ADVICE NOTE



INFORMATION & ADVICE FOR MEMBERS OF THE SCOTTISH SECONDARY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSE PEOPLE

Neurodiverse people experience the world differently from neurotypical individuals. Their traits vary, but common characteristics include:

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

They may struggle with social cues, body language, or tone, and may avoid eye contact or communicate in different ways, from quiet to very expressive.

ROUTINE AND REPETITION

Many prefer predictable routines and may use repetitive movements or sounds ("stimming"). Sudden changes can be stressful.

DEEP INTERESTS

Strong focus on specific topics or hobbies is common, often with great passion and detail.

SENSORY SENSITIVITY

They may be more sensitive to light, noise, textures, or smells, which can feel overwhelming.

DIFFERENT THINKING STYLES

Their thinking can be highly original. Some have strong problem-solving skills or high intelligence, while others face learning challenges.

STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

They may struggle with organisation or communication but often excel in creativity, memory, or attention to detail.

DIAGNOSIS

Neurodiversity describes natural differences in how people think and process the world. This includes autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and related conditions. While some are diagnosed in childhood, many are identified in adulthood due to increased awareness. Tools like the RAADS–R help identify autistic traits in adults who may have been missed earlier.

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UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSE PEOPLE CONTINUED...

ARE REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS NECESSARY?

Yes. Neurodivergent workers (including those with autism, ADHD and dyslexia) can face barriers that affect their wellbeing and performance. Under the Equality Act 2010, neurodivergence may be classed as a disability, meaning employers have a legal duty to prevent disadvantage and provide reasonable adjustments.

Reasonable adjustments are changes to the workplace or working practices that enable neurodivergent staff to work safely, effectively, and on equal terms.

What is counted as reasonable depends on the needs of the individual and the context of the building.

KEY REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS FOR NEURODIVERGENT STAFF MAY INCLUDE:

COMMUNICATION

- Be clear, direct, and explicit.
- Explain expectations, workplace etiquette, and unwritten rules.
- Provide written, step-by-step instructions.
- Avoid vague or informal directions.
- Check understanding and encourage feedback.
- Emphasise that adjustments support performance, not weakness.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

- Address issues quickly and sensitively.
- Share information with consent to build understanding.
- Promote neurodiversity awareness across the workplace.
- Foster an inclusive environment and support peer understanding.

ANXIETY AND WELLBEING

- Discuss concerns privately and supportively.
- Clarify expectations and provide consistent feedback.
- Use regular short check-ins.
- Balance constructive criticism with positive reinforcement.
- Offer mentoring or signpost Occupational Health/GP support if needed.