

DMA Talent: Dyslexia Employer Guide

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/ Supporting a Diverse Workforce

Over the past three years, **DMA Talent's Neurodiversity Initiative** has worked with neurodiversity consultants, health experts, brands, and leading industry figures, some with neurodevelopmental conditions themselves. This collaborative approach has helped us to define best practice and develop a forum to raise awareness and understanding of neurodiversity across the data and marketing industry.

DMA Talent's goal is to attract the next generation of fresh thinkers into the data and marketing industry by showcasing the sector's inspiring and dynamic range of career opportunities. We nurture aspiring data and marketing professionals by providing the roadmap, skills, and connections to kick-start their professional journey.

Our previous Autism Employer Guide proved to be hugely beneficial to both our Members and organisations across the UK – so far, it has been downloaded by nearly 1000 professionals in need of free expert advice.

With the help of leading consultants, new case studies, and best practice, this guide will help employers to understand dyslexia and what they can do to make their workplace more inclusive and supportive. While this guidance has been developed to assist the creative, data, and marketing industries, much of the content is pertinent for all organisations and sectors.

We will provide comprehensive guidance and recommendations on reasonable adjustments that employers can make to recruitment processes, the workplace environment, support networks, and most importantly, how to treat employees as individuals.

In addition, it features case studies offering advice for dyslexic people written by dyslexic professionals, from junior marketing executives all the way to managing director level, on useful coping mechanisms they apply on potentially problematic areas and how their skillsets have helped them to thrive.

If we want to strive to have the best people in the right roles, we must move one step further from just raising awareness, to implementing measures that support and develop the career opportunities for a diverse workforce.

From an employer perspective, it makes great business sense to have a diverse, skilled workforce able to build better business outcomes through innovation, collaboration, loyalty, and a strong sense of community. A happier workplace will lead to a more productive workplace.

Kate Burnett,
General Manager, DMA Talent

/ Definitions and Terminology

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a term which is essentially used to describe people who think differently from the majority. It is often used in relation to neurodevelopmental conditions including autism, attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and Tourette syndrome. It is important to note that individuals may have more than one condition, as they can often co-exist and there can be overlaps in the manifestations.

The neurodiversity movement focuses on strengths and skills. The movement promotes and recognises the significant role neurodivergent people play in society. It strives to help give them equal opportunities to gain and retain meaningful employment.

There have been many neurodivergent individuals throughout history who have made remarkable breakthroughs in business, science, mathematics, art, and music. For example, Richard Branson and Steven Spielberg have both spoken publicly about the role dyslexia has played in their success.

In today's society, there is increasing recognition of the unique skills that 'people who think differently' possess. For example, many dyslexic people are excellent communicators and are hugely innovative – able to bring a unique perspective when generating ideas and are adept problem-solvers.

Neurodevelopmental conditions fall on a spectrum, and so it is important to recognise that each person has their own individual pattern of strengths and weaknesses.

Employers have a vital role to play, particularly as the Equality Act 2010 makes it a legal requirement for employers to make 'reasonable adjustments' for people with disabilities. The legal framework provides protection for those with dyslexia and related conditions.

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a neurodevelopmental condition which mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is estimated that 1 in 10 people have dyslexia, but symptom severity will likely range significantly between each person.

Dyslexia is often regarded simply as a difficulty with reading and writing, but in fact these literacy difficulties are 'surface symptoms' of underlying cognitive weaknesses in the areas of short-term memory as well as speed of information processing and phonology, the way a person can manipulate the segments of language. The literacy (and numeracy) difficulties associated with these weaknesses may be severe and obvious, or they may be more subtle, manifesting themselves in general slowness rather than inaccuracy in tasks.

Therefore, dyslexic people have an uneven cognitive profile with contrasting abilities. Often, they have strengths in creative, problem solving, and communication skills, but challenges with spelling, reading, and with holding onto or retrieving information quickly and accurately.

Dyslexia manifests in many different ways, depending on the composition of a person's abilities, training, skills, experience, personality, and the demands made on the individual. Dyslexia can also be more difficult to recognise in adults, as they may well have developed compensatory strategies in some areas or have concealed their difficulties in others.

Even though there has been increasing recognition of the value and skills someone with dyslexia can bring to an organisation, more needs to be done to help employers understand what they can do to support their workforce. While people with dyslexia may bring exceptional gifts and skills to their work, dyslexia can also be the reason for underperformance across a variety of areas.

The challenges most often reported in training and the workplace environment include:

- Reading quickly with good comprehension
- Following and remembering written and spoken instructions and messages
- Formulating thoughts rapidly enough to take part in discussions
- Writing memos, emails, letters, and reports quickly and accurately
- Accurate data entry
- Organising, maintaining, and keeping on top of a work schedule

This isn't just a workplace issue. The industry needs to come together to bridge the 'education to employment' gap, supporting dyslexic people in further education, so they can embark on their journeys into the creative industries.

Proprietary research undertaken by **Commercial Break** shows that almost two thirds of people with dyslexia aren't able to complete their reading lists, and a third of them are getting to the point where their problems with the list are almost putting them off going, or forcing them to choose courses that might be considered more 'dyslexia-friendly'.

Whatever their reaction, three quarters of respondents agree – the reading list in its current form is putting people with dyslexia at a disadvantage. It's not unreasonable to think that universities are probably aware of this issue and are providing ways around it. But, according to the research, two thirds of people with dyslexia claim that universities aren't doing enough.



Inclusive workplaces are those where there is a whole organisational understanding that adjustments may be needed to enable people to work differently. We need to embed the understanding of difference in the culture of an organisation, so that adjustments are accepted as the norm, and all employees are able to work to their strengths and to the best of their abilities

Katherine Kindersley,
Co-Author, Dyslexia Employer Guide, and Director,
Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy

/ Seeking a Dyslexia Diagnosis

Seeking a diagnosis is a personal choice, but a diagnostic assessment will provide important and accurate information about both the strengths and challenges for a particular individual. It also enables effective adjustments to be implemented more easily.

Many people find that having a formal assessment is a very beneficial process and feel a huge sense of relief that their challenges can be given a name and they can understand themselves better. Others may feel that they do not need or want a formal diagnosis. Some even fear being 'labelled' and the preconceptions that can go with this.

A diagnostic assessment explores how an individual processes information and reveals the underlying causes for any difficulties being experienced.

An assessment should include the following components:

- Review of developmental, educational, and occupational history
- Comprehensive assessment of cognitive abilities. E.g. verbal skills, memory
- Detailed analysis of literacy and phonological skills, including timed tests of reading comprehension and of writing
- Consideration of emotional problems related to dyslexic difficulties
- Evaluation of how all of the above relate to the employee's difficulties in the past and now at work
- Recommendations, as appropriate, for specific workplace needs assessments, where precise and bespoke adjustments for the workplace are discussed

As assessment can be very motivating and reassuring, and following an assessment, individuals generally feel inspired to improve their skills and efficiency at work. They can be supported in this through specialist training or job coaching.

Diagnostic assessments should always be commissioned from a specialist organisation, where there is expertise of dyslexia in the workplace. There are some services recommended at the end of this guide.

What are the Employer's Responsibilities?

An employer has responsibilities for all their employees and where there are difficulties, they should explore the reasons for this and ways of supporting them; a person should not need a formal diagnosis to be supported in the workplace. However, a diagnostic assessment can provide an understanding for a targeted approach to the specific challenges and, in this way, can help employers provide more effective support.

Employers should:

- Ensure that all staff have the ‘hidden’ disability awareness training to promote understanding and knowledge
- Have a well-informed HR and OH team
- Offer in-house learning materials and have a neurodiversity representative/s, so people know who to contact if they think they might have dyslexia and would like to access a diagnostic assessment
- Provide clarity on who will be responsible for any costs associated with a diagnostic assessment
- Give reassurance that there will be no stigma or discrimination if a positive diagnosis is given
- Encourage open and honest dialogue to agree how best to support staff – have set performance reviews or ‘catch-ups’ across the organisation to facilitate this

If you think someone may be dyslexic, but don’t know how to approach them and think it would be beneficial to discuss, do this sensitively and carefully. Provide factual information rather than just your opinion, ask the person if they can relate to it, and offer them advice on next steps if they wish to be referred for an assessment or request additional information.

Be aware that the person could have low self-esteem about issues surrounding this or lack of understanding about dyslexia, so present information in a balanced way that doesn’t just focus on notable difficulties, but also includes associated strengths.

HR personnel and particularly line managers may not be able to identify dyslexic traits, as difficulties can arise in the workplace for a wide range of reasons. For example, those who have missed out on education in some way, generally low ability, health and stress, lack of skills training, the type of job they are in etc. A diagnostic assessment can separate these out, so the reasons are clear



Dyslexia is a ‘hidden’ disability and a complex condition. It can be hard for managers and colleagues to understand how demanding, time consuming, and tiring it is for a person with dyslexia to work as expected, unless there are appropriate adjustments in place. Equally, people with dyslexia are likely to have compensating strengths and many individuals, even with undiagnosed dyslexia, achieve strongly in the workplace. While dyslexia is a life-long condition, individuals should be reassured that effective strategies can be put in place to support or help resolve areas of difficulty.

Katherine Kindersley,
Co-Author, Dyslexia Employer Guide, and Director,
Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy

/ Qualities Associated with Dyslexic People

As with all neurodevelopmental conditions, dyslexia falls on a spectrum, so there is a danger of becoming rigid and expectant with any challenges and strengths associated with it. However, dyslexic people often possess qualities and skills that make them valuable assets to any organisation, including being:

- Highly creative and innovative
- Good problem-solvers
- Visual thinkers/imaginative – strong at articulating ideas verbally
- Confident orators/public speakers
- Strong team players – often thriving in social dynamics
- Self-analytical/aware
- Resilient – working hard throughout life on certain tasks that others take for granted
- Resourceful – used to implementing coping mechanisms to overcome challenges

While people may share certain characteristics with each other, it is important to recognise that everyone is different.



Dyslexic people who are motivated to succeed in their work despite their challenges know the meaning of hard work, long hours, and determination; they have a ‘grit’ which earns the respect of any employer who has some understanding of dyslexia. Many dyslexics excel in lateral thinking and innovation, with excellent practical skills and entrepreneurial traits.

Akama Davies,
Director, Global Solutions and Innovation, Xaxis

/ Simple Ways to Modify the Recruitment Process

Job Advertisements

A job advertisement is essential for any organisation trying to recruit. Try not to put applicants off by asking for skills and experience that aren't required or relevant for the role. A person with dyslexia, for example, may be put off roles that state 'excellent attention to detail' or 'flawless written communication' that many roles advertise. There will be certain roles that require this, but not all, and so it is important to prioritise clearly the skills required.

Businesses should clearly state that they encourage applications from all candidates with the right experience and qualifications. They should also encourage individuals to request reasonable adjustments that will help them to perform to the best of their abilities and make them feel more comfortable. To be an attractive employer to candidates, make it known that your organisation has neurodiversity policies and training in place, and give assurances of a supportive and inclusive workplace.

It should always come down to how well the applicant can do the job. Any accidental, unconscious bias or miscommunication will only limit the talent pool, which could include the most promising candidates. This all starts with the job advertisement.

Work Trials and Skills Testing

Some employers find that informal interviews combined with a work trial or skills testing is a better way of assessing a candidate's compatibility than a formal interview.

Interviews – Before, During, and After

Making reasonable adjustments during an interview could be essential to allow dyslexic candidates to portray their skills and competencies to their full potential. This will help to ensure that you are making an informed choice about who to recruit.

Generally, if an adjustment is possible in the job itself, then prospective employers should allow that adjustment in an assessment/recruitment process.

Interviews rely heavily on social and communication skills. While some people with conditions such as dyslexia have excellent communication skills, others do not. One of the areas of difficulty associated with dyslexia that often gets overlooked is oral communication. Some people need more time to absorb what is being said and to organise a reply.

Candidates may find certain parts more challenging, such as:

- Verbalisation, fluency of speech, and word recall – particularly in the heat of the moment and with ‘on the spot’ questioning
- Memory recollection – they could get in a muddle with recalling events and dates
- Auditory memory (e.g. listening to a new task) – individuals could have slower information processing speeds – consider this when stating an interview task, especially one required for group work

Some candidates will be aware that they require consideration at interview. Others will be less aware that their difficulties are likely to cause underperformance or not even know that they have dyslexic difficulties. It is best to implement best practice either way.

Things to consider before the interview

Some useful examples of accommodations that you might want to consider:

- Provide a list of interview questions in advance of the interview
- Notify interviewees that notes are allowed to be brought into the interview as prompts (allow time for the interviewee to look at them during the interview)
- Send over, in writing, any case studies or scenarios that will be used in the interview
- Offer candidates the chance to fill in a brief questionnaire asking:
 - If the interviewer should avoid asking about specific dates or times that may be hard to recall, and if instead, they should put questions in context with references
 - If the interviewer should avoid asking long or multiple questions, and instead keep to shorter, singular questions
 - Instead of non-specific questions if the interviewer’s questions should be more direct and focussed. For example, instead of ‘Can you expand on that?’, they could ask ‘What was your role in the project?’
 - If the interviewer should use full titles and names, avoiding acronyms and initials

Sensory distractions:

- What might be going on in or around the building on the day of the interview that could act as a distraction?
- If a candidate has problems with visual or auditory distractions, consider ensuring the interview room is free of background noise and movement to allow for better concentration. E.g. other staff talking or moving visibly across the office

Things to consider before the interview

Literal questions and specific examples:

- Avoid general questions. E.g. 'can you tell me a bit about yourself?' or 'where do you see yourself in five years' time?'
- Avoid hypothetical 'what would you do if?' questions. Instead, ask the candidate to give specific examples of relevant situations they have experienced in the past
- Give the candidate questions in advance. Many people have difficulty retaining verbal information, especially when experiencing anxiety, which will likely occur at a job interview
- The interviewer should be aware that people with dyslexia/neurodevelopmental conditions can become verbally muddled when asked to give details or describe a situation, so perhaps ask them if they would like to make notes before providing an in-depth response

Clear signals and prompts:

- Verbally prompt the candidate if they have not given sufficient information
- When sourcing information from a CV, the interviewer should provide a copy or prompt if asking about specific knowledge and experience

Body language:

- If a candidate has difficulties with speed of information processing, do not time responses to questions. Encourage them to pause and think before giving an answer
- Allow and encourage people to use any strategies they have in place to manage anxiety. E.g. deep breathing exercises

The adjustments suggested above do not give an advantage to candidates; they remove the barriers that may prevent some candidates from demonstrating their suitability for the job.

Preparation for the First Day

Reasonable adjustments do not need to be complicated or expensive. Making a few simple changes can improve productivity and reduce anxiety and stress for many employees. **Access to Work** can help with making reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

Further information on the **Access to Work** website:

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Note: if specific support is required in the workplace to address issues arising from the individual's condition, it must be under the terms of the Equality Act (2010) and be provided by the employer as a reasonable adjustment. Employers can apply to the government's Access to Work scheme to assist with any costs of this support.

Advanced Preparation – Prior to the First Day

Implementing as many of the above points, as much in advance as possible, should help reduce the anxiety someone could experience in the lead up to starting work. This will give them the best chance possible to commence employment effectively. Again, it is simply a case of removing potential barriers to success.

Prior to employment commencing, it is important to deliver high quality training to line managers, colleagues, and HR personnel.

It is important to determine:

- The nature of the individual's dyslexia, which should be obtained from their diagnostic assessment
- The demands and expectations of the role itself, and any related task and competency requirements
- The working environment and practices that could impact performance
- Are there requirements for relevant training and assessment? This will help to identify job and training options that are likely to be the most successful in mitigating any areas of difficulty

Line managers to provide in advance:

- A timetable for the first day or week
- A map of the building/office, including a clear seating plan
- A mentor/buddy or support from a suitable colleague to be the 'go-to' person if the individual has any questions/issues
- Flexible working arrangements (where possible), enabling the employee to take advantage of quieter hours in the office

First Day at Work

Prior the first day, managers should become informed about dyslexic difficulties and their effects, both practical and emotional, and accept that individuals may need to work in different ways.

On the first day of employment, the following arrangements would benefit most individuals, particularly those with dyslexia:

- A brief introduction to any employee that they will be working with
- You might consider asking all employees to complete a profile of themselves, including name, job title, likes, dislikes, and responsibilities. This also gives people the opportunity to disclose information that will benefit their interactions with colleagues E.g. I am hard of hearing in my left ear, so please try to direct speech to my right ear
- Directions and orientation around the workplace environment

Sensory Environment

While not everyone experiences sensory differences, many neurodivergent people are acutely sensitive (hyper) or under sensitive (hypo) in one or multiple senses.

When employees can reduce the negative impact of their physical working environments, they become more productive and experience less work-related stress.

Be aware of sensory differences and adverse sensory environments. E.g. open-plan offices that have lots of background noise and lights.

Some important recommendations to consider:

- Ensure staff have access to both print and digital materials. E.g. they have the option of printing notes for meetings and writing on Post-It notes for organisational practices
- For printed material, ensure coloured paper is also available
- Check the employee's position in relation to entrances, exits, the photocopier, the kettle, lift lobbies, etc.
- Supply desk partitions and low lights in certain places
- Telephones that light up for an incoming call instead of ringing out loud
- Provide noise-cancelling headphones
- Offer flexible working hours
- Arrange flexible working zones – having a quiet space / project zone to work in may increase productivity of all staff
- Show staff how to adjust the colour or contrast of their computer screen background
- Have adjustable lighting at workstations



It is hard for individuals to succeed in isolation, and the most successful outcomes are where the employer and the organisation are working together, and the workplace culture is a supportive and inclusive one. Employers operating in a competitive commercial world may feel it is not easy to create dyslexia-friendly work environments, but it can be done. Many adjustments are relatively easy to introduce and are not expensive.

Katherine Kindersley,
Co-Author, Dyslexia Employer Guide, and Director,
Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy

/ Managing Someone with Dyslexia in the Workplace

Dyslexia Awareness

It is understandable that not everyone can be an 'expert,' but try to:

- Become informed about dyslexia and its effects, both practical and emotional
- Become informed about the related syndromes of dyspraxia, ADD, and visual stress
- Remember that dyslexic employees will find written work and aspects of organisation much harder than most people. They may need to apply extra effort in many areas, which may make them prone to fatigue.
- Encourage employees to talk to you and others about workplace difficulties
- Allow absence from work for dyslexia-specific training

Staff and Structure

Most employees benefit from a structured working environment. Therefore, it would be beneficial to consider:

- Using shared timetables, calendars, and lists as visual reminders. Encourage the use of planners that visually highlight appointments and deadlines
- Offering help on planning and prioritising workloads and scheduling daily work tasks
- Breaking down large tasks into small, manageable tasks with clear deadlines
- Offering guidance and support with new or difficult tasks
- Trying to limit approaching staff with surprising questions and trying to email them in advance
- Ensuring staff know how often they should take breaks and where they can go to relax
- Giving advance notice of tasks whenever possible, rather than setting sudden deadlines

Feedback and Appraisal

Give direct, constructive, and regular feedback. If a problem occurs, it is important that it is addressed at the time, not in an appraisal three months later. Ensure that ongoing, proactive support from HR or OH is booked in regularly and not used as a last resort.

Delegation and Instructions

Always be clear, concise, specific, and include information, such as how long a task should take, and the quality expected in the outcome of a task.

Verbal communication

- Give full, clear instructions and take time to explain things properly
- Repeat things, if necessary, and check back understanding
- Give written, taped or oral instructions, as necessary
- Avoid setting multiple tasks when possible, but if you do, write down a clear order of task priorities

Written communication

Reading:

- Present written instructions in a clear format or visual diagram, which allows the use of text-to-speech software
- Allow extra time for reading tasks

Writing:

- Provide speech-to-text software if needed
- Allow extra time for writing tasks
- Do not expect the employee to take notes or receive dictation at speed

Training Courses

Be aware that reluctance to apply for promotion or training courses may be linked to fears of excessive paperwork, and the possible exposure of weaknesses during training. Ensure that in-house courses have a Good Practice policy in relation to dyslexic trainees. For example, trainers should:

- Provide in advance a clear outline of their talks and relevant course material
- Repeat things, if necessary
- Leave a few minutes at the end of a session to check that dyslexic trainees have understood the main points
- Be aware that whiteboards can cause visual stress

Career Development

Dyslexic people often express concerns that a confirmed diagnosis could hold them back for promotion, or a fear of being underestimated when being considered for taking on increased responsibilities. It is essential to ensure that there is career progression and equal development opportunities for all staff. It can simply be a case of putting together a plan that identifies and targets an individual's strengths.

For example, some dyslexic management personnel may express concerns about proofreading the work of junior colleagues or having to write quickly/note take during senior management meetings. It is important to have balance across any organisation to account for strengths and weaknesses – consider delegating proofreading to a more experienced junior member of the team or perhaps a line manager on another team.

Not everyone will want to line manage, so consider increased responsibility in a more technical or advisory capacity, or even project management. Either way, it is imperative to match salaries for senior technical or managerial roles. This will diversify and encourage specialism across the workforce, which could be hugely advantageous to an organisation.

Assistive Technology - How Can it Help?

Assistive technology is any item, piece of equipment, software, or system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of an individual/s.

These devices can help people who have difficulty speaking, typing, remembering, seeing, hearing, learning, and walking (to name a few challenges).

Assistive technology can include digital recorders to record discussions and meetings, voice recognition software, spell checking apps, software to read text aloud, as well as programmes to help organise and prioritise ideas and activities.

In particular, Dictaphones and Grammarly can be incredibly beneficial. OneNote, a Microsoft Office tool, also has a Dictaphone feature. Mindnode is a mind-mapping and brain-storming tool useful for those who like to visualise multiple ideas at once.

Leo is a free online platform created by the advertising industry, designed to help students/marketers who have dyslexia with further education course reading. It offers a personalised reading experience, incorporating customisable text, audio, and video. Over time, it will build a comprehensive library of the most popular ad books. The platform launches in late 2020 with Steve Harrison's book *How to do Better Creative Work*.

/ Support Networks

Ongoing Staff Support

It is important to provide ongoing support to all staff for their mental and physical wellbeing, ensuring employees feel included in social aspects of the workplace. It can be hugely beneficial to get to know staff, what they enjoy or dislike about their roles, or even their hobbies and interests. This can be a key communication tool for making the workplace more inclusive, growing staff loyalty, and even increasing attendance to work-related social events.

An employee may require additional support if they encounter unprecedented challenges or a change in their lifestyle. It is important to recognise symptoms of increasing struggles with mental health, and signpost staff to appropriate services or their GP. Unexpected changes to personal circumstances or loss of a loved one can happen to anyone, so it is essential to have a support network in place for staff to communicate concerns.

Peer Support

If there are multiple people who identify as neurodivergent in the workplace, it is important to encourage and provide resources for peer-support systems to be established. Many people find it more beneficial to speak with neurodivergent peers, rather than HR professionals, line managers, or colleagues, who do not experience the world in the same way.

It can be helpful for staff to have a platform to share strategies and experiences with others, as well as a neurodiversity network in the workplace. E.g. an intranet information hub, or even the encouragement to attend awareness raising training.

This could be done through:

- Electronic communication. E.g. email
- Group meetings
- External events and conferences. E.g. The Future is ND events and Diverse Minds conferences in London



We must create supportive workplace environments. It is vital to have senior people in organisations to champion diversity and inclusivity – to create a positive, supportive, and flexible culture that permeates all levels of the business. Teams are most effective when they are comprised of colleagues with complementary skill sets and different perspectives, supporting and inspiring each other.

Laura Chamberlain,
Managing Director, Sign Salad

/ Case Study: Understanding Dyslexia in the Workplace

The challenge of Hanif

Hanif was not just a challenge. Fiona, his line manager, found him exasperating! He had been moved into her team three months previously, arriving with good references from his previous manager. He was employed as a digital marketing executive, and his job was to provide marketing support across digital mediums including email, Pay-per-click (PPC), website, and database management. Fiona's team included four other junior executives.

Hanif certainly put in the hours and was hardworking. Fiona, recognising this, had supported him by providing some additional one-to-one 'catch-up' sessions. Yet there had been no significant improvement. She listed his problems.

Hanif was:

- Slow to learn new marketing campaign information
- Unable to remember project updates
- Had issues multi-tasking and meeting tight deadlines

Furthermore:

- During meetings, he seemed to lose track of and go over information unnecessarily
- He sometimes omitted important questions on the phone to suppliers
- Database entries and records were not 100% complete or accurate
- Emails were unclear and frequently included typos

Fiona felt she had given Hanif plenty of support. She now had no alternative but to place him on a capability review process, with formal monitoring of performance. As a result, Hanif's anxiety increased, as he feared he would not receive his bonuses and might even lose his job.

When an employee is not performing to expectations, it is important to consider whether the person may have an unidentified 'hidden' disability.

A common situation

These circumstances are not unusual. There are many situations similar to that of Fiona and Hanif across the whole range of employment sectors, where in spite of the individual being seemingly well-motivated and hard-working, and the line manager wishing to be supportive, performance issues remain. Anxiety and stress on the employee's part exacerbate the situation. The relationship between the employer and employee deteriorates.

Dyslexia is a complex condition

A difficulty for the line manager is that dyslexia often appears to be an amorphous, and therefore perplexing condition. It manifests in many different ways, depending on the intricate patterning of a person's abilities, training, skills, experience, personality, and the demands made on the individual. Dyslexia can also be more difficult to recognise in adults, as they may have developed compensatory strategies in some areas or have concealed their difficulties in others.

In the work environment, a person with dyslexia is likely to meet the greatest challenges in the following three areas: memory, the ability to recall and hold onto information in the short-term; organisation, the ability to remain in control of activities and time, and thirdly, the ability to work with speed and accuracy. So difficulties may be seen across a range of work tasks dependent on the efficient processing of information.

The challenge of the workplace itself

Recent trends in the workplace have tended to increase the difficulties experienced by those with dyslexia. Workplaces have become more pressurised: performance targets and performance monitoring are increasingly common. People are expected to work to short timescales and tight deadlines.

In addition, workplaces commonly demand the following:

- Accurate literacy – most jobs require some degree of literacy
- Multi-tasking skills – the ability to manage several aspects of a job at one time
- The strict following of a process – the way a task is completed is considered important, not only the outcome or result

Further challenges in the workplace, especially for new entrants, may be created because, unlike in the world of education, help is often only given if it is requested or if there are performance problems.

In the context of such demands described above, a change of circumstances at work often puts additional pressure on an employee and is the reason for the dyslexic difficulties being revealed. It may be a change of job or a promotion, bringing new and challenging responsibilities. There may be a new line manager who introduces a different style of management and different ways of working. A new appraisal system may record performance in a more detailed way. More monitoring and supervision can highlight weak performance. It may be that a change in personnel results in the dyslexic person losing a particularly supportive colleague.

Perhaps even a change in a relationship outside work means that there is no longer someone who can check documents for the employee. Change can affect both the work performance and the emotional well-being of an employee with dyslexia.

A line manager should consider if a recent change has affected the performance of an employee.

How the challenge of Hanif was resolved

Hanif had talked to friends about his worries at work, and it was they who suggested that he contact Human Resources (HR) and raise the possibility that he might have dyslexia. It was something he had not considered before. Faced with a looming capability procedure, he plucked up courage and did so. As a result, he was referred for a dyslexia assessment and following this, a workplace needs assessment. Both of these assessments were important in helping Hanif become effective in his role.

The diagnostic assessment

While the diagnostic assessment confirmed that Hanif did have elements of dyslexia, it emerged that the dominant condition was dyspraxia or developmental coordination disorder (DCD) **. It is common for dyslexia and dyspraxia to co-exist and, in some areas, the manifestations can be similar, particularly in the areas of organisation. Yet in other areas, the challenges are different, and it was important for Hanif and those supporting him to also understand the challenges of dyspraxia/DCD.

Hanif himself felt a sense of huge relief that he had a recognisable condition and the cause of his difficulties was understood. He was also very reassured to learn that in some areas he was highly gifted: his verbal reasoning ability, he was told, placed him in the 'very superior' range of his age group in the general population. Yet in contrast, he had low scores in his visual-spatial and visual-motor skills and his ability to process visual information. There were also weaknesses with working memory and attention to detail.

When dyslexia is identified, the solutions become clearer. The tensions between the line manager and the employee subside.

** See 'Further Information and Reading' section at the end of this guide for a detailed definition of dyspraxia/DCD.

As Hanif's case exemplified, the 'diagnostic' assessment is important in the following ways:

- It enables the person's profile to be properly understood
- It enables the line manager to understand why appropriate workplace adjustments should be made
- It enables the workplace assessor to understand the particular ways the employee can be supported
- It provides an understanding of how much support is needed, and where the focus of the skills training should be placed
- It provides important information for the specialist trainer
- The key information provided by the diagnostic assessment may make all the difference to a person's career and life. At the very least, it should ensure that the recommendations made are realistic and appropriate for the individual employee

The workplace needs assessment

The assessor explored the different aspects of Hanif's job and made particular recommendations in the form of assistive software, equipment, and individual specialist training.

Sometimes, it is possible to adjust the job itself. Hanif was able to focus more on campaign planning, idea generation, and pitching projects to relevant stakeholders.

There were multiple changes introduced to assist the whole team. Visual mind-mapping tools, project flow charts, and shared planning spreadsheets were used to help team members coordinate campaigns with one another, preventing last-minute requests/poor organisation. In addition, 'proofreading sign off' was factored into departmental processes, ensuring all marketing material sent outside the organisation would be proofread in advance, prior to being published.

Support for the line manager

People cannot work successfully in isolation. Hanif was unable to sort out his difficulties by himself. So Fiona too needed the input of HR and her managers to resolve the performance issues of a member of her staff. The most supportive and productive workplaces are those where there is an understanding that people may need to work differently, and where training throughout the organisation has created an awareness of dyslexia and related conditions.

How the business reaped the benefits

For Hanif, a puzzle had been solved: he had always felt that he had the ability to understand complex ideas and concepts, but that he could struggle to apply his understandings to practical tasks. It was the diagnostic assessment which gave him the confidence to share the findings with his managers. The report provided important insights into Hanif's pattern of strengths and weaknesses and how he might move forwards.

Hanif gained an understanding that his difficulties with learning new processes, organising, scheduling activities, and managing time were quite commonly found in those with dyspraxia; he was not alone. He needed time to assimilate information and work out priorities. He worked best within clearly structured frameworks.

Hanif also began to understand that his anxiety and his resulting frustration and stress had been adding to his difficulties, making him less efficient. Following the assessment, the sense of relief was such that he felt calmer, he was able to think more clearly, and be more organised, an improvement also noticed by Fiona.

The diagnostic assessment had identified visual processing difficulties. The assessor recommended a larger monitor and a 'screen reading ruler,' a line magnifier which highlights part of the PC screen in a horizontal band. This helped Hanif track text accurately, particularly when working with emails, spread sheets, and the database.

With his dyspraxia, he also found that if he stood up to talk, his words became part of a 'performance' and were easier to assemble. He therefore needed to move the position of his desk, and to have his monitor and keyboard placed at an appropriate height. He could now work standing up and without constantly sitting down again to input data on the computer. This adjustment improved the speed of his data recording.

The assessment gave Hanif an understanding of his particular pattern of strengths and weaknesses, which he found a great help in moving forwards. It also gave Hanif the confidence that he could do his job. Fiona realised that Hanif did not just need additional monitoring of performance, but targeted support for his neurodiversity.

/ Living with Dyslexia: My Journey to a Role in Marketing at Direct Line Group

Yvonne Akinwande is a Propositions Consultant in the Marketing Division at Direct Line Group. After a couple of years working in the data and marketing industry, she feels like she has found the right role for her after a difficult transition period.

When were you diagnosed as dyslexic? What made you seek a diagnosis?

During my senior secondary school years, I was really struggling with spelling and written tasks. This created a negative learning dynamic for me, as I was not able to process certain written language. It really started to affect my self-confidence.

My English teacher in Year 10 picked up that I was extremely passionate about language and creativity, but there was an issue with grammar and punctuation. Shortly after a discussion with my teacher, I undertook a test for dyslexia at school – this confirmed our suspicions.

Receiving a dyslexia diagnosis gave an initial boost to my confidence, as I now knew what was causing some of these difficulties, so I could start working towards measures to help. The additional exam support and one-to-one learning sessions offered to me helped a lot when it came to GCSEs.

Dyslexia affects people differently, but there were several issues that I noticed. My dyslexia can cause issues with memory recall in pressurised environments, and so any tasks or scenarios that require this will not get the best out of me. In addition, I struggle with visualising letters and numbers, and so they can often become jumbled in my mind.

On the other hand, I think being dyslexic has contributed to my strengths. I really thrive when I am socially immersed, problem-solving, and able to express my creativity. Public speaking, in particular, is something that I have always excelled at.

Did this diagnosis affect your choices when it came to further education?

With anything you pursue in life, you need to discover your strengths and weaknesses, and how these could have an impact. I had a steep learning curve when it came to my education and career choices.

At college, I undertook courses that could play to my strengths and passion for language. The 'Mass Media & Communications' course was really practical and full of public speaking and creative content production – I received distinctions in a variety of modules.

At university though, things really dipped for me. The 'Media, Theatre, Drama, and Culture' degree was much more focused on writing, and I lost the practical and aural elements that really helped me succeed at college. I eventually got a bursary to acquire a Dictaphone and other support materials. This, alongside additional time for assignments and exams, really helped.

Has being dyslexic influenced your employment choices?

After my college experience, I desperately wanted to get into media and communications. Although job descriptions were a real problem, as 99% would say 'excellent attention to detail and written communication' as a prerequisite. So I rarely even applied out of fear of being unable to do the role.

I ended up applying for jobs that did not require much writing, such as sales and customer service roles, even though they did present other challenges. I had a sales role with a 'rent a car' service, but unfortunately this really exacerbated my anxiety with numbers. Having to do on-the-spot numerical sums and spell customers' names correctly in front of them was a bit of a nightmare.

This did build character and resilience, but it really wasn't a pleasant experience, as you always fear you could lose your job if you aren't performing. I knew this wasn't the right path for me.

Why did you join Direct Line Group? What have you learned from your experiences?

After I realised customer-facing sales roles weren't playing to my strengths, I started looking at customer service.

I was first employed by Direct Line Group (DLG) in 2017, working in the customer call centre for the Home Claims department, which required us to respond to inbound calls from policy holders.

This role was a better fit than what I had previously done but was not necessarily what I wanted to do for my long-term career. However, I knew it would give me a platform to get my foot in the door at a national organisation that provided a wide range of services.

My dyslexia did create some challenges in this role. The policy holders, who I would be answering queries for, didn't know I was dyslexic, and there wasn't a spell check on the 'Incident description' form that I often had to fill in. While I was focusing on my spelling, grammar, and punctuation, this sometimes led to me missing information and asking people to repeat things. I didn't want to mention that I was dyslexic, as this was very personal to me and the policy holders were strangers. Plus, it just isn't their problem.

I started hearing more about a new neurodiversity strand of the Diversity and Inclusion network, after a couple of members from DLG attended DMA Talent's Neurodiversity Initiative training workshop back in September 2018. Their focus was to help people with neurodevelopmental conditions (like autism, ADHD, and dyslexia) at the company. This is when I decided to get in touch with the founder, Louise Calvert.

What changes have you witnessed at DLG since staff attended DMA Talent's workshops?

Prior to mid-2018, when applying for internal roles, there were many recruitment tasks that included 'spot the difference' and text-based assessments – with a focus on grammar and spelling – in addition to other tasks that revolved around analysis of written information, when this wouldn't necessarily be important to the role.

There were also questions like 'Are you disabled?' on the job application forms, which can be rather alienating to neurodivergent people if there isn't another option to fill in. I don't see myself as disabled – like many people, I just have different strengths and weaknesses.

Over the past two years, there have been a range of improvements. There are now multiple options for candidates in the recruitment testing mechanisms – team exercises, verbal and/or written tasks.

There have been changes to job specifications, so the language used is a lot more inclusive and not so daunting to candidates.

HR and IT have also developed a comprehensive online portal, 'I-Learn', which is accessible to everyone at the company to find a broad range of learning materials.

Our Diversity and Inclusion network work closely with the HR and Recruitment teams when hiring candidates to ensure DLG are inclusive, approachable, and talent driven.

The neurodiversity strand of the Diversity and Inclusion network is a safe space for people to come together to share and express themselves. I personally have benefited from this support network being in place – it has grown from two members to over 150. We advise people on all aspects of life, from individuals seeking a diagnosis to those requesting workplace adjustments through our HR team.

How did you find your current role as Propositions Consultant in the Marketing Division?

In early 2019, I met Louise Calvert and explained to her my concerns that my role at the time wasn't a good fit and I had other skills to offer. Together, we formulated a plan to help get me where I wanted to be and methods to how I could get there.

Louise introduced me to the Marketing and Communications Divisions, and I learned what I would need to do to join. DLG's online learning portal offered courses that would help, so I selected several that focused on marketing.

By April 2019, a job opening came up in the Marketing Division. I knew the time was right to make the transition.

There was a values-based interview and online personality assessments, to see if your personality traits would be a good fit. There were also competency tasks related to the role – it was great to have an opportunity to showcase my problem-solving, communication, and creative skills.

The final stage required us to pitch a proposition idea, using our presentation skills, which was ideal.

The hiring team really liked my passion and positive attitude – I now have a role that I absolutely adore.

My current manager recently stated during my appraisal that I have an excellent ability to analyse and explain aspects of my work that may seem otherwise complicated to others. I am also able to clearly communicate images that I visualise in my head to those around me, helping them get on the same page. She also highlighted that I am naturally a very creative individual.

What tips would you offer to a dyslexic person seeking employment in the data and marketing industry?

Communication really is key. Sometimes, all it takes is asking for help and explaining your situation. It's easier for an organisation to assist you when they are in the know. Try to find someone experienced in the industry (and who you could feel comfortable with) to discuss what you want from your career and how you can get there. DMA Talent also host a [Mentoring scheme](#) that could help if you don't have a contact in mind.

Be ready to have open and honest conversations. They really can open up so many opportunities. You are easier to help if people are aware of what you need help with.

Try to adopt a constructive and positive mindset – be willing to learn and be proactive. Confidence comes when you understand your own strengths and weaknesses, and also where you can add value to the world.

/ Living with Dyslexia: How I Became a Neurodivergent Managing Director

Laura Chamberlain is the Managing Director at Sign Salad – a cultural insight agency. Being dyslexic has impacted her career in many positive ways and has helped her to become an influential figure in the creative industries.

I used to keep my dyslexia a secret when I first entered the working world. For the first 15 years or so of my career, I rarely, if ever, mentioned it for fear of revealing a vulnerability and being seen as ‘not good enough’ in some way. I felt (wrongly) that I could not be ‘weak’ and that I had to be ‘perfect.’

Growing awareness and the rise of the term neurodiversity has given us a new language to talk about and celebrate our differences. The rise of the diversity and inclusivity movement more broadly is creating profound positive change to business cultures across the industry.

I wish I had realised much, much earlier that it would have been better for me and my teams if I had been more open about it. I could have saved myself a lot of anxiety by being up front about the little things I need – printouts, Post-Its, for the order of my slides not to be changed two minutes before the meeting – rather than hiding things.

We need to create a culture in the workplace where people feel comfortable being vulnerable and where they can ask for what they need. If we strive to bring out the best in one another, we will succeed more often than not.

A shift from a career in law to embrace my strengths

I was diagnosed as dyslexic at seven years old. I had a tough time at primary school, as I struggled to learn to read and was held back to repeat a year.

One of the biggest issues with a diagnosis is that it can be difficult to be labelled, as you then have to deal with others’ preconceptions, which could be positive or negative. Now I welcome being asked about my dyslexia and encourage open, curious, and positive conversations.

Following my diagnosis, I really felt I had something to prove (to myself as well as to others), so I pursued a very traditional, academic education – culminating in a history degree from Oxford. Getting there, I learned a lot about grit, determination, and the merits of hard work.

After Oxford, I started a law conversion course, but swiftly learned that memorisation of case law and the rigid application of precedent were contrary to how my dyslexic

brain was wired.

I realised I was far better suited to a career that let me think more creatively, more laterally, and was more visual – and would prove to be a lot more fun!

Building a career in the data and marketing industry

My parents were fairly horrified that I was leaving the pathway of a safe, sensible profession like law for the bright lights of AdLand. For me though, it was the perfect fit from the start. I joined a creative agency as an account executive and the role let me think creatively, work with visual and conceptual ideas, present creative work and advocate for it. And, luckily, I was pretty resilient and used to a spot of hard work, which my role needed in conjunction with business acumen and creative instincts.

I have a range of tips and tricks for coping in the workplace. If you didn't know I'm dyslexic, you'd probably think I'm a bit (possibly a lot) peculiar for some of them...

- Being able to print things out and make notes is a big benefit. Post-its, Post-its everywhere. If I haven't written it down, it doesn't exist.
- Printing things out removes 'screen glare' and makes dense documents easier to read and digest
- My trusty pink ruler. I wouldn't dream of sitting down to proof something without an opaque ruler (so you can focus on one line at a time). It's a vile shade of pink, so that it's less likely to go walkabout in the office!
- Reduce your screen's brightness to reduce the glare
- Rehearse presentations thoroughly. Like many dyslexics, reading live off PowerPoint will make me break out in a sweat. Ironically, rehearsing more to compensate will make you a much better presenter.
- Spellcheck and proof everything. The Grammarly programme is good too.
- This is an army term, I believe – Prior Planning and Preparation Prevents Poor Performance. I plan and prepare for everything. I have lists for my lists!

It's so vital to identify where your strengths lie and find the role that lets you use your talents. Play to your strengths and do something that you feel passionate about.

I now realise it's okay not to be perfect. But this was harder to accept when I first progressed into management roles, as my role often meant I was the person people were looking to for leadership and reassurance. I now know that a little bit of vulnerability would have added a ton of humanity and empathy to my leadership style.

My dyslexia continues to be a strength as an MD

Being dyslexic has taught me resilience and to appreciate the strength of diverse teams.

I'm good at digging in when the going gets tough, but I also hope that I'm good at appreciating that every team member has different strengths and that we can

support each other. None of us are ‘perfect,’ and I no longer hold myself or others up to that impossible bar.

I try to never use my dyslexia as an excuse. It’s a mindset where you have to manage the cards you’re dealt. Being dyslexic has impacted my career positively in so many ways (far more so than negatively)...

- Being dyslexic made me remarkably resilient and determined. As the famous Kipling line goes, I had met with ‘triumph and disaster,’ well before I joined the industry. I knew what it was to confront and overcome challenges.
- Dyslexics think differently and, in an industry where the currency is new ideas and different approaches, that’s invaluable
- Problem solving comes naturally to many dyslexics. We’ve had to do it every day to navigate the world – but still best not to ask me for directions, as I usually mean your ‘other left’!
- Like many dyslexics, verbal communication and visual concepts are our natural habitat
- Ironically, being dyslexic has made me hyper aware of my areas of weakness, so I’m a vigilant proofer. Many of the ‘coping mechanisms’ I’ve put in place actually have made me a better – though not perfect – proofer and more likely to catch an error.

I try to teach my teams that failure is acceptable and inevitable: it’s what you learn from it and do next that matters.

It’s vital to have senior people in organisations to champion diversity and inclusivity – to create a positive, supportive, and flexible workplace culture that permeates all levels of the business.

A neurodiverse-friendly working environment across the industry

Unfortunately, too many adversarial agency cultures persist, where people feel they need to present themselves as invulnerable and as an ideal, titanium version of their role. It’s unrealistic and exhausting for everyone, not just the neurodiverse community.

I remain optimistic though. The recent pandemic has shown us all how vulnerable we are, and remote working has given us a glimpse of our colleagues’ and clients’ real lives. It’s forced us all to adapt and work differently, to be more empathetic. It’s clear there is no longer one, universal right way to be or work. Work culture has proved how remarkably adaptable and human it can be.

The ‘new normal’ isn’t normal. It’s flexible and diverse. Community and individuality can coexist. That’s something to celebrate and look forward to.

/ Living with Dyslexia: Play to Your Strengths and Forge a Career Path

Akama Davies discusses how innovation, resilience, and problem-solving skills have helped him thrive as Director, Global Solutions and Innovation, Xaxis.

My dyslexia diagnosis came quite late in life – I was 20 years old in my second year of university studying history. Up until then, I hadn't really contemplated that I was dyslexic, until my course tutor mentioned that I should seek a diagnostic assessment, as there were certain signs that I could be.

This was a bit of a light bulb moment. The assessment helped answer a lot of questions that I had for most of my life and, most importantly, it helped me to understand where I would excel and where I would be challenged.

I was diagnosed as a high functioning dyslexic, meaning that I use a high intellect to compensate for some of the difficulties caused by my dyslexia. My tests also revealed that I have excellent verbal/oral communication skills and exceptional problem-solving skills, which would prove to be extremely beneficial in my chosen career path.

Entering the workplace environment with dyslexia

After I graduated in 2011, I wanted to find a role that would offer both commercial prosperity and a long-term career path. I was really hoping for something that needed a person with entrepreneurial and creative traits, as well as a personality that is both personable and thrives from being socially immersive.

The financial services sector ticked some of the boxes, but the roles seemed to be very well defined and set in stone – career progression is also quite fixed within a set hierarchy. Data and marketing roles also ticked these same boxes, but fortunately the career path is not so linear. You can forge your own path with a vast range of roles and opportunities.

At first, I was hesitant to be open about being dyslexic. People often have preconceptions and label people with neurodevelopmental conditions (most of the time they can be negative). It has only been in the past two to three years that there has been a huge shift in awareness and understanding of neurodiversity, but there is still a degree of inaccurate profiling.

While people may have become more acceptant, most are not informed about each neurodevelopmental condition – especially the relationship between them, how symptoms impact neurodivergent people on a day-to-day basis, and how

structural forces can inhibit career progression. For example, many people presume that I struggle most with reading and spelling. However, it is actually my short-term memory that I tend to struggle with. I've also had people assume that I don't like writing, but that is far from the truth.

Proactive people forge their own career paths

I knew from the start of my career that I likely wouldn't thrive as much in roles that were heavily focused on writing tasks. I am a strong communicator and like to focus on both oral and written communication in a conversational context. I knew that in-depth written tasks that require a tight turnaround would be a struggle. My early roles in account management were a great fit for my skills and personality traits.

There is definitively a mindset you develop when faced with hardship. I knew what my strengths and weaknesses were, but by learning how to mitigate challenges that present themselves, you are better positioned to find ways to overcome them. You have to proactively get on the front foot and identify what you need to work on and how to achieve your goals. Try to be resilient and find where you can add real value.

For example, to help with my career progression at AOL, I knew I could thrive at entrepreneurial problem-solving tasks, so I would offer my services for finding business solutions across the organisation. After helping to find solutions to a variety of product-related challenges across the business, I managed to turn it into a newly created programmatic lead role – taking the initiative can go a long way.

In addition, I spotted issues within the business where there were many initiatives taking place to help clients, but there was a lack of product-led strategies to provide a commercially viable solution.

I also started coaching colleagues on AOL's programmatic propositions to help others become more familiar with the products offered. As Programmatic Lead, I would lead a team of product specialists to create and build new performance products. This really helped me to excel and make a case for becoming Head of Brand Performance.

Creativity and problem-solving skills help me to excel

Of course, being dyslexic still presents challenges, even in my current role as Director, Global Solutions and Innovation.

I am generally concerned about proofreading work and my 'writing tone', as I am conscious my tone of voice could be a little 'off' in terms of the context of the message I am trying to get across. To help, I use assistive technology, or I ask someone within my team to help proofread work and to also inform me how my messages come across to others. This helps me to focus my time on the strategy and overall vision of the business – areas where I can add most value.

I often use The Avengers as an example of how a team of high-functioning individuals can come together for a greater purpose. With a diverse range of skills, backgrounds, and personalities in a team, you are more likely to thrive, rather than just having a team of 'Hulk-like' characters, who are visibly/noticeably strong but lack other

important traits and skills.

Within my current team, I have other neurodivergent staff, as well as neurotypical, with their own strengths and weaknesses. Our 'Tiger Team' philosophy is key, as every project must have a blend of people with different abilities, expertise, and attitudes to ensure there is always balance. Another key to success is developing a 'safe space' and a culture where everyone can be honest and transparent – always playing to people's strengths and creating a dynamic where people can have open conversations about areas of improvement.

I believe that many of my strengths can be attributed to my dyslexia and they are integral to my success. My role as a director is to provide a top-level vision, discovering ways to blend various complex components together and gain stakeholder buy-in, which will help turn my idea into a practical concept with a clear strategy.

I always try to start with a top-level vision of the overall project/campaign journey. Then begin to break it down gradually into each key development stage. By starting with this approach, I can make sure that all key performance markers are acknowledged, which helps with getting others to understand the concept. Visualising and articulating ideas to different stakeholders with conflicting interests can be problematic. But I think my early struggles with communication have helped me to learn how to communicate with a diverse audience, taking complex concepts and positioning them in a way that everyone can understand and get behind.

Seeking employment in the data and marketing industry

I can't emphasize enough how important it is to seek out employers that have had some training on neurodiversity – you should never feel like a training exercise. You have every right to ask questions about their policies on diversity and inclusion, so don't be afraid to ask. Remember, inclusive employers will get the best employees, which makes them more competitive.

Try not to let self-doubt and people's opinions affect you too much. While you don't have to disclose if you are neurodivergent, it can help employers make reasonable adjustments for you. It may not always be feasible to accommodate every request, but it's always best to have open conversations. Employers will benefit most from you being in an environment where you can thrive.

/ Living with Dyslexia: A Marketing Apprenticeship Was the Right Fit

James Dredge is a Marketing and Events Executive in the Talent Division of the Data & Marketing Association. He joined the company after completing a digital marketing apprenticeship in 2017.

I received my dyslexia diagnosis just before I took my GCSE exams. The assessment showed that although I have normal reading comprehension, my reading and writing speed is considered 'slow'. It identified that this issue could be easily overcome by providing me with extra time for my exams and highlighted that I have a low/below average working memory, which means it's hard for me to retain information that I hear, as it takes time for me to process it.

Having dyslexia has never held me back, and I feel it has contributed to more of my strengths than weaknesses. After completing the assessment, I learnt where my weaknesses lie, which has enabled me to develop ways of coping with them. For instance, due to my working memory, when someone gives me a task at work, I repeat it back to them to make sure I haven't missed any key details. I then ask them to email it to me, so that I can add it into my schedule.

I decided to pursue a career in marketing as it plays to many of my strengths. I'm very creative, imaginative, and love working as part of a team, collaborating on projects with others – all skills that are key to success in a marketing role. After completing my A-levels, I was offered a place at university to study a Marketing Communications degree, but I decided to defer my place and do an apprenticeship.

I wanted to do this because I am a visual learner, and I thought the best way to find out if the data and marketing industry was right for me was to spend a year in it (before spending three plus years studying only to discover it wasn't). I achieved a valuable qualification and gained a year's work experience, picking up lots of soft skills on the way, which are critical when it comes to getting a job.

Upon completing my apprenticeship, I knew the industry was for me and decided I didn't need to go to university. I went job hunting and landed my first role at DMA Talent as Marketing and Events Assistant. I then earned a promotion six months later to Marketing and Events Executive.

I really enjoy my role at DMA Talent, as it allows me to express my creativity through managing our social media channels and creating article and email copy. My work helps to promote our initiatives to a range of different audiences, using a variety of writing styles to engage with each.

I often liaise and collaborate with many teams across the business on various projects, sharing my ideas with lots of different people and learning new skills from them. My job is very varied, working across all aspects of marketing, including managing social media accounts, creating content, measuring web traffic, and improving the customer experience and user journey on our website. This means I have lots of various tasks to do and every day is different.

If I had one piece of advice to anyone with dyslexia, it is to embrace it and see it as a strength, not a weakness. There will be areas where you'll struggle more than some, but there will also be areas that you excel in, so find them! If you're struggling with something, don't be afraid to talk to your manager about it. There are lots of simple things, as detailed in this guide, that they can do to support you.

/ Notes on Authors

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Katherine Kindersley is the director of Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy (DAC), an organisation which has long specialised in working with adults in employment. DAC works with private and public companies, government organisations, as well as individuals, providing assessment, training, and advice on reasonable adjustments. Katherine and her team run regular training courses for dyslexia professionals on employment consultancy work and for managers on dyslexia awareness.

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Kate Burnett,

General Manager, DMA Talent

Kate's mission, alongside the DMA Talent team, is to inspire young people to join the growing data and marketing industry by increasing awareness and creating clear career pathways. She is passionate about educating and enabling the next generation of marketing talent with the skills they need to succeed.

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Propositions Consultant, Direct Line Group

James Dredge,

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/ Further Information & Reading

- DMA Talent's Neurodiversity Initiative: <https://dma.org.uk/article/dma-talent-neurodiversity-initiative-1>
- Working with Dyslexia: <https://www.workingwithdyslexia.com/>
- Matthew Trerise Neurodiversity Training & Consultancy: www.matthewtrerise.com
- British Dyslexia Association: <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>
- CIPD 2018 Study: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/150218-neurodiversity>
- Commercial Break: <https://www.commercialbreak.org.uk/>

Dyspraxia/ Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) Definition

DCD, also known as dyspraxia, is a common but serious disorder affecting movement and coordination in children, young people, and adults, with symptoms present since childhood. As well as affecting the organisation of external movement, it also affects organisation at the internal cognitive level, so the organisation and structuring of language, thought, and ideas.

For further information visit: <https://www.workingwithdyslexia.com/information-hub/information-guides/>

/ About the DMA

The Data & Marketing Association (DMA) comprises the DMA, Institute of Data & Marketing (IDM) and DMA Talent.

We seek to guide and inspire industry leaders; to advance careers; and to nurture the next generation of aspiring marketers.

We champion the way things should be done, through a rich fusion of technology, diverse talent, creativity, and insight – underpinned by our [customer-focussed principles](#).

We set the standards marketers must meet in order to thrive, representing over 1,000 members drawn from the UK's data and marketing landscape.

By working responsibly, sustainably and creatively, together we will drive the data and marketing industry forward to meet the needs of people today and tomorrow.

www.dma.org.uk

About DMA Talent

DMA Talent champions young people as the future of our industry.

Our goal is to attract a new generation of fresh thinkers by raising awareness and showcasing the sector's inspiring and dynamic range of career opportunities.

We nurture aspiring marketers by providing the roadmap, skills and connections to kick-start their professional journey, and by instilling our customer-first principles, we drive our industry forward in a responsible and sustainable way.

About DM Trust

The DM Trust has been established from the merger of the DM Foundation and IDM Trust to serve the whole direct, digital and data marketing industry. The main function of the Trust is to distribute funds in support of projects and activities which contribute to the future growth and governance of the data driven marketing sector.



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