

# NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

The term 'neurodivergent' was first used over twenty years ago to describe the way everyone's brains work differently. Neurodivergent people are those who think, process, perceive and interpret the world around them differently to 'neurotypical people' i.e. those who think and behave in a way that it considered by society as 'normal'.

Neurodiverse conditions can include:

- ADHD
- Autism
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Tourette's Syndrome

Upwards of 15% of people in the UK are neurodivergent and so there is a high likelihood at least one or more of the staff that make up any workforce are neurodivergent. Very often neurodiverse conditions are not obvious and frequently undisclosed by employees. For this reason, they are often referred to as unseen or silent conditions.

Employers can frequently feel that creating a neurodiverse workspace and employing those who may have a different way of working can be challenging. In approaching this, there are common factors which apply when dealing with existing and potential employees. process.

## **Communication**

Employers should consider that neurodivergent employees often do best with direct, non-ambiguous communication and may struggle to pick

up nuances in tone in the same way a neurotypical employee might. Employers should consider whether different forms of communication may help those who might digest information differently than others. This will also be relevant when hiring staff and should be thought of when considering questions on applications forms and in interviews.

## **Environmental factors**

Neurodivergent employees can be affected by environmental factors such as sound and light. Workstation assessments should be considered to explore any helpful adjustments such as screen brightness settings, noise cancelling headphones or screen overlays as well as flexible working arrangements that could help accommodate the employee's needs.

## **Training**

Training plays a vital role in nurturing good relations with a neurodivergent employee. Those involved in the management and supervision of such employees should themselves be considered for training to increase their awareness of these conditions.

## **Support**

Getting to know individuals who may have one of these conditions is important. Creating a supportive working environment to allow staff to raise any concerns or suggestions they have is key to creating a safe and respectful workplace. Any changes or adjustments made to working practices for affected employees should be recorded and reviewed regularly.

## Is a neurodiverse condition a disability?

Disability is covered by the Equality Act 2010. Neurodiverse staff are not specifically considered disabled under the legislation. Instead, the Equality Act 2010 defines a disability as an illness or condition, either physical or mental, which:

- is capable of lasting 12 months or more or has lasted for twelve months or more, and
- has a significant and negative impact on the employee's day to day life.

This means that in most cases, there will need to be an assessment of the impact of the condition on the individual. A GP's report may help with this but an occupational health report may be more comprehensive.

If an employee's neurodivergent status does mean they are classified as disabled, it will be a requirement to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace. This may include such things as providing specialist equipment or allowing flexible working. Whether or not an adjustment is reasonable will involve matters such as cost and the size of the business affected.

## How does an employer know a member of staff is neurodivergent.

The short answer to this question is that often it is not apparent (the hidden condition) and most commonly is it not discussed during the recruitment process, unless raised by the applicant themselves. It is not a question which can be asked during the interview stage.

Differences in working practises may become apparent later in the working relationship and a welfare discussion may reveal information about the condition.

Neurodiversity in the workplace is now a very common occurrence as individuals feel more confident in acknowledging their condition. With many high-profile sufferers of one or more neurodiverse conditions, it is a subject that has come out of the shadows into the light and as such affected members of the workplace need to be understood and supported.

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