

Neurodiversity

A guide for managers

union for professionals



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

Like many human characteristics, such as height, weight or shoe size, there is a natural variation in people's brains.

Many authorities use the term neurodiversity to describe this range of differences, which includes autism, attention deficit disorder, dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia, among others.

Many neurodiverse people are highly able, have successful careers and hold positions of authority – including managers, professionals and specialists who are members of Prospect.

But they face many challenges, often because organisations do not understand their strengths and weaknesses and do not provide the work environment they need in order to flourish.

GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS

Neurodiverse people may have learned to compensate for their condition. Many dyslexics, for example, may possess above-average reading and writing skills. But they still have the underlying traits associated with the way their brains are 'wired', such as problems with memory and processing words.

Many may not realise that they have a condition. Others may not have been formally assessed. If they have, some may not have disclosed this. However, trained managers could consider neurodiverse conditions if they recognise characteristics.

Remember that members with some neurodiverse conditions may have difficulties with social interaction, interpersonal skills and non-verbal communications. Please bear the following points in mind when dealing with personal cases – particularly for neurodiverse members.

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING

Neurodiverse people may have problems with 'normal' forms of communication. Some people on the autism spectrum, for example, have difficulties in reading other people's facial expressions, body language or nuances within conversations.

It is important that managers and colleagues are aware of the differences in communication styles for those with neurodiverse conditions. For example, they may appear to be 'blunt' when talking, they may talk to themselves or they may unintentionally invade other people's personal space.

Please bear the following tips in mind when you are communicating with neurodiverse members:

- be clear and direct, using concise sentences
- use short sentences in written communications
- diagrams can be better than written communications
- where appropriate, use closed rather than open questions
- speech-to-text software can aid in digital communications
- during organisational change, ensure that employees with neurodiverse conditions are included in plans that affect their work and that they are informed of developments.

WHAT CAN ORGANISATIONS DO?

The Equality Act recognises neurodiverse people as disabled if their condition has a substantial and long-term effect. This entitles them to protection from discrimination, as well as the provision of reasonable adjustments by their employer.

Fortunately, many organisations recognise that employees with neurodiverse conditions bring particular strengths to the workplace, and are willing to address the challenges involved.

Many challenges can be overcome by better understanding the strengths and weaknesses of neurodiverse employees and making reasonable adjustments so they can flourish.

Line managers and supervisors should receive training in managing neurodiverse workers. Awareness training for colleagues can also help to alleviate stressful situations.

Neurodiversity should be taken into account during selection, training, performance management and promotion processes.

Getting a professional assessment is an important step when making reasonable adjustments for a neurodiverse employee, as any changes should take their specific needs into account and they may not know what is appropriate for them.

Reasonable adjustments can include:

- specialist training for the individual
- flexible working options
- clear and concise communication, written and oral
- structured routines
- appropriate software, such as speech recognition.

ORGANISATIONAL BENEFITS

People with neurodiverse conditions work at all levels within organisations. Proactively making reasonable adjustments for them offers benefits, including:

- increased productivity
- reduced absenteeism
- maximised returns on staff investment
- reduced risk of litigation
- enhanced organisational reputation
- improved 'bottom line'.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

- Prospect website's neurodiversity pages
www.prospect.org.uk/at-work/neurodiversity
- Negotiator's Guide to Disability Equality
<https://library.prospect.org.uk/download/2008/00088>

EQUALITY BRIEFINGS

- Neurodiversity and discrimination
<https://library.prospect.org.uk/download/2013/01208>
- Disability discrimination and appraisal and performance systems
<https://library.prospect.org.uk/download/2013/0192>



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