



# Towards a dyslexia-friendly Scotland?

Findings from a baseline survey of dyslexic adults in  
Scotland by Dyslexia Scotland and The University of  
Glasgow



University  
of Glasgow

Report sponsored by  
Morton Fraser MacRoberts



# Acknowledgements

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**About Dyslexia Scotland:** Dyslexia Scotland is a national charity that aims to ensure people with dyslexia have their rights met and are able to reach their full potential. Our vision is for a dyslexia-friendly Scotland where our community is fully accepted, included and valued.

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Our sincere gratitude goes to the many people involved in helping to achieve this report. First and foremost, to Dr Jeremy Law from the University of Glasgow for his thorough research and his generosity with his time and expertise.

We are extremely grateful to MFMac for their sponsorship of this report. Their backing ensures that this report can be placed in the hands of the stakeholders and decision makers who can act on its vital recommendations.

Particular thanks must go to LGBT Youth Scotland for sharing their learning from the Life in Scotland survey processes, which helped guide our research journey.

To the volunteers who supported this project: Alison Lochhead for her support with contact mapping, without which we would not have reached so many willing participants; and photographer Dave Ferguson, whose portraits show some of the real people behind the statistics. We are very grateful to those who agreed to be photographed for this report - their arresting images are a reminder to readers that these findings represent real-life experiences of people in Scotland.

Thank you to the many hundreds of Scottish organisations, from Aberdeen City Council to Scottish Men's Shed Association and Youth Scotland, who promoted this survey to people with dyslexia in their orbits. This enabled us to surpass our target number and reach over 1400 participants across the nation.

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# The research process

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## Research process and context

A number of international studies provide a picture of dyslexia, highlighting both its advantages and disadvantages. However, to better understand the specific needs of our community, we sought Scotland-specific data. Our aspiration is for a dyslexia-friendly Scotland, so it is essential to have a clear and accurate picture of the current situation. The survey aimed to capture a baseline snapshot of life in Scotland for adults with dyslexia.

## Demographics

When conducting a survey or study, it is essential to include enough participants to ensure the results are meaningful and reflect the broader population. In our survey, we included 1420 participants. To put this in perspective, for a population of 500,000 dyslexic individuals, a sample size of 384 people would generally be considered enough to give us a reliable picture, with a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error. This means we would be 95% sure that the results are accurate within 5 percentage points.

By including 1420 participants, our survey significantly exceeds this minimum requirement, making our findings even more reliable and accurate. This large sample size helps ensure that the experiences and views we captured truly represent the wider dyslexic adult population in Scotland.

Our survey included adults aged 16 to 95, providing insights across different life stages. Participants were from diverse geographic locations, including every local authority across Scotland, ensuring representation from urban, suburban and rural areas. The study also drew from a wide range of work and professional contexts, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of dyslexic individuals. However, it is important to note that we had more female respondents (66%) and more White ethnicity respondents (95%) than other groups. This overrepresentation is something we expected based on known trends in dyslexia identification. For example, research indicates that dyslexia is often more readily identified in certain demographic groups [1,2]. Furthermore, the higher representation of White participants does reflect Scotland's 2022 Census, where 87% of the population identified as White.

56% of participants were employed full-time, 17% were employed part-time and 4% were unemployed. Scottish Government figures on the general population showed that an estimated 74.4% of those in employment aged 16 and over in April 2023 to March 2024 worked full-time, while 25.6% of those in employment worked part-time. The unemployment rate recorded in May 2024 was 3.7%.

Our comprehensive approach and large sample size mean that our findings can be generalised to the broader population, offering valuable insights into the experiences of adults with dyslexia in Scotland.

Furthermore, we asked participants to disclose their sexual identity, employment, educational background and whether or not they had ever been care-experienced. Our rationale for this is to understand whether these factors, combined with being dyslexic, have an impact on educational attainment and life chances. Information such as this will help determine if any targeted support is required to improve outcomes for these groups in the future.

## **Ethics**

The survey was designed to be as dyslexia friendly as possible. To accommodate the diverse needs of our participants, we offered multiple ways to participate: online, through interviews, or by having a proxy input their responses. This ensured that everyone had an equal opportunity to contribute their experiences.

We adhered to the highest ethical standards throughout the research process. Prior to participation, all participants were provided with clear, accessible information about the purpose of the survey, what their participation would involve, and how their data would be used. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the survey at any time without any consequences. This was to ensure that their participation was entirely voluntary and free from any coercion. Consent was obtained before participation, ensuring that all participants were fully informed and agreed to take part voluntarily.

The privacy of our participants was paramount. All responses were anonymised to protect the identities of the individuals involved. Data was stored securely, and only the research team had access to it.

Recognising that discussing personal experiences with dyslexia might evoke emotional responses, we provided participants with information about support

services and resources available to them. This was to ensure they had access to help if needed after participating in the survey.

Our ethical commitment ensured that the survey was conducted with respect for all participants, maintaining the integrity of the research and the dignity of those who contributed their experiences.

## **Methodology**

We conducted a survey to gather data on the lived experiences of adults with dyslexia in Scotland. The survey was hosted on the Qualtrics online survey platform and was open from 1 November 2023 to 12 May 2024.

To ensure the survey was as accessible as possible for individuals with dyslexia, we implemented several key features, such as dyslexia-friendly design for questions and answer methods. For example, we used interactive sliding scales instead of word-based answers wherever feasible. This helped reduce the cognitive load on respondents and made it easier for them to participate. The survey included clear and concise instructions, and assistance was available to participants throughout the process to help with any difficulties they might encounter.

The survey was promoted widely to ensure a representative sample of adults with dyslexia in Scotland. The survey was promoted through Dyslexia Scotland's social media and magazine, national and local press, radio advertising, and through a network of stakeholders ranging from local authorities, third sector organisations, further and higher education establishments, and private sector businesses.

Overall, the survey design and methodology aimed to create an inclusive and supportive environment for all participants, ensuring the collection of accurate and meaningful data.

## **Analysis**

Before analysing the survey data, we undertook a thorough data cleaning process to ensure the accuracy and reliability of our findings. Any duplicate responses were identified and removed to ensure each participant was only represented once in the dataset. Responses were checked for consistency and validity. For example, we verified that demographic details such as age and employment status were within reasonable ranges, and corrected any obvious errors. Responses were carefully reviewed to ensure that all participants met the survey criteria. Specifically, participants were removed if they were found to not be from Scotland, did not identify

as being dyslexic, or were not completing the survey on behalf of someone with dyslexia.

Responses to open-ended questions were reviewed and codes were assigned based on common themes and emerging topics. The coded data was then grouped into broader categories to identify overarching patterns and insights. A selection of these have been published where they illustrate the quantitative data. Some quotes have been edited with changes to spelling and grammar to ensure legibility.

Various statistical analyses were used to interpret the survey results. We calculated frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations for key demographic variables and survey responses, which provided a basic overview of the participants' characteristics and experiences. Comparative analysis was conducted across different demographic groups (for example, age, gender, geographic location) to identify any significant differences in experiences and outcomes. Correlation analysis examined the relationships between different variables to understand how factors such as employment status, education level and demographic characteristics influenced the experiences of adults with dyslexia.

## **Limitations**

While the survey provides valuable insights into the experiences of adults with dyslexia in Scotland, there are several limitations to consider when interpreting the findings.

### **Methodological Differences in Comparative Studies**

Our study aimed to capture a snapshot of life for adults with dyslexia in Scotland, providing unique and specific insights into this population. However, when comparing our findings to broader studies, such as the Scottish Health Survey 2022 by the Scottish Government, differences in methodology, sampling and recruitment methods must be acknowledged. For example, our reported rates of depression and anxiety being 3 to 4 times higher than the general population were derived using different survey instruments and participant recruitment strategies compared to those used in the Scottish Health Survey. While our large sample size and targeted demographic focus enhance the reliability of our findings, these methodological discrepancies mean that caution should be exercised when making direct comparisons between our results and those of studies with differing contexts and approaches.

## Demographic Representation

Our survey included a diverse range of participants from various geographic locations across Scotland and spanned different life stages. However, there were some notable demographic imbalances. The sample had a higher representation of female participants (66%) and White ethnicity respondents (95%), reflecting the general demographics of Scotland, where 87% of the population identified as White according to the 2022 Census. While this overrepresentation aligns with Scottish demographics, it may limit the generalisability of the findings to underrepresented groups, particularly ethnic minorities and male participants. This demographic skew suggests that further research may be needed to explore the experiences of dyslexic adults from more diverse backgrounds.

## Self-report bias and participant recruitment

As a self-report survey, our study relies on participants' personal accounts, which may be influenced by their current understanding and perception of dyslexia. The voluntary nature of survey participation and our recruitment methods, which included social media, press and stakeholder networks, may have also contributed to a self-selection bias. Participants who are more engaged with dyslexia communities or who have strong views about their experiences may have been more likely to participate, potentially skewing the results.

## Conclusions

While our survey provides a robust foundation for understanding the lived experiences of dyslexic adults in Scotland, these limitations highlight the need for cautious interpretation of the findings. Future research should aim to address these limitations by incorporating more diverse sampling methods and refining comparative analyses with other studies to ensure more comprehensive insights. Despite these constraints, our study offers critical data that can inform efforts towards a more dyslexia-friendly Scotland.

## Statistical Significance

In our analysis, we used a p-value threshold of  $< .05$  to determine statistical significance. This means that there is less than a 5% probability that the observed differences or relationships occurred by chance. While this standard is widely accepted in social sciences, it is important to note that statistical significance does not always equate to practical or clinical significance. Some findings, although

statistically significant, may have small effect sizes that limit their impact in real-world applications.

## Terminology

Throughout the report we refer to both people with dyslexia and dyslexic people. This variation in how we describe individuals is reflective of our community's varying preferences between the two terms.

## Presentation of data

Each finding from the research is presented alongside the number of participants who responded to the question. This is denoted by the term  $n=$ .

For accessibility purposes, we have rounded percentages to the nearest whole number, so in some cases, the data total can be 99% or 101%.

## Glossary of terms

**Dyslexia:** a difference in learning to read, write and/or spell that can also cause difficulties with memory, processing, directionality and sequencing that is estimated to affect one in ten people in Scotland.

**ADHD:** Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

**Assessment:** Testing for dyslexia by a trained professional

**Autism/ASD:** Autism Spectrum Disorder is a lifelong neuro-developmental difference that affects the way a person communicates and interacts with others, how information is processed and how the person makes sense of the world

**Co-occurring:** Neurodivergences that occur alongside one another

**Dyscalculia:** a specific difficulty in understanding number and number processes

**Dysgraphia:** a difficulty with forming letters and writing

**Dyspraxia:** a difficulty with physical movement and co-ordination

**Identification:** a confirmation of being dyslexic

**Independent assessment:** a paid-for dyslexia assessment service provided by Psychologists or Dyslexia Specialist Assessors

**Screener/Screening test:** self-report questionnaire on indicators of dyslexia, usually computer-based

**Neurodivergent:** a non-medical term that describes peoples whose brains develop differently from most people

# Foreword

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**Sir Jackie Stewart OBE**  
**President of Dyslexia Scotland**

We cannot underestimate the importance of this report, which captures a snapshot of the experiences of people with dyslexia in Scotland. The findings tell a story of both the stark difficulties our community face, and the opportunities we must seize if we are to improve outcomes for future generations.

My own school days were the worst days of my life. By the time I was 8 or 9 years old, I was embarrassed and ashamed that I could not do the things that came so easily to the others. I was much torn apart by various teachers, I could not read or write with any decent results, and further abused by being told that I was “stupid, dumb and thick” by the grown-ups who were supposed to help me.

My frustrations were so deep that I avoided anything academic for fear of humiliation. It was my aptitude for clay pigeon shooting that, in a way, saved my life. As a young man, I had turned out to be able to do it well and progressed to compete at Olympian level.

Irrespective of the above, I still couldn't read, write and I certainly couldn't spell, but luckily I found my voice in the sporting world, eventually moving to Formula One.

After discovering in my 40s that these challenges and abilities were because I am dyslexic, I became an advocate for people with dyslexia. For many years, I have pushed hard to get people to realise that if they have dyslexia, they shouldn't be embarrassed or troubled by its presence. I know that I have been successful despite the lack of belief that my teachers had in me, and I recognise how this can set some people on difficult paths in life.

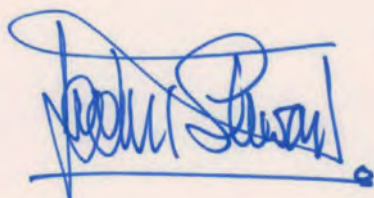
I once visited several prisons in Scotland where I spoke with the inmates. I started by asking them to raise their hand if they had dyslexia. Nobody did. I then went on to explain that I was dyslexic myself. At the end of the session, I asked again if anyone present believed they might have dyslexia – about 90% of those present raised their hands. A lot of the people there were simply there because they couldn't read or write correctly, and the educational system had let them down. Crime can pay better than unemployment benefit and some of those people had taken that road.

Einstein is thought to have been dyslexic, as was Winston Churchill. Steven Spielberg is dyslexic. Richard Branson is dyslexic. These are all enormously successful people.

How can you criticise someone like Einstein just because he possessed skills that were different to others? So many people with dyslexia have turned out to be geniuses in their chosen field when they are given the right conditions to thrive. So if there's some young Jackie Stewart out there who is marginalised and not supported to reach their potential, I hope they find their voice and realise, just as I did, that sometimes dyslexia is what helps us to succeed in ways we couldn't have ever imagined.

Thank goodness for Dyslexia Scotland. I am proud of how our small organisation punches above its weight. In my time as President, we have:

- challenged society's perceptions of dyslexia through influential campaigns led by our high-profile Ambassadors
- created the ground-breaking Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit for all teachers in Scotland alongside dyslexia and inclusive practice training
- supported hundreds of thousands of dyslexic people of all ages through our Helpline, national and local services and dedicated support networks.



# Introduction

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**Cathy Magee OBE**

**Chief Executive of Dyslexia Scotland**

At the time of writing, the outcomes as set out in the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework speak of our country's aspiration for inclusive communities, fair work and a population of well-educated people who live free from discrimination. In order for these admirable goals to be successfully achieved, we need to address the inequalities that dyslexic adults highlight in this report.

## **Top areas of concern:**

- Cost of dyslexia assessment is a significant barrier.
- Participants highlighted a range of emotional and psychological challenges related to unidentified dyslexia.
- Training programmes for teachers, employers and service providers to better understand and support dyslexia were seen as crucial.
- Dyslexia is still misunderstood by society.

## **What can we be optimistic about?**

- The age of identification is lowering across the generations.
- Early identification has positive consequences.
- We can learn from encouraging practice about the impact of supportive policies and resources in some educational institutions and workplaces.

This extensive report captures a flavour of the detailed data that was gathered from our survey. That data will continue to be analysed, and we plan to publish further thematic reports and briefings to build on the learning and recommendations set out in this report.

Our report paints a vivid picture of the challenges that exist for our community. I strongly urge all readers to be dyslexia changemakers for your community, sector or country. We call on you to use the findings from this research to effect positive changes for our nation's dyslexic community.



**Martin Glover**

**Chief People Officer**

**Morton Fraser MacRoberts LLP**

As Chief People Officer at MFMac, I can say it is with great pride and commitment that we sponsor this important report on dyslexia in Scotland. Dyslexia, affecting 10% of the population, presents unique challenges in both education and the workplace.

This report not only highlights these challenges but also sheds light on the remarkable strengths and potential of individuals with dyslexia. We know from experience that with the right encouragement and support, people with dyslexia, as with other neurodiverse conditions, go on to have amazing careers.

At MFMac, we recognise the vital importance of fostering an inclusive environment where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and be at their best. Supporting this report aligns with our core values of diversity, inclusion and belonging. We believe that understanding dyslexia better will enable us to provide more tailored support to our people and contribute positively to society at large.

The insights and recommendations presented in this report are essential for shaping policies and practices that empower individuals with dyslexia. We hope this report will inspire employers, the education system and policymakers across Scotland to take meaningful action towards a more inclusive future.

Together, we can create a world where everyone, regardless of their differences, can reach their full potential.

# Executive summary

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In Scotland, the landscape of dyslexia is one of contrast - stories of resilience, advocacy and success alongside accounts of struggle, misunderstanding and systemic barriers. Over the years, awareness and identification of dyslexia have improved, yet many adults and young people continue to face significant challenges in their daily lives, education and workplaces.

This report draws on the voices of over 1400 dyslexic individuals across Scotland who participated in a survey. Their stories reveal a broad spectrum of experiences - from those who have found empowerment through early identification and appropriate support, to those who continue to struggle with stigma, inadequate accommodations, and the emotional toll of navigating a world that often does not understand or accommodate their needs.

These are not stories of individuals failing to manage their dyslexia; they are narratives of a society that is still learning how to support neurodiversity effectively. Dyslexia is often misunderstood, and the lack of tailored support can lead to long-term negative outcomes, including higher rates of mental health issues, economic disadvantage and social exclusion.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of life with dyslexia in Scotland, highlighting the progress made, the gaps that remain, and the urgent need for action. The findings emphasise the critical importance of early identification and support; the links between mental health struggles and dyslexia; the integration of assistive technologies; and the need for workplaces and educational institutions to adopt more inclusive practices.

The potential benefits of addressing these challenges are immense. Improving support for dyslexic individuals can lead to better educational outcomes, higher employment rates and a more inclusive society that values the unique strengths of every individual. This report calls on policymakers, educators, employers and communities to commit to creating a dyslexia-friendly Scotland - a Scotland where every individual can thrive, regardless of their neurodivergence.

## **The current landscape of dyslexia in Scotland**

Despite increased awareness, 76% of dyslexic individuals report that their dyslexia negatively affects their job performance, and 69% say it has impacted their educational opportunities. This report details the barriers that still exist - from the high cost of independent assessments to the inconsistent support in workplaces and educational settings.

Identification remains a key issue, with 80% of respondents citing the cost of independent assessments as a significant barrier. For many, the journey to identification and support begins late, with 36% not assessed until tertiary education. The impact of this delay is profound, often leading to years of unmet needs and lost opportunities. Women and girls are being identified on average at least 2 years later than men and boys.

Furthermore, the mental health implications are stark, with dyslexic individuals reporting experiencing anxiety and depression at rates three to four times higher than the general population. The report underscores the need for integrated mental health support, alongside educational and workplace accommodations, to help alleviate these pressures.

By implementing the recommendations in this report, Scotland can make significant strides towards becoming a truly dyslexia-friendly nation - one where every individual has the opportunity to reach their full potential, supported by a society that understands and values neurodiversity.

# Executive summary | key findings

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Our key findings highlight particular areas of need to be addressed, but also many reasons to be optimistic that a dyslexia-friendly Scotland is within our reach.

## Identification

Many participants did not discover they were dyslexic until adulthood. However, they reported that knowing about their dyslexia earlier in life can be incredibly valuable, often leading to significant personal and professional benefits. It is encouraging to note that the average age of identification appears to be lowering through the generations, although women and girls are being identified on average at least two years later than men and boys. The cost of independent assessment emerged as a particular barrier for those who have left education settings.

## Work and education

A majority of participants felt that dyslexia negatively impacts how well they do their job and that their dyslexia has negatively impacted their education or career. However, some sectors stood out as being particularly supportive. There were mixed experiences of reasonable adjustments and the level of their effectiveness, although most found them helpful to some extent.

Several respondents highlighted the positive impact of supportive policies and resources in education and work.

## Perceptions

Our survey highlights the importance of acknowledging the struggles faced by people with dyslexia and the need to create supportive environments for them. Dyslexia involves significant difficulties with reading, spelling and memory, leading to challenges in school and at work. These struggles are a daily reality for many who took part, affecting their self-esteem and mental health.

Although efforts have been made over the past decade to reframe dyslexia as an advantage or 'gift', our survey shows a range of opinions about dyslexia and how individuals feel about it.

## **Inclusion**

Participants indicated that the emotional toll of dyslexia-related discrimination is significant, leading to feelings of frustration, inadequacy and sometimes severe mental health issues. This impact often starts early in life and continues into adulthood.

There were mixed levels of comfort in disclosing dyslexia in different settings. However, a majority reported feeling comfortable enough to tell friends, employers and service providers.

A majority felt that the media does not portray people with dyslexia accurately.

## **Barriers to reaching potential**

Our survey revealed some day-to-day disadvantages of having dyslexia, including a need for more support in using digital technology and some negative impact in managing finances and taking part in electoral processes. Mental health issues emerged as a particular concern for respondents, with high rates of anxiety and depression.

Positively, those identified as dyslexic as young people while still at school were less likely to experience anxiety and mental health difficulties. A majority said they feel able to advocate for themselves. However, there is scope to enhance self-advocacy skills so that more individuals are able to request necessary support.

# Executive summary | key recommendations

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## 1. Enhance teacher training and Professional Development

Effective identification and support of dyslexic learners rely heavily on the knowledge and skills of educators. Current practices, such as the use of the Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit and the Dyslexia Identification Pathway, provide valuable resources and guidelines for teachers to support learners with dyslexia. The Toolkit is designed to help educators identify dyslexia and implement appropriate strategies to meet the needs of students. However, despite the availability of such resources, recent research indicates a need for more consistent and informed application of assessment criteria and intervention strategies. Variability in teacher expertise and understanding of dyslexia can lead to inconsistencies in identifying and supporting dyslexic students, which may result in some learners not receiving the appropriate interventions they need [3-7].

**Action: We recommend that all teachers engage in a mandatory dyslexia-specific learning programme as part of their career-long professional development and that initial teacher education programmes include learning about the Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit and related resources such as the online Dyslexia and Inclusive Practice modules. This will enable earlier identification and support of dyslexia.**

## 2. Expand access to free dyslexia assessments for adults and young people not in education

The report highlights that 80% of respondents view the cost of independent assessments as a significant barrier to being identified with dyslexia. For adults and young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in education, there are no free assessment services available in Scotland. Such assessments are vital for identifying an individual's strengths and weaknesses, enabling access to necessary support in the workplace, enhancing personal and professional development, and promoting equity

by removing financial barriers to identification.

**Action: The Scottish Government should urgently provide free or subsidised dyslexia assessments for those described above. This would ensure that all individuals, regardless of financial means, have access to the identification and subsequent support necessary for their personal and professional development. This initiative would also contribute to better educational outcomes, improved employment prospects, and greater social inclusion.**

### **3. Implement targeted dyslexia awareness and support in the workplace**

The report reveals that 76% of respondents feel dyslexia negatively affects their job performance, and less than half (41%) have received workplace support or adjustments. The inconsistency in support provided by employers contributes to the challenges dyslexic individuals face in the workplace.

#### **Actions**

- **We urge all employers in Scotland to put in place awareness and training for all employees and managers about dyslexia to foster more inclusive and productive conditions. This includes developing and implementing policies to ensure fair recruitment and creating the environments and culture that help people to disclose their dyslexia and identify effective reasonable adjustments for their individual needs. There is a particular need for targeted dyslexia awareness and support in the healthcare sector. Much could be learned from analysis and sharing of the positive practices in the arts and charity sectors.**
- **We recommend employers participate in a national dyslexia-friendly workplace certification programme under development by Dyslexia Scotland. This will require training for managers to better understand and accommodate the needs of dyslexic staff, fostering more inclusive and productive work environments. This certification will incentivise businesses to adopt best practices for supporting employees with dyslexia, ensuring an inclusive work environment that recognises and addresses the unique challenges faced by these individuals. Achieving this certification can also serve as a point of pride for employers, signalling their commitment**

**to diversity and inclusion, and attract those who prioritise inclusive workplaces. By implementing this certification, businesses would not only enhance their reputation but also contribute to the broader societal goal of reducing barriers for individuals with dyslexia, thereby fostering a more equitable and productive workforce.**

#### **4. Enhance mental health and wellbeing support for individuals with dyslexia**

Survey respondents reported that rates of depression and anxiety among dyslexic individuals are three to four times higher than in the general population. These findings support similar concerns raised in previous research in this area. Early identification during educational years is linked to better mental health outcomes in adulthood. Early identification allows for timely interventions, which can help in developing coping strategies, improving self-esteem, and reducing the academic struggles that often contribute to negative mental health outcomes. Educational systems that prioritise early identification and support for dyslexia can play a significant role in lessening the emotional and psychological burdens on these individuals as they progress into adulthood [8-11].

**Action: The Scottish Government should provide targeted mental health support that is knowledgeable about, and takes account of, the unique challenges faced by individuals with dyslexia. This should be in addition to promoting early identification, intervention and self-advocacy support to mitigate long-term mental health impacts.**

#### **5. Improve digital literacy and access to assistive technologies**

The report indicates that 55% of respondents feel they lack sufficient information or training on digital technologies to support their dyslexia, and 32% encounter digital barriers in accessing day-to-day services.

**Action: The Scottish Government should encourage the implementation of educational programmes focused on improving digital literacy for dyslexic individuals. Widespread access to assistive technologies would help those**

**with dyslexia navigate digital platforms more effectively, thereby reducing the digital divide and promoting equal participation in an increasingly digital world. The Scottish Government must strive to maximise the benefits of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for dyslexic learners and adults in education, the workplace and day-to-day life.**

## **6. Address dyslexia-related discrimination and stigma**

The report shows that 36% of respondents believe dyslexia discrimination is a problem in Scotland, and 28% have experienced bullying at work due to their dyslexia. This discrimination significantly impacts their self-esteem and mental health.

**Action: The Scottish Government should launch a national campaign aimed at reducing dyslexia-related stigma and discrimination. This should include education for the public, employers and service providers about the challenges and strengths associated with dyslexia, as well as promoting the importance of inclusive practices in all areas of life.**

# Demographics

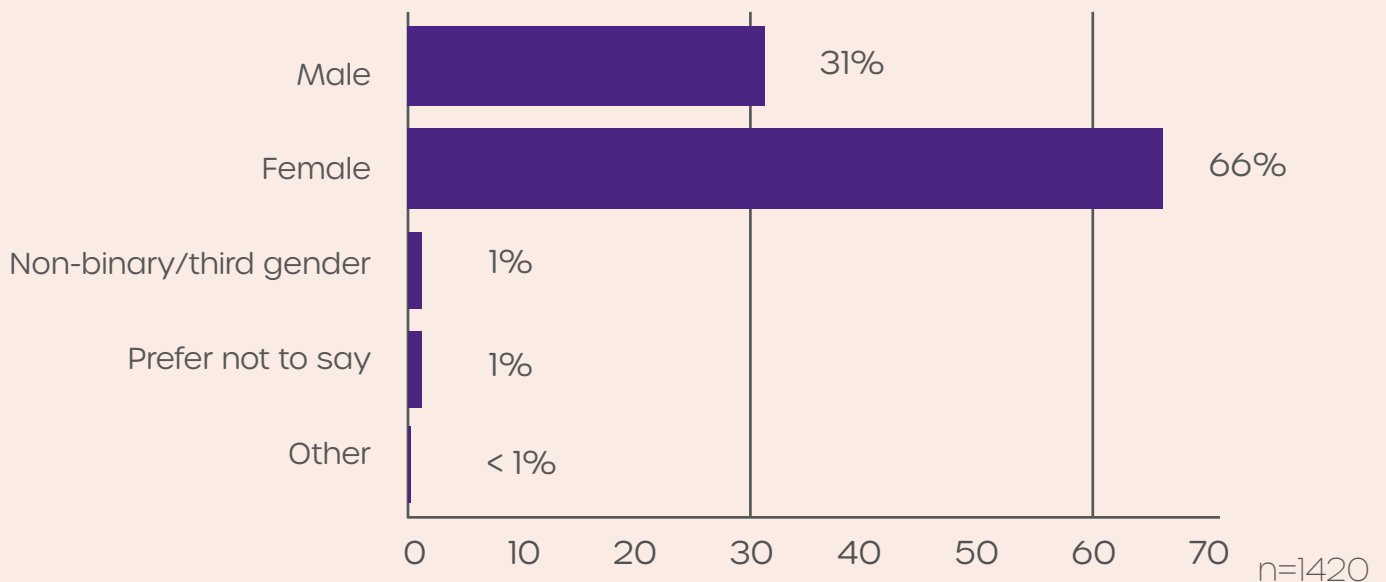
## 1. Age

The average age of participants was 41, with the youngest being 16 and oldest being 95.

Grouping	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	65+
Number of participants	254	245	388	310	173	49

n=1419

## 2. Gender



## 3. Sexual orientation

Orientation	Percentage
Heterosexual	85
Homosexual	3
Bisexual	6
Other	2
Prefer not to say	4

n=1418

## 4. Ethnicity

- **95%** described themselves as White
- **< 1%** as Black/African/Caribbean
- **1%** as Asian
- **1%** as Mixed (two or more ethnic groups)
- **1%** as Other
- **1%** preferred not to say

n=1416

## 5. Language

**97%** stated that English is their first language and **3%** stated that English is an additional language.

n=1398

## 6. Education level

Highest level of education attained	Percentage
Prefer not to say	1
Primary school	2
Standard Grade/GCSE or equivalent	13
Higher/A Level or equivalent	8
Advanced Higher or equivalent	3
HNC or equivalent	12
HND or equivalent	8
University undergraduate (Bachelors) Degree	30
Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS)	19
Other	5

n=1420

## 7. Current learning

**73%** of participants stated that they were not enrolled in any form of education currently, **11%** were in university, **6%** were in college, **3%** were in high school, **2%** were attending Adult Learning services, **2%** were in training or an apprenticeship and **4%** in other kinds of learning.

n=1420

## 8. Care experience

**5%** of participants were care experienced.

n=1401

## Demographics

### 9. Local Authority area

Participants represented all of Scotland's Local Authority areas.

Local Authority	Percentage
Aberdeen City	4
Aberdeenshire	4
Angus	2
Argyll and Bute	1
Clackmannanshire	2
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	<1
Dumfries and Galloway	3
Dundee City	2
East Ayrshire	5
East Dunbartonshire	2
East Lothian	4
East Renfrewshire	2
Edinburgh City	9
Falkirk	2
Fife	5
Glasgow City	8
Highland	5
Inverclyde	2
Midlothian	2
Moray	4
North Ayrshire	1
North Lanarkshire	4
Orkney Islands	<1
Perth and Kinross	7
Renfrewshire	3
Scottish Borders	2
Shetland Islands	<1
South Ayrshire	1
South Lanarkshire	5
Stirling	3
West Dunbartonshire	<1
West Lothian	5
Not sure	<1
Prefer not to say	<1

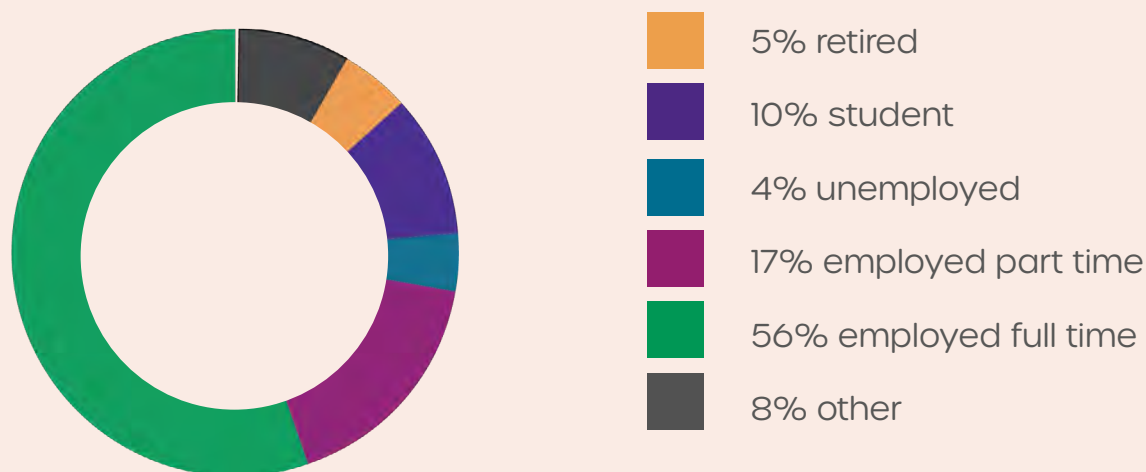
n=1420

Participants described the area they live in as rural (**28%**), urban (**26%**), or suburban (**45%**). **1%** preferred not to say.

n=1408

## 10. Employment status

**56%** of participants were employed full time, **17%** were employed part time, **10%** were students, **4%** were unemployed and **8%** indicated another type of employment status.



n=1373

## 11. Sector of employment

Sector	Percentage	Sector	Percentage
Agriculture	3	Real estate	<1
Mining and quarrying	<1	Professional and technical	4
Manufacturing	1	Administration and support	5
Utilities	<1	Public sector	10
Construction	4	Education	21
Retail and wholesale	3	Health and social care	19
Transportation and storage	3	Arts, entertainment and recreation	3
Accommodation and food	3	Other services	8
Information and communication	3	Charity/Third Sector	6
Finance and insurance	3		

n=1224

# Identification

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For adults, or young people aged 16 to 18 years not in education, there are no free dyslexia assessment services available in Scotland. Currently, their only available option is to pay for an independent assessment. An assessment of dyslexia by a trained professional can cost anywhere from £300.

Those identified in school do not necessarily have the required evidence that they are dyslexic when they leave, which presents barriers when they need 'proof' for support in Further Education, Higher Education, driving tests or work.

We wanted to find out when and how adults in Scotland were being identified as dyslexic and what wider impact this has had on them.

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# 80%

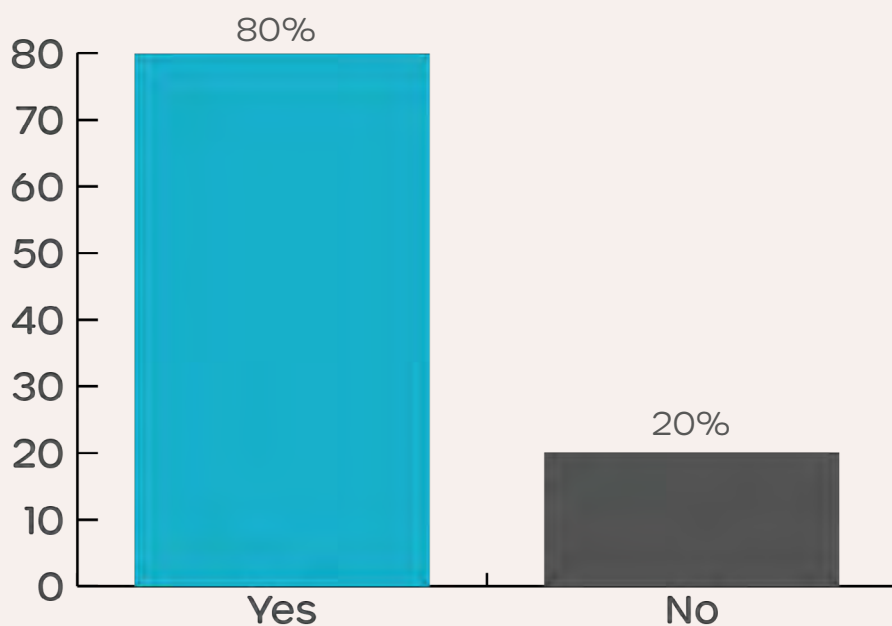
## state that the cost of assessment is a barrier to identification

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### 12. Affordability

**An independent dyslexia assessment costs between £300 and £600. Would this cost prevent you from seeking an assessment?**

80% said that the cost is a barrier.



n=1419



## Summary of key findings

- The average age of identification is lowering through the generations - but there is still a way to go
- 80% say the cost of independent assessment is a barrier
- 49% have at least one co-occurring neurodivergence
- 49% reported a negative impact on self-esteem
- 47% feel validated by an identification
- 57% experienced positive life changes as a result of being identified as dyslexic
- 27% reported being first identified by a teacher
- Women and girls are being identified on average at least 2 years later than men and boys
- Those identified by a teacher, psychologist or dyslexia specialist report a more positive impact on education/career opportunities

**“I was above average intelligence but kept failing written assignments at university. I think education and society always puts us down into boxes that if you don’t learn this way, or don’t do things a certain way, that you’re stupid.”**

Fran, Trainer, Facilitator and Qualified Nurse, 49

# Identification

## 13. Age of identification

### At what age did you find out you were dyslexic?

Initial age of identification ranged from 4 to 64, with the average age being 21.

Scottish advice suggests early identification from approximately the end of Primary 2 (roughly 6 to 6.5 years) onwards [10].

4 21 64

n=1072

The following table shows the breakdown of average age of identification by generation.

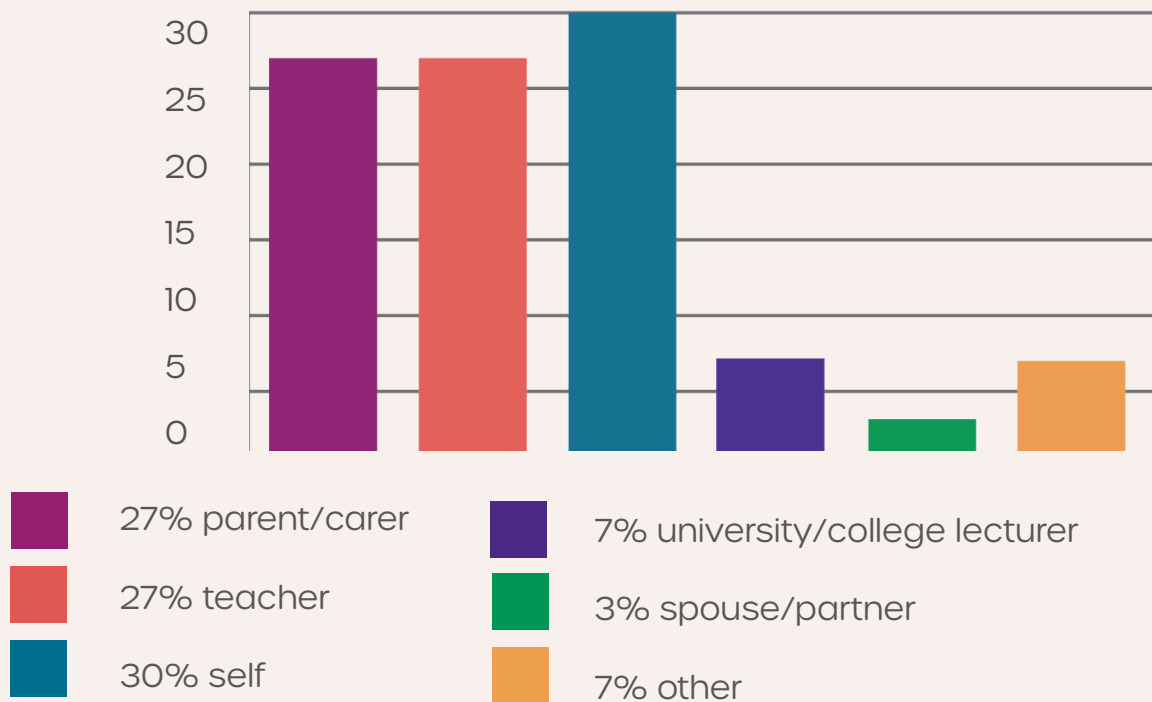
Age grouping	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	65+
Average age identified	13	16	19	30	34	40

The average age of those being identified by an educator has also lowered through the generations, from age 20 in the 65+ generation to age 12 among the 16 to 25 generation. This trend could be attributed to a wide range of factors, including legislation such as the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004; a Scottish working definition of dyslexia agreed in 2009; the Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit for all teachers; and increasing awareness of dyslexia as a result of campaigns by organisations such as Dyslexia Scotland. Furthermore, the Making Sense: Education for children and young people with dyslexia in Scotland report made a number of recommendations that have led to positive change such as increased career-long professional learning opportunities for teachers and an increased awareness and use of the Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit [12].

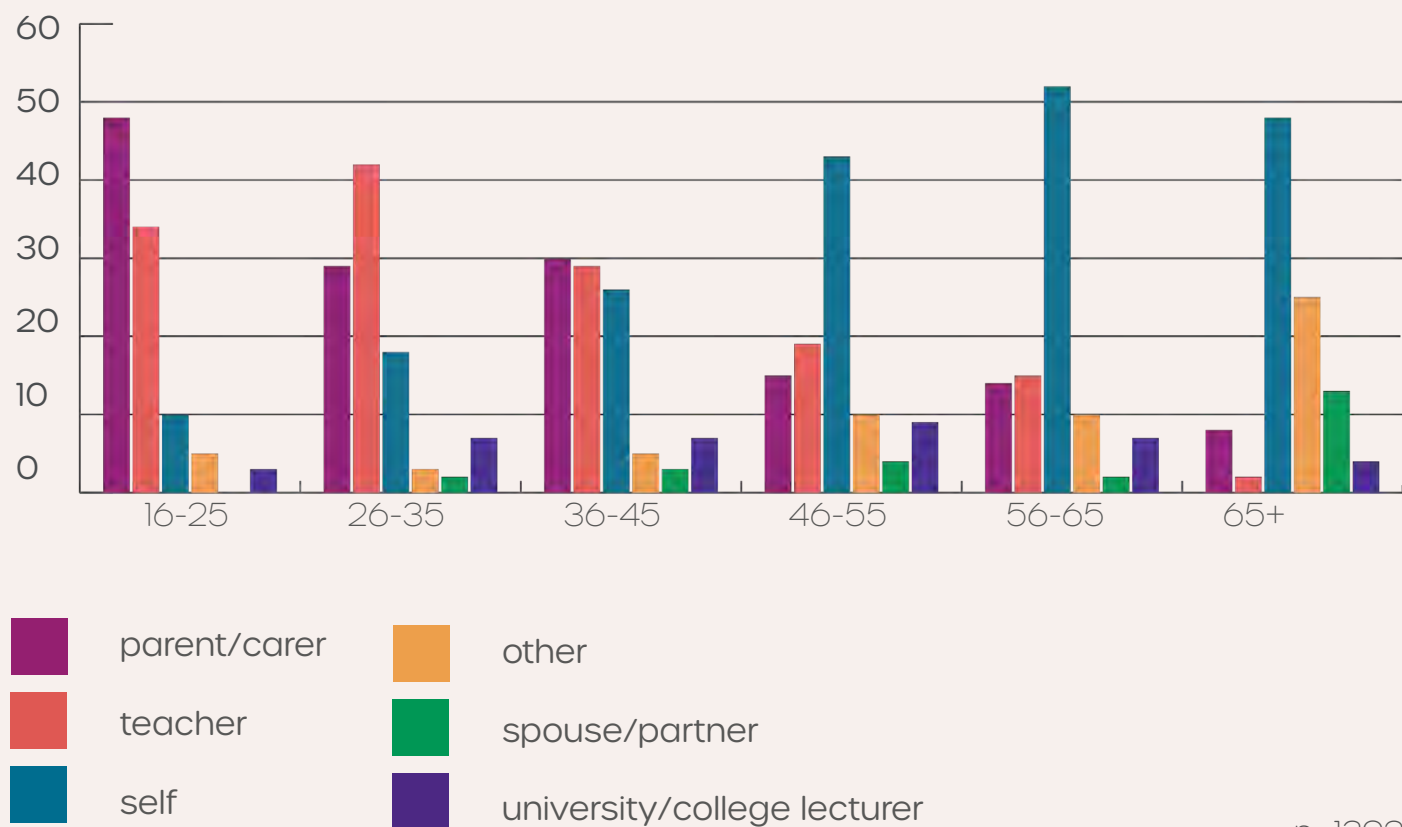
Further analysis highlighted a significant difference in age of identification by gender. Girls are identified on average 2 years later than boys. In the 16 to 25 grouping, boys were identified aged 12 on average, while girls were 14. The 26 to 35-year-old group also had a gender split where women/girls were identified on average 2.6 years later than men/boys. In the 36 to 45 group, women/girls were identified on average 2.7 years later.

# 14. Who initially recognised dyslexia?

Who was the first person to recognise that you might be dyslexic?



The first person in individuals' lives to recognise their dyslexia has changed generationally, with a trend towards more parents and teachers identifying it first, as illustrated by the following graph.



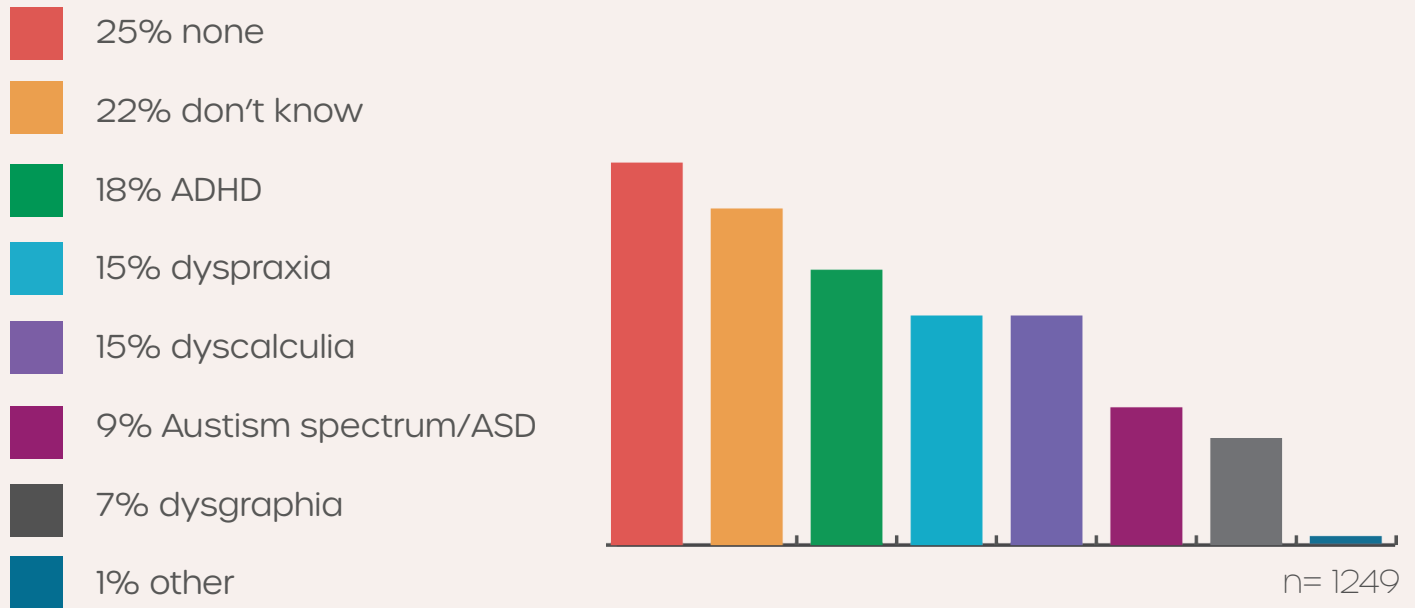
n=1392

# Identification

## 15. Co-occurring neurodivergence

### What other neurodivergences do you have?

**49%** of participants recorded having at least one additional neurodivergence to dyslexia. **32%** had one additional type, **11%** had two types, **6%** had three or more.



## 16. Method of identification

Some participants were professionally identified while some self-identified, in some cases through use of a screening test.

**55%** were assessed by a dyslexia specialist, such as a psychologist, **16%** had completed a screening test that indicated dyslexia, **13%** self-identified, **10%** were identified by a teacher, and **5%** by other means.

n=1219

## 17. Difficulty in accessing assessment

Of those identified by a dyslexia specialist or psychologist, **40%** found it difficult to access professional assessment. **36%** were not assessed until they were in tertiary education, and **22%** were assessed independently.

n=497

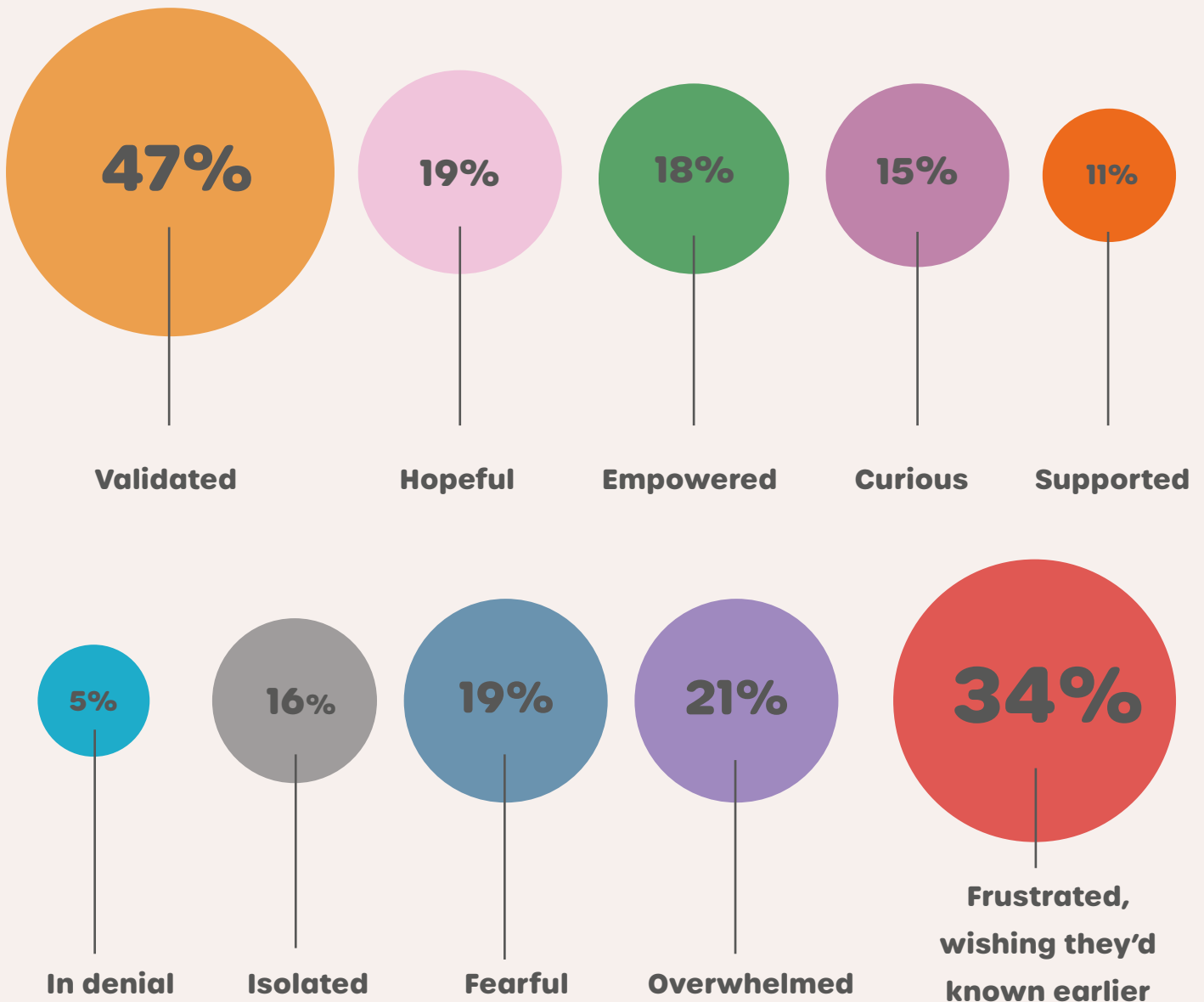
## 18. Use of screeners to identify

Of participants who used a screener to identify dyslexia, **26%** accessed it online, **13%** with a teacher at primary school, **16%** with a teacher at high school, **23%** with an Adult Learning tutor, and **23%** through other means.

n=196

## 19. Emotional impact

How did you feel when you first received your identification of dyslexia?



Participants were asked to select all of the emotions that applied from the 10 above. **67%** responded to this question with at least one positive emotional response. **47%** felt validated, finally having an explanation for their challenges and indications of their strengths. **34%** felt frustrated that the identification had not come earlier in life.

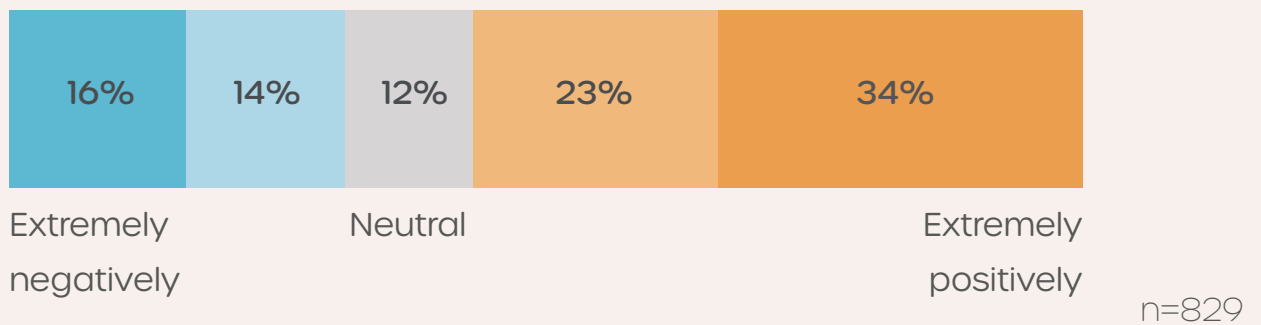
n=1221

# Identification

## 20. The impact of the label on work and education

The label of dyslexia has led to changes in my life (for example, receiving support, work adjustments, exam arrangements or others).

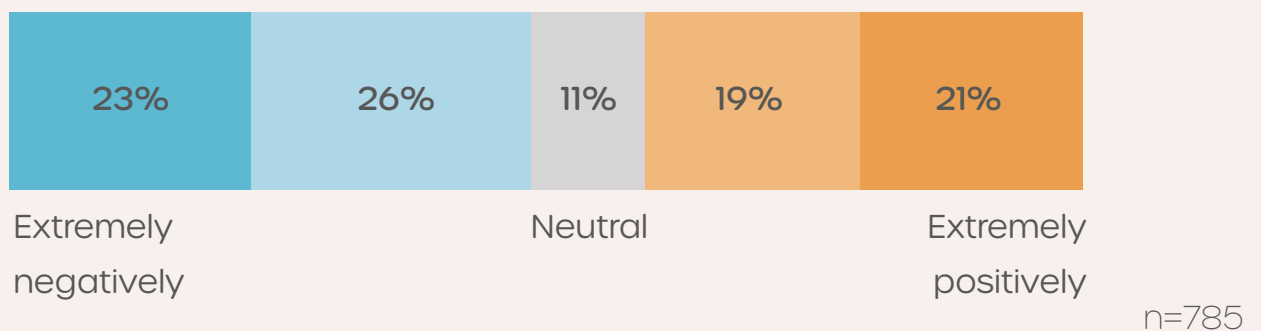
**57%** experienced a positive change. Those identified by a profesional, such as a teacher, psychologist or dyslexia specialist were more likely to report a positive effect.



## 21. Impact on self-esteem

How did finding out you are dyslexic impact you and your self-esteem?

**49%** experienced a negative effect on self-esteem.



## Key learning and recommendations

A formal identification of dyslexia by a trained professional is essential for individuals to access support in the workplace and education. However, for adults and young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in education, there are no free dyslexia assessment services available in Scotland. We call on the Scottish Government to address this inequity as a matter of urgency. Independent assessment costs from £300 upwards. Other disabled young people and adults do not have to pay to be assessed. The Scottish Government should make provision for free or subsidised dyslexia assessment for adults who need to know they are dyslexic in order to access appropriate support.

An identification of dyslexia can help someone understand themselves better. Dyslexia can make learning difficult, which can damage a person's confidence and affect their life choices. Being assessed for dyslexia can explain why someone has faced challenges and it can also identify both their weaknesses and their strengths. This can boost their confidence and provide a sense of relief. It helps someone move past any academic struggles and see new possibilities with the right support. Scotland needs to identify dyslexia in children and young people earlier in life to help them understand themselves better from a young age.

Clear recommendations from a dyslexia assessment report can also help adults to request tailored reasonable adjustments in their work environment to perform their jobs more effectively. This creates opportunities for employers and employees to benefit from the valuable skills and unique problem-solving abilities that individuals with dyslexia often bring to the workplace [13-15].

As dyslexia frequently runs in families, having an identification can help parents relate to and support their children better. It fosters a supportive environment where both parent and child can share their experiences and strategies, improving confidence and outcomes.

Overall, a dyslexia assessment can provide crucial insights and open doors to support and opportunities, enhancing personal development and career prospects.

# Support in education and work

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We wanted to find out from participants what impact they believe being dyslexic has had on their education and careers. We also wanted to know about about their experiences of accessing and using support in education and work.

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69%

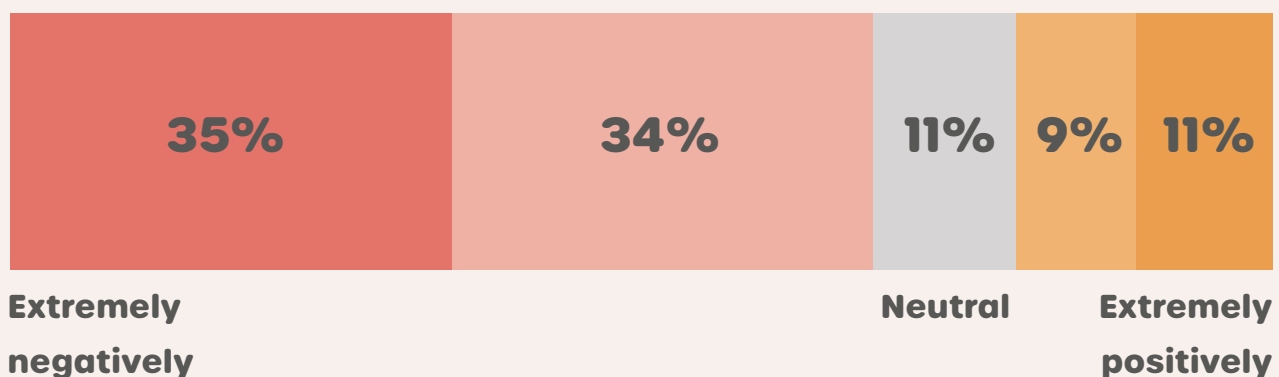
**feel that dyslexia has negatively impacted their education or career**

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## 22. Impact on education and career

**How has dyslexia impacted your education or career opportunities?**

A majority (**69%**) felt negatively impacted.



n=821



**“I grew up always wondering why I wasn’t doing as well as other children in school. I knew I was clever but it didn’t feel like it when it came to exams. My daughter has dyslexia and there’s much more positive information for her generation than there was for mine. I wish dyslexia had been better understood when I was younger.”**

Jacqueline, Dog Walking Business Owner, 52

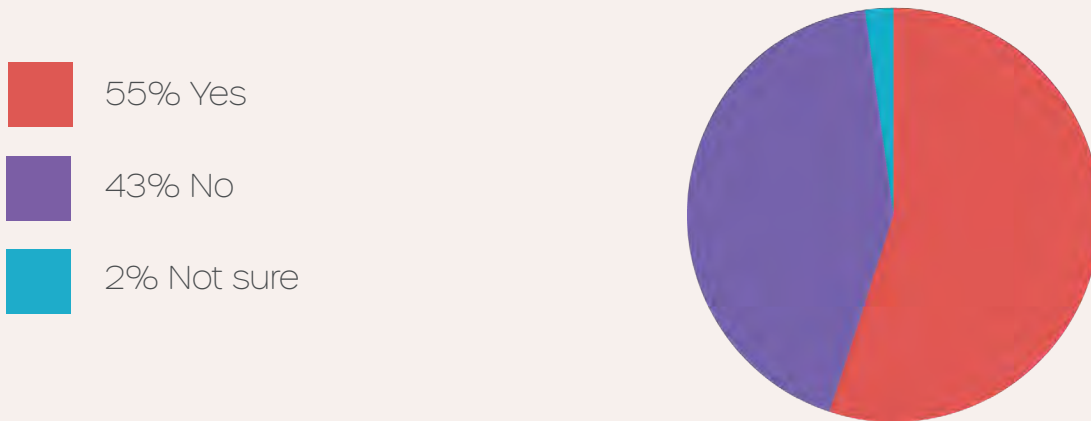
### **Summary of key findings**

- 76% say that dyslexia has negatively affected how well they do their job
- 69% say that dyslexia has negatively impacted their education or career
- 55% have received support or assessment arrangements in education
- 41% have received reasonable adjustments at work

# Support in education and work

## 23. Support in education

Have you ever received support or assessment arrangements for dyslexia during your education?



n=1318

## 24. Effectiveness of the support or arrangements

How would you rate the effectiveness of the support or assessment arrangements received during your education?

Those who said they had received support or assessment arrangements rated their effectiveness:

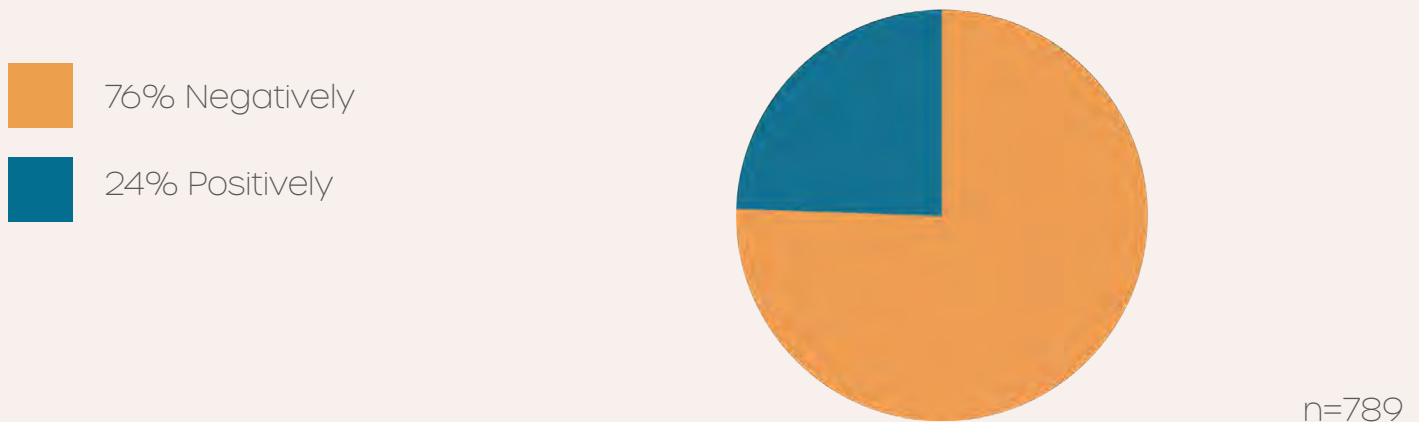
Rating	Percentage
Not helpful at all	5
Slightly helpful	28
Moderately helpful	27
Very helpful	28
Extremely helpful	11

n=721

## 25. Support in work

### Has dyslexia affected how well you do your job?

This question was asked to post-school participants.

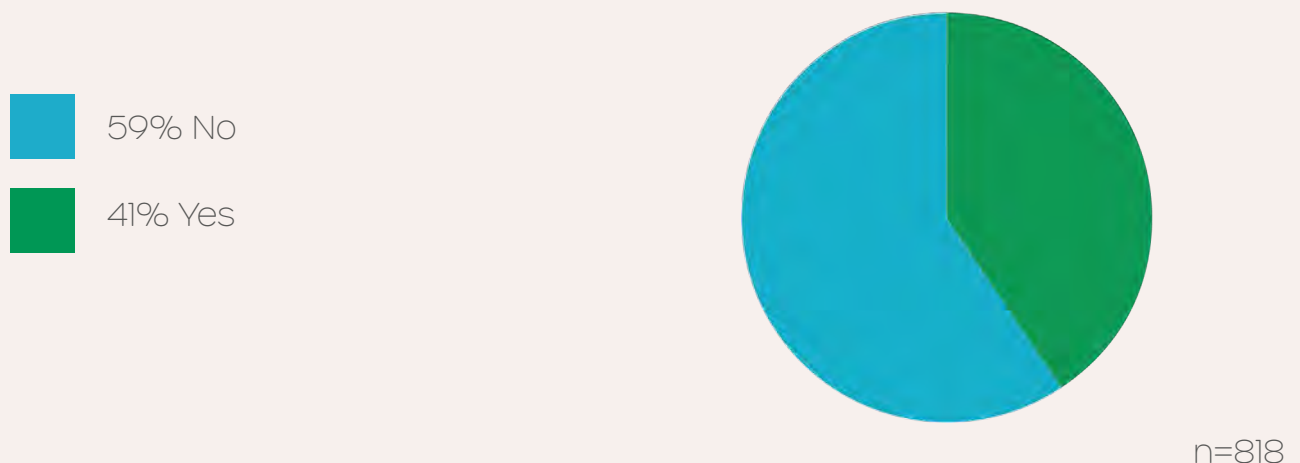


When asked “Has dyslexia affected how well you do your job?”, most participants (**76%**) felt negatively affected. The Healthcare sector stood out as the most negatively affected sector. Conversely, adults with dyslexia working in the Charity sector or Arts, Entertainment and Recreation showed a more positive impact of dyslexia on job performance. This may stem from the more supportive environments or flexible working conditions that benefit individuals with dyslexia, which these sectors are often found to offer.

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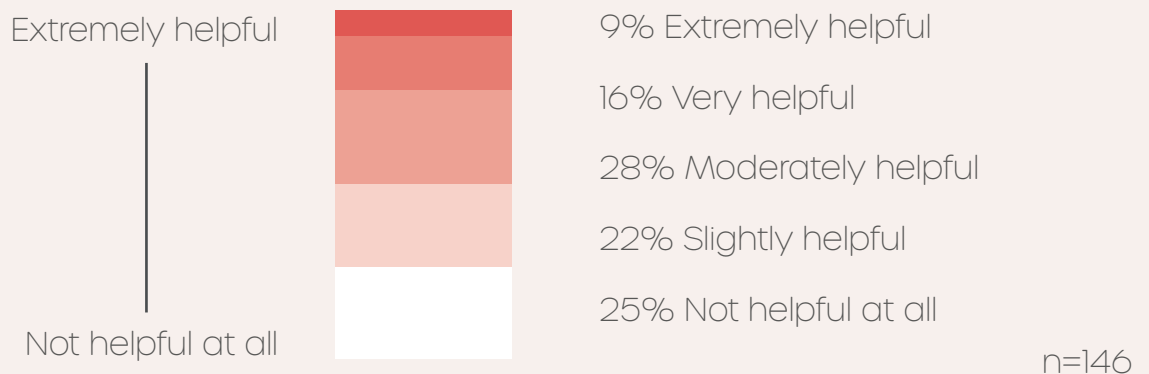
## 26. Reasonable adjustments at work

Does your manager provide reasonable adjustments for your dyslexia-related difficulties at work?



# Support in education and work

## 27. How helpful were the workplace adjustments?



Participants who were currently employed were asked whether their managers/employers provide reasonable adjustments for their dyslexia-related difficulties at work.

Less than half of the respondents (**41%**) reported receiving reasonable adjustments at work, suggesting that many Scottish workplaces may not be adequately addressing the needs of employees with dyslexia. This inconsistency can negatively impact job performance and satisfaction for employees with dyslexia. This may in turn have an impact on productivity levels for the workplace. However, it is important to note that in answering other questions in this survey, 38% of respondents reported managing without adjustments and others reported not being comfortable disclosing dyslexia at work.

Those who had received adjustments were asked how they viewed the effectiveness of them; responses varied widely. While some participants found them very or extremely helpful (**25%**), a significant proportion found them not helpful or only slightly or moderately helpful (**75%**). The mixed responses about the helpfulness of adjustments indicate that even when adjustments are made, they may not always be effective. This could be due to a lack of understanding of the specific needs of dyslexic individuals or inadequate implementation of adjustments.

## Helpful practice

Participants identified the practices they find highly effective. These included:

**Technological supports:** use of specific software and hardware tailored to the individual's needs, such as voice recognition and text-to-speech tools.

**Supportive leaders:** managers who actively understand and accommodate dyslexia-related needs, providing both formal and informal support.

**Task-specific modifications:** adjustments that align closely with the individual's job role and responsibilities, such as delegating writing tasks or creating bespoke roles.

## Unhelpful practice

**Lack of awareness and training:** instances where adjustments were made to comply with legal requirements but lacked practical effectiveness.

**Inconsistent support:** variability in the support provided by different managers, leading to mixed experiences.

**Stigma and non-disclosure:** some respondents did not receive any adjustments due to discomfort in disclosing their dyslexia, stemming from stigma or negative attitudes.

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## Key learning and recommendations

There is a particular need for targeted dyslexia awareness and support in the healthcare sector. Much could be learned from analysis and sharing of the positive practices in the arts and charity sectors.

Scotland's workplaces would benefit from increased awareness and training for all employees and managers about dyslexia to foster more inclusive and productive conditions. This includes creating the environments and culture that help people to disclose their dyslexia and identify effective adjustments for their individual needs.

Participants identified a need for mental health support. We need to provide access to mental health resources, as dyslexia often co-occurs with anxiety and depression. This is supported by other research which highlights the link between dyslexia and mental health issues [16].

# Support in education and work

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## Participants' experiences of support in education and work

"With technology, for me it's a level playing field."

"People don't understand and then treat you as if you are not capable. It is demotivating. [We need] a greater push for dyslexia protections being present in the workplace and more punitive action when a grievance is raised."

"I really struggled to write sentences and get the spelling correct, and this caused me to feel inadequate in a professional role."

"We're required to swallow a lot of pride. I've had abuse from stressed colleagues, been told I don't know what I'm doing as I don't learn in the usual way. I am afraid to ask for help, particularly where I observe exchanged glances among colleagues."

"When tested at a young age, better proof should be given. Mine was just a letter from the school. How do you prove your dyslexia 30 years on to employers?"

"Having dyslexia made me avoid paperwork to the extreme. Every employer I have had has known of my dyslexia and adjustments were made so that I did not need to do a huge level of paperwork. My strength is in my hands and how I can see problems and solve them without much support from anyone else."



**"I found out I was dyslexic at age 27, which was really quite late, but then it was like a relief. Just having that identification and support - I really, really excelled in work."**

Lorraine, Neurodevelopmental Specialist, 40

# Perceptions

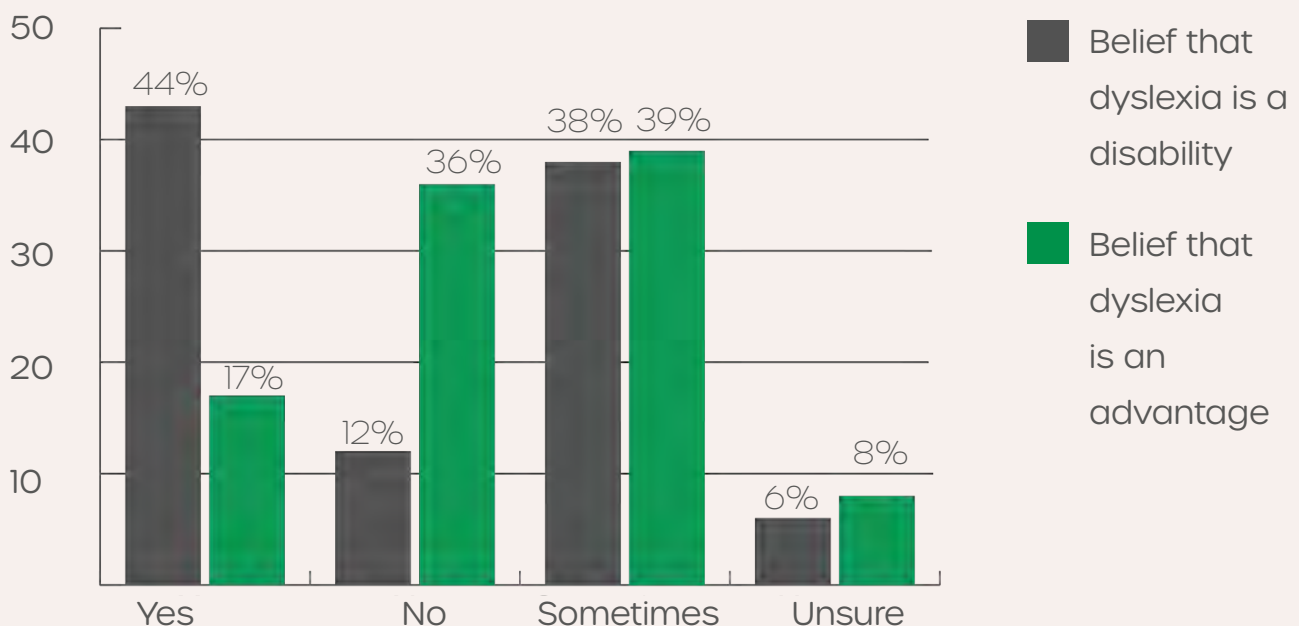
Dyslexia is regarded more and more as being dual natured, acknowledged for causing both strengths and challenges. While dyslexia was previously considered a disadvantage, the current narrative places more emphasis on associated strengths. We wanted to know how participants perceive being dyslexic and to what extent they consider it to be disabling or enabling.

# 44%

## said that dyslexia is a disability to them

### 28. Perception

We asked participants to say if they consider dyslexia to be an advantage and also if they consider it as a disability. 44% said they consider it a disability - this was the case across generations and sectors of employment.



n=1253



**“Once I was assessed, it just made a really positive difference to my studying. I knew then that I wasn’t stupid, it was that I had this learning difficulty. And once I got the support, I came on leaps and bounds and managed to get my degree.”**

**Christina, Project Worker, 42**

### **Summary of key findings**

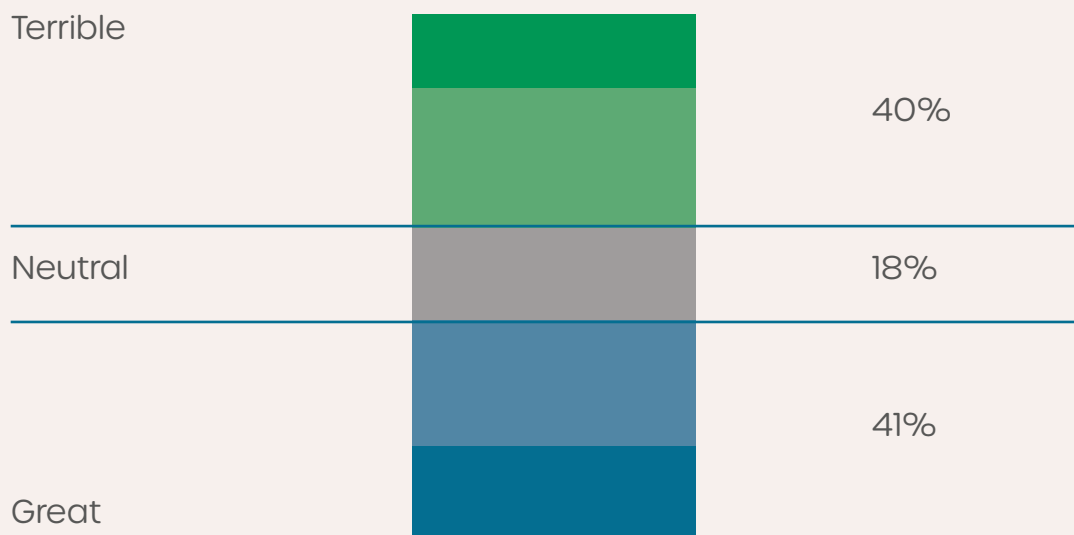
- 44% say that dyslexia is a disability
- 41% feel that Scotland is a good place for people with dyslexia to live, while 40% feel it is not a good place.
- 17% consider dyslexia to be an advantage

# Perceptions

## 29. Scotland as a good place to live

We asked participants to what extent they feel Scotland is a good place for people with dyslexia to live. Responses expressed significant differences in availability of support, with participants living in rural areas indicating a lack of adequate resources. While there are positive experiences of work, education and services, many felt that there is a stigma that persists in Scotland.

### To what extent do you feel that Scotland is a good place for people with dyslexia to live?



n=540

## Key learning and recommendations

Although Dyslexia Scotland, like many other dyslexia organisations across the world, is actively trying to promote positive attitudes towards dyslexia, many perceive being dyslexic as a disability – this was the case across the generations. We must acknowledge that dyslexic individuals in Scotland experience a daily struggle.

Many participants expressed feelings of inadequacy, being perceived as 'stupid', and lacking confidence due to their dyslexia. A significant number highlighted a need for extra support in education and work, which is often unavailable or insufficient.

Several responses reflected the view that dyslexia has a dual nature of being both a

disability and a unique way of thinking that neurotypical individuals may not possess.

## **The need to balance strengths and challenges**

It is important to recognise that people with dyslexia struggle to create a supportive environment for themselves. Dyslexia involves significant difficulties with reading, spelling and memory, leading to challenges in school and at work. These struggles are a daily reality for many, affecting their confidence, self-esteem and mental health.

When asked if dyslexia is an advantage, only **17%** of participants believed it is, while **39%** felt it is sometimes an advantage. Of those who saw dyslexia as an advantage, many noted it was contextual to an individual's job or situation; for instance, one participant mentioned, "My dyslexia is a strength, and it doesn't impact my ability to do my job successfully." Another shared, "As a teacher, it helps me to understand and empathise with my students. However, it comes with a lot of challenges in literacy and concentration."

Although calling dyslexia a gift or advantage is well-intended, it can create unrealistic expectations. While some individuals with dyslexia may excel in areas like creativity or problem-solving, this isn't true for everyone. Emphasising these 'gifts' can make those who don't have these strengths feel inadequate and pressured. The positive stereotype of dyslexia assumes that people with dyslexia have specific innate abilities, but there's not enough evidence to support this. This stereotype can also cause people to overlook the importance of effort and new strategies, for success. Focusing too much on these strengths can be limiting [17].

Additionally, positive stereotypes can overshadow the real need for support and adjustments, leading to a lack of necessary resources. They may also create pressure to conform to these expected 'gifts' or advantages, which can harm performance, confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing.

To support individuals with dyslexia effectively in Scotland, we need a balanced view that recognises both their strengths and challenges. This approach helps provide effective accommodations and creates a supportive environment that promotes their overall wellbeing and development. Additionally, we must address the stigma of dyslexia and ensure equitable access to resources and support across the country.

# Inclusion

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We wanted to find out about barriers to inclusion for people with dyslexia in Scotland. We asked participants to tell us about their experiences of discrimination, bullying and social exclusion.

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# 36%

## believe that dyslexia discrimination is a problem in Scotland

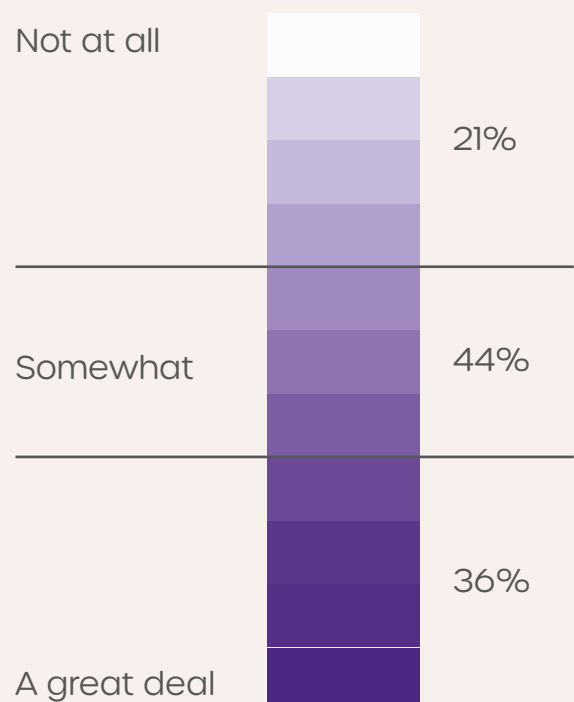
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### 30. Discrimination

**How much do you believe that dyslexia discrimination is a problem in Scotland?**

36% believe that dyslexia discrimination is a problem in Scotland.

n=957





**“We came from a poor background, we couldn’t get tutors. Dyslexia touches everybody, but I think it’s harder for people who haven’t got money to get on in life. We need to identify dyslexia early, help children and young people navigate it so they can channel through education and life.”**

Aisha, Support Worker, 49

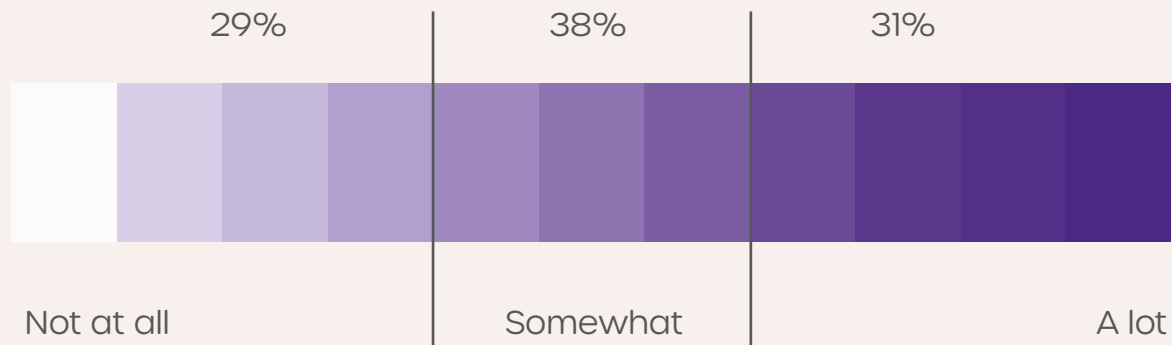
### Summary of key findings

- 73% feel comfortable disclosing dyslexia to friends
- 60% feel comfortable disclosing dyslexia in their place of work or study
- 50% feel comfortable disclosing dyslexia to service providers
- 31% reported that dyslexia discrimination is a problem in their place of work or learning
- 28% have experienced bullying at work because of dyslexia

# Inclusion

## 31. Discrimination in places of work and learning

How much do you believe that dyslexia discrimination is a problem in your place of work or education?



n=793

**29%** of respondents indicated that discrimination is not a problem in their place of work or learning, and **31%** indicated that it is.

Participant comments indicated that they felt the emotional toll of dyslexia-related discrimination is significant, leading to feelings of frustration, inadequacy and sometimes severe mental health issues. This impact often starts early in life and continues into adulthood.

## Participants' experiences of inclusion

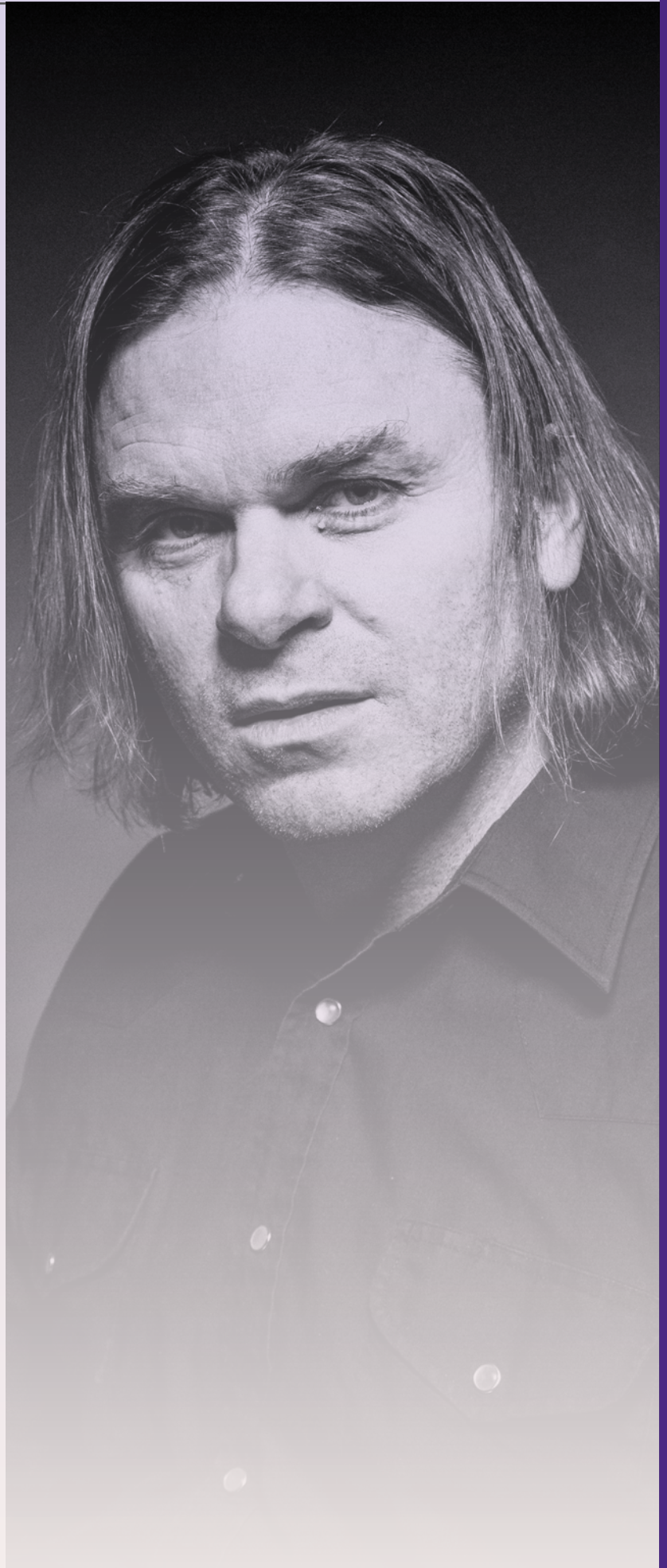
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"People laughed and mocked my spelling publicly."

"I was left with depression and anxiety that I had to get professional help for."

"I sit quietly in class and don't contribute. I don't believe I'm intelligent."

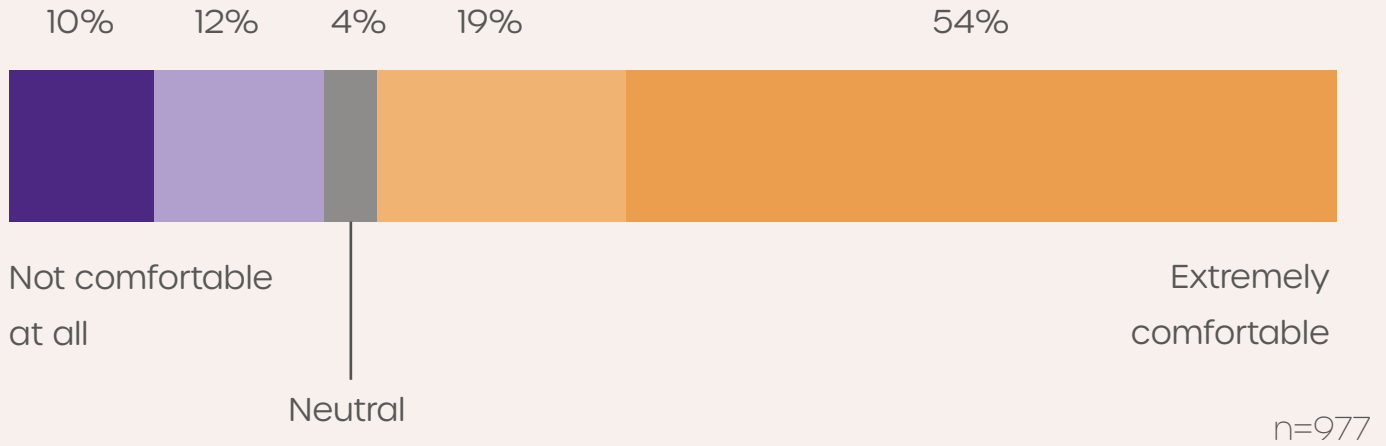
"I think people discriminate without realising. For instance, at a job interview, some people would mark me down or not take me on for using a notepad and pen."



# Inclusion

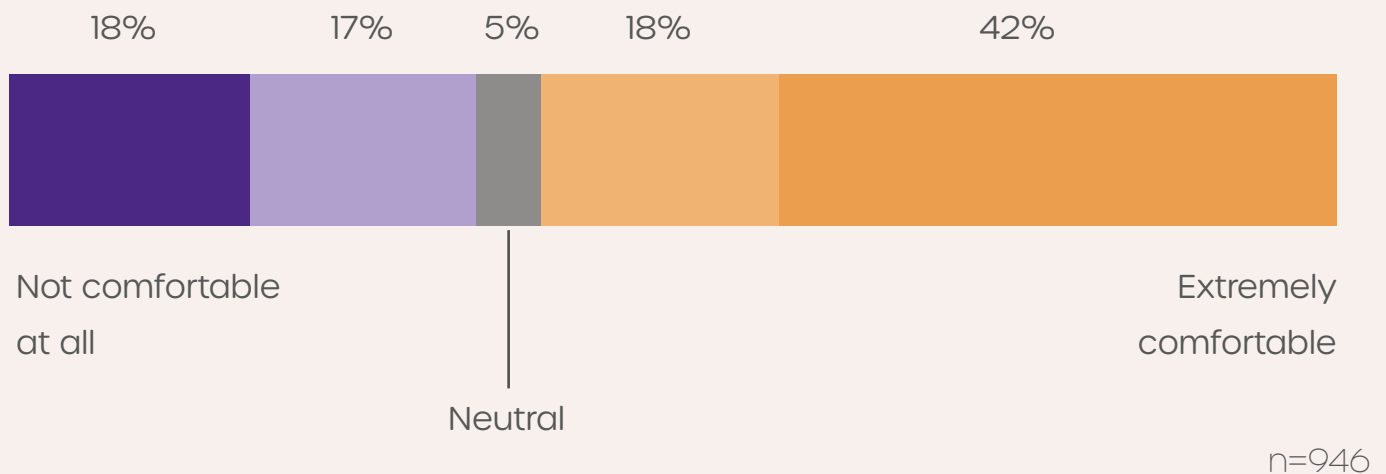
## 32. Comfort in disclosing dyslexia: to friends

How comfortable are you about telling friends that you're dyslexic?



## 33. Comfort in disclosing dyslexia: in the workplace or place of study

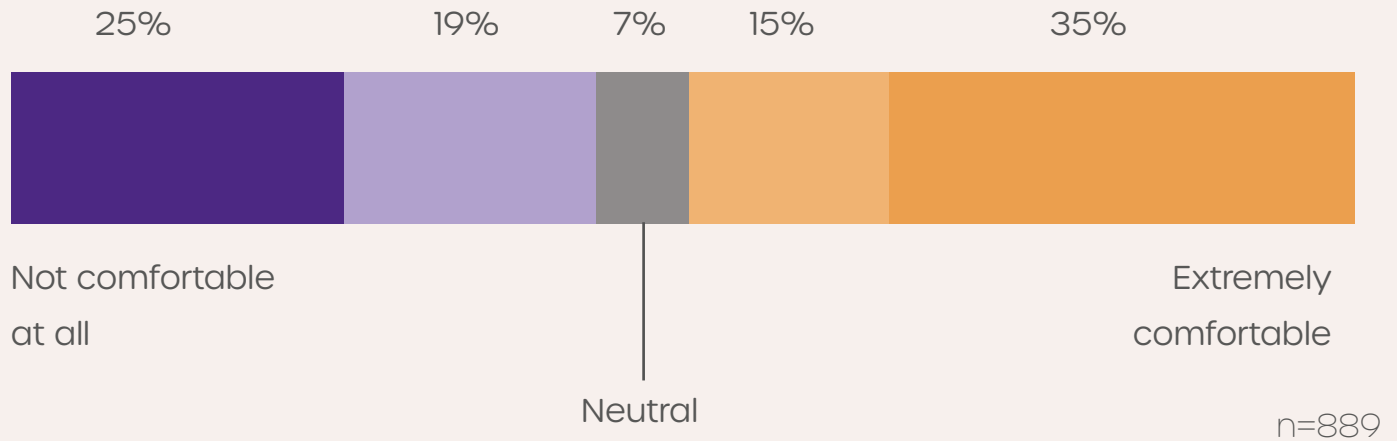
How comfortable are you about telling your workplace or place of study that you're dyslexic?



A majority (**54%**) feel comfortable telling friends that they are dyslexic. **42%** feel extremely comfortable telling their workplace or place of study, but more than one third (**35%**) are uncomfortable to do so. A quarter are not comfortable at all telling service providers. This could negatively affect someone's experiences engaging with service provision, for example, meaning they aren't able to request information in ways they find accessible.

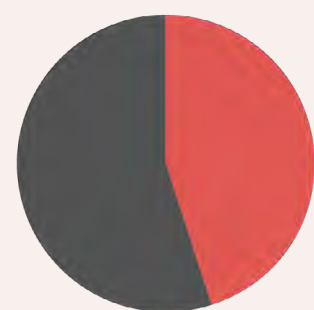
## 34. Comfort in disclosing dyslexia: to service providers

How comfortable are you about telling service providers (such as banks, public transport, shops, the NHS) that you're dyslexic?



## 35. Experience of bullying

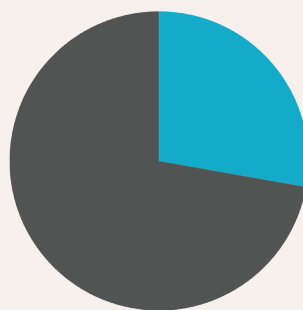
Did you ever experience bullying in the following settings because of dyslexia?



**School**

Yes 45%  
No 55%

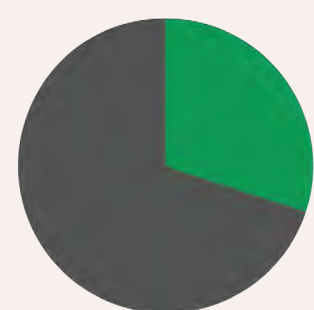
n=1160



**Work**

Yes 28%  
No 72%

n=1129



**Social**

Yes 30%  
No 70%

n=1161

Many participants reported a significant impact on their self-esteem and confidence. Bullying led to them feeling worthless, unintelligent and incapable of achieving their goals.

- **38%** have been publicly shamed for dyslexia-related errors
- **28%** have experienced unfair criticism

# Inclusion

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## Key learning and recommendations

Our survey reveals that nearly **half** of the respondents experienced bullying in school due to their dyslexia, and almost **one third** have faced similar bullying in the workplace. **30%** have even experienced bullying in social settings. Participants were asked to share how this bullying has affected them. Highlights from these responses show a profound impact on the lives of those who have experienced dyslexia-related bullying. Results of the survey found that the most common form of bullying was being shamed for dyslexia-related errors, followed by verbal abuse and being ignored or left out. These experiences have had a pervasive impact on mental health, with long-lasting effects that carry into adulthood. While some respondents reported developing resilience, the overall negative impact on self-esteem, confidence and mental health is profound. Studies, such as those by Humphrey (2002) have highlighted the lasting impacts of bullying on individuals with dyslexia, emphasising the need for supportive and inclusive environments [18].

Scotland must address bullying and discrimination from school years through to adult life.

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## Participant experiences of bullying

"I have zero self-confidence and I don't think I am worthy of anything (education-wise)."

"When I was younger, I became very reclusive and withdrawn."

"Publicly reading always takes me back to being in a classroom. I was shouted at by both the teacher and the other pupils, publicly shaming me for not being able to read passages in books. I felt the pressure of getting it wrong. That still to this day makes me feel sick and stressed."

"When I was a teen, I felt very low. I wanted to take my life. But now I try to not allow it to affect me as much."



**“I was very lucky to be identified so young but many people aren’t. I wish everyone got the support I got at my school. This should be available to everyone.”**

Fiona, Senior Early Learning and Childcare Educator, 35

## Barriers to reaching potential

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We asked participants about their wider lives to learn about barriers they encounter to participation and fulfilling their potential. These included ability to manage personal finances, taking part in electoral processes, use of digital technologies and experiences of mental health.

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**rates of those reporting  
depression and anxiety are  
3 to 4  
times higher  
than the general population\***

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### 36. Mental health

**Have you experienced  
any of the following?**

n= 1092

\*When compared with  
the results of The Scottish  
Health Survey (Scottish  
Government, 2022)

Difficulty	Percentage
Anxiety	62%
Depression	45%
Eating disorder	12%
Self-harm	13%
Suicidal thoughts/ actions	22%
Personality disorder	3%
None	11%



**“I remember coming out of my dyslexia assessment and feeling like I might quit uni - I felt like it just confirmed all my fears. There wasn't any kind of emotional psychological support to help my self-esteem or self-belief. I feel like that would have really helped.”**

Jen, Psychotherapist, 29

## Summary of key findings

- 71% feel that the media does not accurately portray dyslexia
- 70% use technology to support their dyslexia-related difficulties
- 59% feel able to advocate for themselves
- 56% feel confident about managing their personal finances
- 52% feel unable to manage dyslexia in work and education without reasonable adjustments
- 52% experience challenges in filling out financial forms
- 32% experience financial difficulties (7% higher than the general population\*)
- 19% reported facing challenges in electoral processes
- Rates of depression and anxiety are higher than in the general population\*\*
- Those identified as dyslexic during their education years reported lower rates of anxiety and depression compared to those identified as adults

\*When compared with a study by Money Advice Scotland

\*\*When compared with the results of The Scottish Health Survey (Scottish Government, 2022)

# Barriers to reaching potential

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## Key learning and recommendations

**Mental health:** Children, young people and adults with dyslexia often face higher rates of mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, due to various challenges [19]. Academic struggles, social stigma, bullying and the continuous effort to manage their dyslexia in daily life contribute significantly to their emotional distress [20,21]. The constant effort required to cope with dyslexia can lead to cognitive overload and mental fatigue, exacerbating these issues [22].

Results from our survey support this previous research, showing that **45%** of adults with dyslexia reported experiencing depression, while **62%** reported experiencing anxiety. These rates are approximately three to four times higher than those reported in the general Scottish population in the Scottish Health Survey 2022, where 13% of adults reported experiencing two or more symptoms of depression and 17% reported experiencing two or more symptoms of anxiety [23]. This stark contrast underscores the significant mental health challenges faced by individuals with dyslexia.

Further analysis revealed a noticeable difference in mental health outcomes based on the age of dyslexia identification. People identified with dyslexia during their education years reported lower rates of anxiety and depression compared to those identified as adults.

Early identification and intervention can potentially reduce the long-term mental health impact on individuals with dyslexia. Studies have demonstrated effective strategies to help mitigate mental health concerns, such as implementing structured literacy programs and providing psychological support, like cognitive-behavioral therapy [24]. Additionally, educational accommodations and teacher training can support individuals with dyslexia, improving their overall wellbeing and academic performance [25]. Encouraging a strengths-based approach that focuses on their unique talents and abilities can also boost their self-esteem and motivation.

The data suggests that **11%** of dyslexic individuals do not experience any mental health difficulties, which can inform targeted interventions to support those who do.

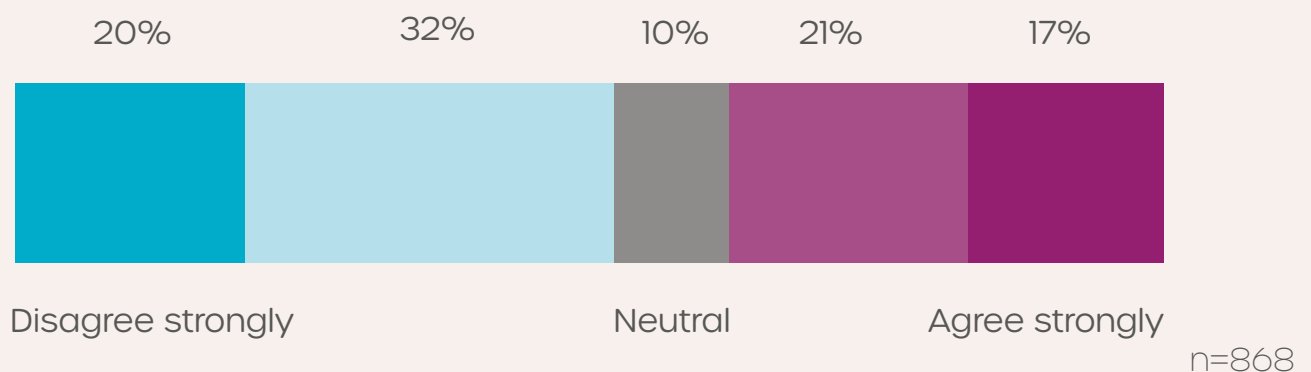
## 37. Encountering digital barriers

- **70%** of participants use digital technology to support their dyslexia-related difficulties (n=1107).
- **55%** said that they feel they don't have enough information and training on technology to support dyslexia (n=789).
- **32%** said that they encounter digital barriers to accessing day-to-day services (n=1419).

**Key learning:** Those who were less likely to use technology were statistically more likely to report not having enough training. There is a need for educational interventions on and access to assistive technologies to enable people with dyslexia to participate equally in an increasingly digital world.

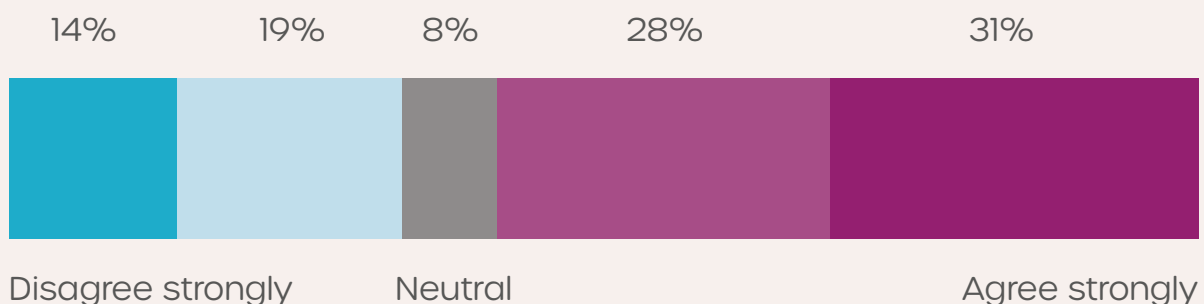
## 38. Managing dyslexia without support

**I am able to manage my dyslexia in the workplace or education setting without support or reasonable adjustments**



## 39. Self-advocacy

**I can advocate for myself**



n=837

# Barriers to reaching potential

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## Self-advocacy (continued)

Self-advocacy is a crucial skill for individuals with dyslexia, empowering them to request necessary accommodations and support, which lead to better outcomes both academically and professionally [26]. The ability to effectively self-advocate significantly enhances one's confidence and ability to navigate various challenges associated with dyslexia. According to our survey, **59%** of participants agree or strongly agree that they can advocate for themselves, while **41%** feel less confident in this ability. This indicates a substantial number of individuals who feel capable of asking for what they need, but also highlights the need for further support and training in self-advocacy skills.

Additionally, our findings suggest that adults whose managers provide reasonable adjustments for dyslexia-related difficulties have higher self-advocacy ratings compared to those who do not receive such support. Research supports this, showing that supportive work environments contribute to better self-advocacy and overall job performance for individuals with dyslexia [27].

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## 40. Understanding the causes of dyslexia

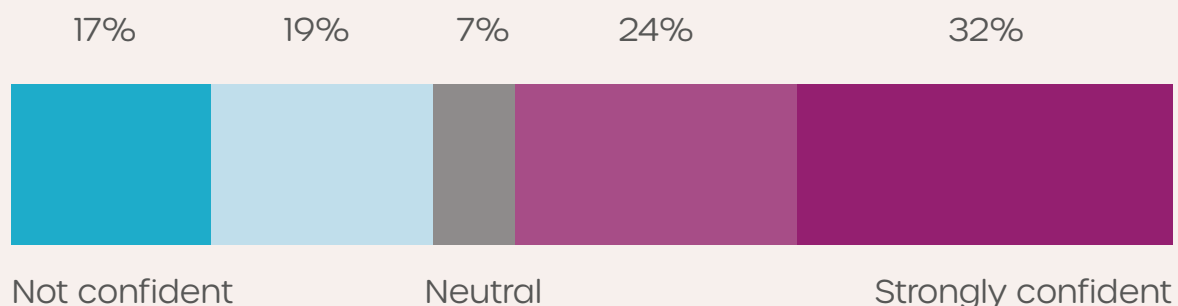
**66%** felt that they lack sufficient information about the causes of dyslexia, indicating a need for better education and awareness.

n=819

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## 41. Managing personal finances

**How confident do you feel about managing personal finances?**



**56%** of respondents feel confident about managing their personal finances.

n=847

- **52%** often or sometimes experience challenges in filling out financial forms.

n=928

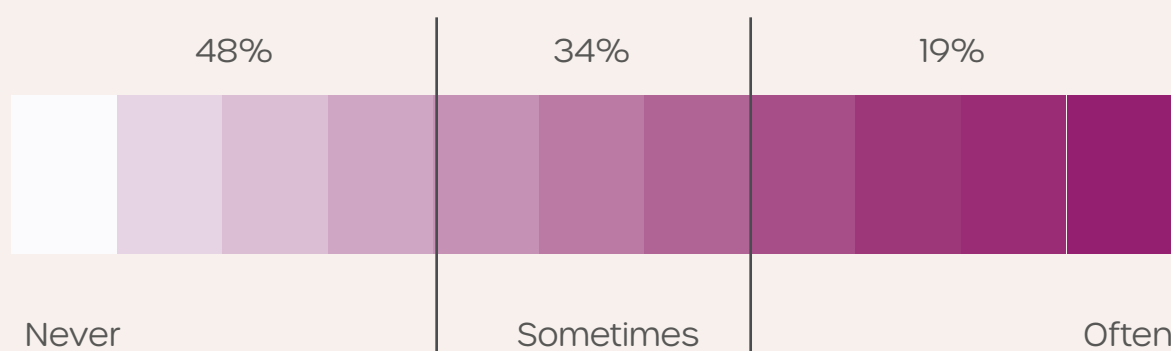
- **32%** have experienced financial difficulties. A study by Money Advice Scotland showed that **25%** of the general population do not manage finances well [28].

n=550

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## 42. Electoral processes

**Have dyslexia-related difficulties negatively affected your ability to vote in political elections?**



Around **19%** of participants have faced challenges in voting due to dyslexia-related difficulties.

n=338

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## Key learning and recommendations

**Self-advocacy:** effective training in self-advocacy for individuals with dyslexia could help to open up disclosure conversations in the workplace. It could also highlight the positive impact that supportive environments can have on their ability to request and receive necessary accommodations.

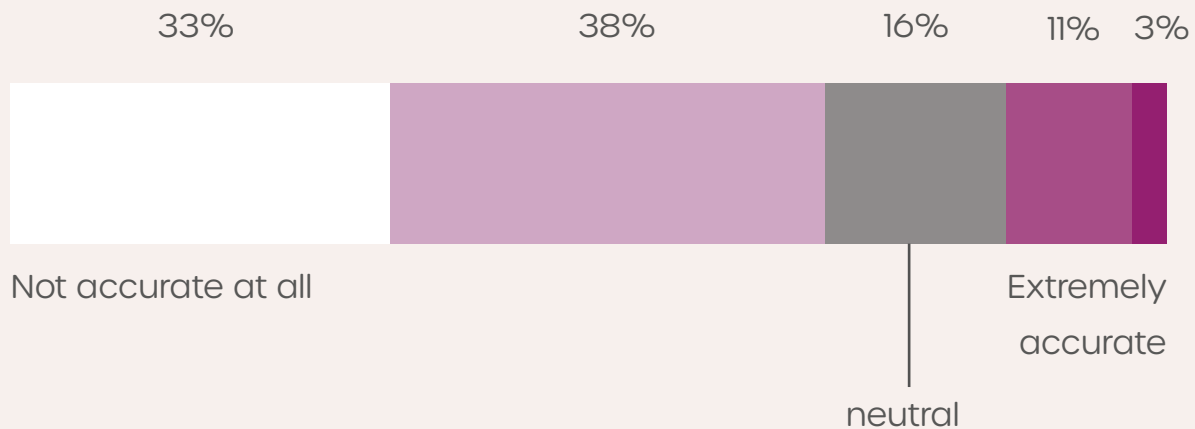
**Financial literacy:** there is a clear need for financial literacy programmes and accessible financial information and advice tailored to people with dyslexia.

**Electoral processes:** Electoral processes need to be more accessible for people with dyslexia to enable full participation in our democracy.

# Barriers to reaching potential

## 43. Portrayal of dyslexia in the media

Do you feel that the way that people with dyslexia are portrayed in the media is accurate/reflects your experience?



n=551

## Key learning and recommendations

**Media representation:** A large majority (**71%**) of participants feel that the media does not accurately portray their experiences of dyslexia, indicating a need for more accurate and inclusive representations.

Many respondents felt that the media often fails to accurately portray the diverse experiences of people with dyslexia, focusing instead of on stereotypes or extreme cases.

While some portrayals are positive, they often focus on high-achieving individuals, which can set unrealistic expectations, overlooking the daily struggles of many people with dyslexia.

We recommend that the Scottish media carefully considers the language and approaches they use when talking about dyslexia. Dyslexia Scotland can work with journalists and producers to set standards for the portrayal and representation of dyslexia in dramatisations, news and other media.

## Participant experiences of dyslexia in the media

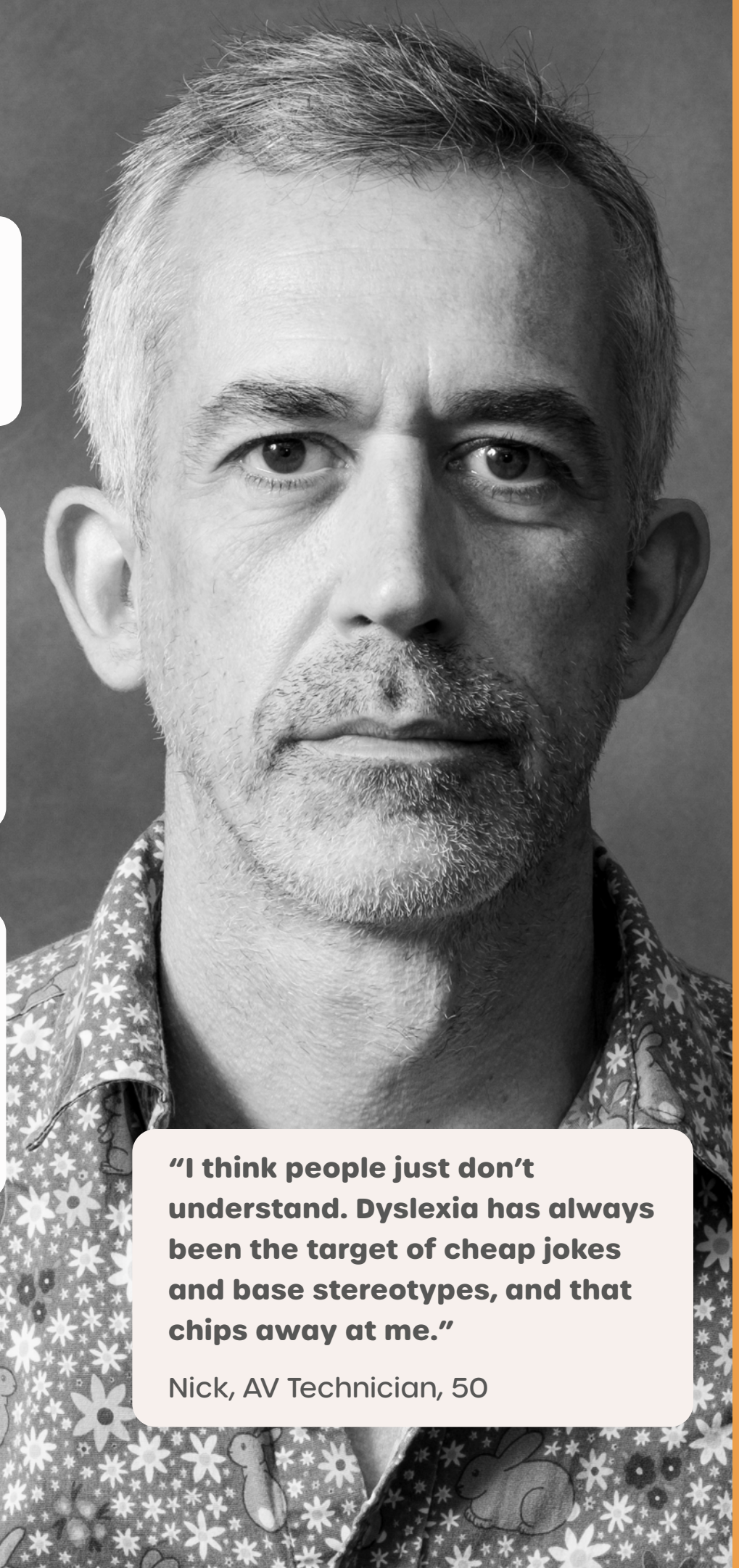
"The media keeps telling about it being a superpower. I have no magical powers."

"The media shows the successful stories but not the struggles and how society makes it difficult to function when you have dyslexia."

"There is a presumption that all [people with dyslexia] can't read and see the words jumbled about on a page."

**"I think people just don't understand. Dyslexia has always been the target of cheap jokes and base stereotypes, and that chips away at me."**

Nick, AV Technician, 50



# Snapshots of life with dyslexia in Scotland

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We invited participants to tell us anything else about living, working and learning with dyslexia in Scotland. 247 people provided further responses about their needs, frustrations, experiences and their hopes. The following is a selection of these.

“Workplaces should be ready for dyslexic workers at all times. I shouldn’t need to wait six weeks or longer to fully participate in my new role.”

“While my own experiences have not been good, I am more confident about my son as things are a lot better for him than it was for me at his age.”

“Being an adult out of education with dyslexia in Scotland is lonely, segregated, frustrating, exhausting, demoralising, defeating, sad, heartbreaking, sacrificing. It’s a minefield of letdowns from people that should help you and from yourself.”

“We’re so lucky to still have DSA [Disabled Students’ Allowance] in Scotland.”

“[I] wish people would understand more about the poor memory part or processing steps. It is this part that makes us feel stupid and this part that we wish people knew more about or could give us space for.”

“There isn’t enough information, but every year it’s getting better.”

“There is such a huge lack of understanding of what it means and how it affects someone’s life.”

“The tech industry is a great place to excel with dyslexia and we need to let more people know.”

“There is still a long way to go in relation to a dyslexia-friendly society in Scotland. There is very little continuity between schools (primary and secondary) in relation to identification and support for young people with dyslexia. Transition between school and Further Education/Higher Education is also patchy. In my opinion, the biggest hurdle for people with dyslexia is in the workplace. This is when many feel isolated, lack support from peers and managers, and find themselves masking their dyslexia difficulties, which can contribute to mental health issues.”

“Sort it out! You could unlock so many people’s potential and boost the economy with hidden superpowers. There is software to correct typos but you cannot teach the imagination, problem solving, spacial awareness, big picture and fine detail lenses and code-breaking natural abilities of dyslexics and other neurodivergent thinkers. Dyslexic people have what AI doesn’t. That’s going to be essential in the not-too-distant future.”

“Sometimes I would like to hear from dyslexic people more like me. I appreciate why you want to share positive examples, but when all the case studies are about people who overcame their challenges to become really successful, it makes me feel more rubbish. And it can perpetuate the stigma that people like me just haven’t tried hard enough.”

“I still feel uncomfortable in a library (even for Bookbug). I can struggle to read to my children (Mr Men and Thomas the Tank Engine are so difficult to read), that I began to avoid reading to my children. There needs to be a culture change around this. I am incapable of correctly filling out a form and all important life admin requires this and often has a financial penalty attached to it. I am literally fined for being dyslexic. I would have picked 6 months of prison over the last two years of school, that’s how much I hated school. I don’t think I am alone in this.”

"Life in Scotland, if you have not got a job, is hard. Staff in job centres and benefits offices are not educated in learning difficulties. You get told to go online and you can't do it. You get sanctioned, not because you don't want to do it. You can't do it."

"I am embarrassed by it and never want to speak about. Probably written more here than I have said in 25 years."

"It's very, very hard. I am a very hands-on, intelligent person, but cannot access my full true ability as I feel dyslexia is such a massive brick wall to overcome before I even start. It is soul-destroying."

"Life could be made easier with simple forms: no one, even non-dyslexic people, needs to have all the complicated jargon. Especially with financial/government-related forms."

"I think more support from a younger age in schools is needed and for all teachers to have the appropriate training and to not give up on a struggling child with dyslexia. Just keep going until you find a way to teach that they can understand. They need to be patient and kind. Encourage them. Bad experiences and feeling you are stupid stay with you for life."

"Educating people about neurodivergence is slow. People say things like 'everyone's a bit neurodivergent'."

"Please change dyslexic from being a 'disability'. As long as it is viewed as our failing, the education system and workplaces will cater to us or only do so out of charity. We need to be seen as we are, different but equal."

"People took the time to show me how things were done rather than just tell me."

"I want to thank Dyslexia Scotland because without them so many people and families would be in a worse place. We have to make Scotland a more dyslexia-friendly nation to make sure we give future generations a better chance in life."

"My dyslexia is an asset at work: I think differently and add a different perspective. My team is email heavy and I am not expected to reply as quick. I require pre-reading in advance. I'm not required to have perfect spelling or grammar."

"There are many elderly dyslexic people, most of whom have never been assessed and may not even be aware they are dyslexic. However they are struggling to cope with the increasing text-based world around them. They may not be receiving benefits because it is too difficult to apply. Retirement can be a very difficult time as there is a lot to read about pension choices and benefits."

"I think people think it goes away, or will get better but when you live with it every day it is wearing. I worry that the schools don't offer the support to the children and don't celebrate other ways of learning."

"I think my son benefitted greatly from moving to Scotland. In his previous school he was described as 'lazy', but within weeks of moving to Scotland his assessment process had begun. He has been supported very well since identification at aged 8 and is now at university."

"Life on a day-to-day basis is hard. Dyslexia is known, but there is only a little bit of it known. It needs to be understood more in Scotland, and how it affects everyone each day. For example, when I am tired, I really struggle, or when I have had to learn a lot, I can get information overload. But dyslexia and its effects are not fully understood in Scotland."

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