

# 'Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper'

## Dyslexia Scotland's response – 16 February 2017

### 1. Introduction – Dyslexia Scotland and the consultation process

Dyslexia Scotland aims to inspire and enable people with dyslexia, regardless of age and abilities, to reach their potential in education, employment and life. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the proposals in 'Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper'.

Dyslexia Scotland can help in a number of ways, including through our Helpline, membership services, dyslexia awareness training, a range of [publications on our website](#) about dyslexia and employment. We also have an employment service specifically for people with dyslexia.

### Consultation process

Dyslexia Scotland was invited to encourage people with dyslexia to participate in this important consultation. We did this in a number of ways, as follows:

- We hosted a focus group with 6 participants
- We had 4 telephone interviews with individuals
- We received 6 independently written responses.

Whilst we planned a structured focus group as outlined in the consultation guidance, participants found that the linear question/answer approach was not conducive to their way of thinking. As a result, the facilitator allowed for open conversation, loosely guided by the overarching themes, and placed comments in to relevant question areas thereafter.

The responses in this paper to the consultation questions were informed by the above interviews and focus groups as well as by our experience of the feedback we receive from our members and others who use our services.

**Note:** It is important to point out that, as an organisation representing people with dyslexia, we found the length and complexity of the Green Paper and the extensive number of consultation questions extremely challenging. Although there were simpler questions in the Easy Read booklets, unfortunately the 4 Easy Read books do not correspond with the 6 themes outlined in the workshop guidance or in the Green Paper itself. This meant that co-ordinating the consultation process was very time-consuming and at times confusing, as was completing the answers. Therefore, we did not complete every question and have left those that were least relevant blank.

We strongly believe that the issues highlighted in the Green Paper are highly relevant to people with dyslexia and it is clear from the number of active respondents to our focus group and interview requests that these are issues

that are deeply felt by people with dyslexia. It is hoped that the length of the Green Paper has not acted as a disincentive to many other people with dyslexia (and indeed other disabilities and learning difficulties) who might otherwise have been encouraged to respond to the consultation.

## **2. Responses to the consultation questions**

### **1.1 What innovative and evidence-based support are you already delivering to improve health and employment outcomes for people in your community which you think could be replicated at scale? What evidence sources did you draw on when making your investment decision?**

1. Dyslexia Scotland delivers an Employment Service for adults with dyslexia who are unemployed, or are looking for help to change jobs. The provision is innovative in that we know that this client group needs time-unlimited support, close one-to-one practical help with applications, CVs and interview skills. The provision combines practical employability support, coaching and career counselling approaches and is free to clients. We have had inputs from large organisations, such as Bank of New York Mellon, to deliver mock interviews and interview technique coaching to individuals with dyslexia. The Employment Service was set up following evidence from a Careers Service pilot, where we matched people with dyslexia seeking career and work-related advice with volunteer Careers advisers with knowledge of dyslexia.

2. We also work closely with the West Lothian Dyslexia Network, a partnership between Bathgate Job Centre Plus, Adult Learning services, voluntary organisations and employers. This group runs dyslexia groups for job seekers in the job centre, and is creating joined up, relevant employment journeys for clients with dyslexia.

We would advocate for scaled replication of both a one-to-one, personalised service and active collaborations between Job Centres, Adult Learning providers and others in developing dyslexia networks and provision to dyslexic job seekers.

Evidence sources we drew on:

- In 2015, 29% of calls to our Helpline were from adults. 5% of these calls were from employers. These highlight that Welfare Reform conditions were adversely affecting people with dyslexia who are seeking work, due to stricter conditions attached to claiming Jobseekers Allowance and an increase in the required number of job application submissions required. A move towards online application forms by employers, as well as by Job Centre Plus and Skills Development Scotland, is magnifying the difficulties already experienced by dyslexic people.

- Our most requested leaflet on our website is the Guide for Adults and the Guide for Employees.
- 20% of calls to the Helpline in 2013 were employment related. That was why we set up the Careers service pilot.
- A number of real-life stories in our 'Dyslexia and Us' book published in 2011 highlighted a need for employment-related support for job-seekers, employers and employees.
  - The UK Dyslexia Adult Network (DAN)'s written evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Disability (2016) further affirmed the need for relevant employment provision for dyslexic people.
  - Dyslexia Scotland Employability Mapping Survey (2016).

**1.2 What evidence gaps have you identified in your local area in relation to supporting disabled people or those with long term health conditions? Are there particular gaps that a Challenge Fund approach could most successfully respond to?**

A recent mapping survey by Dyslexia Scotland of employability support, provision and employment of dyslexic people indicated that the appropriate knowledge and practice around supporting people with dyslexia to get into work is patchy across Scotland. There are some areas, sectors and organisations with excellent awareness and high levels of ability in enabling dyslexic adults to learn and progress. However, adults with dyslexia are often not aware of what relevant help is available to them. A Challenge Fund could respond to gaps in dyslexia awareness for employability providers, particularly in geographic areas most lacking this. A Challenge Fund could cover costs of training and appropriate resources for employability providers, Job Centres and community based job clubs and learning and development providers with skills in supporting dyslexic learners.

The most common difficulty for adults with dyslexia who access our employment service is interview skills. A Challenge Fund could be used to develop relevant learning provision for people with dyslexia in developing these skills, and in training employers on ways of improving/reforming the interview conditions and procedures to get the best from candidates, including putting reasonable adjustments in place at interviews for dyslexic candidates.

There is a gap in provision for support to dyslexic graduates to enter work. Many dyslexic people graduate from university, having had to work harder than their non-dyslexic peers to achieve the qualification, but then are not

supported with getting a job when they leave the supportive structure of the university environment. This further demonstrates a need for development of practical job search and interview skills within educational and in non-formal and community based learning settings, which a Challenge Fund could respond to.

As there is no source of free cognitive assessment for dyslexia in Scotland, a Challenge Fund could also respond to this need.

### **1.3 How should we develop, structure and communicate the evidence base to influence commissioning decisions?**

By providing a wide range of case studies and examples of good practice within reports and commissioning materials which reflect the wide range of health issues, learning difficulties and other support needs which people face in seeking and remaining in work. The language used in these commissioning materials will influence the types of bids submitted and will influence those who submit tenders – e.g. if the language highlights health and disability, without mentioning hidden disabilities such as dyslexia, this is likely to lead to a deficit in the support on offer for people with those hidden difficulties. As outlined in para 55 of the Green Paper, stronger engagement with the voluntary and community sectors should be reflected in the development of the evidence base. Similarly, in relation to the devolved administrations, the particular circumstances arising from geographical challenges in Scotland needs to be taken into consideration in developing appropriate access to support.

### **2.1 How do we ensure that Jobcentres can support the provision of the right personal support at the right time for individuals?**

There was consensus from respondents that all Job Centre staff must be trained to be dyslexia aware and that recruitment procedures must be dyslexia-friendly. Participants in our focus group for this consultation and in our recent mapping survey said that they want Job Centre Work Coaches to ask them about their dyslexia, to enable them to speak about their particular challenges in a safe-feeling way. Additionally, placement of Dyslexia Specialists in Job Centres was recommended, to lead on the development of support for dyslexic job seekers, who are over-represented among the long-term unemployed. Whilst DEAs are in place, they aren't specialists in dyslexia, and participants feel that this is required to address the needs, and have fuller understanding of, dyslexic customers.

Participants were keen that Job Centres provide more opportunity for direct face to face support. Dyslexic people can find it difficult to have over the phone conversations. Allow time for Job Centre Plus staff and customers with dyslexia to meet and converse, and tailor appointment times, places and structures to the needs of each customer. Dyslexic people will tend to need

longer and more frequent appointments. As working memory can be limited in people with dyslexia, they may be likely to forget information soon after being given it, so they may need to be given information in a number of ways. People with dyslexia can struggle with organisational skills, such as forgetting appointments, so Job Centres need to be flexible in their approach to meeting and communicating with dyslexic clients, e.g. text reminders of appointments, send summaries of meeting actions.

Other recommendations from our focus group include:

“Have a single phone number through which I can be transferred directly to the right department.”

“Provide guidance on what to expect from the benefits process. A visual guide outlining the whole journey would be helpful.”

“Have a less constrained/non-binary structure to the pre-questionnaire. Help me to let you know my individual circumstances and the variables involved. It would also help to do this face to face with someone.”

“People with dyslexia tend to have weaker organisational skills and difficulties managing information. A more straightforward process to benefits, with the availability of support from an adviser to understand these would be beneficial.”

Job Centre staff should begin their relationship with each customer by asking “How can I support you? What difficulties do you have?” There needs to be a complete organisational culture of genuineness, patience, compassion, and a person-centred approach, from the management to the ground.

How do we make sure that support to find work is tailored to the individual?

- Communicate clearly with the individual about what they want.
- Encourage them to look at skills and interests that can be used in the workplace and go for the type of work and job that interests them.
- “In my own experience going for a ‘job for the sake of a job’ is very counter-productive as it may require a skill set that goes against your dyslexic grain. Examples of this for me are admin heavy roles”.

Job Centres work best when they are engaged in active networks, both nationally and locally. A good practice example is Bathgate Job Centre’s Dyslexia Network in West Lothian (Scotland). Work Coaches should have full awareness of the organisations they can work with (not just signpost to) in supporting a customer. For example, there are a number of ways in which Dyslexia Scotland can offer support, training, information and guidance to individuals with dyslexia as well as those who work with them.

## **2.2 What specialist tools or support should we provide to work coaches to help them work with disabled people and people with health conditions?**

There is an over-representation of dyslexic people in the unemployed group, and the benefits of their distinctive skill set and abilities are lost to the country if they remain unemployed. (Source: Written evidence submitted by the UK Dyslexia Adult Network to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Disability, 2014). Dyslexia awareness training and Dyslexia support training must form a key part of Work Coaches' roles. The Professional Development Award (PDA) in Supporting Individuals with Dyslexia in Learning and Workplace Setting could be a suitable qualification, or tailored basic Dyslexia Awareness Training provided at a reasonable cost by Dyslexia Scotland. Dyslexia Awareness training should be delivered on an ongoing basis and refreshed regularly. In addition, participants feel that a dyslexia specialist in Job Centres would support positive changes for dyslexic job seekers' journeys.

An additional specialist resource worth exploring is supporting routes for self-employment. Many adults with dyslexia take this route but would benefit from support to get started if they are unemployed. Entrepreneurship is a viable route for dyslexic people (20% of UK entrepreneurs are dyslexic), and support through Job Centres for this could reduce the number of people with dyslexia who are unemployed. For example, many people are not aware that Access to Work could offer significant support to dyslexic entrepreneurs with assistance such as book-keeping.

*People with dyslexia/SpLDs often choose self-employment. In regular employment they report being held back by processes and procedures which are not 'dyslexia-friendly' and feel unable to express their abilities. (UK Dyslexia Adult Network, 2016)*

Job Centre staff frequently tell Dyslexia Scotland's Employment Adviser that they do not know whether to believe people who tell them they have dyslexia. This indicates a need to upskill Work Coaches in 'hidden disabilities', the prevalence for dyslexia among the unemployed and what impact dyslexia can have on someone's employment journey. Likewise, respondents indicated that they often aren't believed by Job Centre staff and, therefore, are not supported appropriately. It was proposed that a Dyslexia Specialist in Job Centres could support positive change around this issue.

Provide work coaches with training and resources to support dyslexia. This includes appropriate physical environments. Participants fed back that the setup of the Job Centre could be improved by provision of quiet rooms without distraction.

Job Centre Plus (Scotland) should continue to engage with Dyslexia Scotland at a strategic level, working closely with the charity to identify and implement solutions to reduce the number of unemployed dyslexic people.

### 3.1 What support should we offer to help those 'in work' to stay in work and progress?

Supporting changes in organisational culture across sectors was a prominent focus of discussions in our focus group. Flexible working, trust and a willingness to enable employees to thrive will create the conditions for those in work to stay. Many respondents emphasised a need for development of "Dyslexia Friendly" and positive psychology based work places and systems, from recruitment to departure of employees. Where this had been experienced, employees felt happier, healthier and were more productive. Many respondents had experienced negative cultures, including bullying, where managers and colleagues focussed on their difficulties, rather than their strengths. This was described to lead to vicious cycles of low self-esteem and further reduced productivity, ultimately leading to the dismissal or departure of the employee.

Adults with dyslexia who have left jobs out of frustration, or have been terminated from their roles, tell us that had they been allowed to approach tasks in ways that make sense to them, they would have more likely stayed in their job. People with dyslexia tend to think differently and to approach work in a different way to non-dyslexics. Set processes and bureaucratic systems (or managers) tend not to allow for doing things differently.

Participants indicated that they wanted, as far as possible, all people to be supported to work to their strengths. Job roles should be designed around the person, rather than the person having to fit into a role where they aren't applying their skills and strengths.

Dyslexic people can take longer to adapt to change, and may need to be supported to manage this gradually. A change in line manager, work load or physical environment can be extremely unsettling. A dyslexic employee will adapt better to change if they are informed about it in advance and supported to manage it. For many people, a change in working environment can expose difficulties which have never been apparent before. Managers need to understand that it can take dyslexic employees longer to adapt and that they need more help to learn new systems, procedures or expectations. Dyslexia Awareness training within organisations can support this understanding.

One consultation participant cited the BT disability passport as a resource that worked for him and his line managers, helping him to retain his job. In addition, the role of the Trade Unions and advocacy services has helped dyslexic people stay in their jobs and to keep communication with their managers open when conflict has arisen. Other things which have helped people retain work include allowances for giving reports in alternative formats, open minded managers, support from other colleagues with similar

challenges, support from team members with complementary skills, having options to work from home, or in a quieter environment, being allowed to work to strengths, being allowed to use their own tried and tested strategies and tools.

People with dyslexia who have a job need the following to help them earn more money:

- Support to go for promotions
- Best access to training to suit their needs and training for colleagues.

In our recent mapping survey, people with dyslexia cited a number of things that would create “dyslexia-friendly” work places. We are happy to share this information.

Again, dyslexia awareness from board room to ground floor was considered key to enabling the above developments.

Dyslexia Scotland provides a range of free information for employers and employees with dyslexia, including:

Our leaflets:

<http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/our-leaflets>

A Dyslexia Guide for Union Learning reps:

<http://www.scottishunionlearning.com/content/resources/Dyslexia-Guide-2012-Update-web.pdf>

### **3.2 What does the evidence tell us about the right type of employment support for people with mental health conditions?**

With early intervention and the right support, people with dyslexia can reach their full potential. Making learning and work dyslexia-friendly can benefit all. However, if unsupported, dyslexia can affect behaviour, self-esteem, mental health and the ability to cope day to day. Therefore, although dyslexia is not a mental health condition, its impact when unidentified or unsupported can lead to mental health difficulties and tailored support for people with dyslexia at the right time can make a significant difference to one’s ability to succeed at work.

### **4.1 Should we offer targeted health and employment support to individuals in the Employment Support Allowance Support Group, and Universal Credit equivalent, where appropriate?**

Yes – the suggestions in paragraphs 109 -114 of the Green Paper are welcome. Dyslexia Scotland would be willing to offer advice to work coaches

on a strategic level in relation to people with dyslexia in Scotland who need more support in programmes such as these.

**4.2 What type of support might be most effective and who should provide this?** Targeted, tailored support, in liaison with local community/third sector groups and relevant key workers.

**4.3 How might the voluntary sector and local partners be able to help this group?** As above in 4.1, Dyslexia Scotland would be willing to assist on a strategic level in relation to advice for work coaches etc. They may be able to help with the 'keep in touch' suggestion in para 114 of the Green Paper re dyslexia-friendly approaches. Other Third Sector organisations with expertise in other issues/conditions would also be able to offer advice.

**4.4 How can we best maintain contact with people in the Support Group to ensure no-one is written off?** Ask the individuals what works for them, e.g. does texting work for them or a pre-meeting 'phone call, or a prompt via a local community group?

**5.1 If you are an employer who has considered providing a supported internship placement but have not done so, please let us know what the barriers were. If you are interested in offering a supported internship, please provide your contact details so we can help to match you to a local school or college.** We are a very small charity - both office space and capacity to support an intern are the biggest barriers.

## **6. Reforming the assessment process**

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**6.1 Should the assessment for the financial support an individual receives from the system be separate from the discussion a claimant has about employment or health support?**

Many respondents felt it would be appropriate to separate these supports. We often work with people who are not entitled to Job Centre support because their partner's income, or housing status, prohibits this. This leaves them further isolated, without any practical support with job search, and ultimately further removed from the labour market.

**6.2 How can we ensure that each claimant is matched to a personalised and tailored employment related support offer?**

Consider part of the role of Work Coaches to form/join active employability support networks in their area, and to work collaboratively with partners in developing support offers. (See Bathgate Job Centre's dyslexia provision as a model).

Allow and encourage Work Coaches to personalise and tailor support offers for the individual.

### **6.3 What other alternatives could we explore to improve the system for assessing financial support?**

A number of people accessing our employment service are advised by Job Centres that they are not eligible for financial support and, therefore, not entitled to help finding work. This has caused some to feel further isolated and in a “vacuum of depression”. The system for assessing financial support should recognise that even if someone isn’t entitled to benefits, they may still need, and would benefit from, Work Coach and Job Centre help of a practical nature.

### **7.1 How might we share evidence between assessments, including between Employment Support Allowance/Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments to help DWP benefit decision makers and reduce burdens on claimants? What benefits and challenges would this bring?**

A benefits/employment passport owned by the individual and held electronically?

### **7.2 Building on our plans to exempt people with the most severe health conditions and disabilities from reassessment, how can we further improve the process for assessing financial support for this group?**

Participants highlighted a need to simplify the processes for initial assessment. Other recommendations included:

- Provide opportunities for people to be directly supported with their initial application and pre-questionnaire.
- Set up a ‘one stop shop’ phone number or drop in so people can get all the help from a single point of contact.

### **7.3 Is there scope to improve the way DWP uses the evidence from Service Medical Boards and other institutions, who may have assessed service personnel, which would enable awards of benefit to be made without the need for the claimant to send in the same information or attend a face-to-face assessment?**

As above, could a benefits/employment passport owned by the individual and held electronically?

### **8.1 What are the key barriers preventing employers of all sizes and sectors recruiting and retaining the talent of disabled people and people with health conditions?**

From our own experience, and from focus group discussions, we are aware that some employers think that having dyslexic employees is an

inconvenience. Increased awareness of what dyslexia is, and the benefits of recruiting dyslexic staff are vital for changing this. Dyslexia expert Professor Roderick Nicholson stresses that employers need to know the cost of not having dyslexic employees, and suggests there is evidence that 30% of CEOs in America are dyslexic, yet that just 1% of middle managers are. This demonstrates the blockage that stops people with dyslexia progressing, yet highlights the successes a dyslexic mind can bring to an organisation, and the economy (ref Positive Dyslexia, Roderick Nicholson, 2015). This is further supported in the UK Dyslexia Adult Network's written response to the APPG inquiry in 2016.

Fundamental change has to come in relation to an attitude towards disability in the workplace. The idea of dyslexia being related to intelligence or general ability is still prevalent, even in the educational field. Awareness-raising and also monitoring and (for want of a better word) punishing discrimination. This needs to be at all levels of society i.e. education, workplace and the wider community at large. The disability status is also a bit of a conundrum, especially in relation to hidden disabilities such as dyslexia, as whilst it gives the legal protection, it can lead to negative attitudes in the workplace.

Controversially, an employer's own attitude towards it and also their fear of someone with dyslexia: 1) not being able or 2) costing them money. Attitude is important as many may see it as a 'problem' or tick box thing. The help is there for them! Also, their own recruitment policies can hinder dyslexic people if they look too much at tests above actual practical skills knowledge and functional intelligence.

Traditional recruitment processes are a barrier to dyslexic people. Job hunting relies on reading and writing, skills which many dyslexics are not automatically skilled in. (Achievability Commission on Recruitment and Dyslexia, 2016). Online applications can be particularly problematic as they can time out, not save and don't tend to have spell-check functions; they are also difficult as people with dyslexia find it hard to cross-refer or refer back to a previous page, which is particularly difficult online. These applications rarely work with assistive software. Short timescales, reliance on written applications and the amount of information required for each application form is over-burdensome for many dyslexic people. One participant said, "Some of the jobs I have applied for would have been ideal for some dyslexics I know but I also know that they would have given up at the application form stage." This highlights how businesses are losing out on talented individuals at the earliest stage of their processes.

The most common difficulty adults accessing Dyslexia Scotland's employment service have is in interviews. This can be because interviews are often over-formalised, linear in structure (direct question and answer approach; sometimes interview questions contain several questions at once

which is especially confusing and unclear for people with dyslexia) and time-bound. These aren't conducive to a dyslexic person's thought processes. Many people with dyslexia can have challenges in speech processing, and this is exacerbated in a pressured, linear, question/answer style interview. Added to that, the inevitable stress that anyone experiences at interviews further exacerbates the difficulties associated with dyslexia such as ability to focus or process.

Many respondents raised the question, "What is an interview actually testing? Do the skills required to perform in an interview actually match skills required for the job?". Comments included "competency interviews are a type of criteria bingo... you are being assessed on telling a story"; "interviews are memory tests – no good if your memory and sequencing are disadvantaged."; "it is impossible to tell a story succinctly covering the situation, task, action, result and reflections [if you are dyslexic.]", "some people excel at interviews, it doesn't mean they're going to be any good in the job, yet they are more likely to get it." There was a feeling that there is over-reliance on interview performance when assessing candidates for a role.

Despite this, participants in our focus group said that they wouldn't completely abandon traditional recruitment processes, but would recommend the following improvements:

All recruiters should use dyslexia-friendly application forms as a standard. (See [Dyslexia Scotland](#) for guidance).

Where using online application systems, provide an option for applicants to upload their basic information in the form of a CV, Word document or scan, rather than having to type it out every time to a new format.

Allow people to apply in different (multiple) formats. Employers could accept applications in written (CV or application), verbal (video/recorded) or other formats. Put the onus on the employer to adapt to the information format provided.

Many people with dyslexia will have great talents and successes, but may have extreme difficulty "fitting" that information to interview questions. Interviews should be relaxed and informal, conducive to relaxed conversation. Move away from a rigid question and answer format and let dyslexic candidates (and all candidates) know in advance what the conversation will cover (some employers already provide the questions in advance - this is a helpful step forward). Some dyslexic applicants prefer a "show and tell" approach to the interview, or to find alternative ways to present and demonstrate their strengths to employers than traditional interview formats allow for. There needs to be a basis of "good interview practice" for everyone.

Offer practical work trials or role specific simulated tasks so someone can demonstrate their skills, rather than just talk about them and/or write about them.

Overall, recruitment processes should be reflective of the skills of the job and employers should be flexible and adaptive to candidates' styles when assessing their suitability for a job. Recruitment should be more personalised. Ideally, employers would recruit based on how well someone is likely to fit the personality, values and ethos of their organisation, with job roles made to suit the individual strengths they bring to the team. Job application forms and interviews have become the default way of recruiting. We need to allow and encourage more ways of applying and recruiting. Typically, applications and interviews don't create the best conditions for people with dyslexia to shine. Employers can be too focussed on how someone answers a question, rather than how well will they fit in to a team.

Companies need to demonstrate that they are "dyslexia-friendly". Could companies highlight case studies on their website, to reassure dyslexic people that they can apply there and be accepted? Could companies also have information and resources on their website to help people leaving university to get in to work with employers who have a positive mindset about dyslexia?

Recruitment: Get rid of the traditional written application for practical jobs. Do task-based interviews, ones relevant to the skills of the job. For example, an effective engineering role recruitment task is team based problem-solving activity. Ineffective recruitment for dyslexic engineers is when recruitment processes rely on "story-telling" (scenarios, applications) which isn't how the practical, mathematical engineering mind works. Companies are losing out on top employees through inappropriate recruitment styles.

Employers need to create 'portals' for communication about dyslexia. A good practice example: when recruiting someone with dyslexia, ask them what their dyslexia means to them, what their difficulties are, and how they get past them. It's best to be solution-focused, not prejudiced. Employers should be looking to recruit the person most motivated to do the job and to learn.

On the Disability Confident/Two Ticks scheme, one participant said, "All the application forms ask about possible coverage under the Equality Act but most do so in a way that feels very negative. Most of us do not feel that we are disabled (dyslexia or other) but that society is [disabling us] by not seeing past our challenges."

There is also the need to develop interview practice/learning through Job Centres and other employability providers for free. Interview skills weren't available to participants through their education or employment, and many

people lack the skills for managing the competency based interview. Support for developing these skills is few and far between, and usually is expensive.

Whilst offering “reasonable adjustments” in the interview is positive, if a dyslexic candidate doesn’t know what the employer’s interview will be like, it’s difficult to know what might need adjusted. Employers should ask universally, “What set up or style of ‘interview’ do you need to demonstrate your suitability for the job?”

Further comments on this include: Make the job application process easier. Every organisation has a different style of application form – there needs to be more standardisation in form layouts. In addition, interviews need to be more flexible. The current process of giving everyone standard questions in a set time is a memory test to remember the main points of a question in a stressful situation of the interview. This small snapshot does not bring out the best in a potential dyslexic employee. Being put on the spot often causes the potential dyslexic employee’s memory to freeze. “The anxiety caused by the testing exacerbates the expressive language deficit.” (Burton, Diana & Gennosa 1991).

### **In Work**

The talents of people with dyslexia could be retained and maximised if the following conditions existed:

Allowing time to learn and accepting that this will take longer than non-dyslexic employees, but that with support and understanding, they can get there. If training courses were all dyslexia-friendly, it would improve the experience for all employees and fit in with the different learning styles we all have. It would also help with those for whom English is not their first language. This indicates a need for work place training facilitators to develop inclusive learning practices.

Dyslexic people can take longer to adapt to change, and may need to be supported to manage this gradually. A change in line manager, work load or environment can be extremely unsettling. A dyslexic employee will adapt better to change if they are informed about it in advance and supported to manage it. Managers need to understand that it can take dyslexic employees longer to adapt and they need more help to learn new systems, process or expectations.

Allow people to work to their strengths and form interdependent teams. Where someone with dyslexia may have difficulty with a task such as taking minutes, they can excel in tasks such as gap analysis, customer facing roles and creative problem solving.

Written responses to this consultation, and responses to our own mapping survey show that employees are reluctant to disclose dyslexia for fear of prejudice from colleagues and managers. These responses also suggest that a culture of openness, inclusion and positivity around dyslexia could reduce this likelihood. The focus group unanimously agreed that managers shouldn't be afraid to ask someone if they might be dyslexic, saying that often managers worry they will offend. The consensus was that if there is unidentified dyslexia, managers should open the conversation and support the individual to have a dyslexia assessment and/or work place assessment. Ideally, employers will create an opportunity for positive discussion about dyslexia/Specific Learning Difficulties at the start of the contract, and throughout the term of employment. This could be achieved through initial "health screening" forms used in some work places; however, this system should not be limited to health issues, but to the employee's wider world, wellbeing and flexible working needs. This should be developed as a positive tool for getting to know the employee.

As outlined earlier, other barriers include an employer's own attitudes towards it and also their fear of a person with dyslexia 1) not being able or 2) costing them money. Also learning how to nurture their talents and support them emotionally and give equal opportunity.

#### **IT/Assistive Technology/Access to Work:**

There can be conflict in large organisations around installation of assistive technology. IT departments need to be flexible, accommodating and solution focussed in supporting people with dyslexia to use the software that enables them to do their job. A blanket approach often does not work.

When someone with dyslexia isn't given the space and support to thrive, the frustration can lead to low self esteem and ultimately people walk away from their job then.

Access should be given for work coaches to all relevant support software. Training and development as well to embrace the most up to date strategies and also awareness of any other related issues or ailments i.e. stress and mental health problems as they can often follow.

Access to Work issues – see below under Access to Work on page 17 of this paper.

**8.2 What expectation should there be on employers to recruit or retain disabled people and people with health conditions?** It is important to highlight the benefits for all concerned of doing so. There are many helpful suggestions for how to do this in Section 4 of the Green Paper. By ensuring fair selection and giving appropriate advice, employers can support the employee and get the most out of them.

### 8.3 Which measures would best support employers to recruit and retain the talent of disabled people and people with health conditions?

In the first instance, employers need to be supported to create organisational cultures of trust and inclusion. One response to the consultation suggested that people with dyslexia need to be honest about their difficulties, but that they need to feel safe to do so.

A proposed solution was for organisations to have “Dyslexia Academies” and “mentors” to support the skills development of workers with Specific Learning Difficulties.

Allowing people with dyslexia to work in a way that makes sense to them. Not “micro-managing” their processes. Although it is not widely known, performing a task in a linear manner can be constricting for a dyslexic employee.

Other measures identified include:

- Personalised working styles
- Team/collaborative ethos
- Work culture

Many feel that it is important to find the form of communication that works best for the dyslexic employee. Some find a lot of email communication difficult to manage. Some people will prefer to be given information verbally, with the additional option of having the information in writing.

It is best to ask the individual dyslexic employee what support they need, as they know themselves best. Where they're not sure what can help, make use of work place assessments, or contact Dyslexia Scotland's Helpline for ideas on what might help.

Likewise, work with the dyslexic employee to create the best conditions to suit their way of working. For example, they may need a quiet working space to help them with concentration and organisational skills. Helpful things can include availability of noise-cancelling headphones, being seated away from thoroughfares, water coolers and photocopiers, support to work flexibly, having a permanent work station (i.e. not hot-desking). By enabling a dyslexic employee to reach their potential, the likelihood of them leaving the job due to stress or frustration (or termination) is reduced.

As dyslexic people think differently to non-dyslexic colleagues, an enabler of their success is to allow them to do things in their own way. One participant said, “If you want me to approach a task in your way, it will be late and probably wrong. Allow me to approach it my way, it will be on time and well done”. The focus group explained that managers can tend to scrutinise processes, rather than supporting the pursuit of an agreed outcome in

different ways. This can result in tension between manager and employee, reinforcement of negatives, and a break down in the working relationship. Many respondents had experienced disciplinary processes as a result of not understanding, or managing prescriptive processes. Very few had experienced improvements in their work as a result of this process, most experiencing stress and leaving as a result. All felt that this could have been avoided by having closer support to learn a system, or by being allowed to approach the tasks in a way that made more sense to them.

Where using dyslexia friendly technology, it's best to check in advance:

- 1) That it is compatible with existing systems/hardware and
- 2) That the employee is confident and able to use it. This may require close support and repetition of training. Dyslexic employees can need plenty of training as they need a lot of memory reinforcement to remember new information.

In larger organisations there can be a conflict between the technological solutions required for the individual, and the IT security policies and systems of the organisation. There needs to be universal awareness and understanding by employers and IT providers of the need for personalised approaches to use of technology at work. Stress and frustration caused by IT systems can be the root cause of many dyslexic people exiting jobs. Solution-focused approaches to IT could prevent this.

**Access to Work** – participants identified that there needs to be greater awareness of Access to Work - what it is, how to use its services. There is a need for Access to Work staff to be consistent in their approach. What we are told by strategic leaders is different to what can be offered on the ground. For example, we have been told through meetings with DAN and Access to Work that individuals do not need to have a formal assessment of dyslexia in order to access support from Access to Work; however, front line staff at Access to Work have often told our Helpline advisers and/or clients that they do need to get an assessment (as this can cost from £250-£600, it is clearly unaffordable for many people and unacceptable that people need to pay for an assessment of their learning difficulties in order to access the support they need to make reasonable adjustments that would put them onto a level playing field as others without disabilities).

Employers could retain dyslexic employees by having an understanding that some of their dyslexic employees suffer burnout trying to produce the same amount of output as their non-dyslexic colleagues. Where there is a workplace requirement to set targets, e.g. in a call-centre environment, there needs to be flexibility and a realistic outlook for what people with dyslexia can manage. Working memory can be limited in dyslexic employees, so they often need training and instructions repeated a number of times before they

become competent in a task. Employers could retain more dyslexic employees by making training personalised, providing it in various formats and by allowing employees to repeat training and learning several times, if required.

Employers ought to nurture an asset model/collaborative ethos in their organisations. Allowing dyslexic employees to work to their strengths and be part of interdependent teams can help everyone flourish. It is important to emphasise what dyslexic employees are doing well, to recognise their contributions rather than focus on their deficits.

A number of contributors to this consultation highlighted that colleague perceptions of them stopped them thriving in work. For example, people with dyslexia may spend more time thinking and reflecting, and have been perceived to be lazy, unproductive or anti-social. Awareness and recognition of the importance of 'thinking' time, as well as 'doing' time is part of a working culture change that will help dyslexic people retain work.

Allow a flexible approach to break times. Dyslexic employees might need breaks more frequently, particularly during long meetings. Take a positive approach to flexible working. Allow employees to work away from the office, to work to flexible times and in ways that work for them.

### **Networking and support groups within the workplace**

Here is a suggestion from an interviewee which could be applied to many large employers:

The NHS is a large employer with a likely higher proportion of dyslexic employees than average (the same is thought of other sectors, including construction and creative industries). As such, the organisations would benefit from a more innovative, joined up and slick approach to dyslexia in the workplace. A solution would be for a "Dyslexia Team" within NHS Scotland, working across all health boards with responsibility for rolling out dyslexia awareness training, doing screening and assessments, organising and implementing IT solutions, undertaking workplace assessments etc. This approach would be quicker, and more cost-effective than current approaches and use of Access to Work on an ad hoc basis. There are currently Diversity Champions in the NHS. A Dyslexia Champion could mirror this role, with specific focus on Dyslexia. These solutions would save the organisation time, money and workforce stress.

### **8.3(a) What information would be reasonable for employers to be aware of to address the health needs of their employees?**

Participants feel that Dyslexia Awareness training across all sectors is vital, from Board Room to ground floor level. By creating dyslexia-friendly work

places, ALL employees can benefit. A dyslexia-aware friendly work place can minimise risk of subsequent health issues such as stress. Employers need to be aware of dyslexia so they can avoid risks of frustration and stress in their teams, and to learn how they can harness the power of the dyslexic mind for the benefit of their business. Such training could include:

- How to get and give support.
- The law when it comes to discrimination.
- How to implement selection processes that are fair to ALL
- How to arrange reasonable adjustments and get the employee onto Access to work.

Information for employers to support dyslexia at work is available from Dyslexia Scotland, the British Dyslexia Association and Dyslexia Action. For example, Dyslexia Scotland provides dyslexia awareness training (at a reasonable charge) to employers of all sizes.

### **8.3(b) What are the barriers to employers using the support currently available?**

- Lack of awareness of Access to Work.
- Delays in Access to Work implementation. Inconsistencies in Access to Work policy and practice.
- Lack of awareness of dyslexia being the cause of employee difficulties; unidentified dyslexia. Furthermore, the financial cost of dyslexia awareness training and full cognitive assessments for dyslexia are key barriers to employers accessing them.
- Knowing how to get support. But also ensuring their culture reflects diversity and is capable of embracing difference and new ways of thinking and working.

### **8.3(c) What role could a 'one stop shop' play to overcome the barriers?**

It would be useful for people with dyslexia, to save them having to move from pillar to post, navigating signs, directions, systems and new places to find, which often poses challenges. Within a 'one stop shop' setting, it is important to look for the most practical help that is based on the individuals' needs in their context. Move away from one size fits all approach and embrace any individual difficulties or differences as diversity.

For employers, easy access to get all what they need so they don't have to chase several organisations or bodies. It would give some employers less excuses to be lazy.

### **8.3(d) How can government support the development of effective networks between employers, employees and charities?**

There are pockets of existing good practice at local government level, such as the West Lothian Dyslexia Network which consists of Local Authority, Job Centre Plus, voluntary organisations and employers. The partnership seeks to support people with dyslexia and to help improve their lives and employment prospects. The government can replicate the model across communities and regions.

If the government wishes to gather and communicate information on giving help and support to people with dyslexia, they should speak to people with dyslexia and the support organisations through focus groups, surveys, consultations. There are a wide range of options.

### **8.3(e) What role can information campaigns play to highlight good practices and what they should cover?**

Annual national campaigns such as Dyslexia Awareness Week are highly effective for that period, however, we need to drip feed information to employers and the media all year round. There should be emphasis on what's great about dyslexia, how businesses are harnessing the strengths of dyslexic employees and how positive, trusting, flexible work cultures are good for business and good for health. These should also focus on the type of support that people with dyslexia might need to help them do their job and to succeed.

There is a potential parallel with current campaigns around Dementia-Friendly Places and Positive About Mental Health. We can learn from these and apply them to dyslexia.

Campaigns should be directed towards letting others know how to support people with dyslexia.

### **8.3(f) What role can government play in ensuring that disabled people and people with health conditions can progress in work, including securing senior roles?**

Influencing changes in traditional recruitment processes.

In his [TED talk](#), Professor Roderick Nicholson highlights that thriving corporations Google, Virgin and the BBC are successful and dynamic organisations because they have more dyslexic people in their senior roles.

The government could play a role in encouraging all sectors to develop an approach around developing interdependent teams, and forming jobs for people, not people for jobs.

Ensuring support and help is visible to employers, employees and dyslexic support groups. Ensuring education works in the best interest of diversity and upholding the law when it comes to discrimination.

**8.3(g) What impact did the previous financial, or other, incentives have and what type of incentives would influence employer behaviour, particularly to create new jobs for disabled people?**

Ideally, it should not really be about incentives. It should be about fairness, equality and getting the best person for the job regardless of perception or judgement of dyslexia. Part of this process is raising awareness about the strengths that people with dyslexia bring to the workplace and supporting employers with schemes such as Access to Work when they need it.

**8.3(h) Are there any other measures you think would increase the recruitment and retention of disabled people and people with health conditions?**

Proactive approaches to creating dyslexia-friendly work places including installation of dyslexia-friendly software on all work place PCs.

If a supportive working environment is in place before people are assessed for dyslexia, then difficulties and conflicts can be minimised.

The government could make dyslexia assessments free for adults through a subsidised scheme. This would lead to people knowing quickly what supports they need to help them at work, rather than not knowing for a long time what's not working for them, or what might help.

Funding costs of dyslexia awareness training and support for employers would increase awareness of dyslexia and support a change in work place attitudes and practices.

Whether for employers, job centres, or 'one stop shops', it is important to look for the most practical help that is based on the individuals' needs in their own context. Move away from one size fits all approach and embrace it as diversity. Giving the individual information on their rights and what reasonable adjustments and help they can get is important too.

Learn about and emphasise the diverse nature and skill set that dyslexia can bring! There is also the knock-on issue of keeping people out of the unemployment trap. This is imperative for solid economic growth.

Encourage employers to look at how they measure employee success and development. Have effective employee support and development in place. Stop having unrealistic standards that may not be met due to a neurological difference.

### **8.3(i) Do you think there should be a different approach for different sized organisations and different sectors?**

Schemes such as Access to Work recognise that there needs to be a scale of support available to employers based on their size and income.

### **8.4 How can we best strengthen the business case for employer action?**

Please refer to the Achievability Commission on Recruitment and Dyslexia.

It should not really be about incentives. It should be about fairness, equality and getting the best person for the job regardless of perception or judgement of dyslexia.

### **9.1 How can existing government support be reformed to better support the recruitment and retention of disabled people and people with health conditions?**

Allow disabled people to be open about their needs as individual groups and look at how information and support can be given and implemented. Also look at how they can work together and across their platforms for the benefit of everyone.

## **10. Staying in or returning to work**

### **10.1 What good practice is already in place to support inclusive recruitment, promote health and wellbeing, prevent ill health and support people to return to work after periods of sickness absence?**

Edinburgh's Support@Work service is an example of this.

Also:

- Having sensible and fair recruitment policies
- Having a culture of learning about different needs and support
- Giving people access to support i.e. workplace needs assessments and related support
- Access to Work
- Workplace needs assessment
- A large number of consultants and organisations offer information

### **10.2 Should Statutory Sick Pay be reformed to encourage a phased return to work? If so, how? -**

### **10.3 What role should the insurance sector play in supporting the recruitment and retention of disabled people and people with health conditions? -**

**10.4 What are the barriers and opportunities for employers of different sizes adopting insurance products for their staff? -**

**11. Improving discussions about fitness to work and sickness certification**

-

**11.1 How can we bring about better work-focussed conversations between an individual, healthcare professional, employer and Jobcentre Plus work coach, which focus on what work an individual can do, particularly during the early stages of an illness/developing condition?**

Assessment/identification of dyslexia, where someone does not have it, is crucial in enabling someone to understand their own strengths, difficulties and strategies that might help them. Although dyslexia is not an illness, until it is identified, many people with dyslexia may not fully understand what is preventing them from learning or functioning day to day. Early identification can help an individual and their employer to improve their work performance, contribution to the workplace and job satisfaction.

**11.2 How can we ensure that all healthcare professionals recognise the value of work and consider work during consultations with working-age patients? How can we encourage doctors in hospitals to consider fitness for work and, where appropriate, issue a fit note?**

-

**11.3 Are doctors best placed to provide work and health information, make a judgement on fitness for work and provide sickness certification?**

-

**11.4 Turning to the fit note certificate itself, what information should be captured to best help the individual, work coaches and employers better support a return to work or job retention?**

-

**11.5(a) Is the current fit note the right vehicle to capture this information, or should we consider other ways to capture fitness for work and health information? -**

**11.5(b) Does the fit note meet the needs of employers, patients and healthcare professionals?**

-

**Does the fit note meet the needs of employers, patients and healthcare professionals? -**

## **12. Mental health and musculoskeletal services**

**12.1 How should access to services, assessment, treatment and employment support change for people with mental health or musculoskeletal conditions so that their health and employment needs are met in the best possible way?**

-

**12.2 How can we help individuals to easily find information about the mental health and musculoskeletal services they can access?**

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## **13. Transforming the landscape of work and health support**

**13.1 How can occupational health and related provision be organised so that it is accessible and tailored for all?**

Participants said that Dyslexia Awareness and dyslexia training should be a mandatory aspect of all HR and Occupational Health training, qualifications and staff development. Whilst dyslexia is not a health issue, it often leads to stress when people are not supported appropriately. Very often these departments are the lynchpin for the dyslexic employee, particularly if their dyslexia is not yet identified. HR and Occupational Health need to be knowledgeable of dyslexia and confident in supporting it in the workplace. Where dyslexia is possibly the cause of an employee's difficulties and behaviours, this should be formally assessed at the earliest opportunity, to save time, money, stress and difficulty. Occupational health should be able to refer employees for full cognitive assessment for dyslexia. Communication between HR, Occupational health, Management and the Employee should be open, transparent and solution focussed from referral onwards.

We were provided the following quote for use in this consultation,

'One of the challenging areas in occupational health lies in dealing with those employees, usually over the age of 45, who have been missed by the educational system. This often reflects lack of awareness of dyslexia or a lack of educational psychology services in the past. Such individuals may present

to occupational health services owing to occupational stress or a work performance issue. Sometimes the trigger for referral to occupational health is the roll out of a new IT system. Subsequent discussions may raise the question of dyslexia but accessing a dyslexia assessment can be challenging and individual business units rarely have the resources to fund such assessments and although Job Centre Plus staff will undertake assessments the advice offered may not be tailored to the individual's needs. Accessing suitable assistive technology, although at times challenging, is usually less of an issue than the challenges posed by an organisation's own systems which may amplify a dyslexic person's difficulties. In particular the constant state of flux that most organisations impose on themselves aggravates matters.' (Occupational Physician)

### **13.2 What has been your experience of the Fit for Work service, and how should this inform integrated provision for the future?**

-

### **13.3 What kind of service design would deliver a position in which everyone who needs occupational health assessment and advice is referred as a matter of course?**

Self-referral options

Drop-in surgeries systems

Confidential advice systems

A culture that encourages diversity and disclosure.

## **14. Creating the right environment to join up work and health?**

### **14.1 How can we best encourage innovation through local networks, including promoting models of joint working such as co-location, to improve health and work outcomes?**

Networks should consider the jobs and industries in the area. The economic demographic, as poorer areas may have less access or access to knowledge of dyslexia. Geographic factors for supply of resources as well as population density. The uptake of support and accessibility to dyslexia identification.

### **14.2 How can we encourage the recording of occupational status in all clinical settings and make good use of these data? -**

### **14.3 What should we include in a basket of health and work indicators covering both labour market and health outcomes at local level?**

-

### **14.4 How can government and local partners best encourage improved sharing of health and employment data?**

Encourage openness and awareness-raising. Encourage diversity training as a key part of business development.

### **14.5 What is the best way to bring together and share existing evidence in one place for commissioners and delivery partners?**

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### **14.6 What is the best way to encourage clinicians, allied health professionals and commissioners of health and other services to promote work as a health outcome?**

-

## **15. Changing the culture around work and health**

### **15.1 How can we bring about a shift in society's wider attitudes to make progress and achieve long lasting change?**

Feedback from participants include the following recommendations:

- More dyslexia awareness to get past the enduring 'myths', stereotypes and assumptions is key, and this needs to reach all aspects of society. Participants feel that there is a lack of understanding about the fact that dyslexia is a learning difference not a lack of intelligence. We need to overcome the stereotype that dyslexic employees are always (or only) poor at reading and writing. Dyslexia affects each person differently.
- In every aspect of society, from early years through to employment, we need to cultivate a sense of interdependence and collaborative approaches, to influence a shift to value one another's strengths, to recognise the contribution people can make.
- We need to let employers know that dyslexia support in many situations does not have to cost the employer a penny, yet can reap tremendous reward for an organisation.
- We need to work from the basis of trust between employers and employees and in working towards solutions. We need to challenge some of the unhelpful myths about dyslexia. Providing dyslexia

awareness training will not result in non-dyslexic employees pretending they have dyslexia to obtain workplace course adjustments or demands for expensive support equipment.

- Organisations/Institutions AND individuals have to be flexible to respond to the strengths of individuals, to move away from silos and place people in the environment and role where they can thrive. This can mean tailoring job roles to individuals. Bureaucratic organisations can lose the talents of an employee because they're too constrained in their approach to recruitment and redeployment.
- Knowledge that providing a dyslexic employee with extra support, further learning or reasonable adjustments is not giving them an unfair advantage but just levelling the playing field
- Build on and extend the 'shift' in the education system with regards to better and earlier identification of dyslexia to employment settings
- Extend and raise more awareness of the role of Dyslexia Scotland.
- Ask people with dyslexia and the bodies that support and raise awareness about dyslexia.

## **15.2 What is the role of government in bringing about positive change to our attitudes to disabled people and people with health conditions?**

### **Other comments:**

- Job Centres need to develop a personalised approach in their services. There should be emphasis on tailored, personalised employment journeys. Job Centres should be reporting case studies of tailored journeys.
- Confidence is key. From early years throughout life people need to know themselves, be accepting of themselves and celebrate difference. Some work cultures and attitudes around dyslexia are a "hangover" from school systems, where those with dyslexia and other SpLDs were seen as different or less able, but it was just that the conditions weren't helping them to work to their strengths.
- Is there a register of Dyslexia-Friendly Workplaces? Can we look to these to learn better practice for all?
- What good practice can be learned from other countries in relation to dyslexia and employment?
- Are there positive case studies of employers who have invested in their dyslexic employees?
- Easy Read Question: The Government wants groups of people from businesses, councils and government to come up with new ideas to improve the chances of disabled people getting and keeping jobs. How can they get these groups to do this? Answer: These groups should be incentivised with funding, for the development of dyslexia-friendly

work places. These groups should all have representation of dyslexic people.

- Can Employers begin to sponsor the literacy tuition of prisoners then support their employment on release?

**Dyslexia Scotland**

**16 February 2017**