



Neurodiversity in the Workplace Toolkit:

Unlocking Potential and Driving Innovation

2023





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Aberdeen Inspired are particularly proud to be partnering with the ADHD Foundation to bring the Umbrella Project back to Aberdeen in 2023 after a hugely successful event last summer, and I thank them for their valuable collaboration which has also made the production of this useful resource for business possible.

The aim of the Aberdeen ADHD Foundation Umbrella Project is to raise awareness of the 'umbrella' term of neurodiversity, which includes ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyspraxia, and to signpost families, teachers, carers, friends and employers to support and information.

I'd like to thank Harbour Energy, TMM Recruitment and CNRL, the sponsors of this year's Umbrella Project installation, conference and seminars as well as all the businesses and schools which have signed up to host a mini-installation of their own over the coming months.

These initiatives are just some of many delivered by Aberdeen Inspired to support local businesses. With this e-booklet, we hope to help both private and public sector businesses understand how they can best serve the 20% of staff and customers who are neurodiverse, and in doing so cultivate an inclusive and thriving city for all who live, work in and visit Aberdeen.

This resource will help your business to understand and benefit from:

- Understanding the benefits of neuro-inclusion and diversity in your business
 - Talent, skills and optimising your workforce
 - Innovation and problem solving
 - Transforming your recruitment, retention and workforce development
 - Collaborating with education and training providers
 - Social capital and brand values
 - Strategies to enable your business to benefit from a neurodiverse workforce
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'Be inspired - to think differently'

Entrepreneurship, enterprise and innovation are key qualities in every successful economy and business. Transforming vision into opportunity and success requires a new type of workforce for a technology driven, rapidly changing economy, workplace and culture.

The skills and competencies required of the 21st Century workforce are radically different from those of 40 years ago, when computing was only just beginning to change our lives and economy. With the emergence of new technologies and computerised artificial intelligence, we are all being challenged to 'Think Differently'.

This different thinking is now recognised in 20% of the workforce who have until now, remained largely invisible. 1 in 5 human beings display different ways of thinking, finding expression in dyslexia, dyscalculia, autism, ADHD and dyspraxia. Research states that over 40% of millionaires are dyslexic and over 30% of entrepreneurs and executives have either ADHD, dyslexia or both. This has implications for our education system where different thinkers are often mistakenly perceived as less able. How wrong we were. 1 in 7 undergraduates now identify as neurodivergent. We now know that university graduates with ADHD are twice as likely to start their own business. There is a very different perspective of talent and potential of young people who we have traditionally described as having special educational needs. Universities, schools and colleges are reappraising how we ensure this talent is not wasted. Collaboration between businesses and education providers is an emerging trend that aims to educate and prepare the workforce of tomorrow.

Neurodiversity postulates that this prevalence of 1 in 5 people with different 'neuro-types' must have an evolutionary purpose. Why is there such diversity in human neuro-cognitive capabilities and potential? How can we benefit from the realisation of talent, potential and diversity of intelligence in a rapidly changing technology driven workplace and culture? The evidence is clear - diversity in the workforce improves profitability. Neurodiversity in the workforce is now recognised as integral to optimise innovation, creativity, technological advances and agile, opportunity ready businesses. Neurodiversity is about unlocking potential, driving creativity, capability and the acquisition of knowledge, skills and intelligences we need in industry and in our communities.

Dr Tony Lloyd
CEO ADHD Foundation



Glossary

Neurodivergent - Someone whose brain processes, learns, and/or behaves differently from what is considered “typical”. Some people prefer to identify as ‘Neurodiverse’ because the root of the word Neurodivergent implies ‘deviating from the norm’ when a diversity of mind is ‘the norm’.

We must therefore respect the right of the individual to self-identify using language they embrace and recognise that language and terminology evolves in the same way we no longer use terms such as ‘invalid’ or ‘handicapped’.

‘ND’ is an abbreviated acronym used by many and is acceptable to the community who differ in their preference between neurodivergent and neurodiverse.

Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, and Dyscalculia - These are acceptable terms to use and describe various differences in information processes and neurological functioning. They do not equate with low IQ.

ADHD - An umbrella term for a range of differences in neurological information processing and functioning. It is a misleading acronym for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Not all people with ADHD have difficulty with each of these characteristics and many see them as an asset in some ‘contexts’. For example, hyperactivity equates to energy and drive, which can be an asset. Inattention can be interpreted as distractibility because those with ADHD can concentrate but can be distracted by noise and activity in their immediate environment. Impulsivity is also linked to creative lateral and innovative thinking. Learning differences are increasingly used instead of ‘learning difficulties’ focusing on the challenges rather than the strengths of different neuro-types.

Neurodevelopmental conditions - The umbrella term to describe all of these ‘naturally occurring’ differences in human neuro-cognitive capabilities that find genetic expression in what we name dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADHD, autism, dyspraxia (also known as developmental coordination disorder in a medical context) and tourette's (tics can occur randomly or cease at any time and commonly occur alongside other neurodevelopmental conditions in approximately 1 in 100 people).

Autistic / Autism / ASC – Autism Spectrum Condition - This is a safe umbrella term to cover a very wide range of neurological functioning differences that impact social and communication skills, information processing and sensory information.

Disorder - This word derives from medical terminology to describe something impairing daily functioning in life and is incompatible with a Neurodiversity culture that sees 'disorder' and 'disability' as mostly (not entirely) the consequence of 'context' and cultural influences. For example, access to employment for wheelchair users is addressed by making buildings accessible. Workplace environments that allow the use of strategies, assistive technology and protocols that enable access to employment change the 'context' so that learning differences do not negatively impact employee abilities and performance.

Workplace Adjustments - This term is preferred to 'accommodations' or 'reasonable adjustments'. 'Workplace adjustments' enable colleagues in our workplaces to work successfully and add value to the organisation with their knowledge, skills, experience and application of their capabilities. This is not to deny their protected 'differences' but seeks instead to 'enable'.

Disclosure - a legal term for when people share that they are neurodiverse, but 'share' is preferred in discussion as this is a less negative term than 'disclose'. Employees are not legally obliged to share medical history unless there is a very specific reason why it may impact their job role. For example, if someone takes medication for ADHD, this 'may' effect their insurance for a job that involves driving or handling dangerous machinery.

Diagnosis - This does not make Neurodiversity exist or not. The majority of people are never screened in our education system and many struggle unnecessarily in 'some' curriculum subjects as a result. Many adults with 'ND' minds do not even know they are 'ND'. A formal diagnosis by a medical professional is an official recognition of Neurodiversity, not causal. Obtaining a medical diagnosis relating to Neurodiversity through public or private health services can be complicated, expensive, and may take many years.

Language - Person-first or identity-first language? 'Person with autism' vs. 'Autistic person'. A person with ADHD does not identify as 'ADHD-ic' or 'I am ADHD'. Some use the term 'Add-er'. Some people prefer one over the other depending on whether they feel their Neurodiversity is an integral part of their person or whether it is secondary to their identity.

Disability - "It is/isn't a disability"? – Legally, autism, dyslexia, ADHD, dyscalculia and dyspraxia (also known as Developmental coordination disorder) are protected characteristics and therefore, legally, adjustments have to be considered. Diversity of mind is a difference in how the brain interprets and processes information and, therefore, a different perspective of our environment.

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is now the established recognition that there is an evolutionary purpose why 1 in 5 of our workforce think differently. Looking at Neurodiversity through the lens of the 21st century technology driven workplace and culture has enabled us to realise that different minds demonstrate skills and intelligences that are increasingly valued in a variety of roles and functions in every organisation. Each brain is as unique as our fingerprints. Character intelligence and the application of intellect and knowledge are not always measured best in school examinations. 'I can, is more important than IQ'.

**1 in
10**

1 in 10 have dyslexic minds that have a talent for lateral thinking & problem solving. Entrepreneurial and effective communicators, dyslexia is now cited as a 'skill' on LinkedIn.

**1 in
10**

1 in 10 display dyscalculia that have skills that can interpret numbers through shapes, charts and illustrations as well as creative thinking and communication skills.

**1 in
20**

1 in 20 who have an ADHD brain are creative lateral thinkers. Visionary, energetic, entrepreneurial and skillful communicators, you will find ADHD minds in over 30% of leaders.

**1 in
60**

1 in 60 who have autistic minds display super linear thinking with capacity to see patterns and information that informs data analysis, system design and attention to detail.

**1 in
10**

1 in 10 minds display dyspraxia processing information in different ways that support solution focused creative thinking while also influencing physical skills.

Why Neurodiversity is good for business

Research proves that diverse workforces have a competitive edge, are more innovative and more profitable. Neurodiversity is now a major influence in employment, education and social policy. How will this impact on your business and workforce?

Businesses wield enormous power in effecting social change, evidenced through their brand values and marketing strategies that are aligned with cultural change. Local and global brands understand and harness this zeitgeist to win new customers as well as impact and shape the economy across a variety of sectors.

Demand for new and different skills outstrip supply in many industries. A new understanding about how we enable talent and potential in our current and future workforce will empower organisations to overcome future talent and resource challenges and prosper where other lesser dynamic employers will fail.



Checklist: some tips and quick wins



Accessible inclusive workplaces: Is the environment Neurodiversity friendly? Provide basic awareness training for your workforce.



Be clear about your company and brand values and how this is reflected in how your workforce are supported and enabled and how this also benefits customers.



Be proud of the 'company culture' – welcoming, friendly, supportive, investing in employee development, community relationships and civic responsibility.



Make clear that disclosing Neurodiversity is not a barrier to employment and how honest disclosure enables you to provide the employee or job applicant with what they need to meet the requirements of the job.



Recruitment and HR management

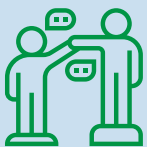
Ensure talents and needs are understood and explore how you could employ cognitive profiling or other metrics to enable the employee to know their strengths and what assistive technology and workplace accommodations are needed to optimise performance.



Establish flexibility of interview protocols, such as employing work-relevant tasks and activities, use of videocalls and group tasks, metrics and providing the interview questions in advance.



Ask the applicant how the interview process could enable them to showcase their ability and potential.



Allow flexibility and creative engagement with induction and on-boarding protocols.



What training needs have been identified by the applicant? If recruited, agree what training could be offered within agreed time frames.



Ensure immediate supervisor / line manager understands how to best enable the employee in the context of their Neurodiversity.

Consider Access to Work funding to offset any costs for training or additional equipment or technology the applicant would need to perform their role. For example, standing desks, assistive technology, coaching, whole staff team training and hybrid working supported by technology in learning and reporting.

Apply for Access to Work Funding - <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Neurodiversity friendly workspaces for employee health and wellbeing

Consider your facilities - are there spaces in your premises or in off-site locations that are conducive to the employee being able to complete their work responsibilities? For example, large open plan offices may be distracting for some people. Noise, temperature and lighting can all impact on performance and employee wellbeing.

A healthy workforce can be supported through your occupational health protocols. For example, make information available about healthy lifestyles, negotiate a company discount with local gyms or sports and leisure facilities.

Team dynamics benefit from a diversity of minds. Consider how 'maverick thinkers', 'rebel talent' and innovators can safely test established hypotheses, practices and conventional thinking in your organisation and create efficiencies or new opportunities.

Explore how meetings could be energised by standing instead of sitting. Use of wall charts, whiteboards, screens, video space conference facilities and clear objectives shared in advance and reporting offered in annotated video rather than pages of written documents.

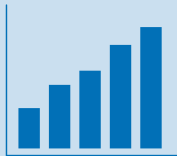
Encourage and facilitate employee-led corporate and social responsibility projects that promote local good causes and organisations to build common purpose, relationships and organisational values.

Explore how parents in your workforce can be supported. Flexi-time can reduce unplanned absence and parent training opportunities will improve their skills and resilience in managing the needs of their children and demands of work.



Communications Policy and Practice

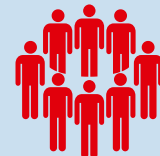
How can communications be adaptable, flexible and multi-modal?



Make use of infographics and charts to make reporting more accessible.



Allow time to read or produce documents and utilise 'alt text' on images or 'voice to text' software to record minutes of meetings.



Ask employees to agree what their preferred modalities of communication are, offering flexibility and mediums for sharing information across the organisation.



IT Support strategies such as Office 365 applications to auto spell and grammar check documents and emails. Text to voice software to read out documents, electronic planners, reminders and task lists that enable an employee to develop their executive functioning skills.



Keep language clear and concise in all communications and always conclude with the questions: What actions need to be taken? By whom? When? Shared with who?



If there are employees who display a 'literal' understanding of language that is sometimes associated with autism, ensure all staff are informed that communications with metaphor, idiom, humour and acronyms many not be understood by an autistic colleague.

Key considerations for human resources management teams:

How will you review and define the skills, experience and competencies needed for a role or function?

How do you improve recruitment protocols and make them adaptable?

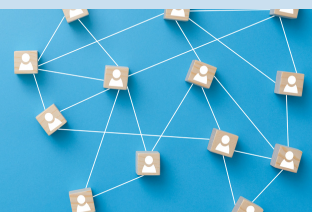


How can performance management frameworks be adapted and flexible to fit a diverse workforce?

What technology and training does your business need to build capacity and skills in-house, to benefit from Neurodiversity?



How will your internal and external communications protocols need to be adapted to be inclusive?



How will your current HR function ensure your company benefits through neuro-inclusion?

How will your induction and onboarding be optimised to improve performance and retention?



Can DWP 'Access to Work' funding be utilised to meet the costs involved in developing your workforce?

What new assistive technology is available to enable employees to meet the requirements of their job role?



Understanding Neurodiversity in the workplace: 8 key messages

01

There is a natural variation

...in how people think, act, learn, communicate, are motivated and relate to others in society and in the workplace.

02

It is the universal design that human brains function differently at their individual level.

Your brain is as unique as your fingerprint. This is the essence of Neurodiversity. Heterogeneity in neurological processing is simply another facet of human diversity.

03

We like to surround ourselves with people of 'like mind'

...but risk producing more of the same at the expense of innovation, agility and profitability. Thinking differently is the new mantra in business.

04

Fear of stigmatisation and lack of understanding

...from others can prevent individuals from seeking or disclosing a diagnosis. Our education system enculturated us into mistakenly believing that those who think differently are less able – less intelligent and less employable. Don't assume that underachievement in education means a potential employee lacks talent or potential.

05

Many workplaces are unwittingly designed in ways which do not support neurodiverse people's ability to thrive and add value

...because of our 19th century lens of ability. Some individuals will navigate these workplaces by hiding in plain sight the signs of their neurodiversity. Masking or camouflaging our different thinking can be exhausting, placing an immense pressure on a person's mental and physical health.

06

Neurodiversity entails not only challenges but also important strengths.

Differences in how individual's process information or communicate ideas are not "symptoms" that need fixing or changing, for example, ADHD isn't an "attention deficit," the variable attention that people with ADHD experience is instead reflective of deep focus, attention to detail and commitment to passions.

07

While neurotypes such as dyslexia, autism, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and ADHD are protected characteristics, not everyone identifies as disabled.

Some people prefer to identify as neurodivergent, others identify as neurodiverse. Respect for people's right to identify is important as the language and understanding about Neurodiversity evolves.

08

Create a context (culture) that enables and optimises performance and employee wellbeing

...and commitment. You will create a fertile environment for innovation.



The business imperative for Neurodiversity: 8 key messages

01

The right person in the right job

In a competitive market, can we afford to overlook qualified, capable individuals who can get lost in the recruitment and interview process? Just 16% of autistic adults are in full-time paid employment in the UK in 2023. Those companies who have developed recruitment and interview processes that proactively include neurodiverse applicants can be assured that they are recruiting from a wide pool of potential and not missing the right person for that job! Cognitive profiling and personalised performance management protocols ensure recruitment and retention is optimised.

02

The value of recognising and respecting difference

Rigid ideas about what makes a good employee and strictly standardised work processes have traditionally prevented neurodivergent employees from thriving in the workplace or have caused them to be overlooked completely. Promoting an understanding of Neurodiversity is not just about tapping into skills but also about being supportive and developing colleagues. Talking about Neurodiversity within your organisation can help all colleagues to identify signs of difference and become more accepting of them leading to fewer instances of misunderstanding, better workplace performance and a happier working environment for all.

03

Even SME's benefit from employee led corporate and social responsibility projects

Consider making some aspect of Neurodiversity a common cause for your workforce. Everyone knows someone who is impacted by dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism, ADHD, or dyscalculia. We talk not only of equity, diversity and inclusion, we also talk about belonging. Employee schemes that unite everyone in a common cause build communities and strengthen workplace collaboration. The intersectionality of Neurodiversity means that whatever your age, race, faith, religion, class, role or sexual orientation, everyone knows someone who 'thinks differently'. Supporting a local school, charity or project that benefits those who are neurodivergent enhances the culture and value of your business.

04

One size does not fit all - success indicators are multiple

No single person in the workforce is good at everything. Different functions in every company require different competencies; excelling in one role does not mean the employee will be as successful in another role. Play to the strengths of the individual and ask them what they need to develop new competencies so they can add value to your company. Employees who know they are valued are always more productive and enjoy coming to work.

Relationships with colleagues are a key component of employee satisfaction and wellbeing. When you have an entire workforce that understands Neurodiversity they will better understand one another, communicate effectively and recognise that some people think differently. So we all need to ensure that we are understood.

05

Context matters - are you an employer who enables or disables their workforce?

When we talk about ability, context matters. Enabling someone to access the workplace is not always understood when invisible abilities and disabilities are not obvious. Inclusion is not an onerous HR responsibility, it is good for business and creating a context where your employees thrive and add value to your company is simply good business sense, so invest in training, peer support and employee driven initiatives.

Many companies have already reported marked gains in productivity, efficiency and work quality as a result of their neurodiversity initiatives. JPMorgan have reported that employees participating in their Autism at Work program are 48% faster and 92% more productive compared to their peers in certain roles.

Employers increasingly recognise that a considerable number of the neurodivergent population demonstrate skills and natural aptitudes in high demand roles and industries such as cybersecurity, STEM, analytics and systems design.

Employers are also now recognising that neurotypes such as dyslexia and ADHD often demonstrate good interpersonal and customer facing skills. You will find an abundance of people with ADHD in sales forces including city traders who thrive in a fast paced environment.

06

Innovation

The ability to compete based on innovation is crucial for many companies. How we work is fundamentally changing. Increased automation is creating a shift in the types of jobs and competencies organisations need. This shift requires different minds. How to innovate? Include colleagues who see things differently, process information differently and focus differently.

07

Harnessing specific skills and talents

There is much discussion currently about "What are neurodiverse talents?" Let us name just a few here, lateral thinking - being wired to 'think out of the box'; exceptional focus; problem-solving abilities; being meticulous; higher analytical thinking; deep focus; creativity; intense expertise; innovation and lateral thinking. By enabling neurodiverse colleagues to thrive and play to their strengths, these skills and talents can come to the fore for the benefit of your company, your profitability and your customers.

08

Retention is the product of happy, hardworking and loyal colleagues

The recruitment and retention of top talent is a strategic priority for all companies. In 2019, an Australian survey into Neurodiversity in the workplace found that 20% of their respondents had lost a job due to their autism. Employee dissatisfaction and turnover have serious cost implications. It is estimated that the direct cost alone of replacing an individual employee is between 50% to 200% of the employee's annual salary. According to Gallup's 2021 State of the Global Workplace report, the highest quit rates are found among actively disengaged employees. High staff turnover can have major indirect costs in lost customer relationships, lost institutional knowledge and decreased team morale. The Harvard Business stated in their report Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage that "neurodiverse people overall were 30% more productive at work." These high levels of productivity derive from colleagues who feel seen, understood, supported, respected and enabled to make a meaningful contribution to the workforce and be valued by their colleagues.



Creating a Neurodiverse friendly recruitment process and workplace

- 01** Ask if there are any specific challenges or support needs that need to be addressed.
- 02** Workplace language - provide a glossary if needed.
- 03** How is performance reviewed and what is the preferred communication style for this?
- 04** Unpack the job role, exploring the work setting and time frames in particular.
- 05** Identify who to go to for support.
- 06** Consider possibilities from Access to Work funding for existing and new employees.
- 07** What has helped in other settings/workplaces?
- 08** Explore the unwritten "rules" of the workplace, for example, dress code or expectations around breaks and lunch.
- 09** Is there any specific technology that would be helpful?
- 10** Ask if they wish to tell anyone else about their neurodiversity and agree how this is done. Would a workplace mentor or Neurodiversity Champion be helpful?

Different cognitive strengths, abilities and differences associated with certain neuro-types

Autism	Dyscalculia
Strengths & Abilities	Strengths & Abilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attention to detail Linear logical thinking Analysing data / patterns Designing processes Adhering to processes Sensory acuity Diligence with repetitive tasks Some executive functioning skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entrepreneurial Lateral thinking Creative & visual thinking Problem solving Multi-tasking Good communicators Energetic / enthusiastic
Challenges 'may' include	Challenges 'may' include
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social skills Interpreting non-verbal communication Managing change Executive functioning skills Sensory acuity in some contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimating distance Understanding of mathematical formula Time management Executive functioning skills

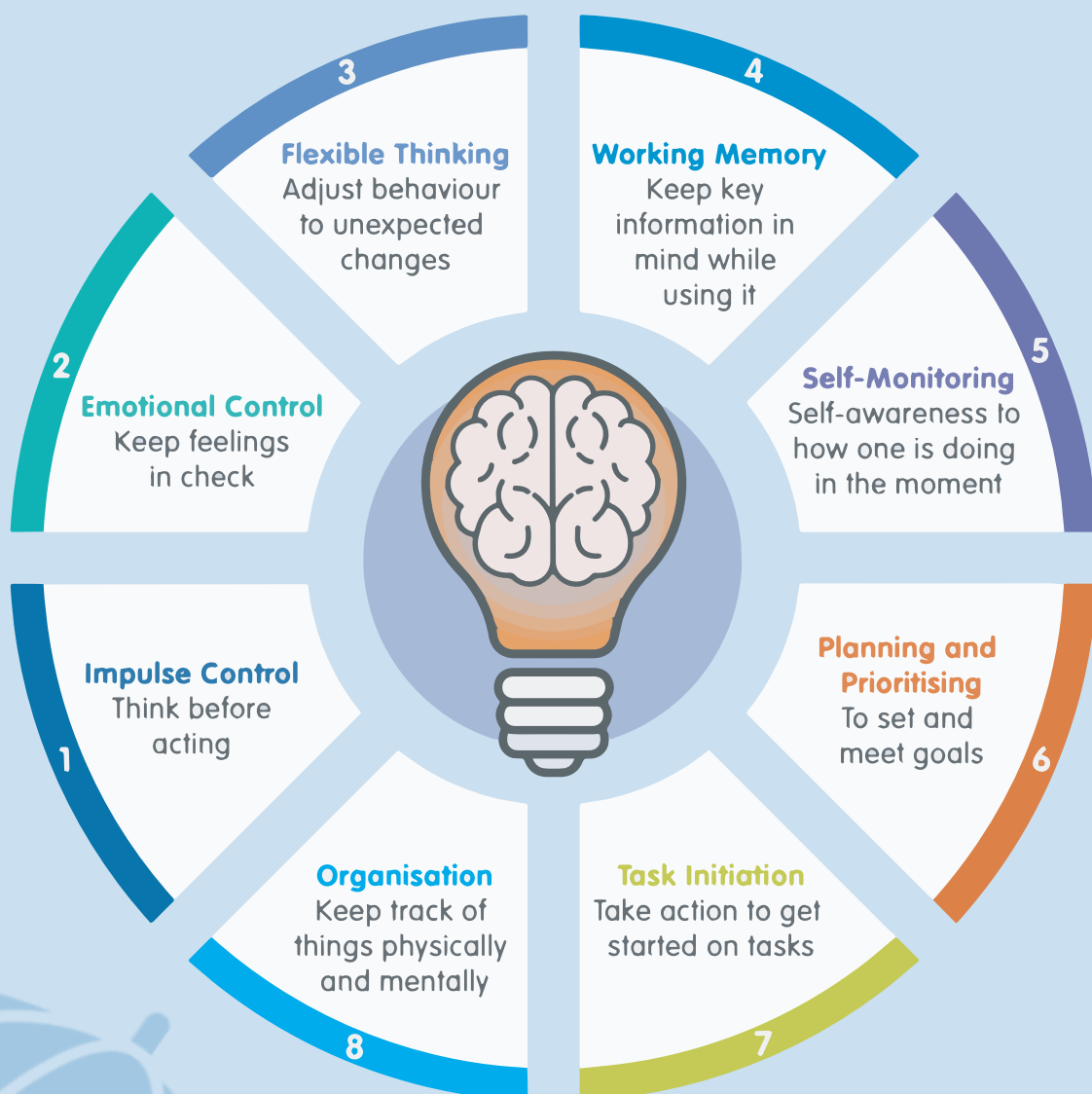


Dyslexia	ADHD
Strengths & Abilities	Strengths & Abilities
Social & communication Lateral creative thinking Entrepreneurial acumen Identifying patterns Some executive functioning skills Visual thinking (marketing and design and publicity)	Lateral thinking Creative thinking Interpretation of numbers in shapes, graphs & illustration Some executive functioning skills
Challenges 'may' include	Challenges 'may' include
Requires more time to read documents Report writing Executive functioning skills Spelling & grammar	Easily distracted Difficulty with repetitive tasks Memorising information Some executive functioning skills Time blindness Need to move

Dyspraxia	Tourette's
Strengths & Abilities	Strengths & Abilities
Creative thinkers Lateral thinkers Social and communication skills	Executive functioning skills Innovative thinkers Creative thinking
Challenges 'may' include	Challenges 'may' include
Spatial awareness Measuring & estimating distance Intricate practical tasks Physical co-ordination Some executive functioning skills	Co-existing with other Neuro-types Inhibitory control Some communication challenges Need to move impulsively Social inhibition

Executive Functioning

The phrase “Executive Function” refers to a set of skills that support a person’s ability to plan, organise, problem solve, store information, follow multiple step instructions and stay focused despite distractions. These skills help us to prioritise tasks, filter out distractions from the environment and control our impulses.



Source:

<https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk>

Neurodiversity training opportunities

Maximising training for employees, team leaders, line managers and employers

The ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity offers a range of training opportunities on all aspects of Neurodiversity in the workplace that are flexible, accessible and easily tailored to meet the needs of your workforce.

To find out more visit <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/training/>

In Aberdeen Autism and Neurodiversity Scotland provide local training and consultancy services. https://www.a-nd.org.uk/consultancyandtraining_

Useful Resources:

ACAS - <https://archive.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity>

Adjustments examples - <https://www.autism.org.uk>

Case law - <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/news/employment-case-law>

Equality Act 2010 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

The Law and Neurodiversity at work -

<https://www.gmb.org.uk/sites/default/files/neurodiversity-law-guide.pdf>

Accessibility information and training - [Aka.ms/AccessibilityAtAGlance](https://aka.ms/AccessibilityAtAGlance)

Autism and Neurodiversity North Scotland - <https://a-nd.org.uk>





the neurodiversity umbrella project for business

For £450: 25 umbrellas and access to two webinars:
"Why Neurodiversity is good for business"

To register, head to:
<https://forms.office.com/e/Fr2hmtMXLE>

For more details, get in touch with:
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