

IoPPN Neurodiversity Toolkit

This toolkit has been developed by the IoPPN Neurodiversity Peer Network and it aims to provide guidance and signpost to additional resources. This document is created for everyone and can be downloaded and used elsewhere. However, please note the date as this document is under continuous review. Please check [this webpage](#) for the latest version.

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Neurodiversity Toolkit: Guidance and information for staff and students

This toolkit aims to provide information and guidance for neurodiverse staff and students, and to support supervisors, managers and colleagues of neurodiverse staff/students/friends.

What is Neurodiversity?

The concept reflects the diversity of human brain that confers strengths as well as challenges, and is inclusive for people with dyslexia, autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, mental health conditions and other neurological conditions.

It is estimated that around 1 in 7 people (more than 15% of people in the UK) are neurodivergent.

Most forms of neurodivergence are experienced along a 'spectrum'. Each form of neurodivergence (such as dyslexia and autism) has a range of associated characteristics and these can vary from individual to individual. For example, the effects of dyspraxia on one person can be different to another person who also has dyspraxia. The effects on the individual can also change over time. Additionally, an individual will often have the characteristics of more than one type of neurodivergence, and neurodivergence may not necessarily be diagnosed. A person may identify as neurodiverse without a diagnosis of a neurological condition.

Understanding Neurodiversity: An introduction in the Higher Education context and beyond

To celebrate UK Disability History Month 2018, the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN) Disability Inclusion Working Group organised this informative discussion event, bringing together King's artists, academic researchers, staff and students to explore the concept of neurodiversity through video, panel discussion and Interactive Q&A. [Click here to watch on YouTube.](#)

Types of Neurodiversity

- Autism spectrum conditions (ASC) - [watch 'Lightning Lunch: Autism' by Brandon High, King's College London](#)
- [Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#)
- [Dyslexia](#)
- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia
- Epilepsy
- Mental health conditions

Guidance for staff

- [ACAS – Neurodiversity in the workplace](#)
- [Disability support contacts at King's for staff](#)
- [Texthelp webinar recording: Supporting neurodiversity in an evolving workspace.](#)
- [King's Disability Toolkit](#)
- [UCL Accessible remote meeting guidelines - neurodivergent participants](#)
- [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#)
- [GMB Union](#)
- [ADHD Foundation - An employers guide to ADHD in the workplace](#)
- [British Dyslexia Association – Showcasing the ND Workplace](#)
- **Ways of working.** There are many ways in which you can support colleagues, friends & family with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Here are a few ideas:
 - **Be Clear and Concise**
People who are Autistic tend to be process driven; give them a bullet pointed list of tasks and be clear in your explanation of what you want them to achieve. Give feedback regularly. They often think literally so be careful not to use idioms or figures of speech.
 - **Social Interaction**
People with ASD often have issues with social interaction. They may avoid eye contact or are uncomfortable shaking hands, or experience (severe)

- anxiety in group settings and gatherings. Some people may prefer not to talk, whereas others may overcompensate and can be seen as if they are trying to take-over a situation. Be patient, deal with them tactfully, and don't expect them to attend every social event.
- **Auditory/Verbal Processing**
Auditory processing can be a problem for neurodivergent people. They may have difficulty hearing conversations in noisy environments or struggle to follow verbal instructions. Try to always provide information in a visual format as well as verbal e.g. in writing or pictures, and make sure they can take notes if they need to. Providing PowerPoint slides in advance is an example of something simple you can do to help neurodivergent individuals participate fully in lectures or meetings.
 - **Schedules and Changes to Routine**
Autistic people may prefer routines, and sudden changes (i.e. in working practices) can be extremely disturbing for them. Communicate any planned changes well in advance - if possible and keep reiterating these changes.
 - **Safe Space**
Many people with ASD suffer from some form of sensory overload at times. Providing a quiet and not too bright space where they can go to relax can help with sensory overload. Some people like to pace up and down, others may like to sit still to get their thoughts in order. Talk to your team members and see what you can do to accommodate their needs.
 - **Respect the difference**
Autistic people have many exceptional abilities that can make them great team members. For example, they may have the ability to hyper-focus, have an exceptional memory, or are deeply passionate and/or knowledgeable about the things they enjoy.

Adjustments

Neurodivergent individuals may already have their own ways of working. Talk to your colleague about the barriers they are experiencing and identify adjustments that will help. You might need to seek expert advice on what's possible and the most effective adjustment but start by talking to individual to see if they have ideas about what they might need. Don't make assumptions or impose adjustments that a colleague does not want.

Some common adjustments include:

- Flexible working arrangements – for example if their condition is better or worse on different days or at different times of day.
 - Flexible days/hours
 - Working from home
 - give people windows of time to arrive and leave (e.g. between 8.45am and 9.15am) if this is reasonable in their role
- Alternative routines, and sharing their routine with the rest of the team (if they agree)
- Reorganising work allocation
- Assistive technology
 - speech-to-text and / or text-to-speech software such as [Texthelp Read & Write](#), which is available on the King's Software Centre on SEO machines.
 - software that helps with time management
 - recording meetings so they don't have to rely on taking notes
 - training in how best to use any equipment they'll use regularly
 - changing computer screen colour configuration
- Ergonomic equipment
 - ergonomic pens and keyboards, and screen readers
 - ergonomic computer keyboards and mice
 - larger computer monitors, or multiple monitors
- Documents in alternative formats, for example on coloured paper or in different fonts
- Providing written and verbal confirmation of requests
- Working in a more private, quiet space or from home

- More regular catch ups and detailed feedback
- Allowing use of headphones or ear plugs to block out noise
- Changing meeting formats to help people maintain concentration
- Provide a workspace that lets people put up reminders and other visual cues about their work, or allow them to carry devices that have reminders – such as a smart phone
- Moving office clocks or provide larger, more visible clocks so they're easier for people to see
- Letting people work with headphones or ear plugs in to block out distractions
- Providing distraction-free quiet workspaces
- Allowing them to disconnect from notifications (such as email and WhatsApp) and turn their phone to silent when they need to concentrate.

Things to remember:

- **There is no one-size-fits-all solution** – just because someone is neurodivergent or has a neurodevelopmental condition does not mean they will need the same adjustments as someone else with the same condition.
- **Adjustments shouldn't be prescriptive** – do not impose adjustments unilaterally. Where possible, ask the individual what their needs are and – where reasonable – provide them with tools or adjustments to support these needs.
- **Use experts** – with the above point said, sometimes help from an expert is required to work out precisely what sort of adjustment is needed. Not all neurodivergent people know exactly what adjustments best address their needs, and the adjustment process can be an opportunity for you to help them work it out. Contact [People Services Advisory](#) for more information and guidance.
- **Review regularly** – once an adjustment is in place, schedule regular, recurring reviews to check-in with the individual and assess if the adjustment is beneficial and define if any further adjustments are needed.

Guidance for researchers

- Ensure your research team is neurodiverse. Neurodiverse teams can be up to 30% more productive than non-neurodiverse teams (Source: [Harvard Business Review](#), 'Neurodiversity as a competitive advantage', 2017).
- [Changing the Face of Autism Research Together](#) is an initiative to bring together autistic people and scientists to share ideas and influence the research agenda.

Guidance for students and their supervisors/teachers

- [Disability Support at King's](#)
- If you think that you may have a specific learning difficulty (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia), the Disability Support Team can help by arranging a diagnostic assessment. [Click here to find out more.](#)
- [Support for learning](#) (funding, facilities, training, and assistive software)

Accessible teaching materials and documents

- [Digital Accessibility Best Practices](#)
- [CTEL Accessible Word Checklist](#)
- [CTEL Accessible PowerPoint Checklist](#)
- [CTEL Accessible KEATS Checklist](#)
- [SSPP Guide to Inclusive Education](#)
- [Teaching to Include Everyone: A Practical Guide for Online Teaching of Neurodiverse and Disabled Students](#)
- [British Dyslexia Association – BDA Style Guide](#)
- [Accessible communication formats – GOV.UK](#)
- [Dos and don'ts on designing for accessibility](#)

Assistive software

There is a wide range of assistive software available at King's for the benefit of staff and students. Most are available to download on the Software Centre. If not, you will need to contact the [IT Service Desk](#).

- Inspiration 9: Create diagrams, mind maps, memory tools, visual learning, essay planning, comprehend and communicate.
- TextHelp Read and Write Gold: Proof read your work, listen to your work, documents, convert text to a high quality audio and create audio revision files
- Dragon Naturally Speaking: Voice recognition software. With Dragon you can dictate documents in Microsoft Word, send emails and more all by speaking.
- Zoom Text 11: a screen Magnifier and Reader it reads most documents and can change background colours. This applications is beneficial to users with a visual impairment.
- Jaws 18: Jaws enables users with vision loss to independently use a keyboard with a computer along with a connection to braille output devices.
- Abby Fine Reader 14: Abby Fine Reader helps you to convert an in-accessible document to a more friendly file format.
- Sensus Access: allows you to convert documents that would normally be inaccessible. These include image-only PDF files, scanned documents, pictures of text and Microsoft PowerPoint presentations.

Things not to say

- [Things Not To Say To Someone With Dyslexia](#)
- [Things Not To Say To An Autistic Person](#)
- [Things Not To Say To People With Tourette's Syndrome](#)
- [Things Not To Say To Someone With An Eating Disorder](#)
- [Things Not To Say To Someone With Depression](#)
- [Things Not To Say To Someone With Schizophrenia](#)
- [Things Not To Say To Someone With Bipolar Disorder](#)
- [Things Not To Say To Someone With OCD](#)

Communities and support

- **IoPPN Neurodiversity Peer Network** - a network for IoPPN staff and PGR students which aims to create a supportive environment and space to share knowledge and ways of working for anyone who identifies as being neurodivergent. The network meet approximately every 6 weeks and are invited to join a Microsoft Team. To join, please email Abbie Russell abigail.russell@kcl.ac.uk
- **[Neurodiversity In/And Creative Research Network](#)** - This new network brings together practitioners and researchers from diverse sectors worldwide, who share their critical inquiries and local efforts. Joined by 120 people in its first month, we're from technology, neuroscience, psychiatry, theatre, health, dance, media art, equality and diversity, and work in museums, higher education, and more. We're from London, Taiwan, Australia, Canada, Netherlands, Glasgow and Portsmouth. Many are neurodiverse, many are allies. Members include Judy Singer, the Australian sociologist who invented the term neurodiversity. The network was cofounded by artist and Visiting Fellow Dr Kai Syng Tan and lecturer in Pharmacy and Leverhulme Fellow Dr Ranjita Dhital.
- **[Autism Hub Islington](#)** - A free service for adults with autism living in Islington
- **[Asperger London Area Group \(ALAG\)](#)** - ALAG is a community organisation working in partnership with local authorities and the voluntary sector to highlight the needs of people with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC).
- The National **A**ttention **D**eficit **D**isorder Information and **S**upport **S**ervice (ADDISS) <http://www.addiss.co.uk/>
- Attention UK <https://attentionuk.org/>

Creating a neuro-inclusive working environment

Be flexible

Allow people to set their own structures and routines as far as possible. What is reasonable will depend on their role. There will be roles for which routines and structures are in place for health and safety reasons, or where other people in the organisation rely on things being done a certain way. In these cases, it may not be reasonable to make some allowances.

Equally, there will be roles where flexibility in routine and structures may be reasonable. In these cases, you may have a legal duty to allow disabled employees to adopt alternative routines and structures. For example, if a routine is established without any reason beyond it being “the way that it’s always been done”, and if changing it won’t have a disproportionate impact on the team and the organisation.

You could allow people to work flexible hours, or work from home – provided they meet their targets and the outputs that you or their role require. Letting your employees’ control as much of their workload and working practices means that a colleague can take their own steps to accommodate their impulsivity and hyperactivity.

Allow people to manage their work in the way that suits them best/their preferred way. Make sure that you have a procedure in place so that you can follow their progress and notice if someone is struggling to keep up with their work. Include a step where you offer them the opportunity to propose an alternative way of working that would suit them better or fits their preference.

If they are not able to suggest/or unaware of possible themselves, but they are struggling to manage their time and organise their work, you may need to arrange for an assessment with a professional ([occupational health or Access to Work for staff](#), and [Disability Support Team](#) for students) who can suggest suitable adjustments.

Let people communicate and interact in their preferred way wherever possible. Provide assisted technology – such as speech-to-text or other 'inclusive' software if they need this to successfully participate (e.g. in class or the workplace). Do not expect them to adapt to the standard ways of communicating and interacting where these are not reasonable for them.

Encourage your team to work in their preferred ways wherever possible and be positive and receptive to new ideas.

Review regularly

Check in regularly and consistently with your team about how they are experiencing the routines and structures used by the team and the organisation. Make sure that everyone knows that you are actively seeking feedback about what processes are or aren't working for them, and that you'll support them by making whatever changes you can to help them.

Meetings

Try to make sure that meetings are focused and concise and share an agenda beforehand where possible. However, some people may forget ideas that come to them if they don't share them quickly. If you manage someone for whom this is the case, try to accommodate them and to structure meetings in a way that allows them to contribute.

For longer meetings, consider having regular short breaks or allow people to come in and out of meetings (if only parts of the meetings may be relevant to them). Ask attendees how they think meetings could be improved to make them accessible for everyone and increase participation. Be open-minded about trying new approaches.

Here are some things you can do that will benefit everyone:

- starting and finishing on time
- provide the agenda and any papers ahead of time, with plenty of time for processing before discussion
- appoint a chair for the meeting, who will ensure only one person speaks at one time, to prevent people talking over each other
- going around the attendees (in the room and people joining remotely) so that everyone gets their say without having to wait or 'find the right time' to speak up.

For online meetings, allow for flexibility, and respect personal preference when it comes to using video for online meetings. Encourage the use of the chat function for inclusivity, to allow neurodiverse participants to participate and share information in written format.

Further reading:

- [Top tips for accessible online meetings - Diversity Digest](#)
- [Making meetings accessible](#) (NHS England guidance)
- Autistica - [Hosting accessible online events, meetings and webinars](#)
- AbilityNet Live [Webinar: How to Run Accessible Online Meetings for disabled people working and studying from home](#)
- [Visual Minutes](#)

Reading

Try to be as flexible as possible. Where people are reading from a screen or monitor, provide them of the options to change as many of the settings as possible, such as:

- font (we recommend using a sans-serif font such as Calibri or Ariel)
- font size and colour
- screen colour settings
- page layout

Many office tools such as Microsoft Office suite, Google suite of apps, and Apple tools allow users to change settings. Make sure these systems are calibrated, allowing employees to change the readability settings as much as possible.

Where people are not reading from a screen, make sure you are prepared to offer alternative formats such as:

- coloured paper
- larger font, sans-serif or a different font (we recommend a sans-serif font such as Calibri or Arial)

Do what you can to use plain English or provide plain English alternatives wherever possible. This means:

- using shorter, uncomplicated sentences
- using regular paragraph breaks
- avoiding uncommon or lengthy words

Writing

Try to be flexible with the requirements for writing. For example:

- let people use computers instead of demanding handwriting (where possible)
- don't penalise spelling or typing errors if that is reasonable, for example in internal emails
- have a stock of/provide ergonomic (including left-handed) pens, keyboards and other writing equipment

You could also consider whether writing is a key element of a role, or whether that part of the role could be altered to remove the need for writing. In some cases, it could be reasonable to reassign the writing tasks to another role/individual/team member. Of course, this won't be reasonable if writing is a key part of the role.

Numeracy

Be prepared to provide some extra training in any mathematical processes that are key to a role. In some circumstances it may be reasonable to reassign mathematical parts of a role to another role/individual/team member. However, this may well not be the case for roles where mathematical processes are integral.

Quiet spaces

Create or provide a space where people can get away from noise, movement and other (sensory) distractions. Make people aware about this space and encourage them to work there whenever they want to. You can also let people work from home if they find that less distracting.

Boost awareness

There can be significant stigma around neurodiversity and mental health conditions, so consider awareness training for your team. Some people may need or benefit greatly from extra support without realising it (yet), so bear in mind that is it possible that you are managing someone who doesn't themselves have any awareness that they require adjustments or support.

Watch and share this [Texthelp webinar recording: Supporting neurodiversity in an evolving workspace.](#)