



CSDDN

The Civil Service Dyslexia & Dyspraxia Network

Newsletter - July 2019

Hello and welcome to the July 2019 CSDDN newsletter.

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1. Welcoming Nick Hamer, our new Network Chair

We are pleased to welcome our new Network chair, Nick Hamer. Nick works at DWP as Deputy Director of Operational Security, Continuity, Resilience and Response:

“I am delighted to take on the position of Chair of the CSDDN. As someone with dyslexia myself it has been an important part of my own journey through education, the Civil Service and more lately, leadership as a member of the SCS. While recognising the challenges these conditions create, I am a great believer in the strengths that come as a by-product. I would never have been so confident in public speaking if it wasn't for my fear of writing and my particular way of thinking, developed to overcome short term memory issues, allows me to boil things down to just the core issues. Of course it also comes with a healthy dose of resilience too, when things go wrong or I make mistakes.

As for the network I see it as key to improving the working environment for Civil Servant's impacted by dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia and will work to help all staff so they can be their best self with their strengths recognised and potential reached. We do this in a number of ways from creating a safe space for staff to share their experiences (good and bad) and get support from others in the network through

to supporting Civil Service HR and Departments to improve their understanding of these conditions and making positive change to processes and policy.

I am looking forward to the year ahead, working with the committee to put on a series of practical events to help people build confidence and move on in their careers. This will be a mix of motivational and inspirational senior civil servants talking about their experiences and practical session on job applications, interviews and other areas. I look forward to seeing you there.”

- Nick Hamer, CSDDN Chair

If you have any questions or suggestions for the network or our newsletter, please contact our [mailbox](#).

2. The Positive Action Pathway – the next 2019 cohorts

The Positive Action Pathway (PAP) is a cross-government development programme which aims to widen representation across the Civil Service. The programme is specifically open to BAME, women, disabled and LGBTI staff from AA to Grade 6.

The programme lasts around 12 months and consists of various development workshops, action learning sets and self-directed learning. The programme is designed to prepare people to move to the next grade or more stretching roles within the Civil Service. It aims to:

- increase skills, knowledge and confidence;
- develop confidence to overcome barriers;
- compete on an equal footing for progression or places on Civil Service talent schemes.

The application window for the next EO and Grade 6/7 cohorts opens on Friday 5th July and closes at 5pm on 26th July.

CSL recently undertook a review of PAP and have removed all online testing to apply. PAP now has a simpler application process that uses the new Civil Service behaviours.

Further information, guidance and FAQs can be found on the [PAP pages of Civil Service Learning](#). The [EO Applicant Guide](#) and [Grade 6/7 guide](#) also give further information on the programme, eligibility to apply, the application process, what learning is involved and workplace adjustments. Some departments may be running internal guidance and help sessions.

3. Dyspraxia/DCD Adult Diagnosis Survey

The Dyspraxia Foundation is [conducting a survey](#) among adults aged 18 and over who have either had a formal dyspraxia diagnosis or those who believe they may have the condition but have not been formally diagnosed.

Information gathered from the survey will be published during the [2019 Dyspraxia Awareness Week](#) in October to raise awareness of dyspraxia in adulthood.

4. Dyslexia Show 2020

[The Dyslexia Show 2020](#) will take place on Friday 20th and Saturday 21st March 2020 in the Birmingham NEC. It will be the UK's first **free** to attend national exhibition dedicated entirely to dyslexia.

The show will be open to all and will focus on awareness and the understanding of dyslexia in education, parenting and in the workplace. You will be able to attend lectures, workshops and build up your CPD. You will also be able to learn about the types of support available and the latest developments in the field of dyslexia.

You can now [pre-register for the event](#) and sign up to the Dyslexia Show 2020 newsletter to stay up to date with all the latest information.

5. Personal Stories – Annwen Johnson, BEM

I always felt like something was a bit off from when I was little. I absolutely hated exams and essay writing, but essay writing was a bit better because you had more time to get your head around it. I got 11 UCAS points, but I somehow got into university after applying to law on clearing.

University was interesting, but the same problems kept coming up and I was struggling with my work. They had an assessor and I was able to get some help, like an extra 15 minutes in assessments. I got through and passed, and then I met my now husband. I moved to London and started working, but my dyslexia never really appeared in any of my jobs until I got into the Civil Service.

When I joined the Civil Service, I did a few temp jobs. One of which was as PA to a Deputy Director at the Treasury. With my dyslexia, I tend to write emails that I think it looks fine. But I remember the Deputy Director saying to my line manager, “can you ask Annwen not to reply to my emails for me.” I thought how rude, I’m replying perfectly to these emails! But when I got back and had a look, I was not. It was a

royal mess and it got worse when I was stressed out, which happened a lot. She'd go through a list of twenty things in her diary and I'd catch two. So, I created a colour-coded system for her diary, and when I introduced that, things improved.

The Treasury was fantastic at dealing with neurodiversity. As soon as I told my line manager, she promised to get me help. It was 2012 and I was sent to the Independent Dyslexia Consultants in Euston. They assessed me, gave me a diagnostic report and explained about my reading and writing, how I take in information, and that I need 15 extra minutes for assessments and interviews. Back then, I did feel like I had to keep explaining it to people. I was a temp for so long before I became permanent and I had this fear that people wouldn't trust me to write things because I'm dyslexic. Over time I felt better about it - I realise now that my dyslexia is a super power. It's like rocket fuel for me and my job is to help people understand that rocket fuel.

A challenge is dealing with people that don't understand. When someone doesn't understand dyslexia, they can start to do something I call pin-pointing. I'd come into work tired because I had a very lively three-year-old. "Oh, is this because of your dyslexia?". I had a headache. "Is this because of your dyslexia?". I misspelt about 12 words in my correspondence, which I told them I was going to do because of my dyslexia. "Did you do this because of dyslexia or because you're lazy?". I am never lazy, but there was a lot of that behaviour and it ended up as a huge heated issue. I then got anxiety and depression, which I think is connected to my dyslexia in a lot of ways. All of them are to do with your brain and how you feel, and when my anxiety was high, my dyslexia would run rampant. Things I could do on a normal day became frustrating and painful.

Another challenge is that people can help you in the way they think you should be helped, not in the way that you need the help. But how do you explain that without seeming ungrateful? I think line managers can make you or break you, so if you have an opportunity to educate them first, do that. When I was struggling with the correspondence element of my job as a policy advisor, I got a Workplace Needs Assessment and that's the best thing I've ever had done, outside my diagnostic report. Utilise every single tool that you can get in your job, be it IT, assessments, or a job strategy coach. It's for you and you take it wherever you go. Set up your reasonable adjustment passport, and if the managers don't have time, find them time. The dyslexia consultancy company also ran a neurodiversity training course where you can be trained up to teach your area, which I have done. I was also able to send my manager on a course and things got a lot better.

A big thing you need when you have dyslexia is perseverance. Never stop being passionate about what you care about. At the Treasury, I did a lot on diversity and inclusion because there wasn't a lot of diversity there for BAME staff. I realised that it was down to a fear of what people don't understand. People fear people with dyslexia too, like not giving someone piece of work because they don't think they'll get it. So, I wanted to be an advocate and educate people and I started to introduce a lot of diversity and inclusion in the Treasury. I used my strengths, like my diverse way of communicating, to engage people because I recognise that not everybody's the same. I introduced Black History Month, and some people like films, so every year I'd have a film afternoon across two lunchtimes. Just listening to the struggles of others and how they overcame them can make you a bit stronger.

I received a British Empire Medal for services to diversity and inclusion in April last year. Getting that medal for me, as somebody with dyslexia, meant the whole world. I'm a mum and a wife and my parents are immigrants who were general workers. The fact the Queen has stamped something that included me was incredible. At the ceremony you stand there, and they talk for a good ten minutes about all the things you've done, and they included my battle with dyslexia. It's rare to hear people talk about you like that. You have to let the positive voices drown out any negative ones.

My new job at HMRC is a level EO transfer and it was the first interview I went for that used the new success profiles. All I could do was go in there with dyslexia and all and be honest, because I didn't have a clue what I was going to come up against. When I read the feedback, the top score is 7 and I got a 6 for my first time doing this and as a person with dyslexia. I was ecstatic. I also told my new job in advance about adjustments and support I'd need and where to get them. It's now 2019, and when I think back to 2012, I would never have done that and been so upfront.

My next challenge, that I'm definitely going to succeed in, is driving. If I can learn to drive, I'll be able to massively celebrate my dyslexia and dyspraxia in a way. I had about ten lessons going left when the man said to go right, but I've got a bit better now. I've probably had 40-50 lessons, but I'm going to get there.

If there's anything I'd say to anyone, is it's not a disability, it's an ability. I'm a doer and a problem solver. Most people with dyslexia are. If you feel like your solution is a bit outlandish, try to get endorsement from the people who want to give it a try. There are many people in the world who have dyslexia – famous stars, entrepreneurs - and they're doing great things, and I think we have to use that as encouragement.

- Annwen Johnson, BEM

6. Resources

General Neurodiversity (including both dyslexia and dyspraxia/DCD)

Acas provides free and impartial information and advice to employers and employees on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law. They have produced [an article on Neurodiversity in the Workplace](#). The article includes written descriptions and videos about ADHD, autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia/DCD. It provides comprehensive descriptions on why and how employers should be supporting neurodiversity in the workplace.

Microsoft has a [dedicated website for accessibility news and tools](#). This covers accessibility for broad range of conditions and has a [section dedicated to neurodiversity](#).

Dyslexia

A monthly support group is available in London for people with dyslexia. It is external to the Civil Service and affiliated with the Dyslexia Association of London. There is no need to register and everyone is welcome to turn up. The first session is free and annual membership is available for £15 (£7.50 for concessions). The next session is on Monday 12th August at 6:30 pm in St. James's Church, Piccadilly. For further information or to contact the organisers, please visit [the support group's website](#).

Dyspraxia/DCD

The Dyspraxia Foundation has a [directory of local support groups](#) which cover a broad range of locations across England. More information and contact details can be found by selecting your relevant area within the directory.

ADHD

A massive open online course (MOOC) on Understanding ADHD is [available for free on the FutureLearn website](#). The course is delivered by Kings' College London and covers topics such as the symptoms of ADHD, how ADHD is diagnosed, as well as the latest ADHD research.

7. Dyslexia and Dyspraxia in the Media

Written Articles

The Guardian features an [article on the experiences of students with dyspraxia](#) at university. It describes difficulties faced in academia and also highlights some of the strengths and coping mechanisms of those interviewed.

BBC Capital believe that [we need to talk about dyslexia at work](#) and discuss how policies for employees with dyslexia can be patchy despite the proportion of people affected by the condition. The article shows one person's experiences of working with dyslexia in both France and London, and also shows how some employers are working to improve conditions for employees.

Business Quarter features [an article about Dave Linton](#), a Northern Ireland-based social entrepreneur who has dyslexia. In 2015, Dave founded the company Madlug which provides backpacks and bags to children in care. While the condition isn't mentioned in the article, it shows an example of the creativity, perseverance and entrepreneurship associated with dyslexia.

TV presenter Holly Willoughby has [spoken about how she discovered her dyslexia late](#) and adjustments she uses at work.

Radio

BBC Radio 4's series "Word of Mouth" features [an episode on dyslexia](#). Michael Rosen talks about the condition with expert Professor Maggie Snowling CBE. The episode covers what dyslexia is, how to understand it and useful advice for parents and teachers. It is 28 minutes long and can be streamed or downloaded to listen to when you have time.

Videos

[I Am Me](#) is a Scottish charity that raises awareness of disability hate crime. They have produced [a video called "Judged"](#) about a ten-year-old girl with dyslexia and her experiences at school. The video is 11 minutes long and closed captions are available.