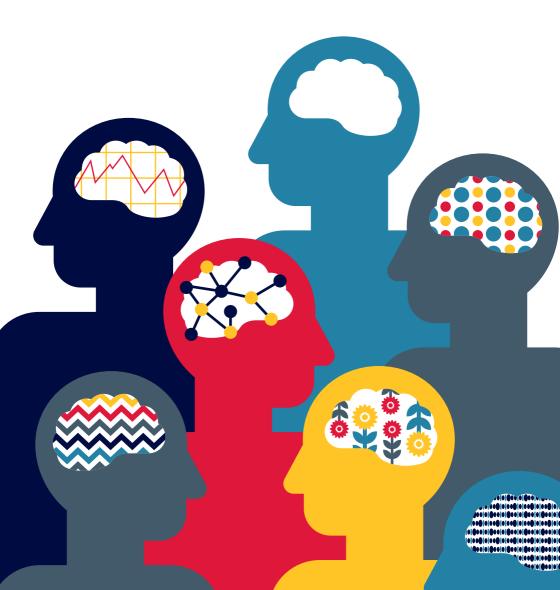
CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF NEURODIVERSITY





Neurodiversity within the Whole Force Royal Navy

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Foreword

As the RN's Neurodiversity Champion I am proud to write the foreword to this booklet because it matters, our people matter, we matter.

Embracing diversity through enabling ourselves and our colleagues to achieve and develop their potential is key to us, as individuals and as a whole force, succeeding in this increasingly complex and ever changing world. Each and every human mind is unique so why wouldn't we value and appreciate the vast opportunities that diversity opens up for us? There is so much benefit and excitement in learning from others, of creating more effective teams, of doing better things and rising to greater challenges because of (not in spite of) the fact that we all think differently. And yet we don't find this intuitive. I trust you agree we owe it to ourselves to break down these barriers.

I grew up a "slow reader" and my "lack of attention to detail" meant I got the wrong answers in maths even if I knew more about the theory than most people. I always got the big issues quicker than my peers – a "nerd" - and saw patterns where others saw none - "a bit weird" - but also people thought I was "sensitive and prone to emotion". Sound familiar? All these things are still true of me but I now see them as strengths. In the end it didn't hold me back – but my story could have been a more pleasant one. We have an opportunity to do better, to change the conversation, and learn to embrace the very differences that make us the exceptional force we are, and continue aspiring to be.

I hope this booklet helps us all to make life's journey just a little happier, more rewarding, and give our teams even more edge.

Neurodistinct conditions are not necessarily a barrier to success; in fact, they can be key enablers.

Thurson

Rear Admiral Paul Marshall

Embracing differences to maximise performance

The RN is made up of many different capabilities; they all have their unique strengths and come together to make us the fighting force we are.

We need our workforce to mirror this diversity; we need people who think in different ways, who challenge the normal ways of doing business and to drive forward innovation. We need to support our neurodiverse workforce to enable them to excel. This may be achieved through increasing awareness

of neurodiversity and breaking down the stigma, through making adjustments in the workplace, or giving people the tools they need to achieve their goals. Small adjustments can have a significant impact, not only on the individual, but also on the whole team.



'Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will be best at any given moment?' - Harvey Blume.

Language and neurodiversity

Language around neurodiversity is changing but is still focussed on the negatives (think of terms such as Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), Dyslexia, Dyscalculia). It works on the basis that there is a problem that needs to be fixed.

That is not always the case, and these 'problems' can be positives and can bring many benefits. Within the RN, we use the term 'Specific Learning Difference' to refer to conditions including dyslexia, DCD and dyscalculia. When we talk about Neurodistinct conditions we extend the conversation to include Autism, ADHD and Scotopic Sensitivity.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to the differences that exist in the brain. Our brains naturally vary from person to person and this is one of a wealth of ways in which we differ (others can include race, gender, hair colour). We all think, move, process information and communicate differently; that makes us all neurodiverse.

WE ARE ALL NEURODIVERSE

Neurotypical

Neurodistinct

Neurotypical – these are our generalist thinkers. Our neurotypical colleagues tend to perform at a similar level across a number of abilities (such as reading, writing, understanding information and processing it). Neurodistinct / neurodivergent / neurominority – these are our specialist thinkers. These terms are used to reflect around 20% of the population who think and process information differently and who will demonstrate a spiky profile across various abilities. The term neurodiversity embraces the natural differences that exist between individuals, encouraging people to look past the dated negative stereotypes associated with learning differences.

Neurodiversity inclusion is about incorporating the high-performance potential of specialists, as well as the competence of generalists.



Everybody's profile is different. If you are considered to be neurodistinct, you will have a spiky profile, potentially like the one shown above. All this means is that there are big differences in how you perform in different areas.

Support is available to enable you to develop in the areas you find challenging.

Neurodiversity means brain difference, not brain deficit.
Thinking differently brings many positives for the RN

Neurodiversity provides a competitive edge.

Why is this important to the Individual?

We are enabled by our gifts; by understanding our needs and preferences, we enable ourselves to work in a way that is most effective.

A different way of thinking is not a weakness and may be exactly what is needed to enable the team to improve and succeed.

Understanding why we find some things difficult can help. It can be the first step in building upon our strengths and developing strategies to support in areas in which we struggle.

Learning about ourselves can make sense of things that have seemed confusing. Things can fall into place once we've invested the time into learning about how our brain works.

If you understand your colleagues better and their needs, you can adapt how you work with them to better meet both their needs, as well as your own.

We need diversity of thought to be an integral part of the RN, and that will come through awareness and acceptance.



Why is this important to the Trainer?

By understanding the learner, trainers are better able to support the learning journey.

Small changes in the way trainers engage, present information and enable learning can have a significant impact on the individual's ability to learn for understanding.

To be able to do this effectively, our trainers need to understand their learners and adapt their methods to meet the needs of a diverse classroom audience. This can only be achieved if we look beyond the labels (such as dyslexia, autism etc) and consider the individual strengths and needs of each person.



- Focus on a universal design, learner-centered approach
- Encourage active learning and reflection, considering individual ways of learning
- Encourage the learner to reflect on how they learn at their best, and where you can, facilitate that
- Support learners to develop study skills and implement techniques that are appropriate to their needs
- Remember that adaptations made for neurodistinct learners will often benefit neurotypical learners too

Why is this important to the Team?

Difference makes better teams and creates better outcomes.

In a Field Gun Crew for example, you need those who are strong, but you also need those who are fast and precise. We need diversity in thinking just as we need physical diversity. You will not succeed unless you have a blend of abilities.

By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your team, you can match people's strengths to the tasks that need completing, or provide support where changes are not possible.

If teams are made up of people who all think in the same way, there will be limited progress. Our working environment becomes an echo chamber, with us all mirroring one another's thoughts and ways of working.

Diversity makes that echo chamber a star chamber; this is essential if we are going to remain an agile and innovation driven Navy.

We need different capabilities throughout the RN; this will give us the competitive edge we need to succeed.



Why is this important to the Line Manager?

Every member of your team has skills that they can contribute, one of the primary roles of the line manager is to enable those skills to be used and developed.

To do this, we need our people to feel psychologically safe and we need to value the differences every member of the team brings. If we want our people to perform at their best, we need to respect these differences and provide an environment in which they can achieve in their own way.

If you can harness the skills, you will get a better outcome. The creation of high performance, creative and innovative teams is dependent on diversity of thought. We don't need one type of thinker; we need to have a variety of minds, perspectives and views to identify solutions that will enable us to respond in the uncertain world in which we live and work.

Neurodiversity changes the lens through which problems are seen and will generate alternative solutions to issues. If teams are made up of people who think in the same way, there will be limited progress.



Myth busting

Much like the language used to describe neurodistinct conditions, the first thoughts that often come to mind are also negative. But, these are often incorrect stereotypes. Here are some examples and why they are often incorrect.

People with a neurodistinct profile are stupid and slow

Having a neurodistinct profile doesn't impact on a person's intelligence. It may take some people longer to grasp a concept, but that is not something that applies to everybody. A different way of thinking doesn't mean less able.

People with a neurodistinct profile are rude and antisocial

Some people may come across as socially awkward and rude, but not all, and there are reasons for it. Some people avoid situations where they know their senses may be overloaded. Comments may come across as blunt and lacking emotion, but it is not done to be rude. It is important to know your team and understand how they interact.

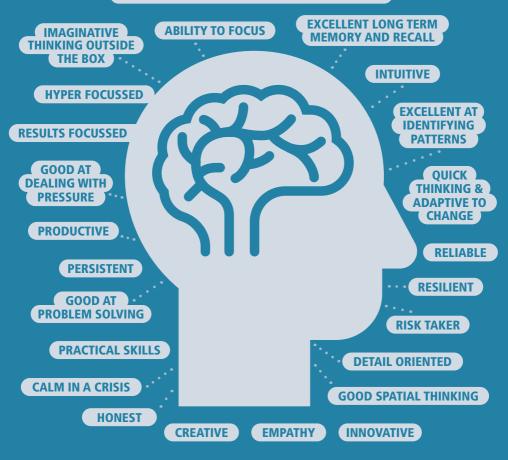
People with a neurodistinct profile are forgetful Some people with neurodistinct profiles can struggle with short term memory but there are many tricks to help combat that. In many cases, these people have excellent long term memory and an ability to focus intently.

- Whilst some of the traits can be associated with neurodistinct profiles, there are so many more positive associations that are rarely considered.
- Everybody is different, and will have areas in which they are stronger, and those in which they are less strong.
- The challenge is in identifying those strengths and using them to reach your professional and personal goals.

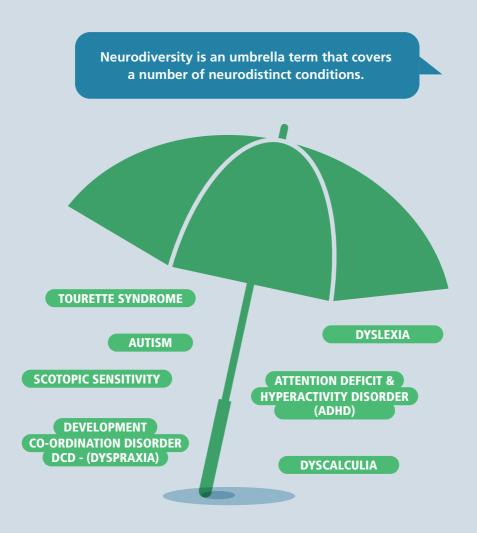
Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible - Frank Zappa

Here are some positive traits that can also be found within our neurodistinct workforce.

PRESENTS INFORMATION IN A RELATABLE WAY



'Many people see their neurodiversity as being their unique superpower; something to embrace and be proud of ' ' Did you know, many companies, such as NASA, Google and GCHQ actively recruit from the neurodistinct workforce due to unique skills specialist thinkers can bring?'



' Did you know, that if you have one type of learning difference, it is very likely that you have at least one other too, or at least have traits of those conditions.

This is called a co-occurrence.'

Having ADHD and dyslexia is a super power.

I find I think differently to other people and this helps problem solve because I give so much of my focus to the problem. People don't realise that ADHD presents differently in women and that we are often much more calm than people first think; for me, my hyper activity is more hyper focus. I enjoy having my super powers, but I wish people would take 5 mins sometimes to ask how they could get more from me. We all need little adjustments



I was 42 when I had my dyslexia diagnosis and I found the experience both cathartic and emotional. Along with other things, reading for comprehension was a challenge for me, and for years I felt a little stupid and less able than my colleagues; my diagnosis helped me understand that this wasn't the case, I was simply differently able. I'd allowed myself to forget that there were things I could do really well, like seeing patterns, or cutting through the chaff to identify root causes. Since my diagnosis I've started to build upon my strengths, recognising that whilst my approach may be different, it is valuable and valid, and sometimes essential to drive us to look at things in a different way. It can be tough, and stress can make it harder, but

I am proud to say that I am dyslexic, and I like how my mind works. *Amanda (Lt Cdr)*

I only found out that I was autistic when I was in my 40s. Autism in women presents very differently from in men, and I still get comments such as "but you can't be autistic - you're so articulate." I've used my experience to advocate for better diagnosis in women and to increase awareness of the huge range of traits that can be associated with autism. Understanding how it affects me has been liberating. I'm much kinder to myself when I struggle with basic organisational skills or find myself panicking in noisy environments, but can also take pride in my visual memory, my ability to see patterns and my speed-reading and information retention skills. *Rebecca (Cdr)*



I always believed that I had a form of Autism. I was diagnosed in 2021 before re-training as a RN Writer, and after serving as a Medical Assistant. My ability to recall information verbatim and my eagerness to learn have always been valued by those I work with, allowing me to share my passions and enjoy my role. I firmly believe there is a need within the Royal Navy for people like me, where that focus, drive, passion, determination and transparency is not only recognised and valued, but also enabled, to allow me to achieve my full potential and to light the way for others to achieve theirs. I'm proud to be Highfunctioning Autistic and I can't wait to help guide our future sailors to make their life in the Royal Navy theirs! *Andrew (Writer)*

An untapped pool of potential

DYSLEXIA

Dyslexia is a learning difference that can lead to people having excellent verbal communication and problem solving skills, as well as being highly creative and having great long term memory. A diagnosis is normally

sought following challenges with processing information, reading comprehension, spelling and/or writing skills. Short term memory can also be a challenge, as can time keeping.

Dyslexic individuals have a range of natural strengths that make them 'hard-wired' for the in demand skills of the future

EY Value of Dyslexia Report 2018.

SCOTOPIC SENSITIVITY

Scotopic Sensitivity (or Visual Stress) sometimes accompanies dyslexia, but they are not the same. People who suffer from this can suffer from light sensitivity, or have difficulty reading as text can be blurry, can flicker

or can give the illusion of moving about. A specially trained optician can diagnose scotopic sensitivity, and coloured overlays or coloured glasses can bring significant benefit.

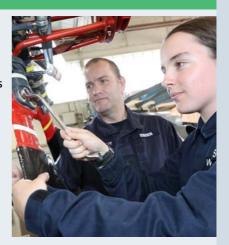




' Did you know, you are about as likely to be dyslexic as you are left handed? Around 80% of the population are neurotypical, this is about the same percentage as those people who have brown eyes. Look around you, how many people have blue, green or hazel eyes? We already work in a neurodiverse environment '

DYSPRAXIA

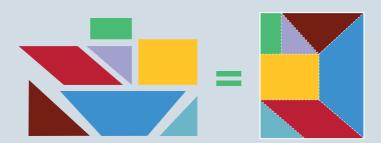
Dyspraxia (also known as Developmental Coordination Disorder) is a learning difference that primarily affects physical movement, but is associated with positives such as creativity, excellent lateral, visual and spatial thinking, and the ability to focus intently on certain tasks. Coordination, balance and fine motor skills (like writing or using a small object) may be more of a challenge.



DYSCALCULIA

Dyscalculia is a difference that focusses around numbers, but whilst these may be a challenge, those with dyscalculia often have a passion for words, be strategic thinkers and have great problem solving ability.

Functional Skills Maths may be more of a challenge than a GCSE in Maths, simply because of the way questions are worded.



Embracing differences to maximise performance

'Did you know, that males and females display very different traits when it comes to Autism and ADHD? Because of this, males are far more likely to be assessed and diagnosed. That doesn't mean that it is more common in males, it is just easier to identify '

AUTISM

Autism is a developmental difference that affects how a person perceives the world and interacts with others. A person with autism may see, hear and feel the world differently. Some people with autism have exceptional skills in terms of spotting patterns, memory

recall and ability to focus. Due to the difference in how a person views the world, they may struggle in social situations, misunderstand what is being said and react in an unexpected, and perhaps inappropriate, way to something.

' Just like neurotypicals, neurodistinct people represent the full range of intelligence. There is no parallel between somebody's neuro differences and how clever they are. Being neurodistinct does not mean you are a genius, but nor does it mean the opposite '



ATTENTION DEFICIT AND HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)

People often think ADHD means that a person can't concentrate, but the challenge is more in controlling that attention, rather than lack of it. The ability to hyperfocus in certain situations is common and can be a strength. Those with ADHD are often good at problem solving, have strong visual skills, are

quick to embrace change and adapt, and are passionate and enthusiastic when motivated. ADHD can impact on working life, and may manifest through poor time management, forgetting things, being untidy and struggling to either start tasks or complete them once started.

' Did you know that ADHD is common within Emergency Room personnel and Emergency Responders? Their ability to remain calm in a crisis and focus on what needs to be done often enables them to excel in these roles '

TOURETTE SYNDROME

Tourette Syndrome is a difference that causes a person to make sounds or movements over which they have very little, or no, control. These are called tics. Tics tend be less common when a person is calm or focused on an activity. As with many of the other differences, those with Tourette Syndrome are often creative, have strong verbal communication skills and have developed great resilience.
Tourette Syndrome commonly co-occurs with ADHD.

Stress and Neurodistinct conditions



Stress

Stress doesn't cause somebody to become neurodistinct, but it can play an important part in how well somebody can manage their differences.

Stress can strip away coping strategies, making it harder to function. Tasks that somebody could manage well when not under excessive stress can become immense challenges, impacting on output, morale and mental wellbeing

Understanding your strengths and challenges is important, along with appreciating the impact stress has on your abilities and how you can work effectively.

Pay attention to your stress levels and speak out if you need support

The RN Leadership Centre of Excellence (RNLCOE) supports leaders across the whole force RN, providing a range of leadership resources. These provide a flexible way to learn, on your terms, and make your personal and professional development as individual as you are. Resources found in the RNLCOE feature on MyNavy and can help you to better understand and manage stress effectively.

Small changes can lead to big differences

Reasonable Adjustments - sometimes, small changes can have a significant impact on performance. Here are some things to think about to help your working, and that of your team.



Time - Take breaks during the day and try to build in thinking time. Plan your day and try to manage your time to allow you to achieve your objectives. Set timers to help keep track of time.



Communication - What is your preferred way to communicate? Is it by email, Skype, phone, or face to face? Share your preferences and ask others how they would prefer you to engage with them.



Physical - If you can, consider your desk location, what you can see from your desk, your seat position, your screen size. Do you need glasses with coloured lenses? Some of these will not be possible depending on your working environment, but they are still worth thinking about.



Environmental - Does noise distract you? If so, try noise cancelling headphones. Try listening to music. Standing in briefs/lessons can also aid concentration.



Mental - Try to build your resilience by exercising or going for a walk. Establishing a routine can also help.



Tasks - Try keeping a log of tasks and ticking them off as you go. Be clear if giving instructions and check understanding. If you are being given tasks to carry out, check back to ensure you have understood correctly. Identify why some may be challenging and explore options. Agree timelines.



Software - Assistive software can be used in some workplaces. Text to speak software is already available on Microsoft packages and can be used to support presentations. Reading pens are another option, along with a number of free to access apps and other technology.

Whilst everybody is different and has different needs, there are some things that can help all our neurodistinct workforce. Here are some ideas:

- Use universal design principles when presenting or enabling learning
- Enable the use of text to speak software, or reading pens
- Provide handouts, and print these on coloured paper
- Prioritise tasks and highlight key facts
- Provide A3 notepads for people to draw mind maps for note taking
- If using slides, use dark text on a light (not white) background
- Present information in a way that is relevant
- Know your team and understand their needs



Often, those with undiagnosed neurodistinct conditions have deep rooted feelings of stupidity and inadequacy. It is important to remember that being neurodistinct does not mean stupid; they simply think differently. The key is identifying how one another thinks, and working with our strengths.

Coaching can play an important part in this process.

See strengths, not difficulties

Communication	Meetings	Awareness
Use bullet points in written communication	Give extra time before and after to review	Listen
Highlight key words	Provide handouts and slides before a meeting	Provide specific and objective feedback
Be concise	Follow up meetings and actions with email or written notes	Set deadlines - don't say 'give it to me when you're ready'
Provide templates and best practice examples	Provide an agenda and link to current projects or work	Take interest in their condition and any support
Provide the wider picture - where does their work fit in	Build in frequent breaks	Consider giving additional time to process information
Explain hidden rules, don't be embarrassed to check understanding	Give alternatives to group meetings - update via 1:1 for example	Be aware of noise, light, smell, temperature and colour which can overwhelm

- Use colour when planning or prioritising
- Check your understanding
- Notice when you work at your best and plan complex work for this time
- Take regular breaks
- Use visual reminders (i.e. post-its)
- Avoid distractions

The Learning and Development Organisation (LDO)

The LDO is there to support you in all aspects of your development, whether that is in a Training Establishment, or within your role. They provide specialist learning support which can include:

- Screenings to better understand an individual's needs
- Can work with the individual, their line manager and/or trainers to develop individual learning plans
- Can identify appropriate reasonable adjustments
- Provide guidance on study skills and support strategies for the workplace
- Support further assessments where needed
- Provide aids to assist you in the workplace

Unlock your potential

Do you want to know more about your strengths and try some strategies to help improve in the areas you are not so strong? If so, register for free using the website address below from your personal device.

https://royalnavy.geniusscreening.com/

Trainers

Trainers and divisional staff within training estates will have some understanding of neurodistinct conditions and will work with individuals to support them in their learning journey. For example, the method of content delivery can vary, handouts with slides and notes can be given prior to lessons (and printed on coloured paper).

In many cases, this will be the first stop for any learners who may face challenges with their learning.

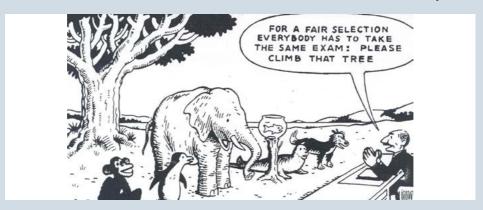
Where necessary, the trainers will link up with the Coaching Networks and the LDO Hubs to seek additional support, working together to support the implementation of learning plans.

Enabling specialist thinkers to thrive

Coaching

Coaching can be used to support all individuals, and teams, to achieve their potential. Within the Training Establishments we have coaching teams who specialise in coaching for learning. The coaches will work with the individual to understand their needs and explore how to move forward.

Within other establishments and in ships and units, there are trained coaches. They do not need to be experts in neurodiverse conditions to provide valuable support as we all have different needs and different ways of thinking. Advice can always be gained from the LDO should any coaches wish to learn more about neurodiversity.



Medical

Being neurodistinct in a world designed by, and for, those who are neurotypical can take its toll, with mental health struggles more common in those who identify as being neurodistinct. Above and beyond stress management tools and techniques available to us through the MyNavy App, support from the medical chain is available. This may including teaching self-help tools to support our people to achieve their potential. ADHD is unique, in that the diagnosis can only be made by a specialist through the medical route. Specific medication can be used to improve focus and support the individual to perform at their best. Enquiries should be made through the unit medial centre in the first instance.

^{&#}x27;We all have a part to play in supporting our neurodiverse workforce and neurodistinct colleagues. If we want to be our best, we all need to enable our people to be their best '

Reach out for support and more information (details are also available through the MyNavy App).

LDO Hubs

West - NAVYTRGHQ-LDOWADMINMULTIUSER@mod.gov.uk

RM - NAVYTRGCTCRM-LDOMAILBOX@mod.gov.uk

East - NAVYTRGHQ-LDOEMULTIUSER@mod.gov.uk

Scotland, NI, North - NAVYTRGHQ-LDONMULTIUSER@mod.gov.uk

CS

CS personnel can seek support and information through the L&D Hubs and through emailing:

DESHR-NeuroNetwork@mod.gov.uk or

DBSCivPers-ExpertSvcRASTeam@mod.gov.uk

RFA

RFA personnel first point of contact is through the LDO RFA Officer: navytrghq-ldoopshelpdesk@mod.gov.uk

Coaching Support

CWD - NAVYOPTRG-MWSRNAECCFTNGROUP@mod.gov.uk

SULTAN - lucy.oconnor785@mod.gov.uk

RAL/BRNC - NAVYTRGRALEIGH-CFTN@mod.gov.uk

CTCRM - NAVYTRGCTCRM-RMHPOCMAILBOX@mod.gov.uk

Medical

For RN and RM personnel, should medical support be needed, this can should be sought through your local medical centre. An econsult should be submitted, highlighting concerns and requesting an opportunity to discuss your needs with a medical officer.

For CS and RFA personnel, medical support can be requested through your GP initially.

Neurodiversity; a talent, not a limitation.

Resources

RN Neurodiversity Network

Royal Navy celebrates neurodiversity (sharepoint.com)

Defence Neurodiversity Network

DESHR-NeuroNetwork@mod.gov.uk Neurodiversity Celebration Week 2021 (sharepoint.com) Neurodiversity Celebration Week 2022 (sharepoint.com)

There are many free online resources to improve understanding of neurodiverse conditions and supporting neurodiversity within the workplace. Here are some useful websites to support you develop your understanding. Many of these websites offer free online learning material through seminars, presentations (on YouTube and Vimeo), lunch and learn sessions or accessible through apps like SoundCloud and Spotify.

- Passionate about Neurodiversity Genius Within
- Neurodiversity Tools and Training Homepage Do-IT Profiler (doitprofiler.com)
- Neurodiversity at work | CIPD
- ADDitude ADHD Symptom Tests, Signs, Treatment, Support (additudemag.com)
- Adult ADHD support (aadduk.org)
- National Autistic Society (autism.org.uk)
- British Dyslexia Association (bdadyslexia.org.uk)
- Tourettes Action
- How to write in plain English
- Made by dyslexia (https://www.madebydyslexia.org/)
- Leadership Centre of Excellence (mod.uk) (royalnavy.mod.uk/my-navy/leadership/)
- BBC CAPE (https://www.bbc.co.uk/neurodiversity)

Working together to accept and maximise the power of difference



'Awareness and understanding of neurodiversity is important, because it matters, our people matter, we matter.

We are all neurodiverse.'