

# Everyone Managing... Disability in the Workplace: Dyslexia



Version 1

Owner: Diversity and Inclusion

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Approved by: Loraine Martins



## A Brief Guide for Managers

## 1. Introduction

For about 10% of our staff, managing dyslexia is something they do everyday. Increasing our understanding of dyslexia, as line managers and colleagues, will help us to be safer and more inclusive and support everyone to perform at their best.

This document is part of a series of guides designed to help us manage our people in a more open, inclusive and fair way. By adopting the guidance we will be more confident that we are implementing our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#) and our [Reasonable Adjustment Policy](#). It contains ideas about types of adjustments that can be made when supporting dyslexic employees and outlines our duties as an employer.

This guide provides useful pointers however it's really important that you have a conversation with anyone with dyslexia as the starting point for any adjustment process.

Further guidance is available from the [diversity and inclusion team](#) and HR Direct

## 2. What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a permanent condition that affects how we learn to read, spelling and/or write. Someone with dyslexia might also have difficulties processing information at speed, short-term memory, organising/arranging, sequencing, spoken language and hand-eye coordination.

There are similar impairments that impact on how people manage numbers (dyscalculia) and movement (dyspraxia). They are not covered in this guide but more information can be found [here](#).

Many dyslexic employees will have well developed creative, practical, verbal and interpersonal skills so having dyslexia does not impact on or reflect someone's intellectual ability.

Many employees who have dyslexia have strategies which enable them to cope day-to-day and this ability allows them to think differently about problems in every day life that others struggle to resolve. However, dyslexia can cause some employees problems at work and simple changes by line managers and colleagues can help to overcome these. Where an individual's dyslexia impacts on their ability to carry out their job, they would be considered 'disabled' under the Equality Act 2010. This means that they are entitled to have their employers make reasonable adjustments.

Dyslexia is a wide-ranging condition that impacts on individuals differently and some

people with dyslexia may have strengths in some of the areas below. A dyslexia assessment will identify the difficulties someone may have in the following areas:

**a) Written and verbal communication**

- Taking in written or verbal information quickly, especially where jargon and acronyms used
- Processing and responding to complex information quickly
- Finding the right word or phrase in a given context
- Responding quickly during conversations
- Understanding detail during conversations
- Speaking at the right volume – either too loud or too quiet
- Pronouncing words correctly
- Spelling
- Taking the right meaning from long passages of text
- Reading because words or letters appear to move or become blurred
- Reading or writing unfamiliar words, jargon, technical terms and acronyms
- Speed reading

**b) Memory**

- Using short term memory to recall facts, events, times and dates
- Holding on to several pieces of information while undertaking a task, such as taking notes and listening, or coping with complex questions
- Recalling routine information such as their partner's age or name
- Holding on to information without referring to notes

**c) Concentration, organisation and time management**

- Staying focused and attentive
- Listening to long, complex instructions
- Working with lots of background noise or movement
- Presenting a sequence of events in a logical, structured way
- Getting organised and not losing items
- Time management

**d) Direction and navigation**

- Finding the way to new places
- Navigating round an unfamiliar place or building

### 3. Getting an assessment

For employees who think that they might be dyslexic, or if you or a colleague thinks someone may have dyslexia, the first step is to arrange a diagnostic assessment with a chartered psychologist. This provides a complete profile of the individual's abilities and difficulties. Where the individual's role does not involve a significant amount of paperwork then a [screening tool](#) can be used.

You can arrange an assessment via the [British Psychological Society](#), through your [Local Dyslexia Association](#), the [Helen Arkell Dyslexia Centre](#) or the [BDA Helpline](#). Network Rail would be expected to fund this assessment.

If this assessment confirms dyslexia then the next step is to arrange a workplace assessment which considers the person's role and what reasonable adjustments are needed.

These can be arranged and funded through [Access to Work](#), via your local Jobcentre. The application is made by the [employee](#) and it is important to request an assessment from a qualified workplace dyslexia specialist.

Alternatively, you can arrange a workplace assessment through the [British Dyslexia Association](#) or through [Occupational Health](#).

The TSSA has trained a number of people to become neuro-diversity champions who can carry out initial screenings for their members. To find your nearest champion, contact [enquiries@tssa.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@tssa.org.uk)

### 4. Starting the conversation

There are many reasons why a dyslexic employee might not discuss their difficulties with their line manager. The fear of discrimination from colleagues and managers; a lack of understanding about the benefits of sharing information with a line managers, for example having adjustments made; and there is still stigma attached to the term 'dyslexia' so some people can be embarrassed.

We should regularly ask all our staff if they face any barriers at work. Many dyslexic individuals are not aware of the support that is available to help them work to their full potential. However, some dyslexic employees will have a great deal of knowledge about the kind of adjustments that might help them to do their job

Appendix 1 includes a useful form to guide and record the discussion with your employee about the adjustments they need. In some cases it may be useful to seek expert advice, especially where there are safety considerations (see Appendix 2).

## 5. Types of reasonable adjustment

When agreeing with an employee what kind of adjustments can be made for dyslexia, it is important to consider the details of the diagnostic and workplace assessments as well as the requirements of the tasks in their job. You might also need to think about the workplace and facilities you can provide, for example a quiet space or computer software.

Below are some ideas from the British Dyslexia Association, that might prove useful but the list is not exhaustive and the psychologist's assessment should indicate what is needed.

### a) Written communication adjustments

- Give verbal as well as written instructions
- Highlight key points in documents
- Use coloured paper, test which colour helps the person best
- Allow extra time to read and complete assessments
- Discuss written material, stressing key points
- Breaking large pieces of text into bullet pointed lists
- Use spider-diagrams to convey complex subjects and ideas
- Use alternative formats, like drawings, diagrams and flowcharts
- Change font or background colour of computer screen
- Using coloured computer screens or glasses
- Supply an anti-glare screen filter
- Switch on the instant spell checker
- Avoid continuous all-day computer work by encouraging regular breaks and alternating tasks
- Provide specialist software e.g. text to speech, speech to text, a digital pen, a reading pen or mind-mapping software. For information on assistive software see the [British Dyslexia Association Technologies website](#)

### b) Verbal communication adjustments

- Give one instruction at a time
- Communicate instructions slowly and clearly in a quiet location
- Write down important information

- Demonstrate and supervise tasks and projects
- Encourage the person to take notes and then check them
- Provide a note taker
- Ask instructions to be repeated back to you
- Write a note outlining a plan of action
- Use a digital recorder to record important instructions.

**c) Memory adjustments**

- Use mnemonic devices and rhymes
- Provide written instructions so that they can be referred back to
- Use diagrams and flowcharts
- Check back understanding
- Use multi-sensory learning techniques such as reading material onto a tape machine and then playing it back whilst re-reading

**d) Concentration, organisation and time management adjustments**

- Provide a quiet workplace away from distractions
- Allow an employee to work from home
- Use a “do not disturb” sign when specific tasks require intense concentration
- Encourage co-workers not to disturb the person unless absolutely necessary
- When interrupting, allow the person to pause and write down what they are doing, so that they can refer to it to the when resume the work
- Ensure that each task is completed before starting another
- Remind the person of important deadlines and review priorities regularly
- Use coloured pens to highlight priority tasks
- Use smart phone reminders and calendars
- Ensure that work areas are well lit, organised, neat and tidy
- Encourage daily “To Do” lists with colour coding
- Build planning time into each day

**e) Direction and navigation adjustments**

- Supply detailed maps with visible landmarks
- Give time to practise going from one place to another
- Supply a GPS car navigation system.

## 6. Providing inclusive and accessible information

When producing written information make it as accessible and inclusive as possible from the start. Following these simple rules will help.

- **Contrast:** Keep the difference between the colour of the type and the colour of the background as broad as possible; e.g. black or dark type on a light cream background creates the best contrast. Yellow type face should be avoided
- **Type size:** 12 point should be the minimum size with 14 point for headings
- **Type weight:** avoid light weight type for printed publications
- **Typeface:** Sans serif type-faces like Arial and Tahoma are the easiest to read as opposed to Times New Roman. (some people with dyslexia will have a preferred typeface that they can apply to electronic documents)
- **Emphasis:** use **bold** - avoid *italics* and underlines, except for hyperlinks.
- **Spacing:** Keep spacing even between words and lines and left justify; avoid splitting words at the end of the lines
- **Paper:** Matt is easier to read than gloss, cream preferable to white
- **Capital letters:** ARE HARDER TO READ THAN lower case letters and should be avoided for continuous text
- **Design and layout:** keep it simple, clear and logical, e.g. where possible leave space between paragraphs and don't cram the page
- **Columns:** Are best avoided. If used make sure the margin between columns clearly separates the two
- **Navigation:** Provide 'navigational' aids e.g. a contents list or clearly differentiated headings, anything which makes the layout easy to follow
- **Text over images:** text should not run across an image or photograph if at all possible, as this reduces the contrast and can be confusing

## 7. Two-Ticks - Positive about Disability Scheme

We have signed up to the Two-Ticks Scheme because we are positive about employing disabled people, making reasonable adjustments where needed and offering inclusive workplaces.

This means that we are committed to:

- Interviewing all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and we will consider them on their abilities.

- Making sure there is a system in place to discuss, at any time, but at least once a year, with disabled employees what they can do to make sure they can develop and use their abilities.
- Making every effort to keep staff who become disabled employed
- Taking action to make sure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness needed to make our commitments work.
- Reviewing the commitments and what has been achieved, plan ways to improve on them and let employees know about progress and future plans every year.

For a TSSA Dyslexia Pack or for more information about diversity and inclusion visit [Connect](#) or email the team on [diversityandinclusion@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:diversityandinclusion@networkrail.co.uk)



## Appendix 1 - Reasonable Adjustments Assessment

Use the form below to discuss with the employee, their needs, set out the adjustments requested and confirm whether they can be implemented.

- Understand the detail of each request or requirement.
- Ask the employee what types of adjustments they believe they require and how the adjustments will help them
- Discuss whether the adjustments can be implemented at this stage. If further advice is required seek additional support i.e. [Access to Work](#), or Occupational Health
- Once additional support is obtained, meet with the employee again to discuss the findings and the suggested adjustments.
- If the adjustments cannot be implemented, detail the business justification for this

<b>Employee Name</b>	
<b>Payroll Number</b>	
<b>Position</b>	
<b>Department</b>	
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Line Manager Name</b>	
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Line Manager/ budget holder Name</b>	
<b>1. Describe the impairment, health condition or issue</b>	
<b>2. Describe the reasonable adjustment(s) requested or recommended</b>	
<b>3. How will these adjustments assist the individual to carry out their work more effectively?</b>	

<b>4. How will these reasonable adjustments be put in place?</b>
<b>5. Has expert advice been sought? List who else is involved</b>
<b>6. If any adjustments cannot be made you will need to provide a clear justification for this decision here</b>

Manager..... Employee.....

Date..... Date.....

Date of next review..... Within 1 year.

**Please submit this form to HR Direct**

## Appendix 2 – Other Resources

### 1. Access to Work

[Access to Work](#) is a specialist service delivered by Jobcentre Plus, which gives practical advice and support to disabled employees.

Access to Work can help us:

- retain an employee who develops a disability or long-term health condition, because by keeping their valuable skills, we save both time and money recruiting a replacement
- show that we value our employees by having good and effective employment policies and practices, and
- support our employees who have a mental health condition.

To be eligible for help, an employee must:

- be disabled
- be over 16
- be in, or about to start, paid employment
- normally live and work in Great Britain, and
- not be claiming Incapacity Benefit, or Employment Support Allowance

Access to Work can provide funds towards:

- special aids and equipment
- adaptations to equipment
- travel to work
- travel in work
- communication support at interviews
- a wide variety of support workers, and
- the Mental Health Support Service.

Access to Work provides a grant to reimburse the cost of the support that is needed. They do not provide the support itself.

### 2. The British Dyslexia Association [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)

UK national organization, offering a wide range of information for parents, dyslexic adults and teachers, with details of the international conferences it organizes,

### **3. Can Do**

Our disabled staff network provides peer support to its members and enables its membership to share experiences; directs individuals to expert advice and raises issues of concern with the diversity and inclusion team, and the ExCom sponsor, which are then fed into HR, for improvements. Get in touch via

[CanDo@Networkrail.co.uk](mailto:CanDo@Networkrail.co.uk)

### **4. Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Assistance**

If you know that one of your employees needs different software, hardware or furniture prior to employment, this should be sourced before the employee starts their job. If you need help with this you can contact the [helpdesk](#) although you will need to get permission from the employee to pass any personal information on.

Once an employee starts with Network Rail, if they use DSE for a significant part of their day, then they will need to undertake the [online training and assessment](#). Any issues raised during this process will be highlighted to Network Rail's external provider who will contact the employee to discuss their requirements. Where necessary, they will also arrange to attend the employee's workplace to carry out an onsite assessment.

### **5. Employee Assistance Programme**

[Validium](#) provide this service which includes a confidential 24/7 counselling and advice service to all employees and their immediate family members, both face-to-face and by telephone. They can provide information and answer questions on a wide range of issues like stress, health and wellbeing, legal matters, pregnancy, landlords, neighbours, debt management, as well as counselling.

### **6. HR Direct**

[HR Direct](#) is a service for people managers, offering you professional support and guidance to help you manage your people successfully. HR Direct can help you address issues earlier and carry out your duties in a consistent way.

It includes:

- A dedicated and secure website where you can store and manage case notes and documents
- Inbound and outbound case and call management by a team of professional HR advisers
- An online 'Ask a question' service.