

# DCD /Dyspraxia and Employment

## What is DCD?

Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), also known as Dyspraxia in the UK, is a common disorder affecting fine or gross motor co-ordination in children and adults. This lifelong condition is formally recognised by international organisations including the World Health Organisation. DCD is distinct from other motor disorders such as cerebral palsy and stroke and occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. Individuals may vary in how their difficulties present; these may change over time depending on environmental demands and life experience.

An individual's coordination difficulties may affect participation and functioning of everyday life skills in education, work and employment. Children may present with difficulties with self-care, writing, typing, riding a bike and play as well as other educational and recreational activities. In adulthood many of these difficulties will continue, as well as learning new skills at home, in education and work, such as driving a car and DIY. There may be a range of co-occurring difficulties which can also have serious negative impacts on daily life. These include social and emotional difficulties as well as problems with time management, planning and personal organisation and these may also affect an adult's education or employment experiences.

## Workplace difficulties described by adults are as follows:

- May affect everyday life skills e.g. preparing a meal, ironing
- Difficulties with handwriting
- Skills requiring balance
- Slower learning a new skill requiring speed and accuracy
- Learning to drive a car
- Organisation, time management and planning skills
- Taking information down at speed.

### Workplace context example

John is working in a law firm as a lawyer. His handwriting is very untidy and he can't read it after meetings. It has also been noted that his appearance is not always as tidy as his line manager wishes especially when facing customers. He has an excellent memory, is very good at recalling information and is very dedicated to his job. His line manager gave suggestions for 'work clothes' so he created a uniform for himself. Use of a computer was agreed to avoid handwriting, and template reports created to minimise completion. He was also shown how to use speech-to-text software for writing more complex legal reports.

## Reasonable adjustments may include:

- Avoid handwritten tasks.
- Use speech-to-text or other computer software, or a smartphone.
- Give adequate time for learning new tasks.
- Break down tasks into small steps and demonstrate them.
- Encourage accuracy first and then increase speed once the task has been accomplished.
- Adaptation or avoidance of tasks requiring very good fine motor skills.
- Provide guidance for organisation and planning where several tasks need to be completed to a deadline.

### **Ways for employers to provide support**

The following suggestions are a guide to being DCD aware and ensuring all processes are accessible, starting with pre-employment and through to job placement.

Many of the suggestions are good not only for individuals with specific learning difficulties/hidden impairments but for all potential employees. Most are low- or no-cost solutions.

### **Website and advertisements**

- Check the reading age of your website. Can this be read by someone with a reading age of 11 years?
- Ensure the site is accessible. The ability to vary the font choice, use of text-to-speech, use of key strokes should be considered.
- Ensure that the job application forms and other written materials are in Arial, Comic Sans Serif – font size 12 +.
- Ensure that there are clear directions on where to complete job applications or to seek vacancies.
- State how you support individuals with hidden impairments.
- Ensure that the job description matches the job.
- Check that you have alternative formats on offer for someone with a learning difficulty/disability such as using the phone, or coming in for a discussion.

### **Job applications**

- Avoid requesting handwritten applications or cover notes. Ensure adverts are clearly worded listing only the skills/qualifications that are absolutely essential for the job.
- Check how long the application process takes.

- Ensure that the application does not 'time out' halfway through and that the candidate can complete it in more than one session.
- Consider the level of IT skills you actually need for the job e.g. does someone applying for a job as a shelf stacker need to use the computer? Consider whether online applications are always the best format or are you 'ruling out' potential individuals for the job?
- Ensure any web-based application forms are 'stable' and boxes don't move or lose their format when being completed.
- Offer telephone completion of applications as an alternative.
- Check if the application process can be read out on a text-to-speech reader.
- Ensure there is somewhere on the form that allows the individual to ask for specific reasonable adjustments for the interview if required and information on who to contact to arrange this.

### Pre-interview stage

- Give clear information about what will be expected at the interview.
- Give a list of what needs to be brought along to the interview and email/post this information to the candidate.
- Send clear instructions on how to get to the interview. Using a postcode and a map helps, along with transport options where possible.
- Tell the applicant how much time the interview will take.
- Describe any tasks that will be asked of the candidate and give some indication of the content/types of questions that may be asked.
- Consider how the tasks asked in the interview reflect what is expected of the individual in *reality* in the job regarding level of skill and the time allowed. Reflect if the job itself has onsite training and time to gain the skills: how job ready does the individual need to be?

### Interview stage

- Consider a work trial as an alternative to an interview.
- Introduce yourselves by name and also have name badges/cards where possible.
- Consider how 'sociable' someone needs to be for the particular job and don't judge this if this is not an essential skill.

- Ask questions based on the candidate's real/past experiences.
- Ask one question at a time, rather than multi-part questions.
- Be patient and allow extra time for answering questions.
- If specific tasks are being tested then ask if additional time has been requested. Consider the setting where this takes place such as in a quiet room, especially if novel tasks are being asked of the candidate.

## Starting the job

- Pre-visit orientation for the job may reduce anxiety and allow the individual to understand the set-up of the organisation.
- Any information on the organisation should be sent out before the start of the job with clear expectations of the day and breaks, holiday provision, map of where the workplace setting is etc.
- It is useful to provide written information that can be emailed to the individual as well as oral information so that they can read this (or someone else can read it with them) at another time.
- Go through the job description in detail at a quiet time and describe what is expected of the individual on a day-to-day basis and how and when these expectations will be measured.
- Be clear about time frames, dress code, social expectations including lunch breaks, coffee breaks etc.
- Explain the hierarchy in the organisation and who their line manager is.
- If there are issues of confidentiality explain these to the individual explicitly.
- Allocate a mentor to assist a new employee, where appropriate, until they are settled in.
- If there are processes to be learnt, plan for someone to show the individual how to do these. Videoing the tasks required may also help the individual to replay this if required e.g. on their smartphone. Encourage the individual to make notes/audio reminders as they go so they can recall later.
- Check what organisational techniques they use already, such as a diary system, to ensure this links with the job processes.
- Discuss with the individual what reasonable adjustments may be appropriate and how these can be best achieved. Ask them what or who has helped them in the past and where difficulties have arisen.

- Discuss how *Access to Work* assessments could be arranged with them to check out what adjustments could be done.
- Consider ways of applicants disclosing their difficulties to others and how this will be relayed appropriately to the line manager and peers.
- Discuss skills gaps that may require additional training e.g. answering phones, data entry, meeting others, working as a team, asking for help when uncertain, time management issues, organisational issues.

### Day-to-day in the job

- Consider the workplace setting. A workspace area that is away from general office traffic and visual distractions such as clutter may be beneficial to the employee.
- Some individuals may have specific needs because of their difficulties, such as having a consistent base to work from, a quiet area, or the ability to cut out noise (e.g. by wearing headphones).
- Break down new skills/tasks into parts and demonstrate as well as telling the person how to do it. Allow sufficient practice time to master a new skill. Be patient.
- Define clear plans and time outcomes expected of the individual. Check for understanding.
- Avoid ambiguous instructions such as -“You could do this”... “Please do this” is better.
- Provide *regular* meetings for review and opportunity to seek clarification – these don’t need to be long. Provide regular feedback to the individual.
- Consider how tasks can be broken into parts through the day in order to remember all the parts of the job (including tasks that they are both good and not so good at).
- Be prepared to set up report templates for repeated work if in an office setting.
- Use of technology can assist some individuals in desk and other jobs such as speech-to-text, text-to-speech, spell checkers, changes in font, screen magnifiers.
- Do not ask an individual to read information aloud, present in front of peers, write on a white board, or take minutes in a meeting without prior agreement.

### Further information:

[www.movementmattersuk.org](http://www.movementmattersuk.org)