

CASE STUDIES

Supporting dyslexia at Hampshire Constabulary

Hampshire Constabulary has taken the initiative to assess all new employees for dyslexia and has trained a group of staff to carry out the workplace assessments. **Kate Godwin** reports.

KEY POINTS

- Hampshire Constabulary set up a project to provide a consistent service to all staff around dyslexia. The special demands of the job meant that outside assessors would be inappropriate, so instead the British Dyslexia Association trained staff members to carry out workplace assessments

- All new members of staff are assessed for dyslexia, so support can be offered from day one of employment. The force has created specialist tools to assist people with dyslexia, such as notebooks that prompt the user to record key details

- The force is currently in the process of obtaining the British Dyslexia Association Quality Mark and receives many requests for advice on dyslexia from public and private sector organisations

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Problems faced by one student police officer a few years ago prompted Hampshire Constabulary (box 1) to consider the support it was offering to people with dyslexia. It now supports staff across the force, including through the introduction of workplace assessors, coping strategy training and better awareness by line managers of what is available.

PC Claire Oliver, who is currently seconded as specific learning difficulties co-ordinator within the force, explains that, despite its good intentions, the help previously on offer was inconsistent. Also, the solutions that were available did not always suit the situations that police officers had to deal with.

This experience made Oliver realise that no-one in the force knew enough about dyslexia, and therefore was ill-equipped to offer the most appropriate support to its employees.

In 2010, Hampshire Constabulary established a pilot project to:

- better educate the organisation about dyslexia;
- provide a consistent service to all staff; and
- screen staff for dyslexia so they would be in a better position to offer assistance.

The pilot project was run for a year, as planned, and a report then sent to the chief constable outlining what had been achieved. It was agreed to continue with the work and integrate it into the business.

The force established a dyslexia assessor group, comprising its own employees who have been specially trained by the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) (see box 2). The force has found it beneficial to use its own workplace

BOX 1: HAMPSHIRE CONSTABULARY

Hampshire Constabulary employs 3,363 police officers, 2,543 police staff and 1,378 volunteers/Specials

The organisation was recently shortlisted from over 400 applicants for a CIPD award for diversity. HR set a specific target to reduce the proportion of employment tribunal claims related to disability, which was running at 50% of all claims during 2007 and 2008. Through a range of measures, including supporting local training events set up by Fairness and Equality Action groups and providing better guidance, this was achieved, with the total number of disability-related claims for the three years 2009–11 being half that of the previous three-year period.

The force is also active in other areas of diversity. It has made submissions to Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index since 2006 and has always been among the top 15 organisations. In 2013, Hampshire's chief constable was named as the UK's Individual Champion of the Year for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

assessors rather than those from organisations such as Access to Work.

"It's because of the special demands of the job," explains Oliver. "For example, external assessors in the past have suggested using a Dictaphone to take a statement but this is not generally acceptable as police officers would not legally be able to rely on recordings as evidence in court."

The BDA initially trained 10 staff members to carry out workplace assessments. It was decided that all new employees – police officers,

BOX 2: THE BRITISH DYSLLEXIA ASSOCIATION

Most people know the term dyslexia and correctly associate it with difficulties with reading and spelling. However, many employers are unaware of the extent of it and what it is really all about. It is estimated that around 7 million people in the UK, and 10% of the workforce, are affected by dyslexia.

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a genetic condition which generally co-occurs with seven other conditions: Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia (DCD), Dysgraphia, Mild Aspergers, ADD, ADHD, and non-specific speech and language difficulties. In practice, this means that it is very rare for an individual to only show signs that fit the classic definition of dyslexia. People tend to have an individual set of challenges and strengths. The conditions mean that the brain is organised differently. However, this neuro diversity also conveys strengths, especially those associated with entrepreneurial behaviours such as thinking outside the box, unique approaches to problem solving, and creativity, which are often also highly desired by employers.

What employers need to know

Employers need to be aware that dyslexia has been recognised as a disability falling within the definition in the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, employers are under a duty to make reasonable adjustments to enable employees who are dyslexic to do their job.

Few dyslexic employees disclose their dyslexia to their employer, not least because many adults do not know that dyslexia is the term for their difficulties, and may even have been told at school that dyslexia did not exist. However, employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for a disability of which they know, or ought reasonably to have known. So there is no need for an employee to have a clinical diagnosis of their condition for the employer's duty to make reasonable adjustments to arise.

Reasonable adjustments

The issues raised by dyslexia and associated conditions can usually be mitigated by reasonable adjustments (see box 3). These tend to fall into the

categories of one-to-one coping strategy training (feedback shows that this is often the most useful adjustment), assistive technology, awareness training for managers and colleagues, and, sometimes, a support worker while new ways of working with technology are being learnt.

Process

The process is very straightforward. The employee requires a workplace needs assessment and the report will contain relevant recommendations. There are two ways to get a workplace needs assessment. Either the employee contacts Access to Work or they arrange for an assessment to be done by a private provider, such as the British Dyslexia Association (BDA). The advantage of Access to Work is that they will fund the assessment, although the payment and allowances for an Access to Work assessment are the same whether the condition is relatively simple or more complex. In the case of dyslexia and its co-occurring conditions, the assessment is usually quite complex and this is where a private assessment can be worthwhile, as the employer can guarantee that they are getting a relevantly trained assessor with enough time for a complex assessment. The employee does not have to reveal their condition in detail to arrange the assessment, just be able to describe what challenges they have in performing their role to the required standard.

The workplace needs assessor will visit the employee for the assessment. They may suggest some solutions on the spot. They will make a series of recommendations for the reasonable adjustments that the employee needs to carry out their job satisfactorily. The assessment report will include three quotations for fulfilling the recommendations. The employer is at liberty to choose their own supplier for these reasonable adjustments but Access to Work will only fund them to the level of the cheapest quote.

It is critically important for the employee to be able to embed new behaviours and normal ways of working with new equipment, which can take up to six months. The provision of a support worker temporarily to help the employee or do

some of the tasks that are extremely difficult due to the employee's disability can be very useful during this period. This also covers the time while waiting for the reasonable adjustments to arrive. For example, if it takes the person double the usual time to read emails, then their working time will be significantly reduced when they are competent at using a text reader. However, in the intervening period while waiting for the software and training to occur, the support worker can read the emails to them.

Workplace assessors programme

The BDA also runs a workplace assessors programme, to ensure that workplace-needs assessors operating in the field of dyslexia are properly trained and operating to agreed standards. A recent development has been entering into contracts to train a group of staff within an organisation as workplace-needs assessors, such as at Hampshire Police Force and the Eddie Stobart Group. These organisations then have a group of dyslexia champions, who are able to do the workplace-needs assessments for other employees. The key advantage to this is that they know the industry and the organisation's culture and work practices. Therefore, when assessing an employee's role, they will already understand the context, demands on the jobs and also what is most likely to work in that situation. This will mean that there is an even higher success rate for coping strategies to work. Access to Work will usually fund the recommendations made in this way so employers do not miss out on funding either.

In 2012, 3,200 dyslexic employees received Access to Work support, which represented 11% of its grant applications work. This is a significant increase on three years ago, but as the UK workforce is estimated at 30 million, with at least 3 million employees with dyslexia, there is still a long way to go to ensure all of them get support to do all aspects of their jobs without stress or difficulty.

Source: Margaret Malpas, BA Hons, Chartered FCIPD, AMBDA, FRSA, Joint Chair of the British Dyslexia Association.