Cannon discuss the acronym REAL, which stands for; reliable, empathic, anticipatory and logical (2020: 2). This concept considers the importance of staff and systems being joined up in delivering appropriate teaching and learning. Empathy is required to put in place arrangements for the student to avoid learning confusion or conflicting advice. They further discuss that anticipation is about thinking ahead and therefore logical systems and logical communication need to be clear, precise and consistent (Martin & Cannon, 2020)

In our HETT manifesto, we are calling for these logical systems and communications though the removal of obstacles to learning. To this end, we propose a framework of entitlement.

The HE teaching and learning experience for neurodivergent students

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (2012: 11), defines indirect discrimination as follows:

A further or higher education institution may be indirectly discriminating against you if a provision, criterion or practice applied to all students (or a particular student group, such as postgraduate students), puts you and others who share your protected characteristic at a particular disadvantage, and it cannot be objectively justified as 'a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

The EHRC recommends that the terms 'provision', 'criterion' or 'practice' should be interpreted broadly as they are not specifically defined by the Equality Act (2010). Where a provision, criterion or practice is putting a student with a disability at a substantial disadvantage, the academic institution must take such steps as it is reasonable to avoid that disadvantage. Examples of a provision, criterion or practice are: formal or informal policies, rules, practices, arrangements, criteria, conditions, prerequisites, qualifications or provisions.

Where a physical feature is putting a student with a disability at a substantial disadvantage compared to other students, providers must take such steps as it is reasonable to avoid that disadvantage. This is particularly the case for remote learning; in the current time of Covid-19, providers need to assess student need and provide reasonable adjustments in the virtual learning environment. Students with disabilities expect their universities to provide a fully supportive and inclusive teaching and learning experience; when they do not feel part of an inclusive environment, this impacts significantly on student confidence to complete their course.

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Learning remotely can place substantial demands on cognitive processing and working memory skills; it is draining. This new, unfamiliar way of learning requires confident and automatic computer literacy skills, the ability to navigate a range of digital platforms seamlessly and locate required information accurately. These are often areas where students with hidden disabilities face challenges. In addition, they lack the usual prompts and triggers that punctuated their days and the routines necessary to maintain motivation levels, focus and concentration. The dynamics of intrapersonal engagement and discussion provided through regular ‘sounding boards’, which many dyslexic and neurodivergent students rely on to process their ideas and thinking, have been taken away:

‘Returning as mature student to HE, 2 years ago, my experience was one of loneliness. I was unaware of all the resources available to me. There was no clear induction for students who are disabled. I felt the Dyslexia and Disability support service was generic and I felt like a number.’

Marcia Brissett-Bailey, 2020

The Disabled Student Allowance (DSA)

The Non-Medical Helper Providers Quality Assurance Framework (DSA-QAG, 2018), set out the expectations and underlying principles with which to measure support services provided to disabled students. These principles include good quality support to enable students to demonstrate their academic ability and enable their independence, and that is given in a way agreed with the student, which suits their learning needs and is compatible with their course and programme of study.

It is unclear how the principles and quality of provision are being upheld by the DSA system, and especially since the onset of Covid-19. In practice, it appears that Quality Assurance has tended to focus on the providers and their ‘services’ rather than the creation of a well-managed, fully supported and seamless journey that makes up the student experience. Students often report the lack of a central point of contact and consistent support to guide them through the process.

To manage the DSA application process successfully, it is evident that students require a significant amount of self-awareness, prior knowledge and effective communication skills. An evaluation report of DSA by Johnson et al. (2019) found that support offered by Higher Education Providers (HEPs) is not consistent across the sector and the level of help provided at DSA application stage varied considerably. Although most students were satisfied with the overall experience of needs assessment, those with a specific learning disability were least satisfied with the type of support offered and the amount of non-medical help they were entitled to.

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There remain challenges for HEPs to overcome in terms of smoothing out variability between different academic departments or even the approaches of individual academics. Some HEPs have suggested that they would like to return to a situation where they have more involvement in the application process, so that they can provide better assistance to their students. The future remains uncertain with the closure of DSA-QAG and its replacement. In the interim, the Department for Education (DfE) issued a note of information to students in November 2019, which stated:

DSA-QAG currently provides a search tool for needs assessment centres on the DSA- QAG website, which will not be available following DSA-QAG's closure. Instead, the Student Loans Company (SLC) will direct students to a list of the available needs assessment centres in the DSA1 letter that students receive informing them that they are eligible for DSAs'. (DSA-QAG 2018 p1)

Students with disabilities are expected to navigate the system alone to access the specialist support they need. Currently, they are not able to visit their HEP's for guidance and to apply for DSA. Students have to process and filter large amounts of written information and complete forms digitally.

Despite these limitations to the student experience in HE, improvements are possible. Some of these are set out in the Framework of Entitlement below.

The Framework of Entitlement

- **Anticipatory information:** HEP's should provide prospective students with accessible and clear information prior to application for the DSA, alongside guidance on accessing support afterwards to ensure better take-up.
- **Inclusive practice** and anticipatory reasonable adjustments; providers have a duty when considering how best to remove barriers to learning.
- **Accessibility:** HEP's need to explore arrangements, which enable a student to better access their studies.
- **Reasonable adjustments:** academic staff should make the design and delivery of their teaching materials as inclusive as possible.
- **Consultation:** courses and programmes should be designed and delivered in consultation with disabled students and disabled people's organisations. This is particularly important when developing online and blended learning.
- **Student voices and flexible methods of assessment:** alternative methods of assessment should be made available. It is good practice to discuss changes with students and for providers to review the arrangements in place to ensure that they are still appropriate. Validation committees should include neurodivergent students.
- **Pastoral care:** advice and support should be in place from the outset to address any problems arising on the course or during assessment. Students should receive regular tutorials to evaluate their learning experience and address any difficulties or problems as early as possible.
- **Mental health:** ongoing attention must be given to monitoring the mental health of neurodivergent students during their time at university, particularly during the current pandemic.

Higher Education Think Tank (HETT) Manifesto and Framework of Entitlement

Dr Katherine Hewlett, Founder of AchieveAbility, Liz Gentilcore

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Post Covid: Good Practice in Workplace Adjustments

Katherine Kindersley, Director of Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy

www.workingwithdyslexia.com

This article draws on the discussions and feedback (emails/ telephone conversations / written reports) to the Director and the team of assessors and trainers at Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy (DAC) working with a range of employers and employees through the dramatic changes in workplace practice as a result of the Covid pandemic.

Promoting Successful Performance

‘For successful and productive working, the barriers preventing neurodivergent employees from working effectively must be removed’.

Katherine Kindersley in AchieveAbility E-Journal October 2021



Photo by Bret Kavanaugh

Post Covid: Good Practice in Workplace Adjustments

Katherine Kindersley, Director of Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy

A New Flexibility?

In response to the health risk posed by the pandemic, we have all had to change the way we work (Aitken-Foxet al., 2020). The details of how we have had to adapt will have been determined by individual circumstances, but for the most part, we have had to make the sort of changes in our work practices that we could not have imagined possible at the beginning of 2020. The pandemic has forced the pace of change and businesses, managers and employees have been compelled work differently to survive (Savic, 2020).

Does that mean that there is now a new readiness to be flexible in the way we work, with rigid approaches and attitudes belonging to a past time? The hope is that the experience of working in new and different ways will encourage managers to respond in an appropriate and timely way to the needs of individuals and be flexible as to what is possible, so employees will not face unnecessary barriers and can be enabled to do their best work.

Neurodiversity
in the
Workplace



Embracing Diversity

Most employers would claim that an underlying principle of their activities is to embrace diversity and support and foster inclusion

(www.acas.org.uk, 2021). Supporting this principle is their commitment and belief in the values of equality, development and well-being. Yet if employers are to ensure that their workplaces are inclusive in practice, there must be a commitment and a readiness to make workplace adjustments for those who would benefit from working in different ways.

However, we frequently hear of cases where managers are resistant to making adjustments and there is a lack of disability awareness (WAC, 2017): ‘There are established ways of working; this is our way of doing things; the due process must be followed; job descriptions cannot be adapted; the job means that we need to have those skills demonstrated 95% of the time’. In other cases, individuals are left to research and organise support for themselves (WAC, 2017). They may manage to do this, but then there are long delays before adjustments are put in place, resulting in great anxiety and stress while they wait unsupported. This has been shown in Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy work (DAC Trainer’s Job Coaching Report on employee for manager, 10th December 2020 and others on file). There can be delays in ordering equipment and assistive software, with further delays before software is loaded onto the computer and then no training is offered in its use. The employee waits and struggles. No job skills coaching is offered – often a valuable adjustment to help the employee work more efficiently. During the past 12–18 months, with most people working from home, and with the difficulties in maintaining regular and close communication between manager and team member, we have seen the delays in offering appropriate adjustments increase (Kindersley, 2020). Employers need to ensure that their policies are working in practice and be proactive in supporting their employees.



Post Covid: Good Practice in Workplace Adjustments

Katherine Kindersley, Director of Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy

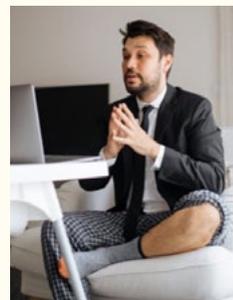
Awareness of Neurodiversity

Most of the resistance for making adjustments comes from a lack of understanding and knowledge about neurodiversity (WAC, 2017). To create this understanding, essential if the neurodivergent employee is to be supported appropriately, there needs to be awareness training in neurodiversity across organisations, for Human Resources, Occupational Health, managers and their teams. Awareness training helps to bring about an informed culture, encouraging an inclusive and flexible style of management (Discussions with managers during Neurodiversity Awareness Training delivered by Kindersley, 2020 / 2021).

At the individual level, the process of assessment and the involvement of managers in this process also help to increase awareness and improve practice. The diagnostic assessment provides information about the way the employee best processes and manages information (Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy, 2021). The discussion in the Workplace Needs Assessment helps employers know what to do, as it identifies the appropriate and bespoke workplace adjustments that are needed in the context of the particular job role and responsibilities. The resulting recommendations, whether for assistive technology and/or specialist job skills coaching or different ways of working for the manager, all help to develop awareness and practice.

Changing Work Patterns

As a result of the pandemic, work patterns are changing and it seems that a blended mix of home and office working will become commonplace (Ro, 2020). The neurodivergent employee may especially welcome this new flexibility, having found that home working allows a greater freedom to work in the way which best suits. Yet it is also true that remote working, separated from the normal work environment, can also be extremely challenging (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020). Employers need to understand these challenges so they can respond appropriately.



The challenges we hear about most frequently are as follows (Kindersley, 2020):

- Feelings of isolation: loss of interaction with colleagues; a loss of collaborative working with the team and associated with this, a feeling of a loss of support. Gone is the opportunity to ask the quick question of a colleague, to check on the direction, or the priority of a task
- Loss of structure to the working day – the day becomes unstructured and endless
- Lack of appropriate space – homes are not normally set up as workplaces – and for a range of reasons, space may be restricted. There may be additional challenges of working alongside family, children, pets
- Loss of 1:1 meetings with Line Manager (LM) – time is pressurized for LMs too and under pressure, one to one meetings seem the easiest thing to drop
- All day electronic communication & emails – everything is online, in front of a screen.
- Back-to-back *Zoom/Teams* meetings – are exhausting
- Everything can distract at home with no distance from the demands of domestic tasks
- For new employees / new managers –with all inductions and contact on video, it is more difficult to build relationships.
- Over months, it has been found that even long-term colleagues can lose touch.

Post Covid: Good Practice in Workplace Adjustments

Katherine Kindersley, Director of Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy



It is important that we learn from this feedback. Working remotely, especially over a long time, is lonely, isolating and stressful (Li et al, 2020). Feelings of isolation and lack of support create significant barriers against successful working for all employees and particularly so for neurodivergent individuals (WAC, 2017).

Good communication underpins successful organisations and flourishing businesses.

Maintaining Mental Health & Wellbeing

- Help employees feel connected by linking the team together for informal, outside work chats. Schedule coffee breaks through the week at a certain time for everyone.
- Create for example, an online social channel – where people can share out of work activities, interests, holiday snaps. Have a Friday end of day video call to talk about things away from work –plans for the weekend / films/ online Pilates classes.
- One very successful example from one organisation was to give everybody an additional day off in the month. Everyone had to share in advance what they were planning to do and then to talk about their day afterwards – from senior managers to new recruits.
- Develop a workplace buddy scheme for support and advice.
- Point people to support mechanisms within the organisation.
- Provide mental health/counselling online.

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Further Ideas for Adjustments by Managers

The following pointers are valid whether the team is working from home or in the normal work location (Kindersley, 2020):

- Maintain regular one to one sessions, even if under pressure. They are particularly important for neurodivergent team members. Find out what is or is not working. Even brief discussions can acknowledge achievements, clarify difficulties and provide a way forward.
- Provide clear and **explicit** communication. Support oral direction / instruction with written back up.
- Help with sifting emails; not all emails need to be forwarded, read and acted upon by everyone.
- Ensure day-to-day tasks and targets are clear and achievable.
- Encourage 'to do' lists, systems to support organisation.
- Help with structure, of activity and of written documents. Provide templates. Give concrete examples of good practice.
- Give guidance about task priorities.
- Keep staff informed of changes / updates across the business.

An employment lawyer once said to me that if managers would only sit down and talk and listen to their team members, there would be no more employment tribunals. In spite of oversimplifying the case, there is much truth in this statement. (Kindersley Interview, 2009, with John Mackenzie, solicitor advocate, specialist in dyslexia and disability discrimination law.

Good communication enhances focus, engagement & productivity levels

Ideas for Working Remotely

(Kindersley 2020/ 2021 Online Awareness Training)

Create a designated work zone

Even if space at home is limited, a designated work zone, however small, will support motivation and focus.

Support concentration

- Keep a clean uncluttered work area, clear of household / domestic distractions.
- Try using noise-cancelling headphones.
- If preferred, have some 'white' noise on in the background to mask sounds.
- If possible, work in an area with natural light and a window for fresh air.

Schedule breaks away from the workspace to maintain perspective & reduce stress

Develop stretching exercises to use while working at the desk. Take some form of exercise. Move away for coffee / lunch breaks.

Structure the day and create a rhythm for the work day

If the 'normal' routine was to plan the day ahead on the commute to work, recreate this time. Sit on a park bench with a coffee before the morning session begins. If a lunchtime walk helped clear the head, still do it, take a lunchtime walk outside. Schedule in a short break mid-morning and afternoon with colleagues for informal chats

Make maximum use of 1:1 with line managers

If one to one sessions are used effectively, they are less likely to be rescheduled – or dropped. Prepare for them. Ask questions. Gain clarity over priorities.

Post Covid: Good Practice in Workplace Adjustments

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Meetings & Training Courses

Online meetings and training courses need careful consideration and managing if they are to be inclusive and allow all individuals to participate. Neurodivergent individuals in particular can find processing the continual flow of words and sustaining high concentration levels difficult (Employee feedback in DAC Diagnostic and Workplace Assessment reports 2020 – 21). Further hindering effective communication, the non-verbal clues, the subtle expressions, the eye movements, the physical movements that we can be alert to when sitting around a real table, are largely removed.



The following adjustments are examples of supportive practice (Kindersley, 2020).

- Email agendas / handouts / training documents in advance to give time for team members to process information and prepare satisfactorily.
- Schedule meetings with good intervals between them through the day/week. Create breaks in long meetings.
- Make ground rules clear, with one participant speaking at a time.
- Appoint a facilitator; ensure everybody has an opportunity to contribute.
- People may need to be asked to speak clearly or more slowly than usual. It can be difficult to absorb information at speed in a remote meeting.
- Some people may find it hard to retrieve words 'on the spot', or in front of large groups – consideration needs to be given to this if their voice is to be heard. Consider break out rooms to feed into the larger group.
- Record discussions so they can be reviewed later as needed, removing the demands of note-taking.
- Managers might use the one to ones to gain feedback on what might make meetings more effective / productive for team members.

Technology

It is important for the usual workplace equipment and software to be replicated at home. This includes computers, laptops with all the usual licences and additional screens which can be particularly useful to support working memory and processing speed when working with electronic documents.



Neurodivergent employees are often willing to use software at home which they were reluctant to use when surrounded by colleagues in the office (Accordmarketing, 2020). This is particularly true of **dictation software** which can be used without comment and perhaps also of **text reading software**. Such speech to text and text to speech software programs often make working with text easier and quicker.

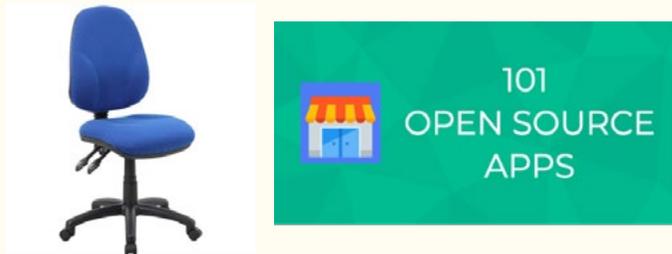
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The printer may have been shared in the office, but a **printer** at home will enable those with a preference to read from hard copy to do so, away from the computer screen.



An **office chair**, not the kitchen stool, will support productive working.



There are now many useful open source apps and for example, one that people find particularly useful is *Grammarly*, supporting spelling and grammar accuracy.

Looking Forward

Returning to workplaces will bring its own challenges and individuals with a neurodivergent profile may find the changes difficult to manage. There will be new protocols, new systems, new ways of working, new team members, along with the etiquette of the workplace to adjust to. Timetable and time keeping requirements will change. It may be the first time the employee is working in a physical location alongside other colleagues.

Once again, there will need to be careful planning for this transition. Will there be a 'return to work' meeting to consider and prepare for the changes? Will there be a gradual staggered return? Will previously furloughed staff be given support after a long time away from work? Will there be allowances to catch up with backlogs with realistic targets for catching up?

Hope for the Future Post Covid?

Looking to the future, it is hoped that the experience of having to work differently will help employers embrace a new willingness to be flexible and proactive, offering adjustments to enable neurodivergent employees to work productively and successfully. We need a workplace culture which includes a diverse workforce and offers reasonable, appropriate and supportive adjustments as standard.

Managers will need to consider the particular pressures of these new demands on their team members and be proactive in making adjustments to support wellbeing and productivity.

Post Covid: Good Practice in Workplace Adjustments

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How Dyslexic People Work

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Photo by Fakurian Designs

Introduction

2022 marks the 50th Anniversary of the British Dyslexia Association (BDA). Since the 1970s, significant changes have occurred in the UK Labour market. (Office of National Statistics, 2019) These changes have had a major impact on the way dyslexic people are employed. Data generated from a model I developed for this article suggests that

- The differences between the ways dyslexic and non-dyslexic people work have widened
- The level of disadvantage faced by dyslexic people in the labour market has been amplified
- Disadvantage impacts on dyslexic people who reach all level of educational attainment
- Disadvantage faced by dyslexic people is compounded by poverty, and ethnicity

This article uses data sets, which specifically refer to dyslexia. However the trends discussed probably apply to all neurodivergent people.

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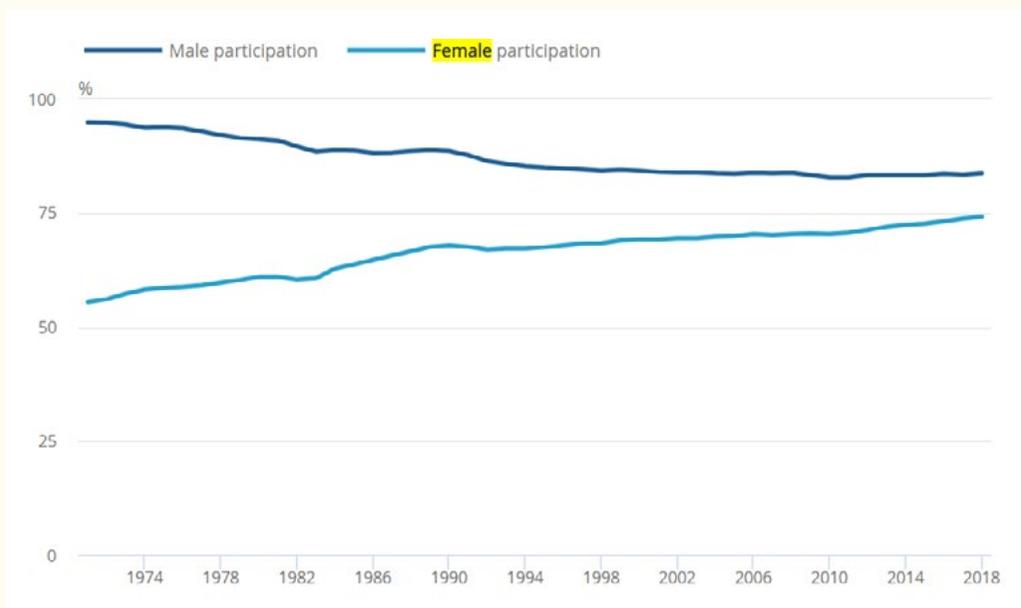
Key Trends in the UK Labour Market

This section looks at some major labour market trends that have occurred in the past fifty years .

Increased Female Participation

Between 1970 and 2020, the employment rate for women rose from 52.8% to 72.6%. (Office for national Statistics, 2019 b)

Table 1: Participation rates of men and women (aged 16 to 64 years), UK, seasonally adjusted, 1971 to 2018



The rise in female employment has led to an increase in the number of dyslexic people in employment. It may also have changed who gets assessed for dyslexia. In 1970 Macdonald Critchley estimated that 4 times more boys than girls were dyslexic (Critchley, 1970; p91). Figures for the percentage of black or Asian people assessed at that time are not easy to find (Kirby, 2020).

In the 70s, only 10% of newly qualified solicitors were female. By 2016 60% of solicitors were women. Similarly in 1982, only 0.25% of newly recruited solicitors came from BAME communities. By 2015 this figure had risen to 14 % (Solicitors Regulatory Authority, 2017, p21; p12).

The people able to access dyslexia assessments therefore frequently more accurately reflects parental and societal expectations relating to the type of people likely to access good jobs, rather than the actual incidence of dyslexia across the population. This may be why Asher and Martin Hoyles asked ‘where are the Black dyslexics?’ In the introduction to their book *Dyslexia from a Cultural Perspective* (Hoyles, 2007). The incidence of dyslexia is now widely regarded as being roughly equal among men and women and people of all backgrounds (Readingwell, 2021).

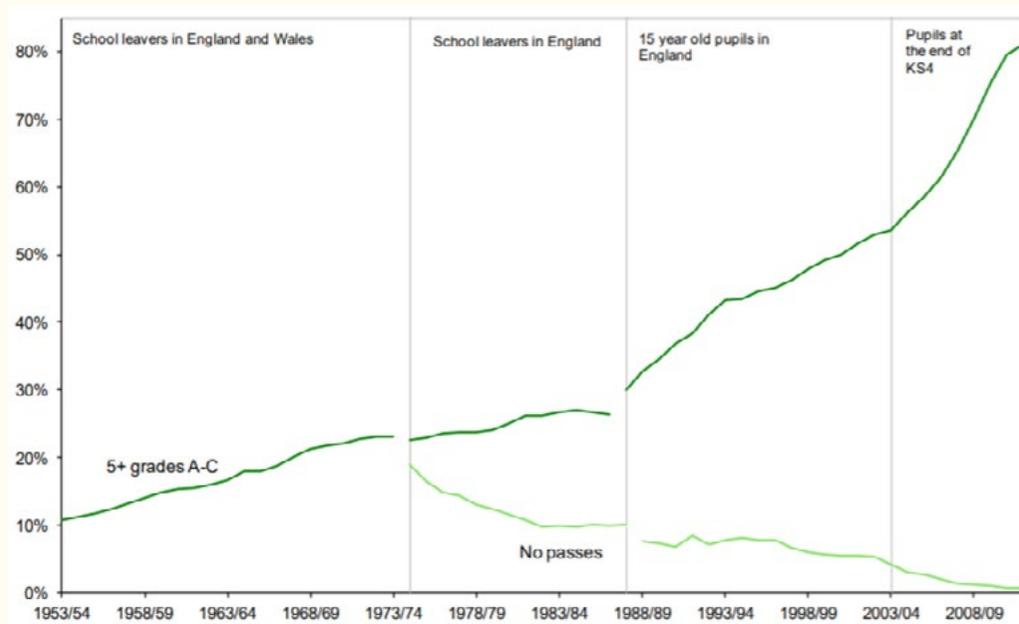
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Changes in Education Attainment and Occupational Structure

In 1970, 20% of the population obtained the equivalent of 5 GCSEs. By 2020, this figure increased to 80%. (House of Commons Library, 2012) 8% of the population participated in Higher Education in 1970, by 2020 this figure rose to 50% (BBC News , 2019 a).

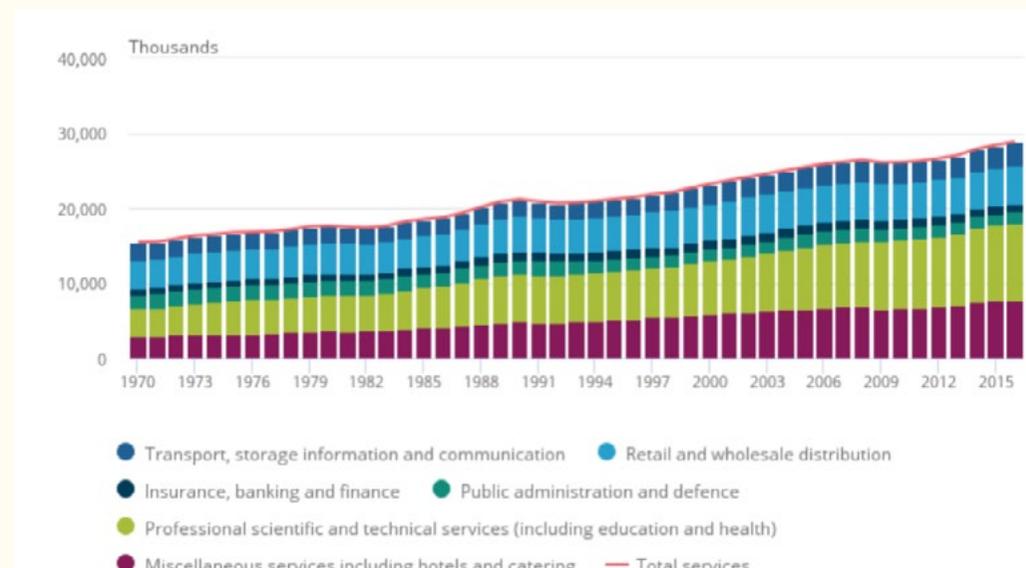
Table 2: Achievement of O Levels / GCSEs, House of Commons Library



Source: Bank of England a Millennium of Macroeconomic Data

Professional scientific and technical jobs, (a loose proxy for graduate Jobs) have doubled in numbers during the past 50 years.

Table 3: UK Employment by Sector (Office for National Statistics, 2019 b)



Source: Bank of England

In the early 70s, most jobs were open to people with few qualifications. In 2021, it is necessary to obtain GCSEs to complete an entry level Apprenticeship (Careermap, 2021).

Many people, who started careers without qualifications in the 1970s retired as skilled well-paid employees. Opportunities for career progression in posts that do not require GCSE or equivalent qualifications in English and Maths are now limited.

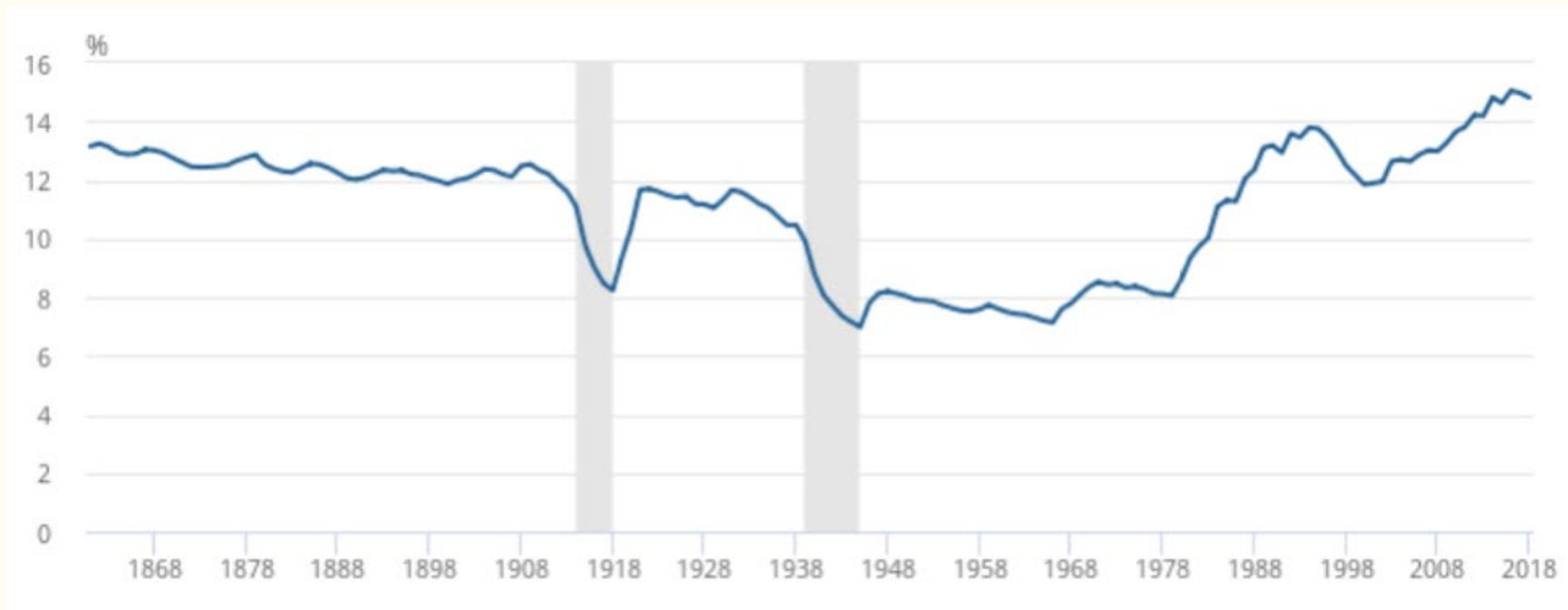
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Changes in mode of Employment

The level of self-employment in the economy has risen from 8% in 1971 to 14% in 2020. Temporary employment and portfolio working have also increased.

Table 4: Share of Employment that is self-employed UK 1861-2018 (Office for National Statistics, 2019 f)



Source: Bank of England - A Millennium of Macroeconomic Data

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An attempt to produce a model to compare the way dyslexics were employed in the 1970s with their mode of employment in the 2020s

Professor Logan's research into entrepreneurship in 2000 and 2009 (Logan, 2009) was ground-breaking in the way it drew attention to the high incidence of dyslexic entrepreneurs in both the UK and USA. It also provides some of the best available data relating to the way dyslexic people are employed. I have tried to use Professor Logan's findings in combination with ONS data, to build a model, which explores the differences between the way dyslexic people worked in the 1970s and the ways in which they work now.

Assumptions and limitations

Several assumptions are embedded within my model.

- The incidence of dyslexia in the population is 10% and constant through time (NHS, 2018)
- The incidence of dyslexia among self-employed people is the same as that among entrepreneurs. Professor Logan estimates this figure to be 19%
- The incidence of dyslexia among people employed in professional occupations is the same as that among corporate managers. This was identified to be 3% by Logan
- Dyslexic people are as likely to be employed in non-graduate PAYE roles as non - dyslexic people. This may be optimistic as Nomis (Nomis, 2021) show that associate professional, administrative, and secretarial roles (office jobs) account for 58% of all non-graduate employment. Dyslexic people may face many of the same challenges sustaining this type of employment as they face in sustaining employment in professional roles

The model has limitations.

- Professor Logan's sample size was small 215. The 95% confidence interval for her estimate of the incidence of dyslexia among entrepreneurs and corporate managers was (+ or – 2.5% and 5% respectively). This was sufficient to support her findings regarding the prevalence of dyslexic entrepreneurs. However, when the data is combined with the ONS data, the 95% confidence intervals widen as numbers grow larger. For the 1970 data, they rise to + or – 3% for corporate managers / professionals, + or – 4 for entrepreneurs / self-employed and + or – 7 for the calculated figure for unemployment. For the 2020 data, the confidence intervals for professionals are + or – 7%. For the self-employed they are + or – 8% and for unemployment they are + or – 14%. This means that it is not possible to be 95% confident of some of the comparisons between 1970 and 2020, which draws on data generated by the model. The figures are however illustrative of trends that are more likely than not to have occurred.
- The research was done at a point in time. Logan's UK research took place in the year 2000. In the 1970s, the barriers to dyslexic graduates entering professional occupations were lower. Many managers had secretaries, psychometric testing was in its infancy, interviews were less formal and performance appraisals were rare. By 2020 barriers to entry had increased. It is therefore quite likely the percentage of dyslexic people who were in professional occupations in 1970 was greater than 3% and that this figure has continued to fall below 3% Conversely the percentage of entrepreneurs who are dyslexic may have risen above 19%. Access to broadband and IT have made it easier to freelance. Furthermore fast growth sectors which employ a disproportionate number of Neurodivergent people such as the creative digital and tech industries (BIMA, 2019) also employ large number of freelancers (Creative Industries Federation, 2017).
- Dyslexia frequently carries stigma; disclosure can lead to discrimination (Achievability, 2017). Dyslexic corporate managers may therefore have not accurately disclosed to Professor Logan.

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Findings

Table 5: Model Findings – Calculation of Percentage of Dyslexic and Non-Dyslexic People working in different occupation categories.

1970	Professional Scientific Technical Occupations	Other PAYE Employment	All PAYE Employment (Professional and Non-Professional)	Self-Employment	Unemployed
All	13%	75%	88%	8%	4%
Dyslexic People	4% (+ or -3%)	75%	79%	15% (+ or- 4%)	6% (+ or - 7%)
Non-Dyslexic People	14%	75%	89%	7%	4%
2020					
All	31%	51%	81%	14%	4%
Dyslexic People	9% (+or- 7%)	51%	60%	27% (+ or – 8%)	13% (+or-15%
Non-Dyslexic People	32%	51%	83%	13%	3%

The Model Combines data from (Logan, 2001) (Office of National Statistics, 2019) (Office for National Statistics , 2021)

The model suggests that the differences between the modes of employment experienced by dyslexic and non-dyslexic people have widened. In 1970 79% of dyslexic people and 89% of non-dyslexic people were employed in PAYE jobs. By 2020, this figure had fallen to 60% for dyslexic people and 83% for non-dyslexic people.

The percentage of dyslexic people who are self-employed had risen from 15% to 27%.

In 1970, a dyslexic person had less than twice the average probability of being unemployed. A Dyslexic person is now more than four times more likely to be unemployed than a non-dyslexic person.

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Implications and conclusions

In this section, I explore the implications of the trends in each category of employment for dyslexic people.

Managerial Professional and Scientific Jobs / Graduate Jobs

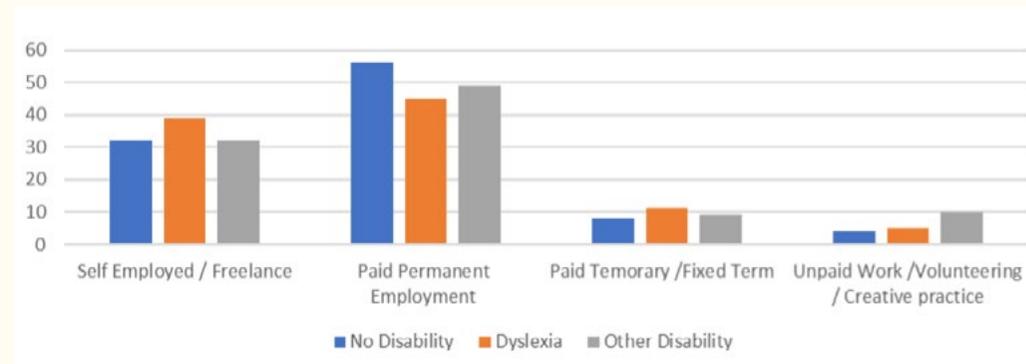
According to the House of Commons Library, 6% of all Higher Education students have a specific learning difficulty and most often dyslexia (House of Commons, 2021). This means possibly 30% of all dyslexic people are now going to University. The House of Commons report goes on to show graduates with disabilities including dyslexia are nearly as likely to be employed as the average graduate.

Overall, 74% of graduates enter Managerial and Professional occupations (Markinstyle, 2021). However, Professor Logan's research suggests dyslexic people including graduates are one third as likely to work in these occupations than non-dyslexic people. Dyslexic graduates while still being employed therefore appear to be more likely than non-dyslexic graduates to be employed in less secure occupations, to freelance or establish their own businesses.

This finding is reinforced by evidence in Creative Graduate's Creative Futures, which suggests that in the creative sector at least, dyslexic graduates are as likely to be employed doing professional activity in the sector as non-dyslexic graduates, but the mode of employment is more likely to be in temporary, self-employed or portfolio roles (Institute of Employment Studies, 2009).

The Employment disadvantage for dyslexic graduates therefore appears to be mostly experienced in the form of less secure employment rather than unemployment. It is important to note that dyslexic graduates appear to be significantly more likely to be employed than dyslexic non-graduates. It could therefore be argued higher education is disproportionately valuable to dyslexic people.

Table 6: Differences in the current activities of Creative Graduates



Source: Creative Graduates Creative Futures Institute of Employment 2009

Dyslexic graduates and professionals cannot rely on a supportive employer to nurture their talent. They need to be entrepreneurial in seeking employed or self-employed opportunities. They also need to take direct responsibility for the development of their own human capital.

Professional careers provide many graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds with a vehicle to achieve social mobility. The under-representation of dyslexic people in these occupations, makes it harder for dyslexic people to be socially mobile.

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Non-Professional Employment

According to the model in 2020, 51% of dyslexic people are employed in non-professional jobs, the Government's Commission on Employment and Skills, Future of Work Report notes that non-professional employment is becoming less plentiful and less secure (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2014).

Support mechanisms such as access to work need to respond to this reduction in secure employment. Instead of helping employers to make reasonable adjustments, it would be more efficient to equip dyslexic people to move with minimum friction between roles. This could be achieved by providing the individual not the employer with assistive technology and agreeing support such as job coaching directly with the individual. Agreed adjustments could be listed in a personalised support passport (GMB, 2019).

Self-Employment

The model suggests 27% of dyslexic people are self-employed, this compares with 13% of non-Dyslexic People. The incidence of self-employment differs with gender and age (Gosimpletax, 2021). Twice as many men as women are self-employed. The percentage of people who are self-employed rises significantly among the over 55s. In the overall population 52% of self-employed people are graduates. It is likely that dyslexic graduates are particularly likely to become self-employed or freelance once their career has become established.

Entrepreneurial skills are a core element of a dyslexic person's survival toolkit. These skills need to be developed both in education and in the community. Self-Employed people are less well paid than people in employment but can achieve greater job satisfaction and flexibility (Gosimpletax, 2021b). This flexibility is crucial for dyslexic people seeking to shape a work environment to fit their spiky profile (Genius Within, 2021).

The choice to become self-employed is much easier if you are financially secure and have a recognised skill. It is more difficult for younger dyslexic people or dyslexic people who do not own assets such as a house, car, or laptop, or for dyslexic people without qualifications, to follow this path.

Unemployment

The model suggests the unemployment rate amongst dyslexic people is 13%. The figure estimated by the model is two and a half times the average for people with no qualifications (see Table 7). The employment disadvantage faced by dyslexic people cannot therefore simply be explained by lack of education attainment.

Unemployment does not just impact the one in eight dyslexic people unemployed at any one time. All dyslexic people are likely to move in and out of employment more frequently and with more friction than non-dyslexic people. In a 40-year career, the average dyslexic person will spend 5 years being unemployed. Fear of unemployment consequently impacts on work choices made by all dyslexic people.

Education attainment is disproportionately important in enabling dyslexic people to secure employment. As discussed earlier dyslexic graduates are nearly as likely to be in some form of employment as non-dyslexic graduates; thus the likelihood of unemployment rises steeply in less qualified groups.

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Table 7: Percentage of 16-to-64-year-olds, who were unemployed and not in full-time education, by ethnicity and qualification level (Office for National Statistics, 2020)

Highest qualification held	All	Asian	Black	Mixed	White	Other
All	3%	4%	6%	5%	3%	4%
Level 4 and above	2%	4%	6%	3%	2%	3%
Level 3	3%	6%	7%	6%	3%	8%
Level 2	3%	5%	7%	6%	3%	9%
Below Level 2	5%	7%	10%	11%	4%	6%

Unemployment is not evenly distributed. It is concentrated in areas with highest levels of poverty. 40% of people on out of work benefits live in the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods (HM Government , 2010). Table 7 highlights the way disadvantage is compounded by ethnic background, and lack of educational attainment. The model shows dyslexia further amplifies the risk of unemployment by a factor of at least four. This would mean dyslexic people from some ethnic backgrounds, who live in the most deprived neighbourhoods and do not hold Level 2 qualifications will face unemployment rates of over 40%.

Professor Kirby (Kirby, 2021) (Kirby & Cleaton , 2018), rightly argues people living in the communities most likely to be disadvantaged by unemployment should be screened for neurodivergence at primary school. This would reduce the individual's risk of unemployment and yield life cycle savings to society (BBC NEWS, 2019a). Similarly, Job Centre plus staff need to be trained to recognise the disproportionate number of unassessed Neurodivergent People, who will seek their support.

Data

This article uses data generated by a model. This data illustrates likely trends, but is not good enough to allow for academically valid statistical comparisons to be made, relating to all the changes in modes of employment, experienced by dyslexic people over the last 50 years. I used the model because little, actual data exists relating to the way dyslexic people are employed. Dyslexic or more generally neurodivergent people form the largest group of permanently disabled people who move in and out of employment (DWP & Department for Health , 2016) & (ACAS, Achived 2021) . Better data would lead to better policy.

Data relating to the incidence of dyslexia in deprived neighbourhoods and among people from minority ethnic backgrounds is particularly weak and unconvincing. Many studies quote that 40% of unemployed people exhibit dyslexic traits but have not been formally assessed (Work and Pensions Committee Parliament 2012). It is also known 40% of unemployed people live in the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods. (HM Government , 2010) It is therefore surprising we do not know how many dyslexic people live in these communities. The Joseph Roundtree Trust, reported that the recorded apparent incidence of dyslexia is higher in more affluent communities. They go onto suggest this may be because of underassessment in deprived communities. (Joseph Roundtree Foundation p9; p17, 2016). Similarly, Professor Kirby has drawn attention to the lack of research relating to the incidence of dyslexia, or more importantly the assessment of dyslexia in minority communities (Kirby, 2020).

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Charles Freeman, Director Charles Freeman Projects

The future

It is tempting to hope Dyslexic and Neurodivergent people will be welcomed back into mainstream employment by 2070. Technology will reduce the dominance of written communication. A talent hungry knowledge economy needs the creative abilities of the neurodivergent mind. Green and new craft businesses should provide more opportunities for everyone to gain employment by following their passion. The future jobs report suggests this is not inevitable. The growth of AI could enable corporate employers to continue to marginalise employees who don't fit in, People in non-professional and managerial occupation may face increased job insecurity (UK Commission for Employment and Skills , 2014). Dyslexic and Neurodivergent people throughout their lives, therefore, need to be able to access catalytic support which releases their potential. This support should be designed to help them take ownership of their skills and shape employment pathways, which do not rely on corporate employers.

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Neurodiversity, empathy, anxiety and burnout – is this a roller coaster of intertwined emotions?

Professor Amanda Kirby MBBS MRCGP, PhD



Photo by Christian Erfurt

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What is burnout?

From a combination of reading, burnout is seen as a state of mind that comes with long-term, unresolved stresses that can negatively affect your work and your life. In an ideal world we would not wait till we are at that point as it is too late to deal with the key issues.

I am hearing more about this, and I wondered if some people are at greater risk of ‘burnout’ than others and consider how this may relate to anxiety, empathy and especially to neurodiversity.

What is empathy?

Empathy comes from the Greek word *empathia* meaning passion. Empathy is the ability to experience and understand what others feel without confusion between oneself and others. Knowing what someone else is feeling plays a fundamental role in interpersonal interactions. It is important for moral reasoning as well as prosocial behaviour. It is also sometimes described as meaning ‘the ability to understand and share the feelings of another’. We can sometimes confuse this with sympathy which relates to ‘feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else’s misfortune’.

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Empathy is defined as an emotional or cognitive response to another's emotional state (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004). It is assisted by other cognitive abilities such as executive functions, perception of visual cues (how we perceive what we are seeing), and how language is shaped and used and influenced by our social and cultural contexts (Decety, Norman, Berntson, & Cacioppo, 2012).

Some people have divided empathy into cognitive and affective components (Singer, 2006) :

- **Affective empathy** being the capacity for an individual to understand someone else's feelings and emotions by sharing these through observation or imagination of the experience (Singer & Lamm, 2009). This aspect of empathy creates compassionate actions (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004). You could say you are feeling for others
- **Cognitive empathy** has been described as the understanding of what someone else's emotions may be, without being emotionally involved (Shamay-Tsoory, Aharon-Peretz, & Perry, 2009). I see this as being able to perspective take, i.e. you may be concerned about World peace but know you are unlikely to be able to influence it

What is interesting and relevant to neurodiversity is this interplay with **cognitive and affective empathy**. Cognitive empathy requires executive functioning (EF) skills, especially in decision-making (whether or not to act on the emotional situation being witnessed or being read about in the papers or on TV. Challenges in executive functioning are very common in people with ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia and DCD (Developmental Coordination Disorder, also known as Dyspraxia) for example. Executive functioning also needs you be able have perspective and not get sucked into the middle of it

Some researchers have concluded that low **affective empathy** is the key empathy component related to antisocial behaviour (Zonneveld et al., 2017).

Decision making is thought to be affected by:

- your personal experiences that one recollects from the past in consideration about the future;so, if there are things in your past that have been challenging for you, you may become anxious thinking about how what is happening now relates to this
- your executive functioning skills such as working memory (how you process information and recall it), inhibition (the ability to not do something) and forward planning
- your ability to appraise what has happened and learn about this for next time

I, along with my colleague Miri Tal-Saban became interested in the intersection between cognitive and affective empathy in adults with DCD (Dyspraxia) and found higher rates on average of affective empathy than in people without DCD, meaning that some people with DCD actually have more empathy and not less. We do not know yet that whether caring more about people a case of vicarious anxiety) results in you worrying too much about everyone else and this combined with lowered cognitive empathy may result in increasing your own anxiety levels.

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Are some people more prone to ‘burn out’ than others?

I wonder if there are some people who get into a cycle of ‘**tend and befriend**’; reaching out and trying to sort out everyone else’s problems, worrying about everyone else and then going into emotional overdrive as a consequence leading to job (and home) burnout. I also wonder if this is something that happens more for some people with particular neurodivergent traits. It is almost like going into overdrive and you are unable to stop until you are completely exhausted. I describe it as a car without gears and a non-existent breaking system. You only stop when you crash. I have had conversations with a lot of people with ADHD describing this to me and I sort of recognise this myself too. One study from **2006 did find more people with ‘burn out’** had ADHD and some also Post Traumatic stress Disorder. Interestingly, also in a **study of pharmacists in 2016** in Japan showed that those with ADHD and with Autism Spectrum Conditions had a greater risk of ‘burnout’.

What is job burnout?

Job burnout is seen as a special type of work-related stress and seen as a state of physical or emotional exhaustion that also involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity. Burn out is included in the 11th Revision of the **International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)** as an occupational phenomenon. This is not a medical diagnosis and could be seen as someone who has become depressed and can also be associated with anxiety.

Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

It is characterized by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job; and
- reduced professional efficacy.”

Why could this be worse now?

We are hearing more about fatigue and emotional disconnection in the third lockdown phase (in the UK) of Covid19:

- This is **VUCA** ++
- Work/home life has become a blur at the edges and the **days have extended**
- Our support network may remain virtual
- Conversations online are often stilted and result in being more tiring and effortful

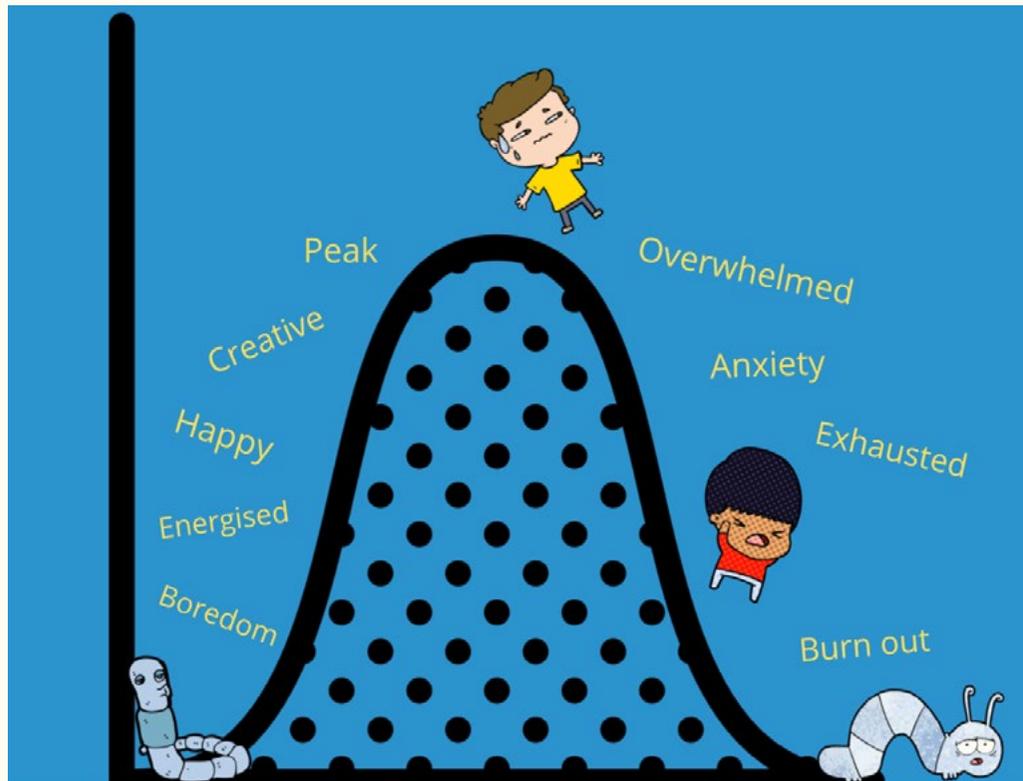
When there is volatility and change, this may mean we have to make more decisions in our lives. This may be harder for some people with weaker decision making skills

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If we could recognise the phases leading to burnout – could we stop it happening?

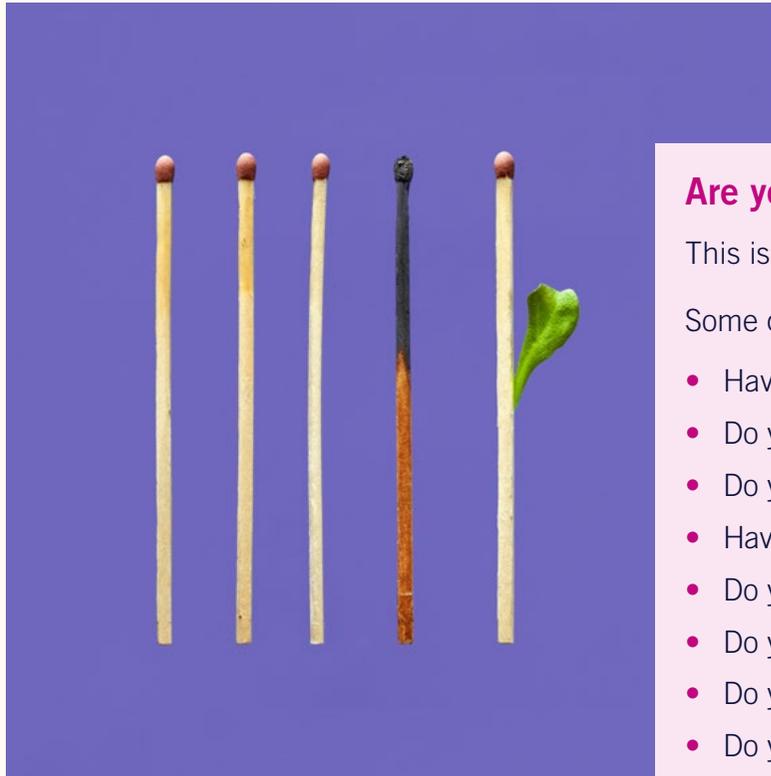
Different people have described the stages:



- **The honeymoon phase.** When we undertake a new task or job, we often start by experiencing high job satisfaction, commitment, energy, and creativity. It feels great
- **The balancing act** (the top of the curve) as opposed to the unbridled optimism and positiveness of that first phase. We are now clearly aware that some days are better than others regarding how well we are handling the stress on the job. Some days it does feel like we are going to fall off our perch and we are juggling too many balls (sorry for all the metaphors!)
- **Teetering over** – this is often a time if you recognise it you have a last chance to step back and gain some control.
- **Down the steep slope** – At this stage, you are likely to have some physical sensations of feeling stressed and you may have one or more of the following: headaches, backache, stomach upset and sleep disturbance, and a feeling of anxiety at times. You are becoming more focused on work frustrations and are pessimistic some of the time. You ruminate more and replay words people are saying to you. You feel more easily criticised and have less elastic stretch to cope on the not-so-good days. You just feel you want to run away or withdraw from everyone and put your head under the covers.
- **At the bottom.** This is depression. You are not enjoying the things you used to, you have sleep disturbance, crying for no reason, not wanting to engage at all with others. Drinking or using substances to 'block out' your emotions.

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Are you heading towards work burnout?

This is never just about work and usually a combination of factors at home and work.

Some questions to ask yourself.

- Have you become cynical or critical at work?
- Do you have a feeling of dread on a Sunday evening?
- Do you have trouble getting started and motivating yourself?
- Have you become irritable or impatient with co-workers, customers or clients?
- Do you avoid participating in conversations with others unless you have to?
- Do you find it hard to concentrate?
- Do you lack satisfaction from your achievements?
- Do you feel disillusioned about your job?
- Are you using food, drugs or alcohol to feel better or to reduce feelings?
- Have your sleep habits changed?
- Are you troubled by unexplained headaches, stomach or bowel problems, or other physical complaints?

Reflection about ourselves and how we behave can allow us to try to get ahead of the curve and not wait for burnout to happen again and again. This can certainly impact on wellbeing and self-confidence.

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12 steps to reduce future risks of burnout

- 1. Recognise that you are 'at risk' of burn out** in the first place. I think this is especially important if you have neurodiverse traits that lean towards having either an 'on or off' button.
- 2. Think about the patterns that led up to this if it has happened before** – talk about this with someone close to you.
- 3. Build in casual chat each day which is not work related** – small talk is actually important, e.g. an online lunch. Create a commute – walk out and back into your home. Change clothes at the end of the day.
- 4. Take breaks way from the computer e.g. 20-20-20 rule** – every 20 minutes look away for 20 metres for 20 seconds. Turn off the video camera for some meetings.
- 5. If you can move away from your desk between meetings** and have a one no-meeting day into your working week. Avoid going back to your desk at off-work times. Close your laptop, and turn off notifications.
- 6. Focus on one task at a time** – do not keep checking emails between tasks do them in batches.
- 7. Increase the frequency of setting regular goals** as this may be important in making changes happen and reviewing what is working. If you are a manager, short but regular reviews may be more impactful than having an annual review. **Try to set goals** for what must get done and what can wait. Be realistic.
- 8. Overwhelmed?** Discuss with your line manager. Are there unrealistic expectations on either side? Can you reach compromises or find solutions?
- 9. Seek support.** Whether you reach out to co-workers, friends or loved ones, support and collaboration might help you cope. If you have access to an employee assistance program, take advantage of relevant services.
- 10. Find something that you enjoy that can aid relaxation.** Explore programs that can help with stress such as yoga, meditation or tai chi. I have been using Guided Meditation using VR recently and have found it an amazing immersive way of staying focused. There is **some evidence of effectiveness** for this approach.
- 11. Get some exercise every day.** Regular physical activity can help you to better deal with stress it can also help you to focus on the tasks you need to. It can take your mind off work if you are in the moment.
- 12. Ensure you have enough sleep.** Get into good habits and avoid huge swings in timing when going to bed.

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The Power of Conversations: Supporting Inclusive Culture Within The Workplace

Becki Morris, Director of DCN, Associate Consultant for EMBED

Board Member for AchieveAbility and StageText



Photo by Fakurian Designs

The impact of the COVID pandemic has created immense challenges to the working practice and service provision of all sectors. Like all sectors, industries and organisations, the Heritage and the Creative Industries have had to adapt to rapid change and uncertainty.

This has been further impacted by the social inequalities such as digital exclusion, poverty and racism which were further emphasised by the pandemic and hierarchical structures and narratives, as well as the need for the audiences and workforce to share experiences and ideas.

The Disability Collaborative Network (DCN) was founded in 2015 to develop and nurture resources to support disabled and neurodivergent people working in and visiting heritage organisations across the UK. DCN works to develop cross sector collaboration and conversation to identify and support key areas of development for Heritage. Since 2018, DCN has become a Community Interest Company (CIC) and is now the heritage partner of EMBED and together we champion the importance of equitable and inclusive practice within Heritage and across sectors.

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Since the lockdown of March 2020, 77% of disabled people felt vulnerable to Covid.. During this time there was clear concern particularly about working practice that does not reflect the diversity of intersectional inclusive practice with family groups and social groups and is not effectively responding to the needs of visitors, staff and volunteers as they return to the working environment.

To date DCN and EMBED have supported over 100 organisations as they look to embed inclusive practice within heritage, including the collaboration with University of East Anglia School of Health Sciences to co-author reopening guidance for organisations to support disabled and neurodivergent people and to reduce risk of COVID-19 for audiences and workforce visiting and working in heritage . DCN also supported EMBED as they created and introduced the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Workplace Passports. We have worked in partnerships with other Heritage organisations such as Rebuilding Heritage funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and have worked with EMBED to offer matured business tools to support workplace adjustments and to support the experience of both the employer and employee.

This has created significant growth in the support we offer to reduce risk for colleagues who may be part of (or their families) the 'clinically extremely vulnerable' and 'clinically vulnerable' lists. This has been focused on how COVID could impact their personal health, managing health conditions, disabilities and sensory impairments and reducing the risk of self-advocacy, supporting colleagues to make inclusive smarter decisions by connecting the dots around conscious inclusion and the need for organisations and managers to take ownership.

The Role of Leadership and Management

Leadership and management have a vital role in facilitating conversations with their employees when it comes to building the confidence to take positive action in, and making, reasonable workplace adjustments to accommodate changing needs. This includes, but is not limited to, the role of front-line staff as observers and practitioners of visitor behaviour and in the causes of anxiety as visitors and staff returns to shops, museums and tourist attractions. Active listening of these frontline experiences, listening to lived experience is one of the key drivers for EMBED, and it is an essential part of creating accessible, inclusive and safe environments.

The art of active listening through authentic conversation can bring empathy and cultural intelligence in creating inclusive processes, but only if people feel able and safe to do so and comfortable to be their authentic selves, only then can we meet the needs of a changing society. A business leader has been quoted as saying 'Business should be part of the society in which they operate. The relationship between business and society is a two-way street' (Hailey, 2020:3).

In competitive funding streams within Heritage, it is critical to bring together collaboration to increase impact of positive change and fully understand both the need to remove the barrier and the action required to do this.

Collaboration will need to be with staff, volunteers and communities no matter the size or budgetary constraints of the organisation to create equitable practice and prioritised positive action towards sustainability of the sector itself.

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Being our authentic selves

Since the release of the WAC Report in 2018, the profile of neurodiversity within the UK is changing towards better positive representation within the workplace. This has happened through systematic methods within organisations such as passport schemes, networks and recognition of buddy systems. It reflects back to the importance of resourceful organisations in building knowledge, skills and confidence to disrupt the norm, to challenge legacy ways of working and to develop workplace practices where all staff, including disabled and neurodivergent people can thrive and develop.

The recent Creative Industries handbook by Universal Music UK (Universal Music, 2020) recognised the importance of clear, consistent messaging for prospective employees and the need for collaboration to understand the range of barriers encountered by neurodivergent and disabled people. The creation of the handbook (which is available to download) gives clear indicators of the importance of neurodiversity within the organisation and need for creative thinking:

‘It is a journey that has caused us to broaden our aims around diversity, to consider people who think differently and create differently. And it begins with respect: it’s not individuals that need to change; it’s company cultures. We need to make it OK to bring your whole self to work, whoever you are’

(Joseph, 2020:7).

Indeed, as the profile of neurodiversity increases, the importance of owning our personal narratives can reduce the risk of negative stereotyping bias and the telling of our own stories to reveal the cross profile and intersectionality of neurodiversity. This can potentially offer a more balanced option on the need for clarity and approach on complexity of diagnosis, to understand traits to steer towards neurodivergence and not singular profiles (Westminster AchieveAbility Commission, 2018).

The need of conversation to understand cultural awareness

Global social movements such as Black Lives Matter have caused radical debate and an emphasis on the need for change to discriminatory behaviour, practice and lack of representation both historically and presently through raising the profile of active, constructive conversation to identifying inequalities together, particularly the recognition of implicit bias and racism in society. However, the narrative can often shift towards the marginalised groups and individuals being the changemakers, when there is a need for sectors to reflect racial literacy and encourage understanding on a holistic scale that will lead towards discussion, greater empathy and the further development of cultural awareness in conversation and practice. It is not the responsibility of people from marginalised groups to change systemic barriers. Leaders, managers and influencers have the responsibility to create a working environment and a visitor experience that are free from discrimination.

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Supporting conversations

DCN and EMBED have, and remain, committed to creating opportunities for a people centred workplace and heritage sector where people can thrive as their authentic self. We are committed to creating better working spaces and customer experiences through recognition of needs and the organisational responsibility to affect positive change. We are committed to supporting constructive conversation that looks to continually develop resources, tools and knowledge to meet a changing society.

Its critical for organisations to recognise vital tools for Heritage and the Creative Industries to support all staff in an increasingly competitive sector, and as public spaces mitigating the virus risk through knowledge sharing, collaborating and feedback. The sector must listen to its people, they must collaborate with other sectors and organisations such as EMBED and DCN, and they must nurture conversation. They must lead the way to the recognition of creative thinking and problem solving and leveraging the power and diversity of thought from neurodivergent and disabled colleagues.

But what next?

The key is what happens next? In a time when innovation and change may be mistaken as high cost and high risk, accepting the challenge of moving forward, ultimately means collaboration to understand and develop working practices, which are matured and work to move forward. These will need to be multi-sectoral support tools. Collaboration, curiosity, commitment and courage to change is fundamental to creating a sustainable future for the sector.

Be the ally, call out what is not working, facilitate and encourage constructive conversation and debate, this is where the power really lies. Competitive sectors are at risk of toxicity and becoming an employer's market where difference may be defined as a threat. Therefore, systematic support and reminder of legislative practice is key to reducing this high-risk approach and develop investment and inclusive leadership is where it counts.

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Designing Inclusive Online Presentations – a practical guide for presenters to neurodiverse audiences

Dr Ross Cooper: AchieveAbility



There has been considerable research into how schools could become more accessible for dyslexic students (Kelly, 2018), and emerging research in universities (Griffiths et al., 2017). However, Kelly's scoping paper (2018) concluded that:

‘Very little of the dyslexia research has been concerned with evaluating the impact of specific teaching approaches and/or strategies for making the curriculum more accessible and inclusive’

(2018: 2).

Nevertheless, Kelly reported research from New Zealand that found that:

‘The use of visuals to support memory and organisational difficulties has been found to reduce anxiety and frustration in children with specific learning difficulties’

(2018: 21).

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Similarly, Roberts (as below) argues that

‘...research suggests images and text work better for learning and understanding than text alone. When images are combined with limited text, it argues, our brains split the workload which then reduces pressure on working memory and mental processing’

(2019)

If this is the case for all students, it is particularly the case for all neurodivergent learners who are often so visual in their thinking that all language must be translated into images to be understood (Cooper, 2009). However, in contrast to this, the main focus of much of the research is how teachers can enable neurodivergent students to overcome emotional, literacy and language difficulties, rather than teachers themselves taking responsibility to eliminate unnecessary barriers to learning, and building on learner strengths. This is the difference between seeing the problem as belonging to the learners (pathological model), and seeing it as belonging to our education systems (social model). There are some exceptions, such as Griffith (2020) which highlight the importance of building on holistic strengths and Roberts (2019), but no attempt appears to be made to understand the linkages between any neurodivergent strengths and the barriers imposed by education systems. This guidance for inclusive presentation strategies is premised on the analysis that the strengths neurodivergent learners demonstrate, such as holistic understanding, visual thinking, problem solving, and creativity are the mirror image of the difficulties experienced when education demands heavy working memory loads, which provoke difficulties with making sense of language, listening, note-taking, sequencing skills, literacy, and verbal memory (Cooper, 2019).

In contrast, this guidance focuses on how a presentation to neurodivergent adults, which traditionally requires good listening and language skills, working memory and potentially note-taking skills, can be remodelled so that the presentation is more accessible. In line with the social model of neurodiversity, our emphasis is on the teacher taking responsibility for accessibility and actively reducing barriers to learning, rather than focusing on what are essentially forms of remediation. If we build on strengths effectively, no remediation or ‘compensatory strategies’ are needed.

In most cases, it can be argued that working memory difficulties underpin most of the difficulties experienced (Gathercole et al., 2005). I have argued elsewhere that having a poor working memory is a consequence of making sense of information holistically, which relies on imagination rather than working memory (Cooper, 2012, 2018). In contrast, learners who make sense of information sequentially rely on working memory rather than imagination. Learners are rarely penalised for poor imagination, whereas poor working memory is often misinterpreted as stupidity or failure to be ‘trying hard enough’. Neither interpretation is accurate; both are emotionally damaging. Given this is the nature of a large minority of learners, it is logical that it is the responsibility of the presenter to avoid overloading working memory. This is essentially achieved by focusing on making holistic connections and encoding meaning visually so that the learner’s imagination is engaged.

Designing Inclusive Online Presentations – a practical guide for presenters to neurodiverse audiences

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In this guide, which was intended for 10 minute presentations provided at the AchieveAbility virtual conference in November 2020 (Neurodivergent voices – good practice in the workplace in a time of Covid) , we focused on three main barriers:

1. Working memory load
2. Perceptual accessibility
3. Handling distraction.

In addition, we provide this guidance in two parallel forms

1. Linear bullet points
2. A colour coded visual chart

1. Strategies to reduce working memory load

Language

- Plain language
 - explain new terms
 - short sentences
 - enable discussion

Short summaries

- highlight key issues
- enable conclusions
- make summaries visual
- Time to process language into visual images to understand
 - provide information (such as PowerPoints) before the session
 - use elliptical teaching (approaching the same core information from different angles)
 - ensure your PowerPoints encapsulate the information visually

Visual information

- Use images, graphics and symbols
 - encourage participants to encode meaning visually
- colour code information
 - such as blue for logical, red for passion, green for learning/growth
- Use explicit analogies and metaphors

Interactivity

- Give brief tasks
 - provide brief tasks that enable participants to experience what you are teaching
- question and answers
- give time to respond

Designing Inclusive Online Presentations – a practical guide for presenters to neurodiverse audiences

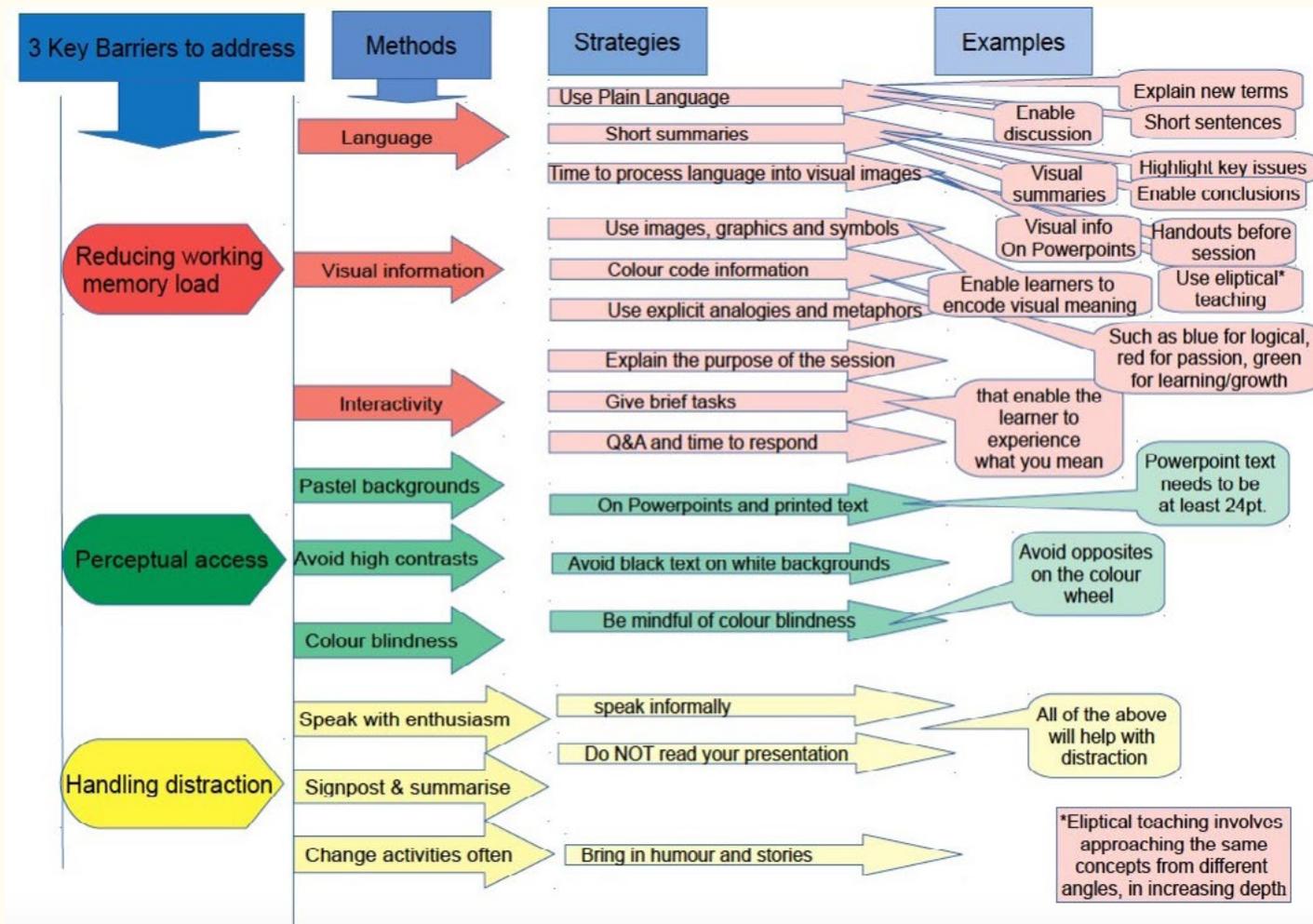
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2. Strategies to ensure perceptual accessibility

- Use pastel background colours on PowerPoints
- Avoid black text on white backgrounds
- Use sans serif fonts and avoid italics
 - PowerPoint Text should be no smaller than pt. 24
- Be mindful of colour blindness and difficult combinations of colours
 - such as opposites on the colour wheel which can be extremely difficult

3. Strategies to reduce distractability (all the above will help)

- speak informally with enthusiasm (do not attempt to read your presentation) and bring in humour where you can
- Signpost what you are going to say, and summarise key points
- Change focus, or activities, frequently



Dr Ross Cooper AchieveAbility October 2020

Designing Inclusive Online Presentations – a practical guide for presenters to neurodiverse audiences

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Reflections on Collaboration and Support in a Time of Covid

Melanie Jameson, Dyslexia Consultancy Malvern



Photo by Brooke Cagle

Dyslexia Adult Network and member of the Westminster AchieveAbility Commission on Recruitment and Dyslexia/ND

As our November seminar demonstrated (AchieveAbility, 2020), ways of doing things have had to be re-thought during the on-line existence that Covid has enforced on so many of us.

As I write this article, I do not know whether normal working has been resumed or whether we have arrived at a hybrid existence, taking some practices from the difficult period of separation.

An area of particular interest to me is collaboration and how to foster it. This became my priority during my two years as Chair of the Dyslexia Adult Network (DAN). Of course DAN is already a collaboration, comprising representatives from a number of charities across the UK (as the name implies), along with specialists to cover key areas. But we always knew that we had to form alliances to make progress with the changes we aimed for.

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A number of considerations arose: Which organisations should we approach? How could we grow our networks, in order to strengthen a collective voice on good practice and entitlements? How would we connect, share contacts and good practice, and advance together? Should we move beyond the ND world to identify shared goals with Disability UK, for example? ([www.disabilityrightsuk](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.com), 2021)

To some extent the question was answered by a huge cross-sector effort to respond to the Green Paper on Improving Lives, (2016), in which the government laid out its strategy for increasing the number of people with disabilities in work. In oral evidence, backing up our submission to the consultation, DAN had to stress that the health / medical model did not 'fit' all potential employees – including the population that we represented. Our submission highlighted ND strengths, the importance of removing barriers to employment and good practice in organisational policies.

As DAN followed up and strengthened the good contacts we had made during this process, I was more convinced that this was the best way forward.

This is worlds away from the dyslexia world of the 1990s when I first qualified in this area - little was known about the breadth of neurodivergence. To my dismay, there appeared to be rivalry rather than cooperation between the two main players: the British Dyslexia Association and the Dyslexia Institute. Since I was drawn to working with students and adults in the workplace – a very new field at the time – I could distance myself from this situation. Thank goodness, over the years, this eased to the point that it was no longer an issue.

One of the best examples I have of collaboration as an integral part of an initiative is the *Westminster AchieveAbility Commission (WAC) on Recruitment and Dyslexia/ND (2017)*. This extended beyond the work of the commission to the follow-up events in which people came together with their range of specialisms and experiences.

So how did collaboration fare in the time of Covid and what can we expect in its aftermath? As regards DAN, Zoom meetings ensured that no-one was barred by considerations of travel for attending steering group meetings. During this time, Dyslexia Scotland (a founder member of DAN) has been able to be a regular participant and, through their contacts, we have been able to welcome the CEO of Dyslexia Ireland, Rosie Bissett, on to the committee. This enables us to gain insight into what schemes the EU is funding. Through Rosie we also have a link to the European Dyslexia Association as long as she is Chair. The Zoom facility has made it much easier to exchange information since we were together in a room, albeit a virtual one, rather than resorting to strings of emails. An example of a recent area of discussion was employment Passport Schemes.

The separation and isolation of Covid has made us more mindful of the need to encourage one another – especially important when we no longer can benefit from the energy generated by face-to-face events. A meeting of the steering group of the Dyslexia Adult Network (17 December 2020) confirmed that many ND support organisations are finding their workload greatly increased, to the extent that individuals face burn – out.

Often they are working in a volunteer capacity or over and above what they are paid to do, juggling this commitment with other demands on their time. Sharing ways of working and useful approaches to coping with this new environment is especially helpful during this stressful period.

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One area where we can always collaborate is in dealings with government and its agencies. The operation of Access to Work (AtW, 2021) has been a long-running concern for DAN; whenever we lose a useful contact we must work together to locate a replacement with whom we can develop equally fruitful communications. Having such a relationship in place can still often determine whether an ND person successfully engages with Access To Work. The All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPG, 2021) provide an opportunity to disseminate findings and also to link with other players, who share our interests.

At the heart of our efforts and initiatives are the needs of ND individuals. We should constantly re-evaluate what barriers are being put in their way and what adaptations/reasonable adjustments should be recommended to enable them to release their potential. The November seminar provided an excellent example of this approach in Katherine Kindersley's considerations of working from home (Kindersley, 2020).

I always recall a contribution to a Dyslexia email list I set up in the 1990s, from an adult who conveyed his/her unique mixture of skills and difficulties. The discussion topic was about a hypothetical cure for dyslexia and whether you would embrace it if you could. He/she wrote:

'When I'm in a cool state of mind I'd never give up my dyslexia talents although the climb to understand some things is 5 times higher and 10 times longer than anyone else's around me. But as soon as I've reached the top of the mountain and see the glowing 3D images beyond, at that instant I HAVE IT – knobs, gears and all'.

'Now this sounds big-headed and I can always test it, but it appears right and I can manipulate it in ways that non-dyslexics think is astounding – and it's great. It makes the long climb worthwhile, just I need reminding of this when I'm only halfway up'.

'Now this is only when I'm cool-headed because when I can't keep up in a group conversation or forget an important date and only recall it two days after the deadline, I would at that moment, happily chuck the whole thing in to be able to spell, remember dates and names and do those things which I have to painstakingly construct, piece by piece, but which seem second nature to everybody else'.

This above contribution articulates both the unique skillset and the everyday frustrations that are the experience of so many ND people. Transfer this to a workplace setting and you can picture someone who is criticised for failings in the small things (such as routine admin) but not appreciated for abilities in the bigger things (such as strategic thinking). It is to overcome these sorts of barriers to success that inspires us to keep on working together for a world in which reasonable adjustments are accepted as commonplace - or better still good practice supersedes the need for them – and ND talents are valued and rewarded.

Reflections on Collaboration and Support in a Time of Covid

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The Journey of Change

Ellie Thompson, Diversity and Ability



Photo by Chris Lawton

What the pandemic has taught us about workplace culture, and where we go from here?

Of all the lessons we have learned from the past year, perhaps one of the most positive ones is that our workplaces can be drastically more accessible and inclusive.

Historically, 'old school' organisations have been sceptical about remote working because of trust issues around employee productivity, effective communication and transparency. Many of these issues are rooted in company culture and fear of the unknown (Wilkie, 2019; Yeung, 2021).

Of course, remote working calls for adaptations and new ways of working, but it has been proven that a more adaptable work environment is not just viable but a really positive shift for many. It opens up our workplaces to a new and diverse workforce, to people who may previously have been excluded by inaccessible office spaces and working patterns.

There are challenges that come with staying connected remotely, notably screen fatigue (not another Zoom!). But there are so many valuable advantages that we can and should consider in the long term. It has been a steep learning curve for everyone, but many companies are now finding that their employees are more engaged and included, resulting in greater organisational success (Alexander et al, 2020; Courtney, 2020; Sahadi, 2020).

The Journey of Change

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So, what are the lessons we have learnt from COVID and can take forward? How can we make sure we keep the same level of inclusive culture when many of us return to the office? And what can we do to further include and welcome all of our employees?



Common barriers in the work environment

For many of us, the office creates barriers from the moment we step through the door to the moment we return home. What this looks and feels like will be different for everyone, and may not be noticeable or visible to others. Here's a quick round up of some of the most common workplace challenges disabled people experience (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2012):

- **Noises.** Loud or constant background noise can activate sensory overload or make it impossible to focus on our own work
- **Light.** Harsh lighting affects us all, but especially autistic people and those who experience visual stress, chronic pain or migraines
- **Temperature.** Which can make a work environment completely inhospitable to people with temperature sensitivities or dysregulation
- **Physical accessibility.** Wider doorways, toilets adapted for us, ergonomic equipment; our home is designed to work for us, but very often a workplace is designed to work for the non-disabled.
- **Singular purpose spaces.** For people who work best when given time and space for rest breaks, having to sit at a desk or in communal areas all day can dramatically reduce our capacity to work

While our offices are never going to be as perfectly welcoming to us as our home environment might be, focusing on some of the areas that can create the biggest barriers does give us the opportunity to address them. By doing so, we can make the workplace more inclusive and welcoming to all our employees.

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Flexible working patterns are a necessary step on the journey to inclusion

The pandemic has made flexible working an absolute necessity, as each of us adapt to the new challenges we face in accessing work, managing our safety and balancing competing responsibilities. But this is something that disabled people, and many other groups that face disabling barriers, have always been managing.

We have now seen that allowing employees to work however fits them best improves productivity, creativity, and most importantly wellbeing (Hernandez et al., 2021). Continuing to allow flexible working patterns post-pandemic will mean including all your employees, and allowing them the space to fulfil their potential at work.

Checking in and anticipating needs

With everyone working and living in isolation, organisations have woken up to how important it is to check in on your team. You have no way of knowing who's struggling, who's looking for new responsibilities, and who may have fresh ideas to share unless you directly make space to find out. You may have had 1-to-1 meetings or support sessions with your employees and discovered how much they have to share outside the confines and pressures of the office.

But this is just as true in our office environments, especially for autistic people and those with specific learning differences for whom certain communication methods present barriers. It is important that we use this time of isolation to explore what communication styles each of our employees find most beneficial, so we create space for genuine interaction and input.



Creating an inclusive workplace culture

When we prioritise proactive, anticipatory workplace support, we're perfectly primed to transform our entire workplace culture to ensure it fully welcomes, and includes, everyone.

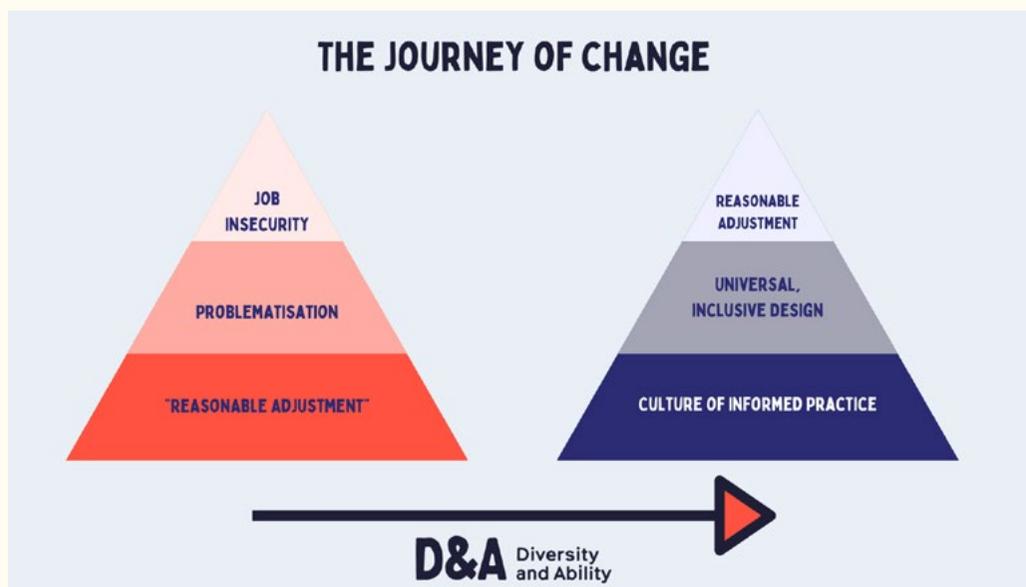
Often when it comes to including everyone, the priority is on 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure the legal responsibility to not discriminate has been met. But by solely focusing on 'adjusting' to include people, we're seeing their differences as a problem, when we should just be creating an inclusive environment from the outset and normalising and even expecting difference. Problematisation of difference naturally creates a path to emotional insecurity, and even job insecurity. So what can we do to fix this?

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The Journey of Change

Image description: a graphic featuring two pyramids, each with three tiers. At the top is the label: 'The journey of change'. The pyramid on the right is red. The bottom tier is labelled "reasonable adjustment", the middle tier "problematism" and the top tier "job insecurity". The pyramid on the left is blue. The bottom tier is labelled 'culture of informed practice', the middle tier 'universal, inclusive design' and the top 'reasonable adjustment'. Below both pyramids is an arrow pointing from left to right, representing a shift from the process described in the left pyramid to that of the one on the right.



Start with a **culture of informed practice**

Recognise the value of lived experience and diversity of thought. Acknowledge that difference does not mean deficit, but power (Speller, Crabb & Hyland, 2017). Look at how and why your community choose to share and celebrate and enhance these pathways. Make space for people to not focus on job protection, but genuine excitement about the way they learn and work.

Use this culture to create **universal, inclusive design**

We have highlighted so many of the adaptations we can make now, to create a work environment that is more inclusive and comfortable for everyone. But more should be done to create an anticipatory welcome for all employees:

- Built-in assistive technology (AT) tools and training that:
 - Highlights the AT that already exists on computers, such as text-to-speech and speech-to-text functionality;
 - Encourages access to **free resources** like **Grammarly** for spelling and grammar, Otter.ai for transcribing voice recordings and videos, or web extensions like **Reader View** which allow customisable adaptations to make web text more accessible;
 - Allows employees space to explore how assistive technology can work best for them with 1-to-1 training and coaching.
- Diverse office set-ups where people have space to:
 - Choose to work communally or individually;
 - Adapt their work environment to fit their access needs;
 - Take meaningful, restorative breaks from work when desired.

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- Make communications inclusive from the get-go by:
 - Using video platforms with live captioning;
 - Sending agendas and slides round before every meeting, whether virtual or face-to-face;
 - Create multiple platforms for people to interact, including virtual and face-to-face, written and verbal, formal and informal, and 1-to-1 and in larger groups.

But remember that there is no such thing as a fully accessible office; accessibility looks and feels different for everyone. In this way, the journey to inclusive design is one without a destination.

Once you have created a space where difference is accounted for, open discussions around individualised reasonable adjustments will ensure each person need not just survive in the workplace, but can truly thrive.

Diversity and Ability is an award-winning disabled-led social enterprise paving the way for a future where everyone is welcomed and included. We support individuals, organisations and social justice projects to create inclusive cultures where diversity is valued and people can thrive.

We are a neurodiverse and disabled team, we believe that peer-to-peer support, delivered by those with shared lived experiences, has the potential to make life-changing differences. Our support is tailored to the unique needs of the individual ensuring it's genuinely empowering. We are particularly keen to highlight the importance of an authentic, intersectional approach to supporting disabled people.

We believe learning differences arise from natural human diversity, as opposed to 'deficit' models of understanding disability. We celebrate different learning styles, and the important contributions neurodiversity makes in society.

Find out more at diversityandability.com



**‘Diversity means counting people;
inclusion means insisting people count.’**

Atif Choudhury, CEO and Co-founder of Diversity and Ability.

The Journey of Change

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Learning differently – D is for difference not for Dunce

Christina Healey, practising dyslexic and retired Specific Learning Differences tutor



Photo by Matteo Paganelli

An HE student turned tutor offers her experiences to dyslexic undergraduates and their tutors

Students are judged by their grades. I experienced this for both my O (now GCSE) and A- Levels in the early sixties. Although I was good at class work and essays, I never seemed to achieve the requisite exam grades. I did eventually get to university but it was not until I was 68 that I was identified as 'significantly' dyslexic. At the age of 17 I was just labelled 'lazy'.

I have had a varied career since as an English-teacher (post-16) but always felt insecure with timed assessments. Definitions of neurodivergence focus on difficulties/differences in organisation, memory, concentration, time, direction, perception and sequencing (SpLD Assessment Standards Committee). A student identified as 'dyslexic' may be slow in storing ideas in the memory, converting these ideas into words and then presenting these words in a logical written sequence (Ellis, 2016). But they usually get there in the end.

Learning differently – D is for difference not for Dunce

Christina Healey, practising dyslexic and retired Specific Learning Differences tutor

A wider understanding of how students learn differently would help tutors avoid unconstructive teaching practices like dictating notes in class which puts unnecessary pressure on short-term memory or asking students to read aloud, i.e. to convert arbitrary written symbols into meaningful auditory ones at great speed. A student with a specific learning difference such as dyslexia cannot work like this and is therefore exposed to potential public humiliation.

Late in my English teaching career, I undertook formal training in tutoring and supporting SpLD in HE. Therefore, I have seen neurodiversity from both sides. This was the undergraduate experience of one of my students. I'm going to call him Phil:

'I started studying confident in my ability. Although I was diagnosed with severe dyslexia, I had straight A's at A-level and I assumed this would continue. I was shocked when my first essay came back as 'unmarkable', 'illogical', 'bad grammar', 'spelling mistakes' and 'lack of structure' was the message scrawled on the bottom of my paper. I was close to dropping out, but before doing so I went to Disability Services where I was introduced to a support tutor. By talking over my essays with me, she understood it was not the concepts or knowledge I was struggling with, it was my essay logic and structure. She worked with me on ways to get my thoughts on paper. Later I resubmitted my 'unmarkable' essay and got a high 2.1. I went on to get First Class Hon's'.

Dyslexic students can succeed at university (Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2020). But one-to-one teaching, whether face-to-face or online, is very demanding. Not all 18 year olds are mature enough to benefit. Phil enjoyed strong family support, both emotional and financial, and did not have to work to pay his fees. Other issues can affect student performance: concentration (sometimes labelled AD (H)D), communication problems (sometimes labelled autism) and anxiety. Somewhere in the university, there is help for all of these, but not always in the same place.

Universities are made up of numerous silos. One of these is the language silo. Over the years, HE has developed a wide understanding of academic English; what it is like, how it varies between different disciplines, and how it can best be developed. The works of Swales and Freak (2000) and Olwyn Alexander et al (2008) come immediately to mind. Unfortunately, in my experience, this understanding has so far benefitted international more than home students.

In parts of mainstream HE, there is a fixed idea that 'good' English is already prescribed in a virtual, Jacob Rees-Mogg-type style guide which some academic tutors assume students know automatically (Snow & Uccelli, 2009). This is unlikely unless they have paid a great deal for their previous education (Henderson, Anders, Green, & Henseke, 2020). An alternative approach to language and learning may be to see academia as a foreign country. They speak and write differently there. New arrivals have to learn the language. Possibly they can 'pick it up' over time but that needs favourable conditions and incurs unnecessary stress. All students need some teaching in how to listen to academic English in lectures, how to participate constructively in academic seminars, how to read academic writing and, most important of all, how to produce this kind of writing themselves. So I am asking academic tutors to give us more time and also more explicit guidance (for more on my thinking on this, see Healey, 2020).

Learning differently – D is for difference not for Dunce

Christina Healey, practising dyslexic and retired Specific Learning Differences tutor

However, some of the adjustments with regard to spelling mistakes, grammar etc., offered to dyslexic students can be counter productive. Accuracy is very important in both verbal and mathematical communication. Small verbal differences such as between 'few' and 'a few' or visual differences between plus and minus matter. It is true that we dyslexics may not be good at identifying inaccuracy in our own work. We have to be taught or, more precisely, 'enabled' to proof-read for ourselves (see also Eide, F., 2021).

There is a need for collaboration between subject and specialist support tutors. But many universities outsource support to agencies - what might be called the 'Serco option' (see also Williams, Pollard, Takala, & Houghton, 2019). The tutors provided may be professionally qualified but they may also be on zero hour contracts. No time usually for collaboration with other professionals in the HEI (for an account of how collaboration can work at its best, see Wingate, (2019).

As an unrecognised dyslexic student/tutor continually getting by rather than getting on, I would like to offer some advice to my fellow learners differently. The most important thing you can possibly have is Self Knowledge. What can I learn to do for myself? Where do I need to ask for help? Where can I get it from? Well, partly from any formal assessments you may have had, but also from your support tutors, from your reading, from other dyslexics and feedback from your mainstream tutors.

But, I would like to end with a good word for academic tutors: we support tutors are specialists with something to offer in terms of our understanding of learning and of language. But we are only midwives to student achievement; the true and lasting credit goes to the tutors who taught them. You are the ones they will remember.

Throughout my career as an unrecognised dyslexic, I have repeated a series of mantras. First the seventeen year old: "I'm not stupid, I'm slow." Then the reaction: "I'm not different. I don't want to be different." Later: "Dyslexia is a gift. Don't knock it" and, finally, "No about us without us" Come graduation day, I hope all those once under-graded and/or 'difficult' students throw their mortar boards high and shout 'Thank God for difference. Diversity for all!'



Learning differently – D is for difference not for Dunce

Christina Healey, practising dyslexic and retired Specific Learning Differences tutor

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How Have Autistic Women at University, in the UK, Coped with their Studies During the Pandemic? A Proposal

A V Dean, Faculty of Education, Health and Human Sciences, School of Education, University of Greenwich



Photo by Windows on Unsplash

Abstract

This article outlines my background into why I have chosen to research neurodiversity and specifically autism.

This research proposal is part of my Educational Doctorate thesis into how autistic spectrum condition (ASC) women at university have coped with study during the restrictions of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID 19), which will include a review of recent literature for ASC women diagnosed or not with autism, due to their compensating strategies and camouflaging, compared to ASC men. I will investigate support mechanisms for managing their studies at this time, whilst discussing recent surveys conducted to gather the general disabled students' experiences during COVID 19. Furthermore, I will consider the frameworks of the medical and social models of disability and terminology, the methodology, methods and the interpretive phenomenological analysis of the qualitative narratives from the surveyed sample of students that will be conducted. I will conclude with the possible outcomes of the research and the ways forward for best practice for myself as a tutor and non-medical helper, with the possibility of extending this to other educators too.

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Introduction

There is a significant background to my chosen area of research concerning neurodivergent students at university with autism spectrum condition (ASC) that has led me to the point of undertaking my Educational Doctorate. ASC is a preferred term for their heterogeneous neurodivergence, indicating strengths and difficulties, as suggested by

Hull et al.(2017: 2519) and Cox et al (2017:19), which challenges the deficit medical model with the social model of disability and hence the neurodiversity nuances (Cooper et al., 2020). In addition to studying, I work as a non-medical helper supporting as a study skills tutor, mentor and educational technology trainer for ASC university students (Association of Providers of Non-Medical Helpers (APNMH) 2020). Hence, I am now considering this as an area of study for my thesis proposal.

My experience and initial understanding of ASC has been from the male perspective, being a mother of a son with ASC who made his way to university with significant support academically and socially from myself, because of his condition of autism. The autism affects him with a lack of social interaction, poor social and communication skills and restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour, (American Psychiatric Association *APA*, 2013) (Bolte and Mahdi, 2017). The support I gave was sometimes to the detriment of myself, as explained by Wayment et al. (2019: 2519), indicating I was both challenged and changed by the experience of his ASC and the advocacy I gave.

Once he attended university, I had started my academic studies resulting in a Master of Arts (MA) in Education studying ASC students and how to support their study needs and the transition to university (Anastasia et al 2018). Whilst researching for my MA, I recognised that ASC female students at university were experiencing autism differently and could be overlooked because the manifestation of ASC in females can result in camouflaging and compensating skills to hide the condition (Hull et al., 2020; Livingstone et al., 2019). This resulted in misdiagnosis or not being diagnosed until later in life, if at all because the ratio of diagnosis was biased 3:1 male to female at this level of attainment for ASC women university students (Baldwin and Costley, 2016; Ratto et al., 2018).

This study will, therefore, concentrate on heterogeneous neurodivergent ASC women at university in the United Kingdom and how they have coped with their study during the last year 2020 to 2021 with government restrictions during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid 19) pandemic (Pellicano and Stears, 2020). This will be framed with the medical and social models of disability to justify terminology (Seers and Hogg, 2021) and to clarify the context for neurotypicals and allies, such as myself (Martin, 2021).

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Firstly, to consider the language of disability in society. Neurotypicals, the dominant majority in society, define and categorises the neurodiverse, the less dominant minority in society, to be able to explain and be understood by the 'dominate cultural narratives' (Woods, 2017; Cox et al., 2017; Seers and Hogg, 2021). This has led to the medical and social models of disability, whereby the medical model suggests that ASC is a deficit and needs to be fixed. The social model suggests society needs to change to accept ASC (Seers and Hogg, 2021; Woods, 2017). Furthermore, being neurodiverse is succinctly described by Cooper et al. (2020: 2) as: 'a group of people can be described as neurodiverse if the group includes more than one form of neurodivergence. So, an individual can be described as neurodivergent, but not Neurodiverse' (Cooper et al., 2020). Hence, ASC students are neurodivergent.

Unfortunately, the medical and social models of disability have become inextricably intertwined because a diagnosis of ASC requires a professional medical assessment, using the medical model, to label the student with ASC (Woods, 2017; Seers and Hog, 2021). This then gives entitlement to academic support via the government scheme termed Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) (APNMH 2020; Woods et al 2017). Whereas, changing the discourse to neurodivergent and the social model is less about what is wrong and more about the positive aspects of ASC that may help to remove some of the barriers that are then imposed and help develop their identity (Gobbo and Shmulsky, 2016; Woods et al., 2017). Therefore, the complexity in terminology, as mentioned by Cooper et al. (2020), in this article is with no disrespect and not intended to be derogatory, but used to convey the intention of the paper and uses terms in other papers used by other authors.

Secondly, autistic women at university are likely to be those that are very capable and have the capacity to study at the 'higher functioning' end of the autistic spectrum (Baldwin and Costley, 2016; Ratto et al., 2018). However, several studies suggest that these women are extremely capable and can use executive functioning skills to disguise their autistic traits (Hull et al., 2020; Baldwin and Costley, 2016; Livingston, Shah and Happé, 2019; Bargiela, Steward and Mandy, 2016). Unfortunately, this appears to complicate their lives, because the mainly male-orientated diagnosis for autism (Baldwin and Costley, 2016) are not present in females in the same way (Hull et al., 2019; Milner et al., 2019). Partly because the inherited ratio of male to female diagnosis is around 3:1, with the present neurodivergence based on the male diagnosis, being displayed as lack of social interaction, poor social communication and restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour, (APA) 2013), which does not account for the female traits. Research suggests that female traits also include masking, camouflaging and compensation to cover their autistic to fit into a neurotypical world (Baldwin and Costley, 2016; Hull et al., 2020).

This results in the misdiagnosis of co- occurring conditions such as anxiety, eating and sleep disorders and stress being the result of the exhaustion caused by trying to fit into a neurotypical society, when they are autistic (Baldwin and Costley, 2016; Livingston et al., 2019). Hence, females go undiagnosed, misdiagnosed, diagnosed late or even self-diagnosed (Bargiela, et al, 2016; Livingston et al., 2019).

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Thirdly, this can mean that the education support is either inadequate in supporting their academic outcome or detrimental and damaging to their wellbeing and mental health because it is inappropriate (Bargiela et al., 2016; Ratto et al., 2018). Moreover, those that are diagnosed, under the medical model, will have access to study skills support, as autism is considered a disability and thus a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, so they will be entitled to Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) (Martin, 2020), entitling them to a study skills support tutor, educational technology training (and equipment) and a mentor, provided by an external tutor termed a non-medical help (NMH), once they reach university study (Office for Students, 2020). Whereas, those that are not diagnosed may not have this advantage, becoming reliant on friends and family, or just struggling to cope or not (Stevens et al., 2020).

I intend to discover if the ASC women whatever the state of diagnosis, were supported well during the pandemic, by any means resulting in achievement and progression (Livingstone et al., 2019). Also, if they had accessed the study skills support via university, the NMH via DSA or relied on family and friends to cope with the changes to study with online sessions for example during the pandemic (Office for Students, 2020). In some instances, it may be these changes have inadvertently supported these students with less stress of travel and social interaction, but that isolation and lack of support in other ways may have been an issue itself (Baldwin et al., 2016). Furthermore, there may be a fear of returning to university.

Finally, from my review of the literature, there appears to be a gap in research at present because studies have not specifically considered the effect on ASC women studying during the pandemic. Several surveys have been carried out to investigate the overall effect of the pandemic on differently abled students at university, by the Office For Students (2020), the Association of Providers of Non-Medical Helpers (APNMH) (2020) and the National Union of Students (NUS) (2020). However surveys suggest this has not been an overall positive study experience, but that over time the support offered via wellbeing teams and the tutorials provided via blended learning and NMH did improve resulting in a reasonable level of support and teaching for most students with different abilities (APNMH, 2020).

Furthermore, a study by the National Autistic Society (NAS) about Autistic people generally, and their families, indicates that not only were ASC people let down, but also their families when they were left to cope, during the pandemic (Stevens et al., 2020). Again, autistic women in education were not specifically mentioned in this study either which further indicates the need to study this area given the challenges the ASC can cause for them.

Aim: to gain insight into the study skills and coping strategies of ASC women during the pandemic and learn what went well and what could be improved with best practice.

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Objectives: to operationalise my aims.

1. What are the issues that affect autistic women?
2. How has the pandemic affected their study progress?
3. Can best practice support teaching and their study and skill?

My objectives will support my research question. To investigate this phenomenon, I intend to pilot a small-scale survey to target autistic females at universities in the UK.

Methodology

Under a theoretical perspective of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) paradigm, which is an approach to qualitative research concerned with exploring and understanding the lived experience of a specified phenomenon (Smith, 2004) which will support the interpretation of themes in the form of the written responses and hence narratives from the open questions in the questionnaire to be constructed. Hopefully, following on from this initial pilot study there may be an opportunity to explore this further with interviews and focus groups to provide rich data to triangulated narratives (Denscombe, 2017). This will be gathered from the students' written narratives whilst iterating lived experiences of their ASC and coping with study during the period of the pandemic.

The application of a thematic analysis of the narratives will be from the open questions in the survey, which will encompass their:

- study progress
- coping strategies
- support for study
- outcomes for this year

This is as gathered by the above 3 surveys for all students with disabilities, conducted by APNMH (2020), OfS (2020), and NUS (2020). I will tailor these to be more specific for the ASC women students.

Method: Data collection will be via the survey constructed in Qualtrics, tested for construct validity, and distributed via a link on a closed Facebook group and emailed via universities' Wellbeing teams. This will maintain anonymity. The consent and right to withdraw will be in the explanation and introduction in the survey (BERA, 2018).

The data will be downloaded from Qualtrics and analysed by thematic analysis to allow me to interpret the experiences and decipher the outcomes of the students' progress and study.

Participants: I will secure the students via the university's Wellbeing team or Support Through AccessAbility Retention and Transition (STAART) programme's closed Facebook group page (University of Greenwich, 2020), both at the University of Greenwich (both of which I am a member as a neurodivergent student myself). This will, therefore, be a purposive or convenience and criterion sample because these are a specific set of students required for the study (Denscombe, 2017).

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Conclusion and Proposed outcomes:

The projected outcomes of this study overall are the provision of better adapted study skills support and progression to successful outcomes for autistic women at university. Hopefully, this will equip them for employment and a better quality of life (Hull et al., 2017). This will also provide a better understanding of their study needs generally, not only during the pandemic. Thus, this will have implications for best practice for universities lecturers, tutors and wellbeing teams plus, the Disabled Students Allowances process and support accessed via NMH, including the consideration of medical and social models of disability.

I hope to find out if they were supported in their study or not and how they coped or if they did not cope what the consequences were. I also hope to find out whether there are any best practice elements evident that supported them, during the pandemic to take forward or aspects that were not supportive. In addition to considering their resultant outcomes, progression, deferral or drop out for the year.

This project will also support my personal and professional development because I am a non-medical helper for DSA university students. I will use the best practice and adapt this to support the needs of these students.

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Six Words: How Covid has affected a Community of Neurodivergent Student and Staff in Higher Education

Dr. Melanie Thorley, STAART Manager



Student Wellbeing Service, University of Greenwich
Trustee and Director of AchieveAbility

I will not be reiterating what a horrible experience COVID-19 had on us all. We are all aware of how ghastly the situation has been since March 2020.

The good news (crossed fingers) is there is light at the end of the tunnel, and I am sure we are all grateful for the hard work of the scientists who created the vaccines. In addition, many neurodivergent (ND) students and staff have been able to prove they can study and work from home without dealing with commuting, sharing inappropriate office space, travelling to meetings, etc. Human Resources departments across higher education are going to have a difficult time enforcing people to go to work/university five days a week from now on.

The AchieveAbility Trustees and Directors were acutely aware there was a lack of ND voices in the media. There were numerous reports about how COVID had affected learning disabled people, those with mental health difficulties and those with physical disabilities, but we were unaware of any national media outlet which had consulted ND people?. This edition of the journal hopes to address this imbalance.

Six Words: How Covid has affected a Community of Neurodivergent Student and Staff in Higher Education

Dr. Melanie Thorley, STAART Manager

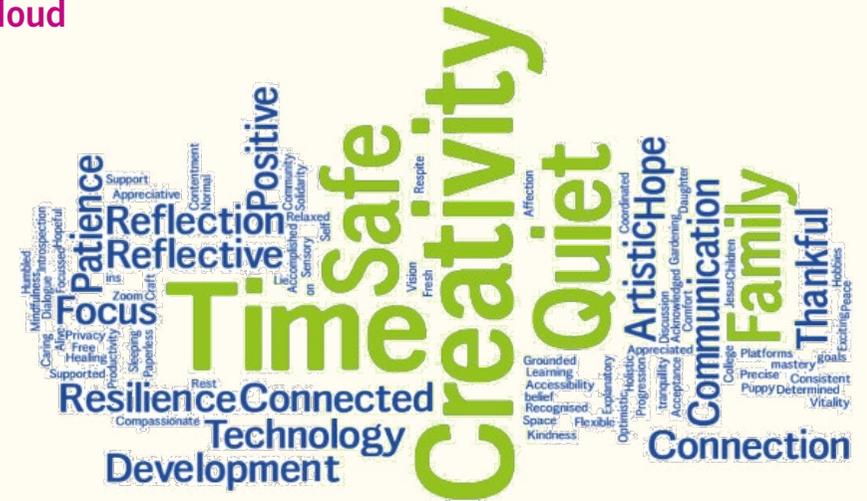
Whilst I am a Trustee and Director, I am not a neurodivergent (ND) person myself. Therefore, I felt it inappropriate to write about my experiences during the last year. However, as a disability practitioner in higher education, I am an advocate of consulting people when undertaking research and/or new activities/support mechanisms. The adage 'nothing about us without us' is fundamental to all of my work. Consequently, it made sense for me to collaborate with neurodivergent students and staff to create an article for this edition of the AchieveAbility e-journal. I did consult my fellow Trustees and Directors to ensure my idea was appropriate and they agreed with my idea for this specific edition of the e-journal was appropriate, both in method and format.

The idea was to consult ND students and staff via my contacts to ask if they would like to contribute their experiences for the two-word clouds. As I am fully aware of how busy most of us are, I requested just six words from them – three positive words and three negative words as to how COVID had affected them as individuals. Forty co-creators (I do not use the terminology of participants or subjects) were kind enough to share their words with me via email. All of the co-creators were self-selected and an equal mix of students and staff. The majority of the co-creators were UK based although a number of my ND colleagues in some of my networks were disabled staff outside of the UK.

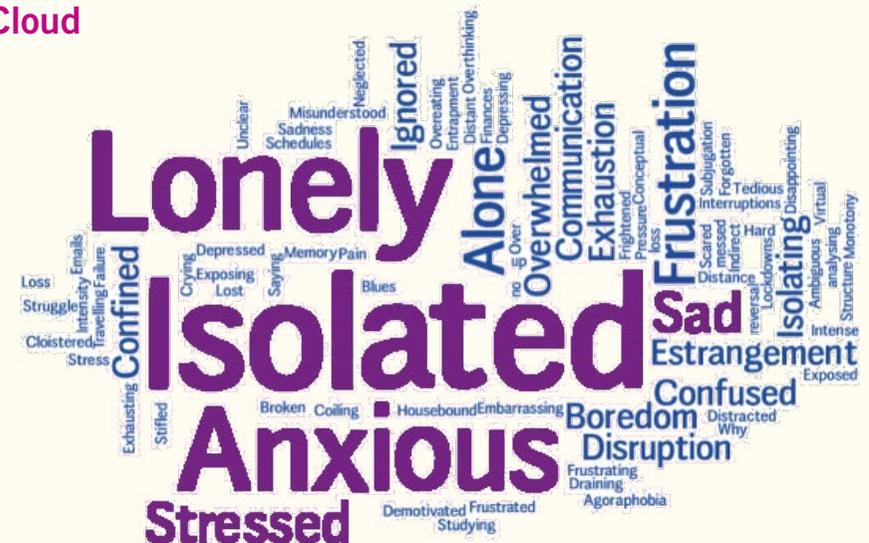
The two lists of words were combined to create two-word clouds – one positive and one negative. I will leave it to you to interpret the findings.

Myself and my fellow AchieveAbility Trustees and Directors would like to thank all of the co-creators who spared the time to contribute their six words for this article. I would also like to thank Zoe Parsons, one of my STAART Ambassadors who created the two-word clouds.

Positive Cloud



Negative Cloud





The views expressed in articles in the AchieveAbility E-Journal are those of the authors of the contributions, and do not necessarily coincide with those of the Editorial Board or of the Editor(s) of a particular journal issue.

Brief Guidance Notes for Contributors

Proposed contributions should be sent to the Editorial Board. Enquiries and other communications should be sent by e-mail to:

achieveabilityn@googlemail.com

Queries concerning the format and presentation of articles may be addressed to the Editor(s) of the specific journal issue in question.

The journal uses standard British English, and the Editors reserve the right to alter usage to that end.

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Cooper, R (Ed.), Hewlett, K., Jameson, M. (2019) "Neurodiverse Voices; Opening Doors to Employment", available at: **https://www.achieveability.org.uk/files/1518955206/wac-report_2017_interactive-2.pdf** (accessed 13 October 2019).

Jones, A. and Kindersley, K., (2013), *Dyslexia: Assessment & Reporting*, 2nd Edition. The Patoss Guide: Hodder Education.

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