

Neurodiverse Voices: Opening Doors to Employment

Over the last 18 months the **Westminster AchieveAbility Commission** has investigated the barriers to employment faced by Neurodivergent (ND) people. This includes those with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, ASD, Dyscalculia etc. Their final report has just been published.

The objective of the Commission was to identify through solid evidence of the difficulties and discrimination experienced by people with dyspraxia and other neurodivergent profiles and good practice for guidance to all. The commission gathered evidence from surveys, interviewed experts in the field of neurodiversity and employment, accepted written evidence from experts and organisations, and took individual statements from members of the ND community.

It is a groundbreaking piece of work which had little disagreement on the major issues.



Commission Members

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

Dyspraxia Foundation were prominent in this process with Richard Todd (Trustee and Employment Adviser) sitting on the Commission; evidence was provided from previous survey work carried out by the Foundation and individual members gave their personal experience of the reaction to their dyspraxia in seeking and maintaining employment.

Over 600 people responded to the survey including some 200 who identified as dyspraxic.

The full report can be accessed at

<https://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/wac2018/>

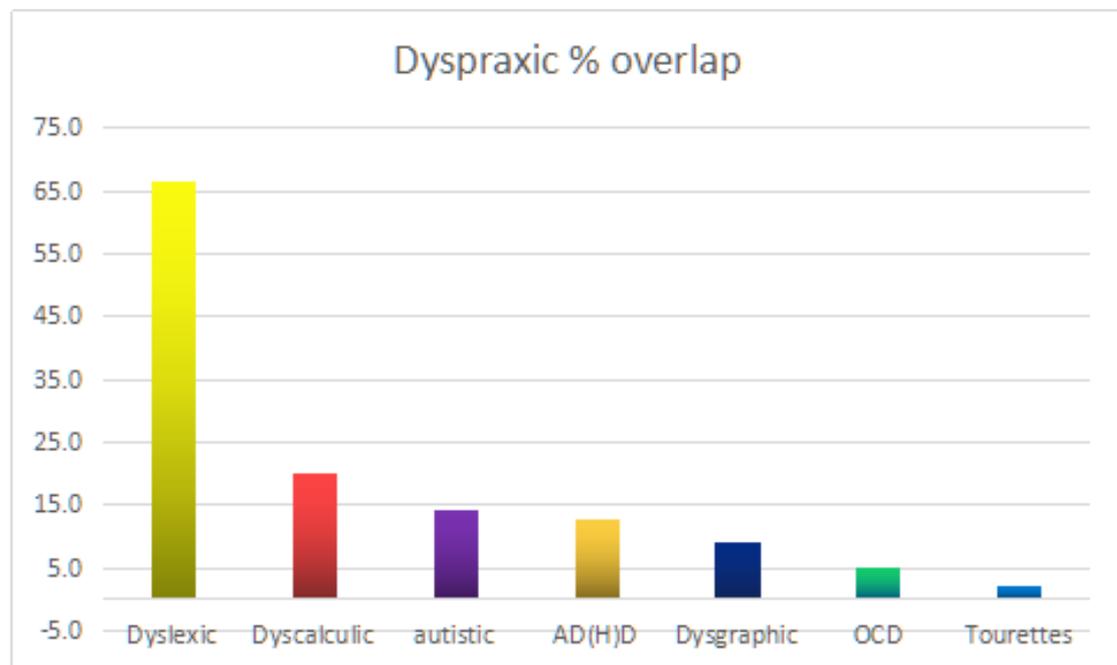
A hardcopy is also available and the Foundation will have some at the

March conference.

Highlights from the Report.

Neurodiversity

Most individuals reported that their neurodivergence had multiple aspects for those with dyspraxia, dyslexia was the most common additional profile (66%) with dyscalculia and ASD also significant. £&% of those with dyslexia as a prime diagnosis also identified with dyspraxia.



Barriers

The barriers to employment vary depending on the individual's profile, but what became clear in the responses was that some barriers were consistent and there was a major lack of alternative approaches that allowed job applicants to get around the obstacle.

The report contains a huge amount of detail and the committee had a substantial task in trying to refine the evidence. 10 specific barriers were noted

1. **Lack of Awareness** or understanding at all levels among employers and managers about neurodivergence and its overlapping nature.
2. The **Consequences of disclosure** can be discrimination and

this in turn leads to a spiral of stress, exacerbated, in some cases, by workplace bullying.

3. **Government schemes** such as Access to Work and Disability Confident are under-resourced, inadequately organised, inconsistent, poorly advertised and so underused by the ND community.

4. **Reasonable Adjustments** are often poor and focus on 'remediating' the individual rather than on the inherent organisational and recruitment barriers

5. The **Equality Act** is not being adequately implemented, protections are difficult to secure in practice, since it may require taking the employer to court.

6. **Psychometric tests** disable neurodivergent applicants through being inaccessible, overly complex and too literacy-based. They are intrinsically unreliable measures of neurodivergent skills and abilities.

7. **Recruitment and Selection Procedures** are **too literacy-based** resulting in working memory overload, handwritten tasks sprung on applicants, dealing with spelling (online forms without spellchecks), incompatibility of online forms with assistive technology etc.

8. **Recruitment and selection procedures** are often **poorly conceived**. Expecting ND applicants to understand the full inferences of questions, and respond appropriately. They are generally better at showing what they know and can do.

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

10. **Performance management** that is not applicable for the neurodivergent, treating ND employees as the problem, rather than recognising the barriers presented by the work culture.

Recommendations

A substantial number of ideas on how to overcome specific issues were raised, through distilling the evidence eight achievable recommendations were made and will be the focus for further work. The first to improve awareness was the highest rated request from the respondents to the Dyspraxia Foundation's survey last year and shows consistency but also of course the extent of the ignorance.

1. **Awareness Training Programmes** should be devised and delivered to ensure greater awareness of Neurodiversity to organisations and government offices.

2. A **Good Practice Guide** on recruitment practices for ND people should be compiled by experts, provisioned and disseminated by DWP.
3. **JobCentre Plus** to end sanctioning of ND customers for failure to submit paperwork/on-line documentation within a short time-frame and without appropriate support. Staff awareness training of neurodiversity, better support for self-employment.
4. **Access to Work** to provide appropriate quality controlled support to the large numbers of potential and existing ND employees.
5. **Disability Confident** should be more widely promoted, across all sectors and monitored robustly.
6. **Accessible written employment information** much current information and process leads many ND people to give up before application. Others are eliminated for not matching process.
7. **Reasonable Adjustments** must be taken seriously by employers. Very few ND people had positive experience. Good bespoke adjustments are highly effective and cost efficient.
8. **Psychometric and other tests** that are inappropriate for a neurodiverse population should not be used in the selection or promotion processes.

The report is a start, it provides a reference point to answer the question and how do you know that people with dyspraxia find getting work more difficult? How do you know that people with dyspraxia are discriminated against in seeking employment?

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

The profile of the Dyspraxia Foundation in Westminster has been raised by these activities and the trustees are grateful to everyone who contributed with evidence and completed the surveys.