INTRODUCTION TO NEURODIVERSITY



ARMY

Introduction

This toolkit supports neurodivergent personnel, people they work with and line managers for wider awareness across the Army and the MOD Civil Service by helping to unlock their strengths and reduce organisational barriers. It outlines how small adjustments can have a meaningful impact and directs users to key resources.

People experience ADHD differently - some view it as a disability while others see it as a difference with strengths. Both perspectives are valid.

Society, education, and workplaces are often shaped around neurotypical ways of thinking. Neurodiversity recognises that people learn, think, and process information differently, meaning we all engage with the world in varied and equally valid ways. Those whose brains function differently from the typical are described as neurodivergent, and their alternative thinking styles should be understood and valued. Neurodivergence includes a wide range of differences, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia. At least 20% of the workforce will be neurodivergent and come from all ranks and all roles.[1]

Neurodiversity is not a disability. However, some neurodivergent conditions may meet the legal definition of a disability under the Equality Act 2010, depending on the individual's circumstances and the impact on day-to-day activities.

Why does it matter?

When people feel understood, valued and supported, they are more engaged, more productive and happier at work. This strengthens our teams, improves retention, and helps create a respectful, inclusive workplace where everyone can contribute fully. This guide is about equitable actions.

Supporting our neurodivergent people is about treating people fairly, not the same. By understanding different ways of thinking and making reasonable adjustments, where possible we remove unnecessary barriers and enable everyone to perform at their best.

A Whole Force that is neuroinclusive will increase operational effectiveness, strengthens and improves retention. Our people and their diverse talents are our greatest asset. By gaining understanding of our neurodivergent colleagues, we unlock fresh ideas, spot risks earlier and work more safely. This helps us attract, retain and grow talent while building pride and belonging across the Whole Force.

[1] NICS Neurodiversity toolkit for managers

Equity (Neurodiversity context)

Equity recognises that people experience the world differently and may face different barriers. Rather than treating everyone the same, it focuses, where possible, on providing the right support, resources, and adjustments so individuals have a genuine and fair opportunity to succeed.

In a neurodiversity context, this means understanding how different ways of thinking, processing, and communicating can be affected by workplaces that are often designed around neurotypical norms. Equity works to adapt the environment, processes, and support available, so neurodivergent individuals can perform at their best.

- It is needs-based rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Provide proportionate support, resources and adjustments where appropriate.
- Enable fair access to opportunities, recognising that identical treatment does not always result in equitable outcomes.
- Review and improve systems, processes and working practices that may create unnecessary barriers.
- Identify, reduce and, where possible, remove institutional barriers that may disadvantage individuals or groups.

Ultimately, equity is about treating people fairly, not treating everyone the same, enabling all individuals to contribute fully and achieve their potential.



Legal context

Understanding an individual's strengths and difficulties and their specific barriers can help employers to support a positive, engaged and productive workplace culture while reducing costs associated with sickness absence.

The Equality Act 2010 applies to the Armed Forces and Civil Service, with some specific exemptions, including the 'blanket' exemption for age and disability discrimination for military personnel. Thus, the following provisions on 'reasonable adjustments' do not apply to those serving in the Armed Forces. Whilst the Army strives to meet its legal obligations in relation to unlawful discrimination at all times, as a result of this exemption the Armed Forces are not legally required to make 'reasonable adjustments' for Service Personnel.

MOD is legally required under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to remove or reduce disadvantages experienced by disabled Civil Servants in comparison to non-disabled Civil Servants.

Where a neurodivergent Civil Servant is considered disabled under the Equality Act 2010, the Ministry of Defence has a duty to consider reasonable adjustments to remove or reduce workplace disadvantage. This may arise where a policy, practice or way of working places the individual at a substantial disadvantage, where physical features of the workplace create a disadvantage, or where additional aids, support or adjustments would help reduce that disadvantage. Any adjustment must be considered in the context of operational effectiveness, safety and the requirements of military service.

Civil Servants:
Civilian Disability Policy
Civilian Disability Toolkit
Launch of the new Workplace Adjustments Policy and Procedure
JSP 375: Management of Health and Safety in Defence
Equality Act 2010: Guidance - GOV.UK

Serving Military personnel:
AGAI_075
ACSO_3226
20260320 JSP822 Chpt 1 2 3 Annex A B Combined

JSP 375: Management of Health and Safety in Defence
JSP 950: Medical Policy

The support available to military personnel and Civil Servants may differ because of the distinct nature of their roles. While Civil Service roles are generally subject to the full provisions of the Equality Act 2010, the Armed Forces operate within a legal framework that reflects the unique demands of military service. Any adjustments will be considered on an individual basis, taking account of role requirements, operational effectiveness, safety and the need to maintain required standards.

Importantly

- A formal diagnosis may not always required in order to provide support.
- Support should be based on impact of the condition, not labels or stereotypes.
- Neurodivergent conditions are often invisible and many people mask their difficulties, increasing the importance of inclusive leadership behaviours.

For support with day-to-day work activities, seek advice from the Education Team.

Legal duty applies equally to home working, regional hubs and offices, regardless of your hybrid working pattern or frequency of attendance.[2]



Reasonable adjustments: Reasonable adjustments at work on the ACAS website

[2] Equality Act 2010: Guidance

Strengths and potential challenges

ADHD

A condition with persistent inattention, hyperactivity or impulsivity.



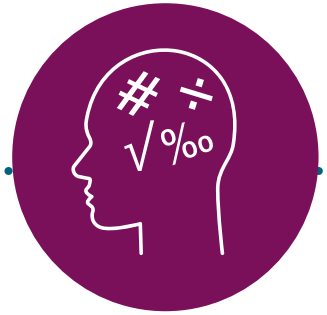
Autism

Affects how people communicate and interact.



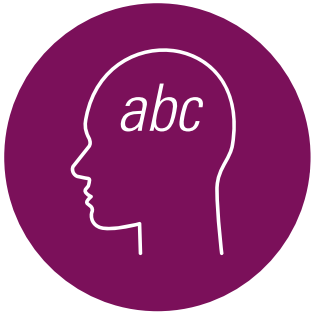
Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia makes maths and number tasks difficult.



Dyslexia

Learning difficulty that affects accurate, fluent reading and spelling.



Dyspraxia

Affects movement, coordination and sometimes speech.



There are many misconceptions about neurodivergent people. For example, some assume someone can't be dyslexic if they can spell, that autism is a mental health condition, or that a person can't have ADHD unless they are hyperactive. Others believe all neurodivergent people are alike, or that neurodivergence only refers to autism. These assumptions are inaccurate and unhelpful.

Lived experience

> That we aren't mean or being difficult on purpose. Sometimes we are just overwhelmed.

> Find that works for you and go to each new posting with an understanding of what your needs are and how it can be managed. You have control of your career and knowing what you need empowers you to get to where you want.

> That it takes longer to learn things, but once I've got it you will never need to tell me again.

People experience neurodiversity differently some view it as a disability, while others see it as a difference with strengths. Both perspectives are valid. As a line manager, understanding your people, and as a team member, understanding your team, is key. Respecting these differences helps create a positive and inclusive working environment and enables everyone to perform at their best.



Inclusive Language

The language about disability and neurodivergence is often stereotypical or negative, and the words we choose can make people feel included or excluded. Neurodivergence is only one part of a person's identity and does not define them.

People have different preferences for how they are described. Some prefer "autistic person," while others prefer "person who is autistic." Likewise, some prefer "disabled person," while others prefer "person with a disability."

The best practice is to ask. Having a respectful conversation and following an individual's stated preference demonstrates inclusion, respect and professionalism.

