

AchieveAbility E-Journal | **Issue 1** | Spring 2020 *ISSN 2634-0798*

Neurodiverse Voices: **Good Practice in the Workplace**

Edited by Ross Cooper, Katherine Hewlett and Debra Kelly



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.

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See www.achievability.org.uk for more details.

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Guest Editors

Guest Editors may be invited to edit an issue of the journal by the Editorial Board, or may approach the Board with a proposal for a themed issue.

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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We are delighted to present the first peer reviewed AchieveAbility E-Journal based on our research seminar: **‘Neurodiverse Voices: Opening Doors to Employment’** held at the University of Westminster in May 2019.

In doing so, we are trying to bridge several gaps. The first is the gap between academic research/writing on the one hand, and the experience of practitioners and neurodivergent people on the other. Perhaps even more importantly, we hope to enable neurodivergent writers and practitioners to find new audiences through their submissions to the E-Journal, and we are pleased that the majority of the contributors to our first issue identify as neurodivergent. This first E-Journal will be available on the AchieveAbility website which has assistive toolbar that allows website visitors to customise the site in a way that works best for them.

Neurodiversity is now a rapidly growing movement, although it began fairly quietly among the autistic community following Judy Singer’s sociological paper in 1990. The changes in language used to describe it are now undergoing rapid evolution to reflect the changes in concept and to help clarify what we mean. ‘Neurodiversity’ is conceived as a parallel to biodiversity and includes all of humanity in the same way that biodiversity refers to all living things. Similarly, 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.

Some in the field have taken a different view about the language of neurodiversity and have, for example, used neurodiversity to describe an individual’s spiky profile in the assessment process. This view is not shared by this Editorial team.

Language is particularly important when those of us who are neurodivergent, or experience learning difficulties (specific or general), are subject to disablement, prejudice and discrimination. We are also aware that language developed to support the social model of disability can be co-opted by the socially dominant deficit model. For example, people with ‘general learning difficulties’ were, until relatively recently, described as being ‘educationally sub-normal’. However, with the advent of Tomlinson’s ‘Inclusive Learning Report’ (1996), this was changed in the Further Education sector at least, to ‘learning difficulties’ to reflect the fact that these were imposed by education systems and practices rather than any inherent ‘deficit’. This shift in emphasis, from the individual deficit to social disablement, was largely reinterpreted to mean that the learning difficulty was an inherent individual deficit. To some degree, power structures will make such distortions inevitable and paying attention to the evolving definitions and usages of language remains critically important. This is further complicated by different agencies using ‘learning difficulties’ and ‘learning disabilities’ interchangeably for ‘general learning difficulties’,. Complicating this even further, ‘learning disabilities’ is used in the USA to mean dyslexia rather than ‘general learning difficulties’. Where an agency or publication uses language different to this E-Journal, we have largely retained it, which means that the reader needs to remain vigilant to avoid misinterpretation.

This AchieveAbility E-Journal therefore celebrates the notion of neurodiversity, those of us who are neurodivergent and the collective community who are neurodiverse. It is for this reason that the values of the E –Journal are embedded within social justice, inclusive policy and practice and the recognition of different ability in education, training and employment. To promote these values we have grouped the papers into 4 categories. The first is Policy and Good Practice. Here we have an important paper by Tom Neil of ACAS, highlighting their research findings and promoting their best practice policies. Andrew Pake’s paper highlights their whole organisational approach and provides both policy and examples from Prospect Union. Finally, Katherine Kindersley describes best practice in the development of reasonable adjustments in the workplace assessment process.

The second category is Strategy in the Creative and Heritage Industries. This includes a successful case-study from Dyslexia Scotland, a detailed analysis of inclusion in the creative industries through apprenticeships by Charles Freeman, and an elaboration of inclusive practice in the Heritage industry which highlights a passport scheme by Becki Morris.

The third category is Skills for Inclusivity and Employment. This includes James Richard’s paper highlighting the training requirements and support needs of managers who manage neurodivergent staff. In contrast, Katherine Hewlett and Phoebe Pennington’s paper describes a frontline project to empower neurodivergent people, who are in danger of homelessness, through assistive technology to enable more effective access to employment.

The fourth category is Supported Access to Employment for People with Learning Difficulties. While not strictly speaking directly related to neurodiversity, we can learn a great deal from policy and practice here. The paper from DFN describes a highly successful project focused on the policy and practice of supported employment. We are also delighted to have a short video from Klaudia Matasovska, with a supporting paper to fill in the gaps, focused on a case-study of supported employment. The Inclusion North paper provides a successful account of employing people with learning difficulties and autism as Expert Advisors, valued for their lived experience, mainly focussed around attending Care (Education) and Treatment Reviews.

We would like to thank all the contributors who remained patient with us while we developed appropriate policies and practices for our E-Journal, as well as all those who attended our research seminar and contributed through discussion and questions. We would like to thank our peer reviewers who made the E-Journal possible. Finally, we would like to thank Professor Debra Kelly for going above and beyond by organising wayward referencing and for steering the editorial team and providing guidance on the editorial process for future publications

Dr Ross Cooper and **Dr Katherine Hewlett.**



01

Policy and Good Practice

Acas Future Thinking on Neurodivergent Practice

Neil (Acas)



Photo by Charles Deluvio on Unsplash

Acas is best known for trying to **resolve disputes between employers and employees**; both those involved in an individual dispute and where it is of a collective nature.

However, on top of these statutory duties we have a variety of services focussed on trying to improve employment relations, and improve working life and workplaces through training, advice and guidance.

Taking a holistic approach

When looking at how to improve workplaces, it is important to take a holistic look at work and consider what good work actually means. Identifying how to create good workplaces can contribute to solving the long running productivity issues in UK workplaces.

Amongst the key values of good work are preventing discrimination and supporting well-being and inclusivity. To achieve this, employers need a good understanding of diversity within their workplace. Neurodiversity and the different ways in how people think and absorb information is an essential element to this.

Neurodiversity is becoming an increasingly important topic. It has come up regularly when talking to specialists and lobby groups and is featuring strongly in public policy debates.

Acas Future Thinking on Neurodivergent Practice

Neil (Acas)

Summary:

- Around **1 in 7 of the UK population is neurodivergent** (British Dyslexia Association, Code of Practice for Employers, 2018)
- This is a huge proportion of the UK workforce and yet many employers have historically not adequately considered their needs or taken their difficulties seriously. The prevalence of neurodivergence alone makes it a vital area for considerations from a labour market dimension
- In most scenarios having a form of neurodivergence will amount to a **disability under the Equality Act**, so Acas has an important role in ensuring that employers know and meet their responsibilities, and employees know their rights
- Neurodiversity connects with our work on health and well-being, and on **'good work'**. A better understanding of neurodiversity highlights that we are all different, with different needs, strengths, interests and motivations. Therefore to better support and motivate their workforce, employers need to be flexible and adaptable.

Acas research findings

To identify good employment practices for employers and managers to follow, we conducted case-study based research that looked at two employers who have actively tried to make their workplaces inclusive for neurodivergent employees. We also conducted interviews with key informants in this area to help contextualise the two case study experiences. Some of the main findings from the research (see 'Neurodiversity at work', Acas, 2016: pp. 44-46) included:

- **Recruitment is often a barrier.** Common recruitment processes often unfairly disadvantage neurodivergent applicants, and employers prefer to recruit generalists with a range of skills over someone with specialised skills but in fewer areas - often regardless of the skills that are needed for the role.
- **Perceived underperformance** was most likely where managers were not aware of somebody's neurodivergence; but with appropriate support in place, neurodivergent staff were no more likely than other staff to have performance issues.
- **Disclosure was a common concern for employees.** Even with an employer who was very supportive, employees typically did not disclose until 2 years into their employment.
- **Progression up the organisation** often put neurodivergent employees into roles that made better use of their abilities and removed the simpler admin tasks that can be deceptively difficult (*e.g. room booking for dyslexic staff*).
- **Neurodivergent staff often do not apply for roles they would be good at.** We found this was mainly due to not having the confidence to do so, not recognising their achievements or abilities, or not knowing how to promote themselves. Additional help in identifying suitable promotion possibilities from a manager and/or mentor is therefore important.

Acas Future Thinking on Neurodivergent Practice

Neil (Acas)

Importantly, our research highlighted that many aspects of the good support and management that neurodivergent employees need applies equally well to all employees. So employers should be seeking to make their workplaces more inclusive as it enables an employer to better meet the needs of all their staff, regardless of whether they are neurodivergent or not.

On the back of the research – and with the help of key stakeholders such as Margaret Malpas (BDA), Richard Todd, (Dyspraxia Foundation) and Nancy Doyle (Genius Within) – we published advice for employers, managers and for neurodivergent employees (available at: www.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity).

Where should employers start?

First, regarding the **recruitment process** there are several simple actions that can make any process more inclusive. These include:

- Identifying and focussing on the key duties of the role
- Avoiding ambiguous adverts
- Offering different ways to complete the application and providing example answers to clarify what is required
- Setting relevant tasks at interview that relate to the actual needs of the role
- Allowing candidates to know the questions before an interview.

A **better awareness** of neurodiversity and the different forms of neurodivergence is fundamental to creating a more inclusive workplace (Neurodiversity at work, Acas, 2016: p.16). There is still a widespread lack of awareness in this area. Employers taking steps to educate their workforce can remove misconceptions and dispel myths associated with some forms of neurodivergence.

A better-educated workplace can make it easier for an employer to encourage neurodivergent employees to tell their manager about it, making it easier for the employer to then provide appropriate support. Neurodivergent employees often do not tell their manager or colleagues because a lack of general awareness within the workplace means they fear being thought stupid, perceived as lazy and making excuses, or seeking special treatment (Neurodiversity at work, Acas, 2016: p.46).

However, a more informed workplace will naturally be more inclusive, making it feel safer for neurodivergent employees to talk openly and honestly with a manager and colleagues.

Additionally, educating staff may also help neurodivergent employees who have not been formally diagnosed or who were not fully aware of how their neurodivergence affects them.

Acas Future Thinking on Neurodivergent Practice

Neil (Acas)

The role of line managers

Managers are key in making workplaces more inclusive. Line management has often only been a small part of a manager's role, with other more pressing duties taking up much more of their time.

However, the greater responsibility employers have on ensuring employee health and well-being means that a manager's main responsibility should be to support each of their team members so that they can perform at their best and ensure they feel valued.

For neurodivergent employees in particular, managers need to be able and willing to adapt and tailor their managerial approach to meet the specific needs of the individual.

Good emotional intelligence and people skills are therefore key. Employers should be prioritising these skills when advertising management roles or providing the training and support for managers to learn and develop them.

Part of a manager's role should also be to get to know each person they manage and they should be having regular catch ups to achieve this. Neurodivergence exists on spectrums and characteristics vary across individuals and over time. Managers therefore need to gain a good understanding of the person separate to the label of their condition, which takes time.

In addition to managers, neurodiversity champions and setting up an employee network can provide valuable information and support to neurodivergent employees and help raise awareness within the workplace. They can also work with employers and help to identify ways of making the workplace more inclusive.

Making the right workplace adjustments

Employers should also be prepared to make adjustments to an employee's working arrangements. It is interesting that while the role of a manager is moving more towards supporting each team member perform at their best, there is still a common reticence to making adjustments. While reasonable adjustments must be considered for disabled employees, it is often seen as a time consuming, costly and complex exercise.

But, in reality, many of the adjustments that can be hugely beneficial for neurodivergent employees are inexpensive, small and simple to implement.

And it should be remembered that there is a clear collective benefit to making adjustments that helps an employee at work. It enables them to perform better in their role and reduces or even removes difficulties that can affect their health and well-being (and likely reduce absence levels with it).

It would be welcome if the focus on adjustments could move away from adjustments being a legal consideration if an employee is disabled, and move it to simply being a normal and regular consideration for managers supporting each member of their team.

There are certainly challenges to employing neurodivergent individuals but as one manager highlighted in our research, 'the challenges are minor compared to what we actually get out of working with that person (Neurodiversity at work, Acas, 2016: p. 35).

Acas Future Thinking on Neurodivergent Practice

Neil (Acas)

Why should we be talking about neurodivergence?

- Around 1 in 7 of the UK population is neurodivergent
- Neurodivergence will often amount to a disability under the Equality Act 2010
- Provide better support to neurodivergent employees
- Improve health and well-being of staff
- We are all different

Neurodiversity at work (2016)

- **Recruitment** processes can be a barrier to neurodiversity
- **Underperformance** most likely where managers not aware of somebody's neurodivergence
- Neurodivergent employees wary of **disclosure**
- **Progression** often puts neurodivergent employees into roles that make better use of their abilities
- Many actions that help neurodivergent employees are **beneficial to the rest of the workforce too**

Acas guidance

- Advice for employers - **Changing your workplace to better support neurodiversity**
- Advice for managers - **Managing and supporting neurodivergent team members**
- Advice for neurodivergent employees – **Working when neurodivergent**

www.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity

Making workplaces more inclusive?

- Rethink how we recruit for roles
- Educate staff on neurodiversity and forms of neurodivergence
- Make staff feel safe discussing their neurodivergence
- Ensure managers have the people skills to support team members with different needs
- Actively consider what adjustments can be made to support staff

Neurodiversity – A Union Perspective:

Pakes (Prospect)



Photo by Nathan Dumlao on Unsplash

Prospect is a trade union **with over 145,000 members**, across both the public and private sectors. Our members are professionals, specialists, scientists, engineers and more. We are committed to equalities across all the diversity strands.

Many professionals in the field of neurodiversity expect a higher prevalence of neurodivergent people in precisely the occupations where we have members. This is one of the reasons why we embarked upon a project to focus on neurodiversity, inclusivity and promoting good workplace practice.

We have produced advice and guidance for our members, in the form of ‘quick’ guides for our members and for managers. Further advice for our reps has been produced in the form of briefings, for example:

A short leaflet has also been produced which is intended to start conversations (S. Maile and J. Timms, 2018).

We have produced brief awareness-raising sessions that can be delivered to our members during lunchtime, for example, and in addition, longer courses for representatives lasting half a day or a day. These courses have been run within branches but also in workplaces where managers and HR can also attend.

Neurodiversity – A Union Perspective: Pakes (Prospect)

Positive case studies can be found on our website, and case study exercises are provided in the training course for reps to work through.

We have successfully worked with a number of employers across our mentorship areas to secure improvements for our neurodivergent members, which also benefit everyone in the workplace. Prospect is working in partnership with a number of STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) employers to explore the potential for a work-based mentoring programme employing many of the principles developed in Prospect's early mentoring work (Prospect Mentoring 2020)

Detailed advice and guidance for members and representatives can be found on our webpages: www.prospect.org.uk/help-at-work/neurodiversity which also includes links to additional, specialist resources.

The Whole Organisation Approach

Prospect has worked, and continues to work, with employers to introduce the 'Whole Organisation Approach' which has been proven to work in many organisations. Prospect recognises that many organisations will adopt a whole organisational approach. However, for the purposes of this article we now set out our original thinking and practice with regard to this approach. Evidence from a survey conducted by the CIPD in 2018 showed that overall, three-fifths of respondents report their organisation has a supportive framework in place to recruit (59%) and retain (60%) people with a disability or long-term health condition and 69% report they have a framework in place to manage people with such conditions (CIPD and Simply Health, 2018, p. 5)

A key part of this whole organisational approach is that the organisation should put in place policies and procedures that take account of diversity and disability, so the strengths of all workers can be recognised and barriers removed to allow them to perform at their best and contribute effectively. Some flexibility in job design is helpful so that neurodivergent workers can spend their time working on what they are good at. Also, as far as practicable, provision of a flexible working environment is likely to be beneficial to everyone, for example it may help individuals avoid the stresses of rush-hour if they can vary their start and finish times, or work from home part-time or occasionally. It is important to emphasise how crucial communication is to the 'whole organisation' approach that ensures a fairer and more effective workplace for everyone. In situations of organisational change, it will be important for neurodivergent workers to be kept up-to-date on how the changes will affect them (S. Maile and J. Timms, 2018).

Neurodiversity – A Union Perspective: Pakes (Prospect)

Here is a summary of the approach:

The individual:

- Initially, the focus is on the individual - identification of their difference, and then supporting activities with them.
- Mentoring has proved to be one of the most successful methods of developing the performance of neurodivergent individuals. Research has shown that 43% have shown improvements after coaching and fairly standard reasonable adjustments.

The line manager:

- Progress for the individual will depend upon the involvement of the line manager. After all, they are the person who has the responsibility of putting in place the reasonable adjustments.

Colleagues:

- It is important to raise the awareness of colleagues, particularly to explain why there is a different relationship between the neurodivergent worker and their line manager, but also to advise them on appropriate methods of communication, etc.
- Raising awareness starts to change attitudes. Tackling the stigma and changing attitudes is one of the main issues for organisations to overcome. Many people with hidden disabilities do not disclose because of the attitudes of the organisation and of colleagues.
- Training is therefore very important in raising awareness which leads to changing attitudes.

The Whole Organisation Approach concentrates on people's strengths rather than their weaknesses. Evidence has shown that implementing a programme such as the Whole Organisation Approach increases the performance of staff significantly (CIPD 2018).

It is estimated that around 10% of the workforce has a 'cognitive functioning different from what is seen as normal' (CIPD 2018, p.4). We would term this as neurodivergent, Therefore if ignored, the organisation is missing out on the talents of 10% of their staff. It is therefore a business imperative.

Neurodiversity and the workplace

The aim of the whole organisation approach is to recognise the contribution of its individuals towards collective organisational success

It is likely therefore that changes will be required in the processes and practices of the organisation to take account of disabilities that cannot be readily identified through hearing, sight, or touch (hidden). Here are some issues to be considered across different employment processes.

Neurodiversity – A Union Perspective:

Pakes (Prospect)

Recruitment, selection and promotion:

- Are the adverts structured such that they are accessible to people with hidden disabilities? Avoid ambiguous/generic advertisements.
- Do the processes of application make it easy to disclose in a sensitive, confidential way? There are more people with hidden disabilities who have not told their employers, than those who have. It is therefore very important to ensure a culture where individuals will feel confident to disclose.
- Is there a procedure in place to make adjustments for the interviewing process and perhaps for the criteria that are being used to judge?
- Ensure that the line manager is briefed and trained in helpful management techniques.
- Are there multiple application methods?
- Ensure interviews give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in different ways.

Training and development:

- Does the training department have a policy for people with hidden disabilities who may have learning differences?
- Is there an understanding of learning styles?
- Is material presented in a variety of different ways?
- Do they give potential learners the opportunity for disclosure?
- Does the individual have a statement of training needs for outside training events?
- Is a checklist of adjustments offered for external training providers?

Performance:

- People may not realise that their hidden disability impacts on their performance and may not therefore realise that they are entitled to adjustments to help them fulfil their potential.
- It is essential that any performance reviews or appraisals are conducted after adjustments have been put in place.
- Are the criteria for assessment objective and justifiable?
- Have line managers received appropriate training in managing workers with hidden disabilities?
- Communications, instructions, aims and goals should be clearly communicated and understood. It may be necessary to follow-up verbal instructions with a written communication.

Fulfilling potential:

- Focusing on individuals' strengths, rather than their weaknesses, and developing their skills is clearly beneficial for both the individual and the organisation.

Reorganisation:

- Neurodivergent people often prefer routine and therefore any reorganisation will need to be handled sensitively. In addition, the compensatory strategies they have built up over time may become redundant and new strategies will need to be established.
- It would be good practice to involve the neurodiverse employee at the outset and throughout the reorganisation process.

Neurodiversity – A Union Perspective:

Pakes (Prospect)

Working with the organisation to develop strategies to enable people to disclose their hidden disabilities, to progress within the organisation etc. will lead to a win-win situation for everyone.

Reasonable adjustments

These are examples of adjustments which may be appropriate. Most of them would very likely benefit everyone in the workplace, but are particularly important for neurodivergent workers:

- A working environment to minimise distractions
- A professional assessment if one does not already exist
- Specialist training for the individual
- Options for flexible working
- Clear and concise communications: both written and oral
- Structured routines
- Appropriate software, such as speech recognition
- Recognition that overworking is a common compensatory strategy which in the longer-term can lead to stress and burn-out, so adjustments should be put in place promptly.

There are many more examples and guidance on the neurodiversity pages of Prospect's website.

Of course, the reasonable adjustments should be appropriate for each individual, and so a workplace assessment is very important, preferably carried out by a qualified occupational psychologist.

Although the individual should be involved in determining what reasonable adjustments would be appropriate for them, it is important that a workplace assessment is carried out by a specialist on neurodiversity since it may not occur to the individual what adjustments are most appropriate for their own circumstances.

Working differently does not imply inefficiency, sometimes employers need to be reminded of this in order to get the best out of their employees.

Adjustments enable the employee to flourish, which makes them happier, which makes them more productive. This creates a 'win/win' situation all around.

Managers and employers should therefore be encouraged to think about how best to get the best out of all the individuals in their team/organisation, including about the impact on the organisation as a whole. For example, it is estimated that 10% of employees are dyslexic, but 35% of entrepreneurs are dyslexic (J. Logan, 2009) which goes to show that unless neurodiverse staff are valued and provided with the correct adjustments their talents may be lost to the organisation - and they may even become a competitor.

Neurodiversity – A Union Perspective: Pakes (Prospect)

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Workplace Needs Assessment – Best Practice Enabling Successful Performance

Kindersley (DAN)



Photo by LinkedIn Sales Navigator on Unsplash

Founder Director of Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy, www.workingwithdyslexia.com

For ease of reading, ‘he’ is used to refer to the employee and ‘she’ for the line manager.

The Workplace Needs Assessment

The purpose of the Workplace Needs Assessment (WNA) or work-based assessment is to explore the particular adjustments which will enable the dyslexic / neurodivergent (ND) employee to work more successfully and contribute fully to his employment. Neurodivergent employees should therefore request a WNA as a good workplace assessment will help to promote a more inclusive environment and influence what happens in important ways, as explained below.

Best practice is for the specialist workplace assessor to meet the neurodivergent employee and the line manager/s in the workplace to talk about the particular challenges that the employee faces as well as the strengths of his work performance. In the light of this discussion and in the context of the diagnostic assessment, the range of job responsibilities and the particular demands of the job, bespoke recommendations will be made. The range of possible adjustments can of course be very wide, particularly where the recommendations go beyond the templated ‘one solution fits all’ and where the workplace assessor is experienced and alert to small adaptations which will make a positive difference. However, common recommendations would include items of equipment, assistive software programs with training in their use, specialist coaching/ job skills training, adjustments to the physical environment as well as recommendations for different ways of working, both for the manager and the employee.

Workplace Needs Assessment – Best Practice Enabling Successful Performance

Kindersley (DAN)

Face-to-Face Discussions

It is the face-to-face discussions which enable the assessor to gather first-hand information about the employment, often resulting in more useful and appropriate recommendations being made for the employee. By talking to the Line Manager and perhaps also the officer(s) in Human Resources, the assessor also gains the employer's perspective which can contribute important information, especially, as happens quite frequently, if the perspectives of the employer and employee are not in accord. Further, the meeting allows the assessor to explain the reasons behind the employee's challenges, promoting the awareness of neurodivergence within the organisation. These discussions help to bring the manager/s onside, so they understand the purpose of the assessment and how they can support the recommended adjustments and different ways of working. We must avoid leaving the employee isolated, trying to advocate for himself, often in what are discriminating practices even if these are unintentional and the result of a lack of understanding. Thus the workplace assessment can help line managers become willing and flexible partners. This makes it much more likely that the adjustments will be successful.



Copyright: Peter Kindersley.

Without such meetings, we are also in danger of setting up potential tensions and conflicts –creating expectations for the employee but with a line manager who does not understand why she is being asked to adapt her working practices. And we know that without understanding, workplaces can be inflexible and rigid in their processes.

The Working Environment

If neurodivergent individuals are to be successful in the workplace, the working environment is a key area to consider and explore. Feedback from the Westminster AchieveAbility Commission Report (2018) *Neurodiverse Voices: Opening Doors to Employment* confirmed this. The environment of course covers many different aspects, from the physical environment and comfort of the workplace for the individual, through to the equipment and systems in place and the particular management style. However, perhaps the most important aspect of the working environment for neurodivergent employees is for managers and colleagues to have an understanding of neurodivergence.

Manager Awareness is Essential

Understanding the need for workplace adjustments and the difference these can make is absolutely the key to successful working for the neurodivergent employee. Otherwise, even with a range of individual adjustments in place, the employee may still not succeed because the attitudes are negative and the system is rigid and inflexible.



A common reason behind many employment tribunals is that the employer simply does not accept that people may have to work differently to do their job. Or else the employer's reluctance to engage fully in making adjustments means that they are made late, unwillingly or begrudgingly and the process of making proper adjustments can take so long that the employee becomes increasingly stressed and finally despairs with no energy to carry on. However, with awareness of neurodivergence on the part of the employer, discriminatory circumstances can be successfully tackled.

Workplace Needs Assessment – Best Practice Enabling Successful Performance

Kindersley (DAN)



The growth of awareness can be promoted through many routes, for example, the inclusion of neurodivergent awareness training in all Human Resource (HR) courses; training for the organisation's HR team, for the senior managers; holding neurodiversity awareness weeks, setting up lunchtime networking meetings, online networking groups, newsletters; the informed neurodivergent employee requesting adjustments within his employment, or in the recruitment process. And again, it is the good workplace needs assessment which will improve the Line Manager's understanding of neurodivergence and signpost how to work best with the neurodivergent individual.

The line manager may well need to do things differently and often there are simple adaptations to the ways of working which will make things easier for the employee. Of course, depending on the particular job and the particular environment, there are myriads of possible bespoke adaptations to working practices, but the following examples give the flavour of what we might ask managers to do:

- give clear, explicit instructions on tasks and expectations
- follow up a verbal communication or instructions with a bullet-pointed email
- encourage the employee to check back to confirm their understanding of instructions
- offer guidance on the sequence for the daily tasks or with prioritising items
- whenever possible, give plenty of notice for new tasks
- provide templates for tasks; give examples
- highlight the pertinent sections of emails
- send out the agenda/ papers for meetings in advance
- space deadlines for different projects
- offer additional time for some tasks
- allow time for planning, for example at the beginning / end of each day
- provide additional support and training
- establish a mentoring / buddy system
- establish regular one-to-one discussion meetings to provide positive support, including encouragement to consolidate successful ways of working as well as specific and clear examples on areas needing improvement. Follow up with an email confirming the discussion and what was agreed.

While such adjustments ask the manager to work in a different way, they incur no cost for the employer and no particular special effort on the part of the manager, but they can make a huge difference to the successful working of the neurodivergent employee.

Workplace Needs Assessment – Best Practice Enabling Successful Performance

Kindersley (DAN)

Specialist Job Coaching

Specialist job coaching is often invaluable and it can make the difference between an employee keeping his job or losing it. In almost all cases, it should be included as a recommendation in the workplace needs assessment along with a suggested outline of the areas to focus on.

Clearly the content of the coaching and the strategies explored would be negotiated as appropriate in the particular case, but the following broad skill areas would often be included:

- **Time and task management:** strategies for organisation; prioritising and planning work; staying in control of core work priorities; delivering on time; responding promptly; preparing for meetings or tasks, coping with meetings; multi-tasking.
- **Ways of managing information:** e.g. requesting incoming email information in a set format.
- **Reading and identifying relevant points:** assimilating information efficiently; sorting and prioritising emails.
- **Writing:** planning outline structures; writing clearly and succinctly; summarising; proof-reading.
- **Communication and presentation skills:** presenting information and ideas clearly.
- **Self-development:** rebuilding confidence; working to strengths; adopting a reflective approach to working; managing stress; preventing overload.

The specialist job coach will be able to devise an appropriate programme, incorporating effective use of any supplied assistive software and responding to the needs of the individual. All neurodivergent employees can be supported by specialist job coaching, including those who feel overwhelmed and are struggling with managing their job.

Positive Change

The understanding of neurodivergence is key to dealing with any negative perspectives such as the insistence that adjustments cannot be made. Once understood, resistance and discrimination often dissolve. We see frequent examples where increased awareness brings positive change. We see frequent examples where increased awareness brings positive change.

- In spite of confidentiality issues, the physiotherapist was allowed to record client interviews so he could review the interview and write up more accurate notes.
- The engineer was offered one-to-one training rather than the group training on the company's new software systems so he could follow at his own pace, see demonstrations of the processes and ask for clarification, making the training effective instead of a waste of time.
- The head of nursing was allowed protected time immediately before and after staff meetings to prepare and to write up notes.
- A dedicated workstation was provided for the project manager so he could organise the computer files in a way that made sense to him, rather than return to an unfamiliar and alien set up found with the usual hot-desking policy.
- All employees in the open plan offices of a big department were allowed to use noise-cancelling headphones if they wished, supporting concentrated and uninterrupted work and creating an inclusive environment where the neurodivergent employee was not made to work differently.
- There was an agreement that an adjustment using assistive software could be made in a civil service selection process once it was understood that it was possible to allow the same adjustment in the workplace. More time was provided for training. More frequent or more explicit guidance was given.

Workplace Needs Assessment – Best Practice Enabling Successful Performance

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Sometimes bolder adjustments must be made. Organisations can be so locked into their own processes and systems and the way ‘things have to be’ that they fail to see what is possible and they need encouragement to be more creative.

We worked with an applicant who panicked at the thought of any psychometric assessment during recruitment processes and we argued successfully that in his dyslexia assessment he had already demonstrated a wide range of high-level abilities and the further assessment should be waived. Another employee was allowed to have the presentation topic in the selection process in advance. An employee on the autistic spectrum was about to be put into disciplinary measures because he refused to go to client meetings, part of the job description, even though the bank where he was employed recognized his superb skill with numbers. Finally, it was agreed that he could stay working with numbers and others could take his research and go and meet the clients. In another case, the employee’s strengths were assessed so he could move directly to the department where the emphasis in the job role meant that he was most likely to succeed. A neurodivergent employee whose relationship with his Line Manager had broken down was allowed to report to a more senior manager who had a more flexible style of management. Possible adjustments are endless but it can be seen through these examples that they can remove the negative or discriminatory circumstances and enable the employee to stay in employment.

Dyslexia / Neurodiversity Awareness Training

For managers to understand neurodivergence within the workplace and to respond positively and flexibly over adjustments, it is most likely that they will need to have awareness training and this recommendation should also be included within the workplace needs assessment report.

What we do not want is to make a range of recommendations for the employee, only to meet with manager resistance. While it might sound rather incredible to some readers, we have found that a common attitude is something along these lines: ‘OK, you’ve had some special training, you now have a laptop, and software, so why hasn’t your performance improved? When is it all going to be fixed?’

With understanding comes a willingness to implement the recommendations for adjustments which will support the neurodivergent employee. The awareness means that the employer is more open to different ways of working and is willing to be flexible where it will make a difference.

Best practice includes
Neurodiversity
Awareness Training for
managers & their teams



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Workplace Needs Assessment – Best Practice Enabling Successful Performance

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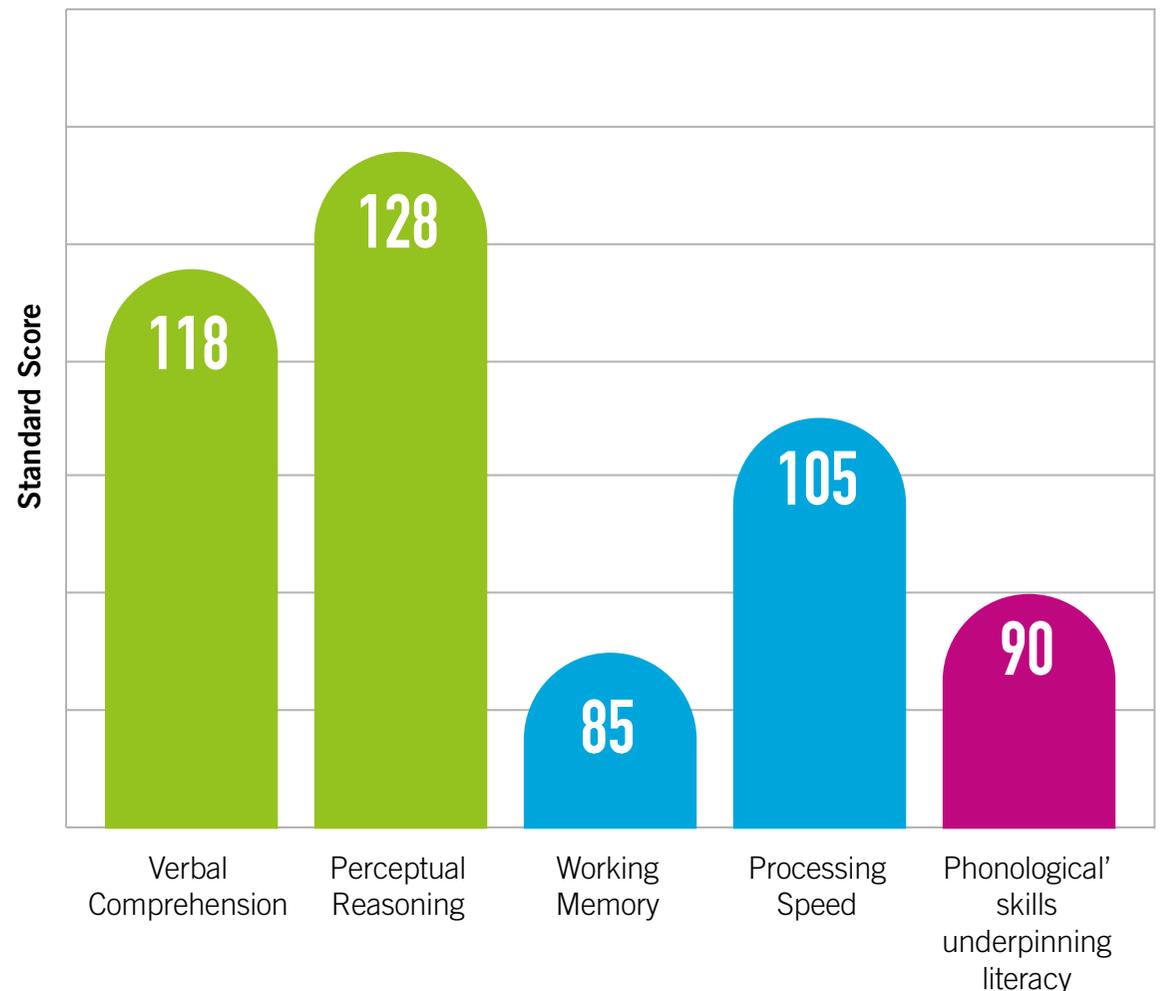
Understanding Strengths – A Huge Boost to Confidence

Joanna

I know there are differences of opinion about the ‘diagnostic’ assessment and the medical connotations of the language used. Yet I believe a good and positive diagnostic report can be of very great value. For example, in Joanna’s case, various measures of her verbal ability come together to form the ‘Verbal Comprehension’ score of 118, which places her in the top 12% of the normative sample, and by extension, above 88% of the general population. Her ‘Perceptual Reasoning’ score, the composite of her abilities when working with visual information and problem solving, at 128, places her in the top 3% of the normative sample, at or above 97% of the general population.

This was the first time in her life that Joanna had been told that she was very able. Imagine the boost to her confidence. We know how important confidence is – and its impact on performance. After years of having little belief in herself or her abilities, she felt great relief in understanding that there was a recognised reason for the difficulties she experienced and that she had clear strengths she could work with. This is a common response. In addition, when people gain an understanding of themselves, of their past and why some things continue to be difficult, they can start to grow in self-belief and be able to advocate for themselves.

Confidence and self-belief are empowering



Workplace Needs Assessment – Best Practice Enabling Successful Performance

Kindersley (DAN)

Bespoke Adjustments are Needed

Feedback from individuals and from the WAC report (2018) confirms that bespoke adjustments are the most successful. This is indeed the case. We are not just rolling out a list of standard templated adjustments. We must respond to the individual and the individual setting and make recommendations that we are confident will be useful.

This is another important benefit of a diagnostic assessment as it provides the evidence for the benefits of particular adjustments. We know the adjustments are likely to work because we know why they are needed. Best practice means that the workplace assessment will respond to the impact of the individual profile on the particular job tasks and it is this that informs the adjustments that are recommended. In Joanna's case, an important area to support in her job activities is her 'working' memory: she needed to be able to gain a record of information that she could return to, whether this was an audio file, or a written record, or memo, so she could work accurately and more efficiently. We are not just putting a plaster over an area of difficulty - and hoping it's the right plaster. Best practice means that the adjustments are **bespoke** – and the ones that are most appropriate and needed. We can also explain the reason for these adjustments to the manager and show why they are important.

Highlight Strengths – Make Use of Them!

We know that particular areas of strength belong to the neurodivergent population and in best practice, they will be noted and made use of in the workplace assessment.

Examples of Strengths



- Resourceful & Creative
- Good with people
- Good communication skills
- Good with ideas & innovative thinking
- Good problem-solving skills
- Ability to find alternate paths to overcome obstacles
- Practical, hands-on skills
- Determined and work long hours

We need to recognise and talk about these strengths. It is excellent practice to make adjustments according to the employee's strengths and to adapt job responsibilities to match these.

For employees, knowing their strengths can also help them reframe the previous difficulties.

- **Question:** Is your memory reliable?
- **Answer:** Yes. I work in a variety of ways to ensure that I am accurate and reliable. I am confident that I don't forget things.

Workplace Needs Assessment – Best Practice Enabling Successful Performance

Kindersley (DAN)

The Overall Perspective

If a team, department, company or organisation is to work in a successful and productive way, the barriers which prevent an employee from working effectively need to be removed. This demands understanding and a positive engagement with adjustments, including those which require changes being made to established processes and systems. Awareness of neurodivergence across departments and organisations will help to develop a style of management and culture which is inclusive and flexible.

In my work, while I see that there is still a very great amount to do to implement what is needed across our workplaces, it is encouraging that there is a general growing interest on the part of many employers to engage with adjustments in working practices to support their neurodivergent employees. Where there is an informed culture of awareness of neurodivergence across the teams and the managers of those teams and departments of an organisation, we will find best practice.

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<https://www.patoss-dyslexia.org/contact-us>

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02

Strategy in the Creative Industries

Collaborative Working in Scotland

Magee (Dyslexia Scotland)



Photo by Tim Gouw on Unsplash

Dyslexia Scotland, Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union (BECTU) and other partnerships

Dyslexia Scotland aims to **inspire and enable people with dyslexia to reach their potential in education, employment and life.**

We do this through a wide range of **support and services** to dyslexic people and those who support them.

Based in Stirling, we also have a network of volunteer-led branches and Adult Networks and we work with a wide range of partners nationally and locally to influence positive change for dyslexic people.

Through calls to our Helpline and Career Development Service, Dyslexia Scotland recognised that there is a high proportion of dyslexic people working in, or aspiring to work, in creative and cultural sectors (Dyslexia Scotland, 2018).

The charity sought to strengthen links with relevant arts unions to ensure that neurodivergent employees are provided with support to help them thrive.

Collaborative Working in Scotland

Magee (Dyslexia Scotland)

There was a particularly positive response from the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union (BECTU). They had identified that many participants applying for their 'Hit the Ground Running' course were dyslexic, or presented with indicators of dyslexia. 'Hit the Ground Running' is an intensive two-day training course designed to equip participants with the skills needed for entry level work to film and TV crew roles.

Seeking to make the course as accessible as possible, BECTU worked with Dyslexia Scotland on developing dyslexia-friendlier communications, starting with their recruitment process.

BECTU were quick to implement recommendations including:

- Adapting their online application form and web page to align with Dyslexia Scotland's Dyslexia Friendly Communication guidance
- Highlighting on course application forms that neurodivergence is grounds for requesting reasonable adjustments at an interview
- Keeping application questions straightforward so dyslexic people find it easier to 'fit' their answers
- Providing the option of submitting a spoken word or video application as an alternative to a written one

Linda Fraser, co-Manager of BECTU vision said,

“Dyslexia Scotland gave us great practical feedback on our recruitment process and we will be implementing these changes across the board for our short course recruitment. I’m just very grateful that there is an organisation like Dyslexia Scotland which we can consult for best practice guidance on how to make our procedures as accessible as possible. Without them, we wouldn’t know where to start.”

BECTU wrote up a case study about one of their dyslexic members, Gregor Mutch, which is available on request from cathy@dyslexiascotland.org.uk.



This is one example of a wide range of collaborative work in Scotland through Dyslexia Scotland and other partners. Other examples include:

- The Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) Scottish Union Learning's Everyday Skills Dyslexia Group was established to develop guidance for Union Learning Representatives in Scotland to help them support and signpost people who may have dyslexia, and also to promote a 'dyslexia-friendly' workplace. The group produced the **Dyslexia Guide for Union Learning Representatives** in 2012. This Guide is currently being updated.
- In 2018, Dyslexia Scotland, Education Scotland, the Community Learning and Development Standards Council and the Open University produced a new module to raise awareness amongst practitioners working with adults who may be dyslexic.

This '**Introduction to Dyslexia and Inclusive Practice**' is available to anyone and is free of charge. It takes around 2-3 hours to complete.

For further details about Dyslexia Scotland, visit: www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk

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Case Study – Gregor Mutch – BECTU

Set on a career in film and television, Gregor Mutch signed up as a BECTU member shortly after graduating from his Media degree at Aberdeen’s Robert Gordon University – and wasted no time getting stuck into union learning.

First stop was the free BECTU Vision Hit the Ground Running roadshow, where a presentation on behind the scenes careers in film and television inspired Gregor to apply for the intensive two-day Hit the Ground Running short course for new entrants.

Despite his degree, and some experience of on-set environments, the interactive practical industry-based course gave Gregor invaluable industry insight.

“The HTGR course answered a lot of questions that I had, along with some I’d never thought of before,” said Gregor. “The training has given me more confidence in my ability to work as an efficient and competent runner.”

Hungry for more, Gregor attended BECTU Vision’s one-day Marketing and Networking course and took part in the follow-up networking event, where he had the chance to mingle with professionals and employers. Living in rural Aberdeenshire, BECTU’s networking events have given Gregor a golden opportunity to build industry relationships.

When BECTU Vision learned that Gregor is dyslexic, they worked with course tutors to ensure training was tailored to his needs. Gregor has also completed an introduction to excel course which was a helpful addition to enable him to improve his CV.

“I’m not the most academic person and struggled with dyslexia throughout school and university,” said Gregor. “However, my experience with BECTU accommodating my needs has been excellent.”

And Gregor’s successes have inspired BECTU Vision to work with Dyslexia Scotland to ensure all courses and materials are dyslexia friendly. Gregor said: “It can be difficult to ask for additional support, so hearing that BECTU Vision are working towards more additional help for others with similar difficulties makes me very happy.”

Thanks to the training and networking opportunities offered by BECTU, Gregor’s career as a freelance Production Runner is flourishing, with his CV boasting work on STV and BBC dramas.

“The knowledge I have gained through BECTU Vision has helped me find employment in a competitive industry and I fully intend to continue my learning with them,” says Gregor.

BECTU’s Linda Fraser said: “Gregor’s story is an exceptionally good example of how a positive attitude to lifelong learning, combined with the opportunities for industry-based training through union learning, can overcome barriers and enable workers to achieve their goals.”

Further information on BECTU training and learning opportunities in the nations and regions can be found at <https://bectu.org.uk/bectu-vision/>

Information on support for neurodiversity can be found on the website of BECTU’s parent union, Prospect.

#talkBECTU union week also coincides with Dyslexia Scotland’s Dyslexia Awareness Week.

Neurodiversity, the Creative Economy and Apprenticeships

Charles Freeman



Photo by RhondaK Native Florida Folk Artist on Unsplash

1. Introduction

In Autumn 2018 and Spring 2019 **AchieveAbility** and **Artwork** led a series of roundtable discussions to investigate how apprenticeships in the creative sector could be made more available to neurodivergent people. These roundtables were chaired by the AchieveAbility President Barry Sheerman MP.

The roundtables included participants with expertise relating to neurodiversity, the creative economy skills and work-based learning. This paper was initially prepared to inform these discussions. The paper seeks to explain the term neurodiversity, outline the scope of the creative economy, reflect on the relatively high numbers of neurodivergent people working in the creative economy, and explain the current position in relation to the delivery of creative apprenticeships before outlining ideas relating to the way in which apprenticeships could be made more available to neurodivergent people. During the course of the roundtable discussions, a number of case studies were discussed; these are listed at the end of the paper.

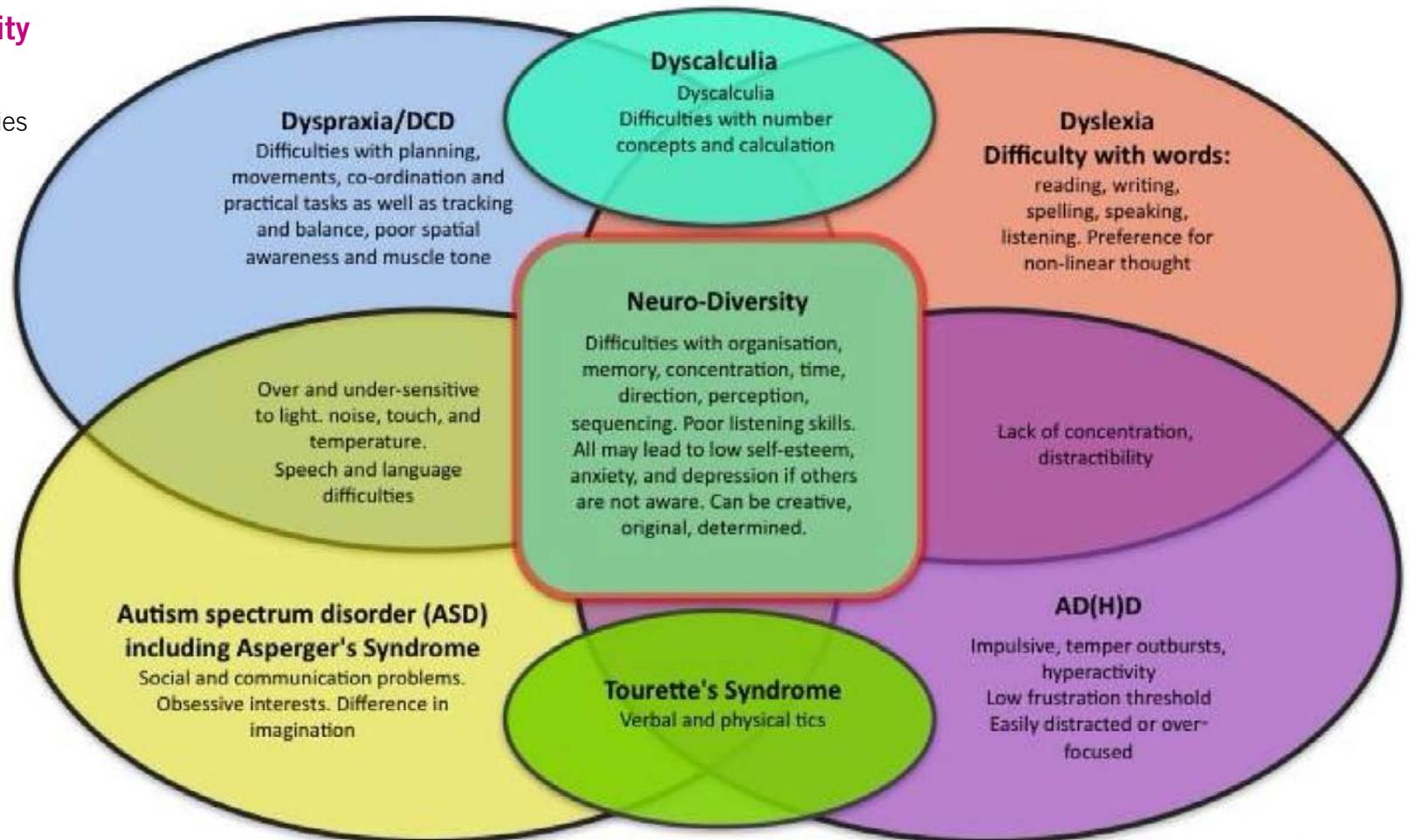
Neurodiversity, the Creative Economy and Apprenticeships

Charles Freeman

2. Defining Neurodiversity

The Make-up of Neuro-Diversity

This is a document for discussion, concentrating mainly on the difficulties of those who are neurodivergent. It must however be pointed out that many such people are excellent at maths, co-ordination, reading etc. We are people of extremes.



Created by Mary Colley

Neurodiversity, the Creative Economy and Apprenticeships

Charles Freeman

Mary Colley used the term neurodiversity to refer to the overlaps between neurodivergent people, as in the diagram above (Colley, 2006).

As noted by Nancy Doyle (2019), the language of neurodiversity is still evolving and sometimes contested.

The **AchieveAbility Westminster Commission** report uses a definition of neurodiversity developed by the autistic author **Nick Walker** (Achievability Westminster Commission Neuro-diverse Voices Opening Doors to Employment, 2018):

Neurodivergent, sometimes abbreviated as ND, means having a style of Neuro-cognitive functioning that diverges significantly from the dominant societal standards of 'normal'. Neurodivergent people include Dyslexics, Dyspraxics, ADHD, Autistics (including those with Asperger's), Dyscalculics, OCD, Dysgraphics, Tourette's, etc. (Walker, 2014)

The Westminster Commission report (2018) notes that it is more common than not for neurodivergent people to have overlapping neuro-differences. For example, someone with a primary assessment for dyslexia, is highly likely additionally to have characteristics associated with other neuro-differences e.g. dyspraxia or ADHD. Furthermore, disadvantage in the labour market is likely to compound the more a neurodivergent person experiences overlapping neuro-differences.

Approximately 1 in 7 people in the population are neurodivergent. Approximately 10% of the population are dyslexic and just over 1% of the population have been assessed as having Autism Spectrum Disorder(ASD) (Autism Facts and History, National Autistic Society, 2016).

It is estimated that dyslexic People are four times more likely to be unemployed than people in the general population. The National Autistic Society estimates that only 16% of autistic people are in full-time employment. Reduced opportunity in the workforce is further compounded by other factors which tend to create disadvantage including gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background. These factors may also make it less likely that an individual might be assessed as being neurodivergent or access appropriate support services (Parliamentary Work and Pensions Committee Report, Universal Credit implementation: meeting the needs of vulnerable claimants, 2012). Small scale studies indicate that possibly 40% unemployed people are dyslexic. There are around 1.4m people unemployed in UK, therefore roughly 560, 000 dyslexic people are unemployed. The UK labour force is comprised of approximately 32 million people, 10% are dyslexic meaning that 17.5% are unemployed compared to a level of 4% unemployment in the total population.

Neurodiversity, the Creative Economy and Apprenticeships

Charles Freeman

3. Defining the Creative Industries

The creative economy contributes £92B to the UK economy and employs 3 million people (Parliamentary Policy Paper, Creative Industries Sector Deal, 2018). While the UK economy grew by 23% between 2010-2016, the Creative Industries grew by 44%.

The Department for Culture Media and Sport defines the creative industries as being: 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (Department for Media and Culture and Sport, Creative Industry Economic Estimates, 2018).

The following industry classifications are covered by this definition.

Advertising and Marketing

- Public relations and communication activities
- Advertising agencies
- Media representation

Architecture

- Architectural activities

Crafts

- Manufacture of jewellery and related articles

Design: product, graphic and fashion design

- Specialised design activities

Film, TV, Video, Radio and Photography

- Motion picture, video and television programme production activities
 - Motion picture, video and television programme post-production
 - Motion picture, video and television programme distribution
 - Motion picture projection activities
 - Radio broadcasting
 - Television programming and broadcasting activities
 - Photographic activities
-

IT, Software and Computer services

- Publishing of computer games
- Other software publishing
- Computer programming activities
- Computer consultancy activities

Publishing

- Book publishing
- Publishing of directories and mailing lists
- Publishing of newspapers
- Publishing of journals and periodicals
- Other publishing activities
- Translation and interpretation activities

Museums, Galleries and Libraries

- Library and archive activities
- Museum activities

Music, Performing and Visual Arts

- Sound recording and music publishing activities
 - Cultural education
 - Performing arts
 - Support activities to performing arts
 - Artistic creation
 - Arts Admin and operation of arts facilities
-

Neurodiversity, the Creative Economy and Apprenticeships

Charles Freeman

4. Neurodiversity in the Creative Sector

Many well-known neurodivergent people have achieved success in the creative sector. These include entrepreneurs Richard Branson and Kelly Hoppen, broadcasters Chris Peckham and Alan Gardner, performers Emily Watson and Eddie Izzard. The BIMA (British Interactive Marketing Association) tech diversity report showed that 20% of respondents self-identified as neurodivergent. This is a 50% over-representation compared to the general population.

Arts schools report very large numbers of neurodivergent students. The Royal College of Arts estimates 29% of students identify themselves to be dyslexic (Royal College of Arts, 'Rebalancing Dyslexia and Creativity at the RCA', 2015). The 2010 Institute of Employment report Creative Graduates Creative Futures estimated that 13% of Creative and Design Students had a disability compared to 7.7% across the total university population. 10% of these were dyslexic ('Creative Graduates Creative Futures', Institute of Employment Studies, 2010).

'Creative Graduates Creative Futures' goes on to suggest that after 3 years dyslexic graduates are as likely to be employed in the sector as their non-dyslexic counterparts. However, their mode of employment is different. They are more likely to freelance or be self-employed (60%) than non-dyslexic members of the cohort (around 40% of whom are freelance).

5. Apprenticeships in the Creative Sector

What is an apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship is a job with training attached. The apprentice must have a contract of employment which must be for a minimum 12 months. Most of their learning takes place on-the-job, but they must also have at least 20% off-the-job training. More information is provided by the British government (What is an Apprentice? Apprenticeships Hub, HM Government:

<https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/apprentice/what-is-an-apprenticeship>).

There are apprenticeships at different levels:

- **Level 2** apprenticeships are equivalent to 5 GCSE passes
- **Level 3** apprenticeships are equivalent to A Level
- **Level 4** apprenticeships are equivalent to BTEC Professional Diploma level
- **Level 5** apprenticeships are equivalent to HND or Foundation Degree level
- **Level 6** apprenticeships are equivalent to Undergraduate Degrees
- **Level 7** apprenticeships are equivalent to Master's Degrees

Different apprenticeships last for different lengths of time with lower levels typically lasting 12 months and higher levels lasting three years or more.

Neurodiversity, the Creative Economy and Apprenticeships

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How are Apprenticeships funded?

Employers with an annual wage bill of over £3m have to make a payment to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) of 0.5% of total wages above that £3m (so a wage bill of £4m would require a contribution of 0.5% x £1m = £5k).

In return, contributing employers receive vouchers which they can use to pay for off-the job training and assessment for apprentices (the employer has to cover wages and on-the-job training). Employers can also transfer some of their levy to cover the costs of training apprentices employed by other businesses.

Employers who do not pay the levy have to pay 5% of the training costs for apprentices - Government covers at least the other 95%. If the apprentice has been in care or has a Local Education Authority Health and Care Plan, the Government covers the full cost.

The Current Apprenticeship Landscape

creative skills | The National Skills Academy CREATIVE & CULTURAL

ukft ukft.org

ScreenSkills

Cultural Heritage, Museums and Galleries

- Countryside Worker L2 ***
- Archaeological Technician L3 ***
- Museum and Gallery Technician L3 ***
- Library, Information and Archives Services Assistant L3 ****
- Cultural Heritage Conservation Technician L4 ***
- Assistant Historic Environment Advisor L4 ***
- Cultural Registrar L6 ***
- Cultural Heritage Conservator L7 ***
- Historic Environment Advisor L7 *
- Archaeological Specialist L7 ***
- Curator L7 **
- Archivist Ltbc *

IT, Software and specialist digital

- Software Development Technician L3 ****
- Data Technician L3 ***
- Data Analyst L4 ****
- Software Developer L4 ****
- Data Scientist L6 ****
- Creative Digital Design Professional L6 ***
- Digital and Technology Solution Professional L7 ****

Broadcast Engineering

- Broadcast & Communications Technical Operator L3 ***
- Broadcast & Communications Technician L5 **
- Broadcast & Media Systems Engineer L6 *
- Outside Broadcast Engineer L7 ****

Animation, Games and VFX

- Assistant Technical Director (Visual Effects) L4 ****
- Junior 2 D Artist (Visual Effects) L4 ****
- Digital Community Manager L4 ***
- Junior Animator L4 ***
- Storyboard Artist L7 **

Fashion and Textiles

- Leather Craftsperson L2 ****
- Fashion Studio Assistant L3 ****
- Fashion and Textiles Pattern Cutter L3 ****
- Costume Performance Support Technician L3 **
- Garment Maker L3 *
- Bespoke Tailor and Cutter L5 ****

Customer Support, Audience Engagement, Marketing and Communications

- Customer Service Practitioner L2 ****
- Advertising and Media Executive L3 ****
- Customer Service Specialist L3 ****
- Cultural Learning and Participation Officer L3 ****
- Digital Marketer L3 ****
- Marketing Assistant L3 **
- Marketing Executive L4 ****
- Public Relations and Communications Assistant L4 ****
- Digital Marketer L6 ****
- Marketing Manager L6 ****
- Advertising Creative L6 *

Content Creation, production and Post-production

- Broadcast Production Assistant L3 ****
- Junior Journalist L3 ****
- Junior Content Producer L3 ****
- Photographic Assistant L3 ***
- Publishing Assistant L3 ****
- Post Production Technical Operator L4 ***
- Media Production Coordinator L4 **
- Associate Project Manager L4 ****
- Creative Digital Designer L6 *
- Journalist L6 *
- Creative Industries Production Manager L7 ***

Technical and Craft

- Puppet Maker L3 ***
- Creative Venue Technician L3 ****
- Live Event Technician L3 ****
- Live Event Rigger L3 ****
- Props Technician L3 ***
- Jewellery Maker L3 *
- Hair, Make Up and Prosthetics Assistant L4 *

Fundraising and Administration

- Bid and Proposal Co-ordinator L3 ***
- Business Administrator L3 ****
- Event Assistant L3 ****
- Team Leader L3 ****
- Operations / Departmental Manager L5 ****

Apprenticeship Standards map for the creative industries

**** Ready for use
*** Standard approved, awaiting Assessment Plan

** Proposal approved
* Proposal in development

L2 - Level 2
L3 - Level 3
L4 - Level 4
L5 - Level 5
L6 - Level 6
L7 - Level 7

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Neurodiversity, the Creative Economy and Apprenticeships

Charles Freeman

Apprenticeships in the creative industries are gaining traction. The above chart shows the range of available apprenticeships in the creative footprint. The table shows the number of starts on the new 'apprenticeship standards' by sub-sector in the apprenticeship year 2017/18.

Sub-Sector	Apprenticeship Standard	Number of starts in Apprenticeship year 2017/18 to date
Content Creation, Production and Post-Production	Broadcast Production Assistant (Level 3)	90
	Junior Journalist (Level 3)	160
	Junior Content Producer (Level 3)	210
	Publishing Assistant (Level 3)	0
Animation, Games and VFX	Assistant Technical Director ((Visual Effects) (Level 4)	0
	Junior 2D Artist (Visual Effects) (Level 4)	0
Broadcast Engineering	Outside Broadcast Engineer (Level 7)	0
Fashion and Textiles	Bespoke Saddler (Level 3)	0
	Bespoke Tailor and Cutter (Level 5)	0
Technical and Crafts	Creative Venue Technician (Level 3)	10
	Live Event Rigger (Level 3)	0
Other	Architectural Assistant (Level 3)	0
	Architect (Level 6)	0
	Digital Marketer (Level 3)	3,900
	Event Assistant (Level 3)	120
	Marketing Executive (Level 4)	0
	Marketing Manager (Level 6)	0
	PR Assistant (Level 3)	0
Total		4,480

The main reason some standards have no starts yet is that they are new.

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Challenges of the Apprenticeship System

Although apprenticeship in the creative industries are gaining traction, there are challenges which may be restricting take-up:

- Small companies (95% of UK creative businesses employ 10 or fewer people) These businesses struggle with the 12-month contract rule and the requirement to have the apprentices off-the-job for 20% of the time.
- Very large numbers of businesses in the sector turn over less than £3m and therefore do not pay the levy and therefore do not have the same incentives as levy-paying businesses to take on apprentices.
- Levy-paying employers struggle to 'spend' their levy funds because of headcount restrictions.
- Training providers able to deliver specialist frameworks frequently do not exist within an easy travel time of an employer.

6. Apprenticeship Pathways for Neurodivergent People in the Creative Sector

In an article in FE Week Chris Quickfall estimated around 19% of all apprentices have hidden learning needs (Quickfall, 2017). Many may not have a formal assessment. Quickfall however argues that these apprentices have substantially less access to support than HE students.

The November 2017 All-Party Parliamentary Group APPG facilitated by Mencap met to discuss how apprenticeships could be made more accessible to Autistic people and people with learning disabilities. The APPG noted that the requirement to achieve a GCSE qualification in English and Maths can act as a barrier for neurodivergent people wishing to take up apprenticeships. The APPG welcomed the Government announcement in September 2017 that apprentices with an education and care plan can use an entry level 3 (one level below GCSE) qualification to access a level 2 apprenticeship. However, the viability of level 2 apprenticeships is increasingly being challenged, this dispensation may therefore be of limited value.

The Department for Education report exploring the funding and support for apprentices with additional support needs draws attention to following available support ('Exploring the funding and support needs for apprentices with additional support needs', Department for Education, 2018):

- Additional Learning Support of up to £150 per month to meet costs associated with learning aids and adaptations. This funding is often used to support neurodivergent learners.
- £1,000 employer and provider payments for apprentices aged 19-24 with an EHCP.
- Access to Work support, although the report notes that awareness of the access to work support is very low amongst training providers, employers and apprentices.

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7. Building Blocks to be included in a Pilot Project

It is possible an excellent opportunity exists in the creative sector to open work-based learning pathways to employment to neurodivergent people. Many neurodivergent people have a passion for creativity, several role models already work in the sector, and the sector is hungry for skills.

However significant challenges exist both in relation to the roll-out of creative apprenticeships, and in addressing the support needs of neurodivergent individuals. The following building blocks may have potential to address some of these challenges.

- **The development of employer's networks** – these might be made up of creative employers who are positive about employing neurodivergent people, aware of the support needs of neurodivergent apprentices and knowledgeable about how to access appropriate support. This approach has been core to the **Artswork apprenticeship initiative**.
- **The use of an Apprenticeship Training Agency (ATA)** – Apprenticeship training agencies have to be registered with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Their role is to employ apprentices and source training on behalf of third-party employers. The ATA reduces the risk to employers associated with employment. Within the context of the creative sector ATAs could also facilitate the sharing of an apprentice between employers. This model is being piloted by screen skills at Pinewood ('Apprenticeship pilot aims to unlock levy skills for UK screen', Screen Skills, July 2019).
- **The development of a network of training providers** who are positive about supporting neurodivergent students. It is also crucial to build awareness among training providers of the support available to neurodivergent apprentices.
- **Recruitment of neurodivergent apprentices who are ready to take advantage of the initiative** – not all applicants will necessarily be ready to take advantage of apprenticeship opportunities immediately. Supported internships, pre-employment programmes, traineeships and paid internships, may all therefore be required to open pathways to employment prior to enrolment on an apprenticeship.
- **Employment Support** – The apprentices will need to access a range of support, possibly including, establishing an appropriate work environment, assistive technology, job coaching and study support.

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8. Some Examples and Case Studies

Neurodiversity in the Creative Sector

- **Creative and Cultural Skills** Melanie Shee – Celebrating neuro-diversity blog <https://ccskills.org.uk/supporters/blog/celebrating-neuro-diversity>
 - **Dyslexic Design** Exhibition curated by Jim Rokos at Design Junction as part of the London Design Festival in 2016 – <https://www.frameweb.com/news/jim-rokos-curates-design-exhibition-to-dissolve-dyslexia-s-stigma> – <https://rokos.com/blogs/exhibitions/dyslexic-design>
 - **DYSPLA International Film Festival** <http://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/eclectic-dyslexics-neurodiversity-key-artistic-success/> – the author of these reviews, Emma Robdale, is a Dyslexic writer <http://disabilityarts.online/author/emma-robdale/>
 - **Everything is Spherical Anthology of Dyslexic Writer** RASP (Rebellion Against Spelling Press) 2014
-

Support for Neurodivergent People developing Careers in the Creative Sector

- **Genius Within** – a social enterprise which specialises in developing Neurodivergent talent and helping Neurodivergent people achieve success.
 - **Auticon** – a Social Enterprise which provides an Autism friendly environment and uses talented Autistic IT specialists to deliver complex IT and compliance assignments.
 - **Ravensbourne University SEEDS programme** (Self Employment Entrepreneurship and Diversity) - an entrepreneurship programme designed for and by Neurodivergent people.
 - **Exceptional Individuals** – a specialist recruitment agency supporting Dyslexic and Neurodivergent people.
 - **The Future is ND** – an excellent networking group bringing together Neurodivergent people working in the Creative Digital and Tech sectors.
-

Employability and Apprenticeship Support

- **Making Theatre Gaining Skills** – Making Theatre is a social enterprise which uses a backstage experience to develop employability skills. Director Hilary Strong believes that over 50% of participants are assessed or unassessed neurodivergent.
 - **Artwork Creative Apprenticeship Initiative** – Artwork has delivered a small, bespoke, employer-led, creative apprenticeship programme. 40 young people have completed apprenticeships several of whom have been neurodivergent.
 - **Supported internships** – <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/parents-hub/supported-internships>. The **DFN foundation** report very high success rates progressing young people with EHCP's into employment following supported internships.
-

Neurodiversity, the Creative Economy and Apprenticeships

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9. Conclusion

The creative economy is expanding fast. Within the sector neurodivergent people are over-represented and many have developed successful careers. The most usual entry route into the sector is via university. 40% of all graduates and possibly 60% of neurodivergent then freelance as part of their pathway into the sector. For many people the prospect of low initial income, unstable employment and student debt is a major deterrent to entering the sector. This particularly adversely impacts on neurodivergent people from families who have not had a history of attending university, as it creates a barrier which reduces the likelihood that they will follow a career in a fast growing part of the economy which is relatively neurodivergent-friendly and in which their talents are in demand.

In theory, apprenticeships and work-based learning provide a way of overcoming this barrier. However, take-up is still relatively low in the sector, and for a range of institutional reasons it is very hard for a neurodivergent to find appropriate specialist apprenticeship opportunities in the creative sector. Furthermore apprenticeship providers are frequently not aware of the support needs of neurodivergent people or the support and funding available to assist them to successfully complete the apprenticeship.

Following the round tables some pilot projects have been established. Artsworld is working on project to open pathways into the sector with a cohort of autistic people. The Museum Cooperative Network is considering commissioning research into the needs of neurodivergent people in the Museum and Heritage sector, and the partners in the creative careers programme are considering how to promote careers for neurodivergent people. Separately the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport has announced a pilot for accessible apprenticeships at Pinewood.

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Neurodiversity in the Heritage Sector

Morris (DCN)



Photo by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash

The case for DCN

The Disability Collaborative Network (DCN) started in 2015 initially as an online resource for museums and heritage organisations to support inclusive practice in the service provision, working practice and the workforce (www.musedcn.org.uk). The resource was established in response to the 4% of disabled people who work in museums. However, it is currently unknown how many neurodivergent (ND) people work in the Heritage Sector in comparison to 20% of working age adults with a 'work limiting disability' in England (Arts Council 2017-18) and 16% of autistic people in full time employment (CIPD 2018).

DCN is committed through our collaborative partners and strategy to work for a stronger, resilient sector in recognising and developing practice in a constantly changing world.

Neurodiversity in the Heritage Sector

Morris (DCN)

The partnerships for effective influence

To ensure we are as effective as possible, within a very limited budget, the DCN has set up working relationships across sectors. Our partners enable us to support and empower museums in the UK by becoming more inclusive in their vision. We collaborate with grass root organisations and work on a strategic and operational level with membership of AchieveAbility (trustee) and Dyslexia Adult Network. We also work with policymakers to provide evidence to affect change in the workplace for this sector (Neurodiverse Voices Report, 2018). Therefore through strategic or operational processes we ensure that appropriate policymakers and organisations are notified of the need for change. For example, when we organised and held an invite only event to present the passport scheme, we ensured all relevant influencers were invited.

Inclusive recruitment and the passport scheme

The Heritage Sector may have members who do not know that they are neurodivergent. Therefore, in a highly competitive sector it is vital that Human Resources are aware and are supported in reasonable adjustments to support these members in the workplace. The passport itself does this through suggestions on how organisations can support the employer and employee. This scheme has been used by the corporate sector for a number of years, with the result that staff sickness was reduced by 50% and 'disclosure' from 5% to 65% (Disability Collaborative Network 2018; <https://cleartalentsatwork.com>)

The passport scheme sets in place inclusive recruitment techniques for the Heritage Sector to provide the best opportunities for the candidates to reach their full potential in the interview process. This process reduces unconscious bias, increases opportunities to understand recruitment processes in advertising and recognises the potential barriers in attracting talented candidates. Another part of this scheme is the suggestions and support for reasonable adjustments during the interview process. For example, we take the view if psychometric testing is required but known to be a barrier to neurodivergent people - why should it be used? Ultimately, there is an organisational risk to preventing talent entering and remaining in the sector. Since recruitment is part of the process, it is also important to recognise the probationary stance of many employers. The passport scheme will provide information on Access to Work (AtW) particularly as there are difficulties regarding the low profile of Access to Work and waiting periods for this service.

In addition to the passport scheme, DCN's work, regarding inclusive recruitment, is to support a number of organisations in making changes to the environment, their methods of interviewing and in their approach to volunteers and trainees. DCN has supported organisations by producing interview questions that are available to candidates thus reducing the risk of overloading working memory for all interview candidates. The location itself is checked for potential barriers due to sensory processing and physical, cognitive and sensory elements. This includes background noise, the increased opportunity of natural light and guidance on how to reduce anxiety and distraction. Information relating to the organisation is provided to the candidate such as directions to the venue and about the precise interview setting. This is all produced by DCN as a guide to support the candidate with suggestions for any reasonable adjustments. We do this work based on the findings of the Neurodiverse Voices Report (2018).

Neurodiversity in the Heritage Sector

Morris (DCN)

Raising awareness on Neurodiversity in the Heritage Sector

The key element of the passport event was to ensure the start of a ripple effect within the sector in raising awareness to processes that exist within and outside of the sector. In addition, to ensure these processes are embedded for inclusive use throughout the 9 Protected Characteristics and at all staff levels.

Part of our work is awareness-raising for the existing neurodivergent talent in the Heritage Sector. Therefore DCN will seek to recognise existing pathways into the sector and help to retain talent. To do this DCN will promote events and information to create a better, diverse workforce. The aim is collaborative work to understand barriers to accessing the Heritage Sector. A second aim is the recognition of the Neurodivergent history and its narrative. The purpose is to create and support authentic, empowered voices in this highly competitive sector. This is done in the context of current legislation and strategies from the:

- Arts Council, through the Creative Case for Diversity and Accreditation Standards
- National Lottery Fund for Heritage
- Museums Association Code of Ethics
- Creative Industries Council Diversity Charter and United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Article 27
- UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity, Article 5.

In terms of supporting volunteers and trainees, DCN has supported recruitment and retention practices for volunteers and trainees who may be neurodivergent (Birmingham). DCN supported a number of initiatives for young people in developing their skills and confidence in the organisation. These included support to reduce anxiety and raise confidence when working with unfamiliar processes and structuring information in flowcharts to support sequencing difficulties and working memory.

Concluding Comments

This work is part of a larger remit to expand knowledge and support for inclusive practice in the Heritage Sector. The overall aim is to support a diverse range of museums and heritage organisations in the sector by expanding and widening participation in heritage and to create opportunities to develop the existing workforce.

Access and inclusion is complicated by nature in the Heritage Sector and there are clear indicators from our partnerships with other sectors, that there are specific areas which need to become more inclusive. This recognises the need for organisations to adopt new practices so the individual is not placed under pressure to share personal information in order to access services. DCN believes that inclusive practice should be a holistic, intersectional, pan-disability and cross-profile for neurodivergence.

Neurodiversity in the Heritage Sector

Morris (DCN)

Brief Biography

For twenty years Becki Morris has managed museums collections, operations and service delivery in the Heritage Sector. She leads the Disability Collaborative Network which she founded with other museum professionals in 2015. In November 2018 DCN became a Community Interest Company (CIC).

Becki works with disabled people, their families, cross-profile Neurodiverse people and low socio-economic groups. The purpose is to identify barriers to participation in museums and the Heritage sector. This is done by developing working relationships in various sectors via her work with the Disability Collaborative Network (DCN).

DCN has working relationships with digital developers, corporations, third sector as well as grass roots organisations and people, this done by creating sustainable intersectional, inclusive practice in service provision and the workforce.

Becki Morris trained at the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester and the Centre of Accessible Environments for Access Auditing. Becki is a late-diagnosed Neurodivergent (Dyspraxia/Dyslexia) and a member of the Access Association and British Standards.

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03

Inclusivity and Employment

The importance of Recognising Emotional Labour in the Line Management of Neurodivergent Employees

Richard (Heriot-Watt University)



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Summary

This short article summarises a research article (Richards et al., 2019) recently published in **Personnel Review**. While there is a small, yet growing range of human resource management literature on Neurodiversity in the workplace (e.g. Babineau, 2010; Richards, 2012; Richards, 2015; Richards et al., 2016; Sang et al, 2016), the originality of the article in question is achieved on the basis of exploring and theorising the lived experience of line managing Neurodivergent employees.

What is meant by Neurodivergent includes conditions such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia, ADD/ADHD and Asperger Syndrome/Autism. The study is set in the UK rail industry, an industry renowned over many years for attracting Neurodivergent employees, yet in more recent times struggling to manage such employees under austerity and changed ways of working. A key focus of the article is the emotional labour skills that turned out to be essential in such situations. Emotional labour skills refers to: 'the emotions required in the interpersonal interaction between line manager and Neurodiver[gent] employee (and employee's team, customers and broader sources of formal organisational support)' (Richards et al., 2019, p. 1908). A quick summary of the findings is that to be skilled in emotional labour represents an effective means to line manage Neurodivergent employees, but by the same token, a lack or an underestimation of emotional labour skills can lead to line managers becoming frustrated, angry and exhausted, resulting in the increased chances of disabling Neurodivergent employees.

The importance of Recognising Emotional Labour in the Line Management of Neurodivergent Employees

Richard (Heriot-Watt University)

Study details

The study is based on 28 lived experience interviews with a range of line managers working across the UK rail industry. We interviewed line managers with responsibilities for, for example, project management, surveying, risk and value, and managing a train station. We wanted to hear what it is like to balance a demanding role, high-levels of responsibility and the task of supporting a Neurodivergent employee – characteristics we believe are shared by contemporary line managers across all industries.

We were primarily interested in where and how line managers got information on Neurodiversity and Neurodivergent conditions, and what sort of wider organisational support they received when experiencing an emergent and specialised area of diversity management. Our participants reported mixed levels of success in line managing Neurodivergent employees and we were keen to understand what underpins successful examples of such practice. Through the analysis of our dataset, it became apparent how emotional labour skills appeared to be critical in terms of how line managers coped with the extra demands of making principally minor and low or no cost ongoing adjustments to the working patterns of Neurodivergent employees, minor adjustments such as encouraging Neurodivergent employees to use certain communication technologies and at the same time manage a team initially confused and frustrated by unexplained changes of routine or perceptions of ‘special’ treatment. Emotional labour was also required by line managers when dealing with HR or occupational health practitioners, functions of the organisation that often left line managers feeling isolated, because they typically could only provide generic and often unhelpful information. Line managers also reported HR and occupational health practitioners working at cross-purposes, resulting in a particular type of frustration and increased demands for emotional labour.

Study findings

What we found out about the emotional labour of line managers is as follows. Emotional labour was required not just to smooth the employee-line manager relationship, it was also required to smooth employee-team and employee-customer relationships. Second, despite no formal training, many line managers performed complex and advanced forms of emotional labour, far from that required of many modern frontline and routine jobs, and more akin to that of employees working in complex care situations. As a consequence, many participants reported exhaustion based on managing the many hidden processes required of line managing Neurodivergent employees, with a minority believing such processes caused serious damage to their own health. Such processes were hidden because they took place in informal situations and often out of sight from wider colleagues or more senior managers. The processes were also considered to be hidden because it is work that rarely gets measured, rewarded or formally recognised as part of day-to-day line management duties.

The importance of Recognising Emotional Labour in the Line Management of Neurodivergent Employees

Richard (Heriot-Watt University)

Conclusions and recommendations for practice

Overall, we found the most successful cases of line managing Neurodivergent employees were associated with line managers who had long and extensive experience of managing complex people management issues. To manage such situations effectively, in some instances, line managers reported drawing on lessons learnt from coping with non-work relationships, such as bringing up an autistic son or daughter, or living with a dyslexic partner. Such findings led us to consider how employers need to do a lot more to support line managers who in turn support Neurodivergent employees. If employers can do one thing when employing Neurodivergent employees, it is to carefully select and train line managers allocated the task of managing such employees. For instance, probing for experience of applying emotional labour in previous employment and training line managers in the importance of emotional labour in managing complex employee-related situations.

It is estimated that 10 per cent of the workforce is Neurodivergent. Neurodivergent conditions are increasingly recognised by employers and wider society. Labour shortages and upholding the Equality Act 2010 further raises the importance of considering how employers can better manage Neurodiversity. This article draws attention to the importance of line managers in such situations and how an employer that fully understands what is required to line manage Neurodivergent employees is an employer that stands to make the most from a historically disadvantaged, yet equally valuable part of the nation's workforce.

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Digital Skills for Life for Neurodivergent homeless at St Mungo's

Hewlett (AchieveAbility) and Pennington (DnA)



Photo by Ev on Unsplash

Over the recent decade there has been an increasing recognition that disability and homelessness are interlinked. The Digital Skills for Life project (2019), at St Mungo's, specifically addresses the needs of the neurodivergent homeless as neurodivergent people can represent 20% of the population.

Neurodivergent means those people who have any of the following learning differences, some of which can be overlapping: dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, dyscalculia and autism. The Westminster AchieveAbility Commission report (WAC 2018) showed that more overlapping conditions could lead to greater unemployment and therefore greater poverty.

The University of Sunderland's recent research paper 'Too Far Gone: Dyslexia, Homelessness, and Pathways to Drug Use and Dependency' outlined a survey of 443 people who had experienced some form of homelessness. The study showed that those with dyslexia or neurodivergence were over represented with increased incarceration, suicide attempt, hard drug addiction, mental health issues and self-harm (S. Macdonald, L. Deacon and J. Merchant, 2016).

Digital Skills for Life for Neurodivergent homeless at St Mungo's Hewlett (AchieveAbility) and Pennington (DnA)

This is not just prevalent in the UK but in many other countries. Six years earlier a key change-making piece of research had highlighted these issues in the report 'Turning the Key' linking homelessness with social exclusion and low literacy levels (J. Olisa, 2010). The report found there was a dearth of research looking at low literacy, dyslexia and homelessness. This is still the case and is an increasing issue, particularly in these times of growing homelessness due to austerity, 'Brexit' and bureaucratic systems that do not adequately support those who are disabled. Stephen Macdonald suggests that professional services in welfare, housing and crime may be completely unaware of the detrimental impact dyslexia and other learning differences, especially those undiagnosed, could have on the life course of their clients.

Due to an increasing need three organisations collaborated, AchieveAbility, St Mungo's and Diversity and Ability (DnA), to deliver the project 'Digital Skills for Life'. The project was set up to address the needs of this vulnerable group of people by providing life skills through the use of technology. The pilot reached 10 St Mungo clients through the delivery of a set of 6 workshops. Workshops took place on a weekly basis and were each 3 hours long. Clients could drop into and also join workshops at a later stage if they wished. At the beginning of the course clients were encouraged to fill in an adult checklist (Ian Smythe and John Everatt, 2001). Although this checklist for dyslexic adults did not provide a diagnostic assessment, nevertheless it was useful in promoting a better self-understanding of future assessment needs for the clients. The course objectives were:

- To enable clients to understand their own learning, develop confidence and manage anxiety
- To provide a pilot programme to introduce neurodivergent clients to assistive technology
- To ensure sustainable life skills through digital knowledge

The course curriculum

- Experienced trainers, with lived-in experience of neurodivergence, who were able to pass on a broad understanding of their life experience, communications and assistive technology, led the workshops. The purpose was to offer tangible examples of specific tools that could be used in clients' own lives, and that are free to access.
- Sessions introduced participants to the course content and allowed time for reflection on lived experiences and individual strengths, as well as discussing barriers they may face in day-to-day life. Along with the icebreaker, the aim was to make people feel comfortable in a space, which would be learner-centred. Throughout the sessions individual learning was embedded within the course content to steer understanding of learning or behavioural difficulties away from a deficit model and towards a social model of disability.
- The course values were linked to the social model, which offers an exploration of practical solutions to disabling barriers created by society. These barriers have been shown to be more prevalent in low socio-economic backgrounds where individuals facing a learning difference would be less likely to reach an early diagnosis, to have access to specialised teaching techniques, and therefore potentially lack knowledge of, or access to, a range of potentially transformative assistive technologies.
- The sessions expanded on this foundation by imparting to clients some knowledge of how to recognise neurodivergent characteristics. Alongside this work, a toolkit of technologies and strategies was introduced to empower and enable the clients to address the barriers imposed in a society that favours 'non-neurodivergent' learning.

Digital Skills for Life for Neurodivergent homeless at St Mungo's Hewlett (AchieveAbility) and Pennington (DnA)

A key example of this transformative assistive technology was the Google Suite, accessible on any device connected to the Internet allowing the client to store information safely and securely. Features within this platform can be transformative to the lives of those lacking the key literacy skills that are necessary to keep afloat. For example, 'Google Keep' can photograph important letters to be read out to the client thus tackling problems with short-term memory and organisation. Google Calendar offers visual planning of time in addition to event reminders and 'To Do' lists. Even simple changes to more accessible fonts like Calibri, or changing from a light to dark text background can reduce visual stress for some people, facilitating longer reading and writing time before fatiguing. Clients were encouraged to bring their own devices so they could explore, in class, what assistive technology benefits could apply to them. Learning-focused material, mental health and wellbeing apps were also covered as poor mental health often goes hand in hand with social exclusion for the neurodivergent.

Communication skills were introduced within a variety of scenarios: to improve skills for listening and feeding back, to have a better understanding of self-awareness, to establish values in a range of contexts and to gain some experience in communicating effectively within large and small groups. These communication and technology skills were then reflected upon as received knowledge for the clients to construct a presentation on any topic that had interested them during the course. Therefore the final course session was devoted to presentation giving, using a range of technologies with feedback received through peer and tutor critique.

Final preparation session for presentations at the pilot course



Feedback from the pilot course showed there is a need for this provision as the skills acquired, through neurodivergent friendly teaching and learning, enabled the clients to feel more confident in progressing towards the next level of digital learning within St Mungo's to then ultimately gain employment. The chance of a spiral of poverty and homelessness was thereby lessened. Key points were:

- The course needs to be longer
- There needs to be content that is pitched to those who have severe learning requirements
- The technology could also focus on other neurodivergent conditions such as dyspraxia
- Can the course be accredited?
- The course was inclusive and informative
- The tutors guided learners through the practice
- There needs to be more hand-outs

Digital Skills for Life for Neurodivergent homeless at St Mungo's Hewlett (AchieveAbility) and Pennington (DnA)

Katy Jones, in her 2018 briefing note, encapsulates recent research into literacy and numeracy support, provided by third sector organisations, designed to help those facing homelessness get closer to work. This briefing links with government expectation for a move closer to work that should be a move away from homelessness. However, austerity and funding reductions have cost front-line workers valuable time away from employment-focused activities and have withheld funding from educational projects. These are activities such as explaining changes to clients' benefits or helping them understand official forms, and being an advocate on their behalf against DWP decisions. In Jones' research it was highlighted that over half of homeless people, in a sample, had poor literacy and numeracy skills. This already placed them at a huge disadvantage in the job world, whilst also demonstrating a link between homelessness and the lack of skills or coping strategies going into adulthood. Jones rightly argues that if accessing work is the government's goal for homeless people then improving these basic skills, via access to appropriate support and staff training, should be at the forefront of our minds.

Another consequence of the lack of funding, in this area, is the inconsistency of learning opportunities, making meaningful and consistent support dependent on local services' ability to find and utilise a budget effectively. This funding gap also leaves it down to volunteers to help clients with such needs. It is important there is investment in our volunteers who do this work by building confidence and empowering both volunteers and the homeless community in their journey out of social exclusion (K, Jones, 2018). As homelessness increases it is therefore essential to provide the skills for people to escape this life of poverty and shortened life expectation. The WAC report (2018) highlighted the key barriers that are prevalent in our society for neurodivergent people and the loss to our socio-economic growth if this is not addressed.

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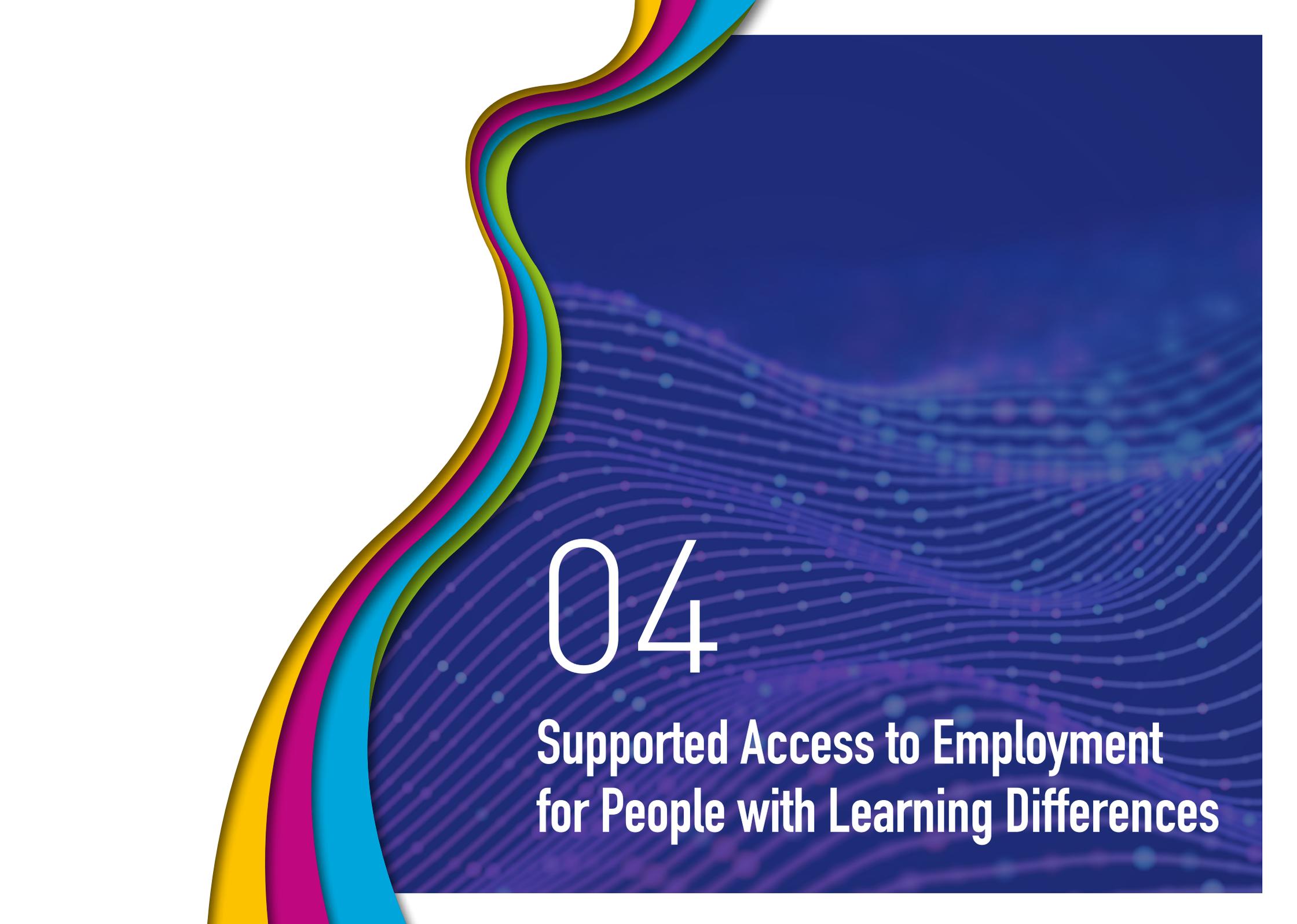
Adult checklist for Dyslexia (2001) available at: https://warwick.ac.uk/study/cll/courses/professionaldevelopment/wmcett/researchprojects/profex2018/outcomes_of_send_groups/dyslexia_screening_tool/adult_checklist.pdf **Adult checklist** (accessed 14 October 2019)

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04

**Supported Access to Employment
for People with Learning Differences**

Treasure Hunting. Giving Employers That Competitive Edge

Cookson (DFN)



Photo by Brooke Cagle on Unsplash

Employing people with learning difficulties and autism is not just a matter of doing an honourable thing.¹

With many sectors struggling with a skills gap, it makes simple business sense to explore this ocean of untapped potential.

A comprehensive 2006 Department of Work and Pensions report, 'Improving Work Opportunities for People with a Learning Disability', however, articulated the barriers to employment for people with learning disabilities.

¹ The term 'learning difficulties and autism' has been used throughout this article. There is no standardized method of referring to learning disabilities and autism. Variations include learning difficulties, SEND and neurodivergent, among others. In this document 'learning difficulties and autism' has been used as a standard term used to describe people with neurodivergent conditions or cognitive impairment. Whilst there is a clear difference between the two, in terms of outputs for employment chances and the various programmes mentioned throughout, they face the same challenges to employment and education. Many publications will use different terminology. When referring to other publications their own terminology is used.

Treasure Hunting. Giving Employers That Competitive Edge

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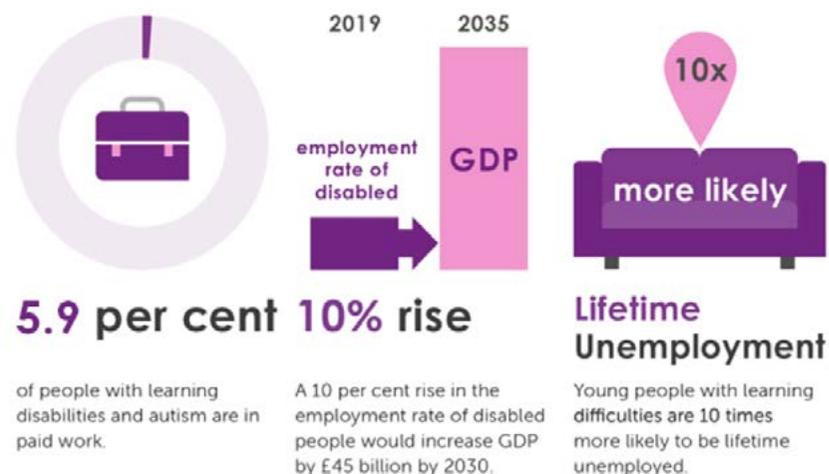
Summary of those barriers addressed by DFN Charitable Foundation

1. Low expectations of work among people with learning difficulties and autism themselves, their carers and professionals
2. Low confidence and skill levels
3. Transport problems
4. Little focus in schools, further education and day centres on employment-related activities
5. Lack of work-based support for people to access
6. Lack of knowledge/understanding of what support is available to people with learning difficulties and autism and their carers and how to access it
7. Insufficient supported employment provision and funding associated with it

Everyone deserves the right to aspire to the very best future – yet nationally only 5.9% of people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) go on to secure full-time paid employment (Employment rates for people for with disabilities, British Association for Supported Employment [BASE], 2018/19).

There is now a pressing need for change and intervention to ultimately improve the life outcomes of young people faced with learning difficulties.

Latest figures show that



Further insight from UK business reveals



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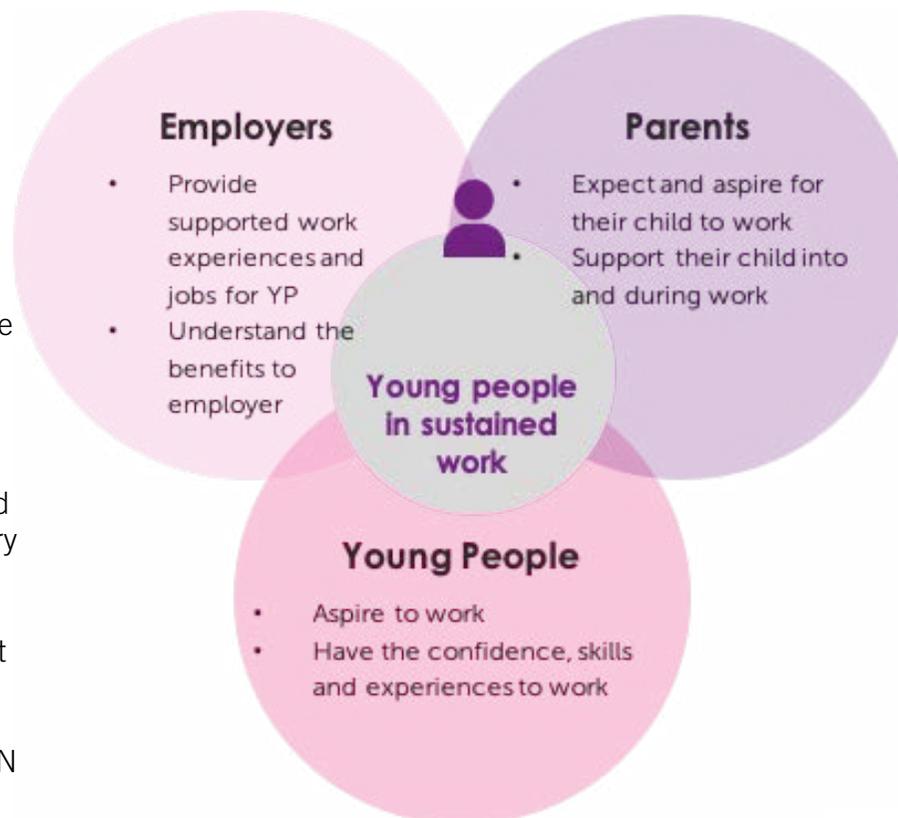
It is vital that we challenge perceptions and make more businesses aware of how they can access a new talent pool and enable a fair and more inclusive workforce (Gatsby Good Career Guidance).

It is evident that training is required to empower young people to make them feel confident about their disability and provide the skills needed to secure a full-time job.

It is also about changing culture and demonstrating how young people with learning difficulties and autism can enrich the workforce, bring greater diversity, stay longer in a job, show stronger commitment, and have a lower rate of absenteeism.

At DFN Charitable Foundation, our vision and ambitions are to eradicate the postcode lottery and ensure that everyone with an Education, Health and Care Plan has the opportunity to access high-quality transition to work support and training in their local area. To make this a reality, in 2018 DFN Charitable Foundation launched two best practice programmes: DFN Project SEARCH and DFN MoveForward.

DFN MoveForward is a school-based programme that coordinates and ensures long-term, differentiated support to young people with mild to moderate learning difficulties and autism to enable them to transition into sustained paid work.



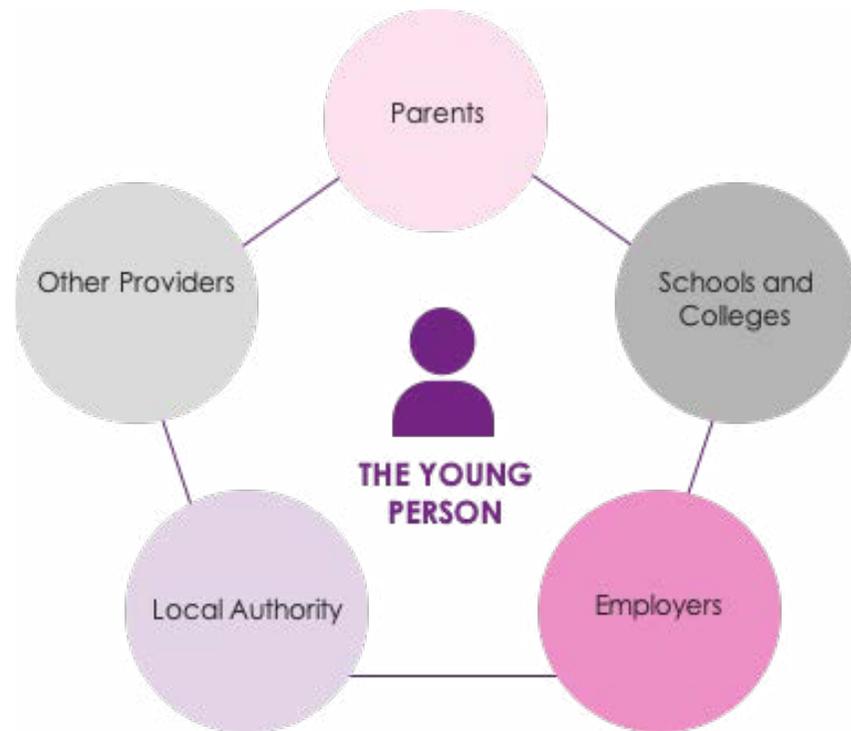
Our success comes from four key principles

- 1. One-to-one coaching** in school / college
- 2. Group workshops** on employability and transition skills, based upon the young peoples' needs and aspirations
- 3. Engagement with partner businesses** for Insight Days, workshops and work experience placements
- 4. Parent curriculum** upskilling and equipping them with the necessary skills to support their child into work

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For this first time we have a model that bring all stakeholders together at an early stage, and places aspirational employment outcomes at the centre of the discussion.



The programme also links to best practice Gatsby Benchmarks to ensure the high-quality careers information, advice and guidance is offered.

DFN-MoveForward and the eight Gatsby Benchmarks

The eight elements of careers provision which schools have a statutory responsibility to provide and report on (based on DFN Project SEARCH results, July 2019):

01	A stable careers programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embedded in the school, taking workload off the Careers Advisor and staff Involvement in EHCP annual reviews
02	Learning from career and labour market information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to labour market information through the Education & Employment Coordinator (EEC) Parents involved to support transition planning
03	Addressing the needs of each pupil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-to-one coaching for participants to ensure tailored support Systematic records kept for individual advice given Accurate destination data
04	Linking curriculum learning to careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coaching sessions regularly address 'How does curriculum learning matter to my later life?' with participants
05	Encounters with employers and employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum of one workplace exposure per term for each student including Insight Days and Work Experience. Non-participant students often join these encounters
06	Experience of workplaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These workplace exposures often take place outside of term-time Examples include Trust Ford, Kent Life and RBLI
07	Encounters with further and higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants are supported to visit local colleges. Partnership with DFN-Project SEARCH and their supported internship programme
08	Personal guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DFN-MoveForward participants benefit from weekly interactions with coaches, who are able to support them for five years in their transition into work.

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To support learners with diagnosed learning difficulties and autistic spectrum conditions to transition from school to work, we launched the DFN Project SEARCH supported internship programme. This evidence-based model of fully immersive workplace exposure is already making a huge impact, with over 1,000 UK interns having moved into full-time paid employment (see: https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wpcontent/uploads/2018/04/CSJJ5158_Disability_report_180426.pdf%20p.%209). On average, over 60% of our interns secure a full-time job (10 times the national average) by the completion of the programme.

DFN Project SEARCH is aimed at people whose goal is competitive employment. Interns remain on roll with their school or college, but are based with a host employer full-time and participate in three department rotations throughout the academic year to build skills, experience different roles and develop their career paths.

In summary, DFN Project SEARCH provides

- An education-to-work programme for young people with learning difficulties and autistic spectrum conditions
- Immersion in large host business's culture
- A full-time Instructor and Job Coach(es)
- Internship rotations for career exploration and job skills acquisition
- Customised job-search assistance
- Ongoing in-work support as required

Programme Philosophy

‘People with disabilities have the right to choose a path toward education and employment. However, while freedom of choice is given, the right to work is earned. Earning the right to work is dependent upon the student’s preparation’

Stephen Simon, ADA Quarterly, Fall 1998

The support and learning network includes an on-site Teacher and full-time Job Coach employment specialist, plus members of the intern’s family, to create a joined-up learning environment and employment goal. Together, they develop the support network the student requires for a successful transition from education to work through continuous feedback and 800 hours of skills acquisition as they study for an employability qualification.

DFN Project SEARCH is so much more than work experience, this is learning at its very best. Interns directly use and apply their learning every day, ensuring they can make a smooth transition into the workplace and make a true business impact.

With up to 12 students on each site, there is a 4:1 intern to staff ratio with further job development coaching and ongoing in-work support for graduates as required. Interns throughout the country are reaping the benefits of the innovative learning experience and the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the host business. They gain increased independence, confidence, and self-esteem, with structured support from Instructors, Job Coaches and host business Managers and Mentors.

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Key highlights of the programme

- Full-time Job Coach on site
- Additional job development/coaching
- 4:1 intern to staff ratio
- Skill training
- Evaluating
- Problem solving
- Employability Curriculum delivered by an on-site Instructor
- DFN Project SEARCH team provide on-site co-ordination

This initiative also brings transformative benefits to the host business as they gain access to a new, diverse talent stream with skills that match labour needs. Employees with learning difficulties and autism stay in jobs longer and take less time off sick while the productivity of colleagues improves (Stephen Byer and Annie Byer, 'A systematic review of the literature on the benefits for employers of employing people with learning difficulties', Mencap, 2017). Our partners also tell us that working with DFN Project SEARCH can dramatically improve performance and retention in high-turnover or hard-to-fill posts, whilst also improving the skill level of job candidates.

Further benefits include enhanced local, regional, national and international engagement and recognition through marketing of this unique programme.

We believe the valuable work carried out at DFN Project SEARCH is having a positive impact on society. It is widely agreed that employment improves health and wellbeing. Transitioning people from education straight into competitive employment saves money for health and social care by around £2million per person. Our graduates become net contributors rather than recipients of adult social care and health services.

Social justice is now being achieved for people who have been frequently marginalised from the world of work, and communities are becoming more inclusive, while people with learning disabilities become more visible.

Intern outcomes

- 60+ Project SEARCH sites in UK and over 1,000 full-time paid jobs
- 35 Hospitals
- One Research Centre
- Nine Councils
- 12 Private Sector employers
- Four Universities
- One National Trust

2010-13	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
21 sites	27 sites	34 sites	43 sites	49 sites	61 sites
176 Jobs (60%)	124 Jobs (65%)	157 Jobs (64.5%)	193 Jobs (66%)	228 Jobs (61%)	226 jobs (60%)

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It makes good business sense to recruit from this neurodivergent population. Think of it in terms of Sigal Barsade's Ripple Effect: Emotional contagion and its influence on group behavior (Sigal Barsade, 'The Ripple Effect: Emotional Contagion in Groups', 2000). Positive people improve team members' performance, group performance, reduce group conflict, create more co-operation and greater overall performance. If you do what you have always done, then you will get what you have always got.



This is an incredible opportunity to benefit from a rich pool of untapped talent which will uplift and diversify the workplace. Thinking outside the box, exploring how neurodiversity can be a huge advantage for many companies, takes us on a journey that enriches and changes the lives of any work force.

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Helping SEND students into employment

Matasovska (SEND teacher)



Photo by Alexis Brown on Unsplash

Summary

In August 2019 I finished my Masters dissertation entitled 'Strategies for Supporting Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) into employment: a case study of a SEND college in Surrey' at Goldsmiths, University of London.

My inspiration for the research came to me through my passion of working with young people with SEN, struggling to get into employment.

The issues around SEN and employment were also highlighted by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation which, in 2014, published Good Career Guidance to offer English schools a practical definition of what good careers provision should look like. The results of the recent State of the Nation Report (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2018) shows engagement with the career guidance obtained via the SEND Gatsby Benchmarks has increased in the past two years. However, for the 14% of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) the reality is that only 6% of them are in paid occupation (ibid). There seems to be a lack of research focusing on investigating the reasons behind this low percentage.

Helping SEND students into employment

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My mixed methods-based study focused on meeting this gap in research. It was carried out on a one case study basis involving a male Y15 student training for a paid position starting after his college studies. The key themes emerged through interviewing and observing the student, discussing students' work experiences with them, interviewing professionals and examining the relevant college documentation. I chose this college because it does not follow the Gatsby Benchmarks and yet it has won awards for its outstanding practice. Study findings imply the students are well-supported, have regular opportunities to express their views and have numerous meaningful work experiences. The Y15 student has secured a paid job due to his independence and professional skills. Despite the successful support provided by the college some professionals view too much support for students as potentially detrimental to their future prospects.

The research process

I am an educator for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). When deciding on the focus of my MA dissertation in 2018, I was influenced by my belief in social justice with regards to SEND young people having the same opportunities for employment as others do. My study examined the opportunities given to young people with SEND to succeed in their transition to adulthood. It was carried out in a SEN college based in Surrey which has students with cognitive and speech impairments. Previous research on this topic is not vast at all and one of the biggest gaps in research is concerning the attitudes of employers and recruiters dealing with people with disabilities. Without extending SEND-friendly approaches to recruitment and selection, the government is unlikely to meet the revised target of getting a million people with disabilities into employment in the next decade.

The Y15 student called Archie, on whom I based my study, was at the time of my research going through a vocational type of work experience (WEX). This involved training in a nursery whilst studying with the idea of securing paid employment at the end of the WEX. Despite the fact the college limited me to one student case study, I realised the importance of drawing on the voices and participation of people with disabilities during my study. Therefore, I made sure I held conversations with the peers of my one case study student whilst visiting the college and I took regular notes of their comments to me and to each other when talking about their work experiences. In addition, my work was assessed as having a good range of data via documentary analysis and teacher interviews. This has resulted in a far-reaching body of evidence which was acknowledged by my tutors from Goldsmiths, University of London.

I structured my dissertation on the key concepts around Amartya Sen's (1999) capabilities approach and four of the eight SEND Gatsby Benchmark (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2018) which outline the best careers provision in schools and colleges: personal guidance, addressing the needs of pupils with SEND, linking of curriculum learning to careers, encounters with employers and employees.

My theory was based on the capability approach of Amartya Sen, an Indian economist, who believes that personal freedom in all aspects of life is an important way to enhance economic development. In his view, 'capabilities must be sensitive to geographic region, social history, and cultural values' (Jacobson, 2016: p.794). Capabilities are a dominant feature of Sen's approach to development with development being viewed as an emphasis on the ability citizens have to make choices about things that they may value (Jacobson, 2016). Sen regularly compares capability with income and wealth and claims that whilst income is essential it is not the only freedom humans need in order to develop and become the best they can be (Beckley, 2002).

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For instance, in a working setting if someone cannot read well they will struggle to use their money optimally – i.e. to build a business. Therefore, if they were able to develop the required skills through an increase in constructing their freedom it would result in them being able to do more, in general (ibid).

According to Sen (1999), increasing freedom as opposed to productivity in the long term would be more advantageous to the individual as well as the society around him or her. He sees a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements and recognises the centrality of individual freedom and ‘the force of social influences on the extent and reach of individual freedom’ (Sen, 1999: p. xii). Sen describes ‘capability as the “what” that societies should seek to equalise’ (Beckley, 2002: p.108). Sen contrasts his idea of capability with various conceptions of equal opportunity and observes that a person’s capability to achieve does stand for opportunity to pursue his or her goals (ibid). Sen (1999) recognises the importance of focusing on individual voice, but he also cautions that if we value individual voice too much we could lose collective action as a consequence of concentrating on individual voice alone. Instead he suggests we focus on using both - individual voice and collective action – as this way no one gets left behind and everyone benefits. Sen claims this can be accomplished via the model of a corporation that focuses on freedom beyond income. According to this model, an organisation would always look after its workers by ensuring any protests from employees are debated and solutions are agreed and this would lead to a happier workforce. Sen states that ‘there is strong evidence that economic and political freedoms help to reinforce one another’ (1999, p. xii). Sen believes inclusive and open management structure to be the more successful model for improving the lives of everyone because if staff are looked after by their bosses they become more driven and productive at work as a result. Inclusive managers should be aware of the importance of reasonable adjustments and acknowledge that complications arise as a consequence of systemic barriers rather than seeing the difficulty as being found within the individual (Hewlett et al., 2019).

The research findings

My study findings show that the strategies used to help Archie get into employment were successful for a number of reasons. One of the main reasons was the fact he and the students felt ‘heard’ and supported and that the inclusive and open management style of the educators was motivating enough for students to want to succeed. Furthermore, the students’ work experiences were meaningful to them and linked with their interests. These strategies also agree with Sen’s (1999) ideas about the success of a society depending on the freedoms its members are able to enjoy.

The importance of listening to students’ voices is also linked to the effectiveness of the Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). I can certainly see the useful potential of EHCPs in the career futures of people with learning difficulties. However, I am also aware that their potential is very much undermined by the funding issues linked to local authorities’ budgets. According to my findings, parents’ fear of losing out on future funding opportunities motivates them to opt for more generic targets as a result. Lowering of ‘real’ options for their children could affect the quality of their lives as acknowledged by Sen (1999), who perceives the quality of life in terms of the options and resources one has available.

My findings show that it is also the college educators who have lower ambitions for the students but for an entirely different reason. They fear providing lots of support to students combined with the students’ freedom in choice-making could result in limiting their actual, real potential. According to them, this could lead to their potential failure in the future. However, despite their lower ambitions for their students, the educators still remain supportive and professional enough to not be too directive in influencing students’ views. This strategy is also applauded by Hooley and Dodd (2015) who see less directive approach to providing individuals with understanding of their true potential as the key to good career-related moves.

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With regards to employers, my study highlighted the importance of the close link between employers' understanding of SEN and higher recruitment rate of young people with disabilities. For example, Archie's boss's knowledge of SEN has influenced her decision to opt for more alternative recruitment approaches, such as vocational training with the possibility of an offer of paid employment. This approach to training and recruitment allows disabled applicants, such as Archie, to adjust accordingly to the job role and most importantly - gradually.

The study shows the Gatsby Benchmarks have a certain resemblance to the college's career provision practices which could explain the success rate of the college's leavers. The resemblances include the following practices: supporting vocational trainees via joint efforts involving educators being in communications with the employers about appropriate levels of support relevant to the needs of the WEX trainees; paying close attention to students' goals for the future; building/strengthening joint efforts with regards to students' families being more involved in the practice of setting future targets.

This research could impact the views of educators and employers looking for ways of creating joint efforts to reduce the current barriers for all involved in the career provision process. This shared effort should start with motivating young people to advance in life by offering them meaningful work opportunities as early as possible. Future research must include negotiations with parents and how their ideas about their children's future could be more in agreement with the choices made by their offspring. To help mitigate the power dynamic, a mixture of anonymous survey data and interviews could be used with a variety of parents of children/young people with different levels of disabilities. Reproducing this study across other colleges/schools with different career provision and schemes of work would be of interest. Further research about the strategies for young people with SEND in terms of their employment prospects will hopefully allow stigma around disabilities to dissipate.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bN5IK1MAKc0&t=3s>

Helping SEND students into employment

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Inclusion North: Increasing Diversity in the Workforce

Marshall (Inclusion North)



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Expert Advisers Hub and things we learnt along the way.

Who are we?

Inclusion North exists to make inclusion real for all people with a learning disability, autism or both. We do this by working with people with a learning disability, autism or both, family carers and organisations that support them. We work to change society so that everybody with a learning disability, autism or both can live as full, active, and equal citizens. This means changing the way people think, and the way things are done.

Whilst there are several medical explanations for learning disability, autism or both, at Inclusion North our starting point is that all people are equal – and therefore people with a learning disability, autism or both should be able to live life as active citizens. Our work is based around the Social Model of Disability. People with a learning disability, autism or both often experience many barriers which discriminate against them and makes them less likely to be fully included in society. We always start with the person and seek creative ways of overcoming barriers.

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Background and context

The Inclusion North geographical area extends to the North East and Yorkshire and Humber and we work with other organisations to reflect the critical issues in supporting people with a learning disability, autism or both and their families. We help people to live good lives in the community, improve health and life expectancy, and we think creatively at a time of economic austerity (Inclusion North mid-year report 2018 -2019).

There has been some attention paid to the numbers of disabled people either in work or unemployed, the barriers to employment for disabled people and the benefits of employment for disabled people.

The current changes to the welfare benefits system and Government pledges have both attempted to increase employment opportunities for disabled people. In 2017 the Government published their document **Improving Lives: The Future of Work, Health and Disability**, their pledge was to: *‘to see one million more disabled people in work over the next ten years’*.

Whilst anti-discrimination legislation plays a key role in ensuring disabled people are not treated less favourably, Scope’s publication **Disability Perception Gap 2018** suggests that attitudes towards disabled people still prevail: *‘1 in 3 people see disabled people as being less productive than non-disabled people’*, and Scope also suggests that *‘disabled people are twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people’* (Scope disability facts and figures 2020).

The employment gap still remains, and according to the most recent House of Commons report figures, 3.4 million people with disabilities of working age were economically inactive. These people were not in work and not looking for work (Parliament Research Briefings, 2020).

Introduction to the Hub

We operate a Hub through which people with a learning disability, autism or both and family members are employed as Expert Advisers who are valued for their lived experience. We recruit, train and support people to enable them to use their lived experience as part of the health and social care workforce.

The majority of Expert Adviser employment is focussed around attending Care (Education) and Treatment Reviews, although other opportunities also exist for other paid work (NHS Care and Treatment Reviews, 2015).

The expert hub is part of our overall organisational aims, which are to:

1. Create inclusive communities
2. Support people and families to stay strong and speak up
3. Connect people together
4. Keep people informed (Inclusion North Offer, 2020)

We realised that our Hub would be stronger if we increased the diversity of the Expert Advisers we employed to reflect the population of in-patients who need people with relevant lived experience in their Care (Education) and Treatment Reviews. In particular, we wanted to employ younger people, people from a black and minority ethnic background, and people with recent experience of living in an Assessment and Treatment Unit. In 2017-18 we spent a lot of time recruiting new Expert Advisers into the Hub.

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We have been working on increasing the range of work that Expert Advisers can do. One area has been increasing co production across the region and working with NHS colleagues to develop local plans by ensuring that the voice of people with a learning disability, autism or both is captured in the development of local plans and services (NHS Long Term Plan, 2019)

What we learnt

We wanted to create a useful source of information rather than just a guide as we wanted to share the detail of what we learned, in a quick, accessible way. Therefore, we created our top ten of things we wished we had known before we started. The following sections also seek to address our overall organisational aims.

1. Barriers to employment

We found that many people who applied to be Expert Advisers had faced barriers to employment. Within the Hub whilst we used accessible recruitment processes, some applicants still experienced some barriers, in spite of our best attempts to be inclusive.

2. Time

We found that for the people we recruited everything takes much longer to do. We found an individual solution for everyone who applied to be an Expert Adviser. This was worth the investment as we have created an inclusive community of valued people with lived experience.

3. Criminal Record Checks and Identification

Systems often did not work smoothly for people, particularly in the case of criminal record checks. Some of our applicants had to start from scratch to acquire the basic ID for the checks. We worked closely with applicants to keep them informed about requirements and to support them to acquire the necessary ID.

4. Employing people with criminal records

We reviewed our approach to criminal record checks to ensure that they were fair, safe and did not create unnecessary barriers. For example some applicants had offences that were not spent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974) but the decision was taken that it was still appropriate to offer them employment.

5. Constantly reviewing our recruitment processes to ensure they are accessible

As each applicant faced different issues in gaining employment with us, we reviewed our recruitment processes to ensure applicants were not unfairly disadvantaged, and were kept informed, connected and felt part of an inclusive community that valued their expertise.

6. How employment works alongside benefits

We found people needed to know what they could earn alongside benefits. Particularly when their first step into employment was through casual work. We kept applicants informed about financial support and advice to be obtained from Job Centre Plus, Citizens Advice Bureau and Access to Work.

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7. Co-producing a programme of induction, training, development and support

Existing Expert Advisers were asked to co produce a programme of development and training for new and existing experts. The confidence of our Expert Advisers increased due to this inclusive involvement.

8. Asset based progression into other roles

We realised that our Expert Advisers had far more skills and experience to share. The asset-based approach drew on this knowledge to create additional roles for the Expert Advisers. Thereby connecting people to new opportunities.

9. Diversification

Points 7 and 8 meant we looked beyond the Care (Education) and Treatment Reviews to develop an 'Offer' for customers using the Hub. This led to more opportunities for our employees within the Hub, and also offered cross sector work with organisations and the opportunity to engage people with lived experience through involvement opportunities,

10. Flexibility

Our biggest advantage has been the ability to respond flexibly to challenges. We are a small organisation therefore we can be responsive and change our processes relatively quickly. Finally, we have a 'can do' attitude and believe in the ethos of our work and so we think creatively to find solutions. This is all achieved through our inclusive approach to our community.

The full guide can be accessed at: <https://inclusionnorth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Inclusion-North-employment-guide-2018.pdf>

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Richards, J. (2012), 'Examining the exclusion of employees with Asperger syndrome from the workplace', *Personnel Review*, Vol. 41, No. 5, pp. 630-646.

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