

# Workplace Dyslexia & Specific Learning Difficulties—Productivity, Engagement and Well-Being

Janette Beetham, Leyla Okhai

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Centre, Imperial College London, London, UK

Email: [Equality@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:Equality@imperial.ac.uk)

**How to cite this paper:** Beetham, J. and Okhai, L. (2017) Workplace Dyslexia & Specific Learning Difficulties—Productivity, Engagement and Well-Being. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 5, 56-78.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2017.56007>

**Received:** April 27, 2017

**Accepted:** June 12, 2017

**Published:** June 15, 2017

Copyright © 2017 by authors and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

This study is the first of its kind in the area of workplace dyslexia/neuro-divergence (in that it is temporal & focuses on one employing organisation) and it aims to support other organisations to learn and improve their businesses and their employees experience of working within their organisations. The report documents an ongoing temporal study of the work being undertaken at one of the world's leading global universities to provide tailored support to their neuro-divergent members of staff (*i.e.* those with dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia & ADD/ADHD). Both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected to reflect the impact of having a clear & “accessible” process for obtaining support as well as having delivery which, although consistent in approach, is tailored to meet the unique needs of the individual. Neuro-divergent “conditions” are thought to affect approximately 18% of the population however whilst a largely inaccurate view of the associated difficulties exists; there is also a regrettable lack of understanding & appreciation of the strengths these processing differences can bring to business and society. Also, many of these individuals are either unaware that the challenges they may be experiencing are associated with a “processing difference” or, if they do know, they can be fearful of disclosure which, on both counts, results in many not accessing appropriate support and therefore not reaching their full potential. (“Individuals report fear of disclosure because of victimisation by the employer or bullying of workmates” [1].) The longer-term impact of not seeking appropriate tailored support can result in work performance issues and it can have a negative impact on overall well-being (plus if not acted upon could result in negative mental health in the longer term). The reported outcomes from adopting the approach focused on in this study/report have been both positive and substantial. Individuals have reported an improvement in the following general areas; self-awareness, organisation (& work performance generally) as well as a reported increase in self-confidence. Also, the wider

---

impact of this, over time, has been that these individuals have reported that improvements have continued in all areas and there has been a general increase in their feeling of being more “in control” of their work tasks. In addition to this, there has been a reported substantial improvement to participants’ career well-being therefore making the current practices a “win-win” for both employees and the wider organisation.

## Keywords

Dyslexia, Neuro-Divergence, Workplace, Well-Being, Productivity, Employee Engagement, Dyslexia Support, Dyslexia Champions™

---

## 1. Introduction

This report outlines the current work being undertaken within one of the world’s leading global universities to support and guide their “neuro-divergent” employees. It documents an ongoing temporal study, focusing on the delivery and monitoring of the tailored, specialist support being provided to staff members in relation to “processing differences” such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and ADHD.

This study is primary research (using qualitative and quantitative data) and it is believed to be the very first study of its kind-in that it focuses on a group of working adults employed within one large organisation who have accessed support using a recognised process and this support, though tailored to meet the needs of each individual, has been delivered via consistent methods. Until this very focused piece of work there has not been a similar opportunity to work with a study group of sufficient number, in one setting, who have consistently experienced the same overall service, to make results truly meaningful and reliable.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. What Is Dyslexia?

Whilst there are many definitions available this is one provided by the British Dyslexia Association [2]:

“Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. It is likely to be present at birth and to be life-long in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual’s other cognitive abilities. It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor coordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia”.

In addition to these characteristics, the British Dyslexia Association (BDA)

acknowledges that some individuals with dyslexia **can also experience visual and auditory processing difficulties** pointing out that, these individuals often have a combination of abilities and difficulties that can affect their ability to acquire literacy (and numeracy) skills. (However, research has shown that when the delivery of learning is “dyslexia friendly” every child should be able to learn to read and write\*.) It is also widely accepted that many of these individuals **also have strengths in other areas, such as design, problem solving, creative skills, “big picture” thinking, interactive skills, entrepreneurial flair and good communication skills** (when they feel confident) [3].

“All Teachers and Teaching Assistants should have Dyslexia-SpLD training so that they are able to deliver quality first teaching in the classroom and personalised teaching to those who need it. With this improved training for all Teachers and Teaching Assistants far fewer pupils will need the support of a Specialist Teacher. A huge, and far reaching additional benefit, is that the teaching techniques and strategies for pupils with Dyslexia-SpLD will help all pupils” [4].

However, although the word *dyslexia* translated literally means “difficulty with words/vocabulary” many adults with this “processing difference” are in fact “literate dyslexics”-with literacy not being their main challenge.

Dyslexia is thought to affect between 10% - 15% the population. Dr Nicola Brunswick, who carried out a PhD in the psychophysiology of dyslexia at the University of Warwick, states “Around 5% to **15%** of speakers of alphabetic languages (e.g. English, French and Spanish) are **dyslexic**” [5].

Unfortunately, there is still a lack of widespread “accurate” awareness about what dyslexia is and unfortunately there is a prevailing stigma and prejudice associated with it. Dyslexia has no correlation to an individual’s global ability (IQ) and the impact of the underlying challenges associated with this “processing difference” are unique to the individual. (Plus, it is important to note that individuals can be affected to varying degrees *i.e.* they can be affected slightly, moderately or severely.)

Dyslexia is one of a group of “processing differences” which are commonly referred to as Specific Learning Differences (or Specific Learning Difficulties) and this also includes “conditions” such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia & ADHD. It is widely accepted that these co-occur which means that a dyslexic individual may actually display characteristics associated with one or more of these “conditions” and we are focusing predominantly on dyslexia here as it is the “processing difference” which is mostly widely recognised.

## 2.2. Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is the concept that there are all types of brains/neurologies. It is widely accepted that whilst every brain is unique there are those who are “more different than others” (and these include individuals with dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADD, ADHD & dyspraxia). It is estimated that around 18% of the population are “neuro-divergent” which means they process information in a different way. Therefore, someone who is neuro-divergent is not neuro-typical-that is, their neurology is different from the majority of the population. (Author Steve Sil-

berman, has used the phrase “neuro-tribes” to describe these non neuro-typical groups [6].)

It is increasingly being recognised that embracing and supporting a truly neuro-diverse workforce makes good business sense as neuro-divergent individuals can bring many advantages to teams, organisations and society.

### **2.3. Dyslexia & Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) in the Workplace**

It could be said that our understanding of dyslexia has taken a step forward over the past 10 years, in that more children are now receiving appropriate support when dyslexia is identified in schools. However, the provision of appropriate dyslexia related support is not yet widespread or consistent. As the result of where we currently are on this “journey” towards becoming a “dyslexia-friendly”, “neuro-divergence supporting” world, adult dyslexics, especially those over 30, are unlikely to have received any dyslexia related support during their education. The individuals who have managed to overcome the challenges their “processing difference” has presented have likely succeeded in acquiring literacy related skills through being fortunate in having a teacher (or parent/family member) who taught them in a way that suited their needs—and through sheer hard work and determination. (Sadly, those who have not been so fortunate may still have major challenges with literacy—and may find themselves unemployed as the result.)

Dyslexia is a “hidden disability” and through lack of awareness it is widely believed to simply affect an individual’s ability to read & write. As the result of this, many adults who are experiencing challenges with their tasks within the workplace may not necessarily consider that dyslexia could be causing them to struggle. Added to this, the stigma and prejudice associated with dyslexia, many of these individuals may be reluctant to seek help as they are fearful that this may have negative outcomes. Commonly these individuals have concerns about how they are perceived by others, how this may affect their credibility and the potential wider and long term impact on their career.

The types of challenges the dyslexic individual experiences in the workplace will vary dependent upon their own unique challenges, their role and the environment they work in. However, some of the more common challenges include; time management, organisation, planning, structuring written communication and presenting information. If these challenges are affecting their ability to meet targets and the quality of their work is not up to a desired standard, line managers who have no understanding of dyslexia (and neuro-divergent “conditions”) are likely to see this as a performance issue and may erroneously initiate a formal performance management procedure rather than signpost the individual towards a source of information and screening.

### **2.4. Anxiety/Stress**

It is widely accepted that being dyslexic is stressful and that stressful situations

can increase the impact of the dyslexia (SpLD) related challenges on day to day life. It is likely that all employees will experience stressful experiences in the workplace during some point in their career. Stress is a personal experience and every staff member will experience it distinctly.

“Stress is experienced when the individual appraises their coping resources to be insufficient to the situation they are faced with” [7].

“Some stress is positive. It causes our bodies to release adrenaline, which helps us to accomplish assignments and projects, and can even enhance our performance and problem-solving ability. But chronic stress, which is constant and persists over an extended period of time, can be debilitating and overwhelming. Chronic stress can affect both our physical and psychological well-being by causing a variety of problems including insomnia, muscle pain, high blood pressure and a weakened immune system” [8].

In the workplace it is noted that unsupported dyslexic/neuro divergent staff will experience higher levels of negative stress and anxiety. Stress over a long period of time may lead to an anxiety disorder and mental ill-health. A situation which is both costly for the individual and organisation.

“Mental ill-health, including stress, depression and anxiety, is thought to be responsible for 91 million lost working days each year, more than for any other illness.

Analysts estimate that this type of sickness absence costs £8.4 billion each year, plus another £15.1 billion in reduced productivity. A further £2.4 billion is lost replacing staff who leave work because of mental ill-health. Overall, recent estimates put the cost to UK employers at £30 billion each year” [9] ACAS.

## **2.5. Disclosure and Declaration**

For so long dyslexia has been associated predominantly with difficulties and often erroneously linked to low IQ (or low “global ability”) and the resulting stigma and prejudice has prevented many adults from seeking appropriate support. (These feelings of insecurity and reluctance affect people in all types of job roles, however it would appear this has been especially so in the case for dyslexic academics. Due to a lack of general understanding and limited support being readily available, they have felt isolated and extremely fearful of disclosure—as being seen as a dyslexic academic could have the potential of undermining their academic/professional credibility.)

However, those who truly understand dyslexia and value neurodiversity within groups, teams and workplaces, know that processing differences can bring additional strengths such as creativity, innovative thinking and problem solving abilities and this is exactly why many of these individuals are in their current roles. For example, individuals with dyslexia associated “processing differences” often think “outside the box” and seek to solve hitherto unsolved problems and come up with innovative new ideas.

“Individuals report fear of disclosure because of victimisation by the employer or bullying by workmates” [1].

### **Dyslexic Academic's Forum (DAF)**

In March 2016 academics from across the UK met in London. This was the first meeting of its kind ever to be held and whilst the actual number that attended the event was around 50, the number who signed up to be involved in the new group was nearer to 100. Delegates from over 35 UK universities and 35 academic disciplines were represented and in total this group includes Deans, Professors and Lecturers.

This was no ordinary “gathering of minds”—this, for the very first time, was a “gathering of neuro-divergent academic minds”—as every one of them was dyslexic!

The aim of this group was to gauge support for a Code of Practice specifically related to supporting academics with dyslexia. The consensus was that there is a need to acknowledge and support the unique needs of this group who sit between education and workplace and they strive to bridge the gap with the work they are starting to undertake.

“Until recently, dyslexic academics have been scarcely visible, often developing their own coping strategies in isolation from others. Negative stereotypes about dyslexics expressed in terms of ‘cannot do’ causes dyslexia amongst academics not to be discussed. Many simply do not declare that they are dyslexic” [10] (Gary Hughes, University of Kent, 15 March 2016).

(Anecdotally, when asked for a show of hands, in respect of how many of this group of 50+ people had had a Workplace Needs Assessment only 5 indicated they had. In addition, when asked about their experience of this only 3 of these said it was a positive experience. Therefore, it is likely that the majority of these individuals have received no workplace related support—whether it be needed or not [11].)

### **2.6. Wellbeing**

Overall wellbeing is not about being wealthy or successful—or simply about being in a state of happiness, it’s about how all the elements of our lives interact to make our life worthwhile. To have thriving wellbeing we need balance in all areas of our lives; psychological, social, physical, community, financial & career. (Having an intense focus in one area, or to neglect one area, can have a detrimental affect overall.)

If one has an occupation, vocation or “job” that they find fulfilling and meaningful they are more likely to have thriving career wellbeing. Conversely, if much of one’s social time is spent worrying about your job this can cause stress which can then take a toll on both physical and mental health.

“People with low engagement and low career wellbeing are simply waiting for the workday to end”. “People with high career wellbeing are more than twice as likely to be thriving in their lives overall”. “People with high Career Wellbeing.... have the opportunity to use their strengths every day and to make progress”. “In most cases, they have a leader or manager who makes them enthusiastic about the future and friends who share their passion” [12]. Also

(Wood 2008 [13]) finds that employees who report more supportive management experience both greater levels of job satisfaction and less job-related anxiety.

Correlations between subjective workplace wellbeing and workplace or firm-level productivity have been found by Harter *et al.* (2002) [14] and Patterson *et al.* (2004) [15].

## 2.7. Dyslexia—A Business Perspective

There are likely to be employees with dyslexia (and other associated “processing differences”) working within every organisation and many of these individuals will be coping without having received any previous support. It is important to note that many dyslexic individuals who are in work are likely to be “literate dyslexics”—meaning that literacy may not be a major problem for them. If these individuals are not “dyslexia aware” they may start to experience difficulties which they are unable to explain. If, which commonly occurs, they feel increased pressure, start working longer hours to be able to complete tasks and/or they experience difficulties with social interaction with colleagues as a result it can start to take a toll of their health both physically and mentally.

It may come as a surprise to learn that there are many dyslexics working in middle management, senior management and at board level. A typical scenario is that an individual may be working perfectly well in a role where they may have been able to use the recognised dyslexia related strengths such as creativity, good communication skills, problem solving ability etc. and then when they go through some kind of change—they are not able to cope as well as they did before. (This “change” could be new job, promotion, change of processes or a change of line manager.) In this new situation their existing coping strategies may not work for them which may result in them having to work harder and put in longer hours in order to try to stay on top of their workload and anxiety starts to increase and if this continues over time this becomes negative stress.

From a business perspective this means that without appropriate support the individual is less likely to perform to their full potential, there is also likely to be an impact on their confidence and reduced engagement. Their focus may turn to simply “surviving” seeing them not fully utilising the skills and strengths and in longer term there is the risk that the individual will need to take sick leave and/or they may decide to find a different job with a new employer. All of which involves cost for all those involved.

“Understanding and recognising the role as an employer, whatever the size of business, does not only make good commercial sense, it is also a legal obligation since 2010 (Equality Act)” [16] Amanda Kirby, 2014.

### The Advantages of Welcoming Neuro-Divergence

There are obvious advantages to having people within the workplace who “think in a different way” as gaining a different perspective can help solve problems and set us on a road of discovery. Whilst we have, for so long, been focused on a

“deficit model” for dyslexia and associated processing differences, the time has come for us to embrace and support difference—in all things. A vital element to be mindful of is that everything man-made starts with an idea and having the courage to voice that idea could make all the difference as to whether it leads to engineering better medicines, providing energy from a hitherto untapped source or whether the idea remains undiscovered. “Now, more than any other time in the history of humankind, engineers are required to provide solutions to ensure the survival of the human race” (Professor Mushtak Al-Atabi, *Think like an Engineer*, 2014) [17].

There is now an increased recognition that the majority of these “neuro-divergent” individuals do indeed have a unique skill set which includes a range of strengths. These positives, without hitherto having received any kind of support, will in many instances, have gone mostly untapped and it is now accepted that it is not just a coincidence that these individuals have these strengths. Along with this greater understanding also comes the realisation that certain career paths are more attractive to dyslexic individuals and that taking a proactive approach to providing appropriate support will help realise potential latent talent. Whilst this support is needed in every type of workplace there are a few forward-thinking organisations who have been leading the way. For example, Shell have a mentoring programme which was set up with guidance from the British Dyslexia Association and the Institute of Mechanical Engineers have a support programme for their direct members and their families (thus acknowledging and supporting the genetic pre-disposition of neuro-divergent conditions).

If the weaker/challenge areas are mitigated by tailored coping strategies and tools then the strengths of these neuro-divergent individuals can be developed and utilised for the common good whether it be for developing a new process, new technology or starting out on a new business venture.

A 2008 study funded by Microsoft revealed that “Dyslexics make up 19% or 600,000 of the 3.5 million entrepreneurial population in the UK but in the US 35% of entrepreneurs are dyslexic”. The report document stated that “If dyslexics in the UK were provided with tailored training and mentoring to increase their skills and confidence, there could be an increase in the number of dyslexics creating new ventures” [18].

## 2.8. Workplace Dyslexia Support

For an individual to feel comfortable about seeking support it is important that everyone has an accurate understanding of what dyslexia is—and when widespread dyslexia & SpLD awareness is achieved only then will the inaccurate and unhelpful stereotype and barriers be removed.

Ideally, for individuals to be able to access support there needs to be a clear and accessible process (and accompanying guidance for line managers, individuals and HR), that everyone in the organization has access to. With this in place everyone can be assured of receiving a consistent service and feel comfortable that they will be treated fairly, without fear of discrimination.

The organisation should decide on the most appropriate screening and/or identification process suited to the needs of the people and the organisation. Following on from this, the individual should be offered a Workplace Needs Assessment by a qualified Workplace Needs Assessor. The Workplace Needs Assessor will then produce a report which contains recommendations for Workplace Adjustments which are tailored to the needs of the individual and their work environment. These adjustments are likely to include; assistive technology, related technology training and a programme of specialist coping strategy coaching to help the individual develop more effective coping strategies and integrate the tools (all of which should be tailored to the needs of every individual).

“It should be borne in mind that it can take anything up to 6 months for an individual to relearn to work with these strategies in place, so a quick fix is not to be anticipated” [19].

## 2.9. Is Dyslexia a Disability?

Since the legal case of Patterson vs Chief of the Metropolis, 2007 [20], which found in favour of the individual with mild/moderate dyslexia, there have been numerous dyslexia related cases. However, it is suggested that rather than being reactive to this, it would be useful to consider the benefits of being proactive in relation to dyslexia (and neuro-divergent individuals generally)—as they represent a large percentage of the workforce whose skills and talents may not currently be fully utilised by the organisation. Plus, if they are struggling there is both a business and personal cost implication. In addition, the Equality Act 2010 encourages organisations to implement an anticipatory approach, for organisation to plan for all disability and ensure they are ready to welcome all staff for employment.

Dyslexia (& SpLDs generally) can disable people when they have not received appropriate guidance, support & “tools” **and** when these individuals are in environments (and with people) that are not supportive of their “difference”.

As we know most individuals are disabled by the barriers they face. If the barriers are removed every person will be able to achieve to their full potential, “contribute” to their communities & their employing organisation and live happier, more fulfilling lives.

“Many dyslexic employees experience disciplinary and misconduct-led approaches for problems which are disability-related” and “there is limited understanding of reasonable adjustments, and what does and doesn’t work, in workplace negotiations to resolve these issues” [1] (Brian Hagan, 2013/2014).

There have been numerous dyslexia related legal cases over the past few years, where employers have been found lacking in their duty to their dyslexic employees which, as a result has seen these organisations becoming more “dyslexia friendly” employers. However, there are also an increasing number of enlightened organisations who are acknowledging, appreciating and appropriately supporting their neuro-diverse workforce. By taking this proactive approach and

---

putting all the necessary components in place there are benefits for all parties.

### **3. The Study**

#### **3.1. Imperial College, London**

“Imperial College London is a science based institution consistently rated amongst the world’s best universities” ([www.imperial.ac.uk](http://www.imperial.ac.uk)) and it is the only UK University to focus entirely on science, engineering, medicine (STEM) & business. It has a headcount of 8400 staff (July 2016) and a total of 14,700 students.

They recognise the advantages that can be gained by providing appropriate work related support for neuro-divergent individuals, un-tapping latent talent and helping individuals achieve to the full potential.

Thus, the College is working towards a truly dyslexia friendly environment which embraces and supports a neuro-diverse workforce helping to ensure students and staff feel safe and appropriately supported. This approach of recognising strengths and helping individuals fulfil their potential is seeing Imperial College continue its tradition of promoting and creating positive change for the good of mankind.

The College has an Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Centre (EDIC) working to ensure all members of staff have access to a process of support & guidance so they can use their skills and experience to support students and develop their own careers.

#### **3.2. Dyslexia (& SpLDs) Support via EDIC**

Approximately 4 years ago the EDIC established an interim process to support dyslexic staff and set up a database recording details of staff members who were approaching them about dyslexia support for themselves. This was led by a newly appointed Staff Disability Advisor. (Although the EDIC were providing this support, until this time, they had no process in place and no comprehensive record). During the year that followed 15 people were added to the database and to promote the service dyslexia awareness posters were positioned around the campus via HR Managers. Since the start of the database, now 4 years on, there are 60 individuals on the database who have approached the Centre for guidance related to dyslexia and other (specific learning difficulties) SpLDs. Some of these individuals requested screening and then decided to go no further and some went on to have a Workplace Needs Assessment and receive all the recommended Workplace Adjustments. (Some of these individuals are currently in the process of receiving support—and for this reason these individuals are not included in the study.)

The term of this study is approximately 3 years, and during this time a further 50 individuals have sought guidance and/or support via the EDIC. It was, at that time (April 2013) that the author of this report began working with staff at Imperial College. (Information about the author can be found at the back of this report.)

The author of the report works closely with the Head of the EDIC, who has championed a positive, pro-active approach to support and secured ongoing budget from the College for this work.

### **3.3. The Study Group**

The research study overall looks at 18 individuals who have now completed a full program of tailored dyslexia (& associated SpLD) related workplace support. (This is the full group without exclusion.) The second part of the study focuses on 12 of these individuals.

## **4. Methodology**

Throughout the 3 years of the study term feedback and was collected after each meeting (Screening, workplace Needs Assessment and Coaching). However, it is the “distance travelled” data collected at the end of the term of coaching which is being presented here. (Therefore, the data is from those who completed the full program of support.) Plus, there was a “follow up”/temporal aspect to the research which involved a questionnaire survey. (The link to this was sent out to all 18 individuals. It was made clear this was completely anonymous with no coding to link it to them. The aim of this was to reduce any potential anxiety and to encourage them to be as open and frank as possible.)

### **4.1. Part 1: Outcomes (Perceived Progress Made from the Program of Support)**

The measurements taken on completion of the program of coaching were for; Self-Awareness, Confidence and “Organisation” (this was explained as being their ability to cope, manage and organise their work tasks).

This part of the study was completed by all 18 employees at the end of their last session of coping strategy coaching.

### **4.2. Part 2: Impact (An Online Survey/Questionnaire)**

The questionnaire took the form of an online written survey containing 10 questions. It was accessed via a password-protected webpage—with no coding used to link individuals to the comments made. This approach was designed to encourage engagement as it ensured anonymity (and this was made known to the respondents). The questionnaire was initially sent to a small sample of independent respondents ahead of the main survey. (The sample comprised four individuals from other organisations who had previously received the same programme of support.)

The main survey was sent to all 18 individuals sometime after completion of the programme of support—for some individuals it was a matter of a couple of months and for a few it was over a year since the time their coaching had finished. Although 18 were sent out only 12 questionnaires were completed and returned however this is a good return rate. (Through investigation it was found that 3 individuals are no longer working at Imperial College.)

As there can be reluctance to “reveal” dyslexia/neuro-divergence in the workplace it is suggested the chosen survey method ensured confidentiality and encouraged full engagement. Given the need to balance “safety” and giving “honest” responses we believe the method used gives reliable results.

## 5. Findings: Part 1 (“Results” on Completion of Coaching)

### 5.1. Job Roles of the Full Group (18 Individuals)

Figure 1 shows the study group included individuals employed in a cross-section of different roles including a director and a senior teaching fellow.

### 5.2. Self-Awareness

Figure 2 demonstrates that regardless of whether these individuals had previously received support & guidance for their challenges (for example during education) they were all found to be lacking in self-awareness. (Little information had been shared with them about how their dyslexia/SpLD related challenges were affecting them in their day to day lives.)

All 18 members of the full study group said they had benefitted from having their “processing differences” explained to them (and the emotional impact of this was quite profound for many of these individuals).

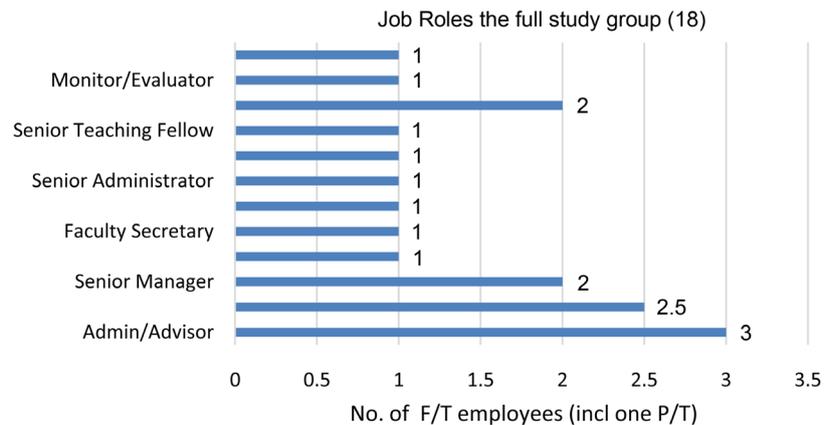


Figure 1. Job roles of respondents.

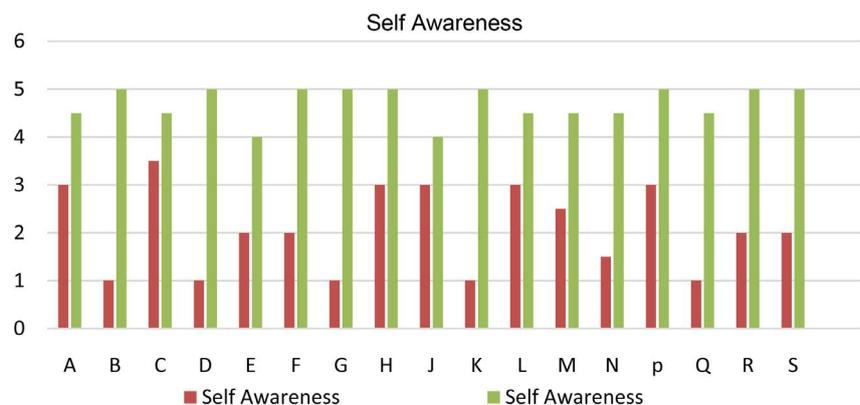


Figure 2. Self-awareness level prior to and after specific workplace one to one support.

### 5.3. Organisation

Figure 3 shows that all respondents from the full study group of 18 said their “organisation” had improved. (With many individuals saying this had improved by over 100%.)

Although the word organisation is used here, what the study group were individually asked at the end of their final coaching session was:

“In respect of your day to day tasks for example; how you are coping with them and how “in control” you feel, how would you rate your organisation?”

### 5.4. Confidence

Figure 4 shows that significant improvements were seen in relation to self-confidence by the end of the final session of coaching—regardless of how many sessions of coping strategy sessions were undertaken. (With many individuals stating their confidence had improved by more than 100%.)

## 6. Findings: Part 2 (The Questionnaire Survey)

Figure 5 gives an overview of profile of the entire study. (The questionnaire survey was sent to all 18 of the study group however responses received totalled 12 individuals.)

Figure 6 shows that the majority of the final focus group of 12 individuals were in the 36 - 50 age group.

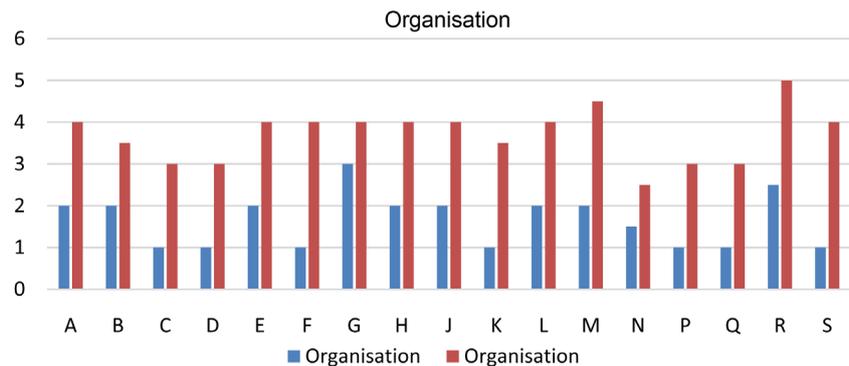


Figure 3. “Organisation” prior to and after a program of specialist one to one support.

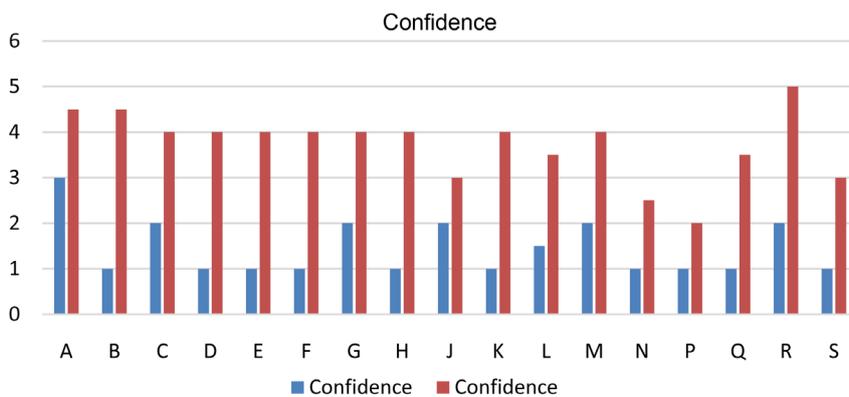
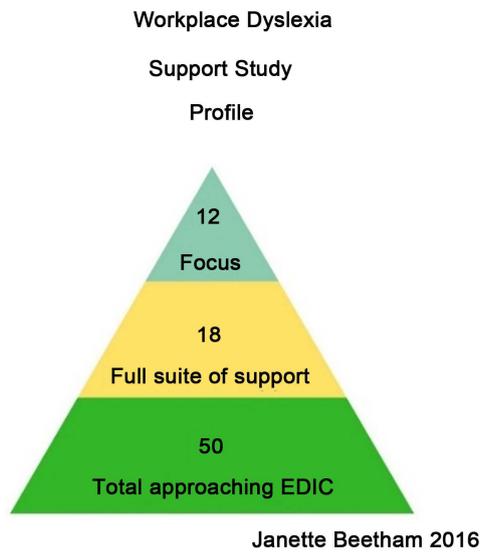
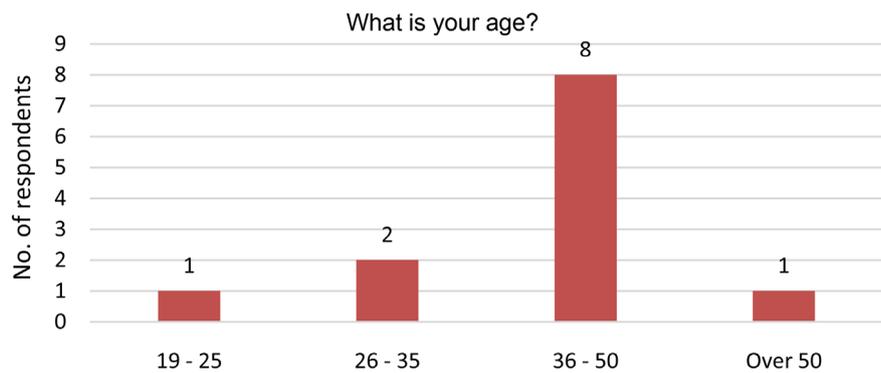


Figure 4. Confidence prior to and after specialist one to one support.



**Figure 5.** Workplace dyslexia support study profile.



**Figure 6.** Age profile of the “group of 12”.

### 6.1. How Did You Find Out about the Support Available from EDIC?

**Figure 7** reveals that the majority of respondents said they had found out about the specialist support that was available within the organisation from speaking with a work colleague.

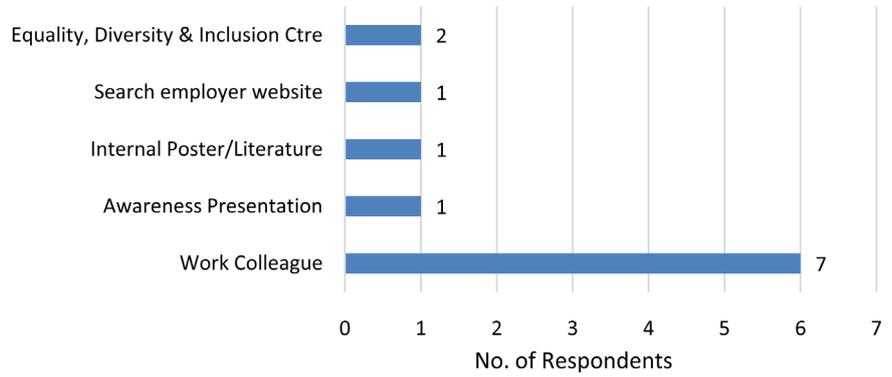
### 6.2. How Many Sessions of Strategy Coaching Did You Receive?

**Figure 8** shows that most of the respondents to the questionnaire survey had received 3 sessions of coaching. However, the mean was 4 sessions.

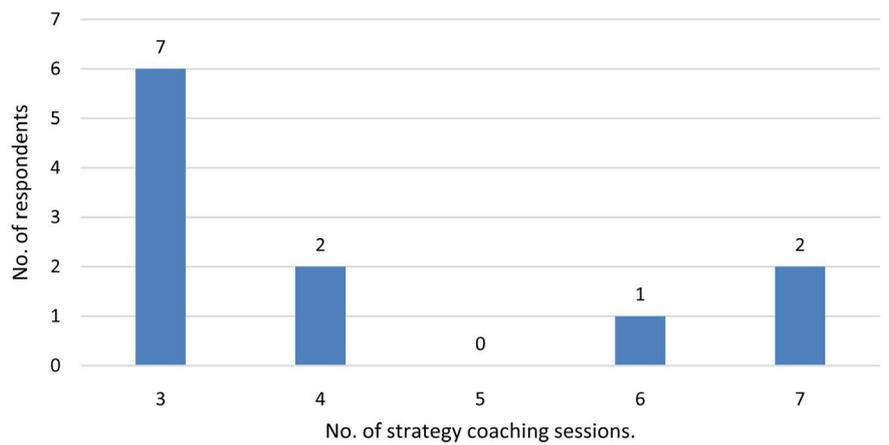
### 6.3. How Would You Rate Your Career Wellbeing before Your Coaching Sessions?

**Figure 9** shows that before undertaking a programme of specialist one to one coaching the majority of respondents rated their career well-being as either “struggling” or “suffering”.

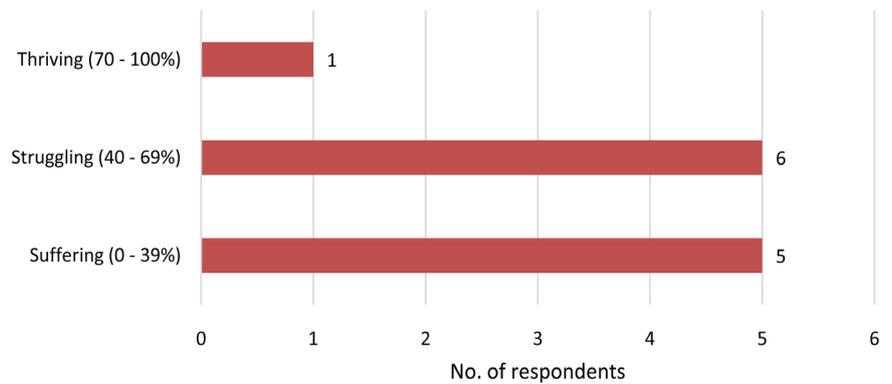
The categories used here match those used by Gallop in their Wellbeing Program (Rath & Harter, 2010).



**Figure 7.** How did you find out about the support available?



**Figure 8.** How many sessions of strategy coaching did you receive?

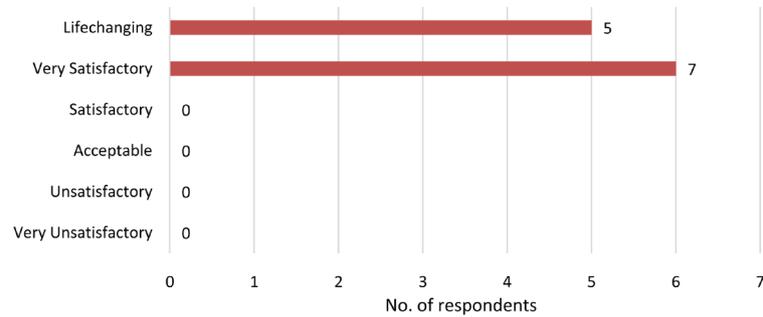


**Figure 9.** How would you rate your career wellbeing before receiving support for your challenges?

### 6.4. How Would You Describe Your Experience of Receiving Coaching?

**Figure 10** shows that the respondents either described the coaching experience as “very satisfactory” or “life-changing”.

(It was decided to include the term “life-changing” within the questionnaire because so many individuals had said this during their support programmes.)



**Figure 10.** Describe your experience of one to one strategy coaching.

### 6.5. How Would You Rate Your Career Wellbeing at the Present Time?

**Figure 11** shows that at the time of completing the questionnaire (Sept 2016) the majority of respondents rated their career well-being as “thriving”.

However, three respondents said they were “struggling”. Two of them gave reasons for this as follows; one was in a new role and was awaiting a new job description after which time they would be requesting a new Workplace Needs Assessment, one said they “needed to be much better at implementing changes but I’m a lot better than I was”.

Another respondent who indicated “Other” said their wellbeing had been “up & down due to significant issues outside of work. The coaching has really helped”.

### 6.6. What Difference, If Any, Has Workplace Dyslexia Support Made to You? (e.g. Are You Doing Something Now That Perhaps You Would Not Have thought Yourself Capable of Before?)

**Table 1** lists the answers given to the above question and all respondents mention positive differences following the programme of support. These include; moving to a role more suited to their strengths, improved confidence, taking a more structured approach to work tasks and reduced anxiety.

### 6.7. How Would You Say Your Work Performance Has Changed Since Completing Your Strategy Coaching? If Others Have Commented on This (Line Manager, Colleagues) Please Say?

**Table 2** lists responses to the above question and the responses were all positive. Changes listed here include; being more organised, worrying less and completing & achieving more. However, it was reported by one person that their “line manager had struggled to understand”.

### 6.8. Additional Comments Regarding Your Experience of Workplace Dyslexia Support and the Impact It May or May Not Have Had Please Add Here

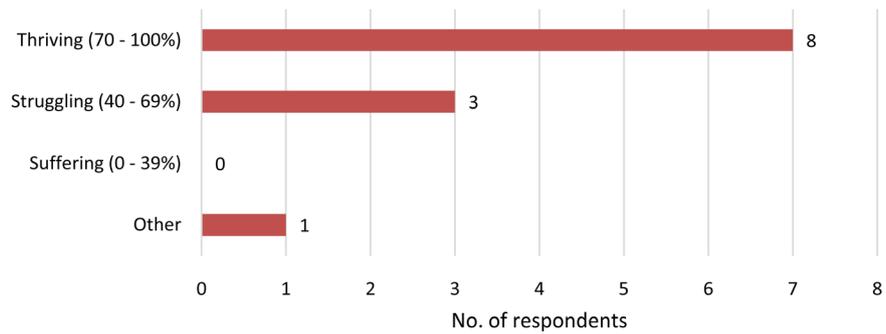
**Table 3** is a list of additional comments which include comments about the

**Table 1.** What difference, if any, has workplace dyslexia support made to you?

1	I have really good strategies for dealing with my work and the support really boosted my confidence. I don't put off tasks and have finally found the answer to why I find certain tasks more difficult than others.
2	Yes, I'm transitioning into a new role which is much better suited to my strengths. Having coaching changed my perspective. I was putting myself under a lot of pressure to perform and succeed without taking into account my dyslexia. For me it's still early days but this feels so much better.
3	Confidence has improved.
4	I feel more confident in what I do and I don't beat myself up about being too slow or struggling to read. I find comfort in the techniques I've learnt to help me better work and daily life.
5	Thinking things through a little more rationally and not having so many panic attacks.
6	I'm definitely doing things I wouldn't have thought I could ever do before. Shortly I will be making a presentation to the National ***—which is unbelievable.
7	I am more aware of what my difficulties are but rather than viewing them as hindrances I can adopt strategies that I learned through the coaching.
8	More structured approach to organising work in particular producing written materials.
9	I'm aware of why I struggle in certain areas of work and have systems in place to help.
10	I have improved my organisation of my emails and have software to assist in planning out new projects or pieces of work. I have altered the way I use Outlook calendars to make this more functional.
11	I have more confidence in my writing skills and no longer doubt my ability.
12	More confidence in myself and to see other people's perspectives of dyslexia in the workplace.

**Table 2.** How would you say your work performance has changed since completing your strategy coaching?

1	I feel far more in control which has boosted my confidence and this has been noted by colleagues.
2	I'm still not very good at deadlines (but I'm working on it). My manager has commented that I seem more confident and less anxious. Hopefully it (my confidence) will grow with time.
3	Yes. I really did not know that my dyslexia was the reason I couldn't do my job properly. Since I have completed my sessions I am more organised.
4	It takes time to readjust but it's better. I couldn't be more happy with the dyslexia support I received. It has more certainly changed my life and the way I feel about the struggles I have had my whole life that have gone unnoticed. Thank you.
5	It still needs some work but overall I think that I am not worrying about things as much and not worrying helps performance. I have found the support and the assessor to be very accommodating. I would like to thank the assessor for being so kind, something which I will value for a very long time.
6	I am completing and achieving more. I am managing my email better, though there is still room for improvement here. I am prioritising better and am more efficient at completing tasks to deadlines (even if self-imposed). The mapping technique is helping enormously for everything. I don't forget or miss so many things out—I always map a plan even for some small things.
7	There has definitely been an improvement in my confidence and overall work output. This has also been commented on by my line manager which is reassuring.
8	Manager has observed an improvement and is supportive. Discussed at PRDP.
9	Some aspects of work are still challenging, but I have a better understanding of myself and my abilities.
10	It has helped me build relationships and identify strategies for dealing with delivery of multiple projects.
11	There is a lot more awareness of my condition as some of my colleagues have also been diagnosed with dyslexia.
12	My line manager has struggled to understand my dyslexia and there have been many problems over this. My work has improved due to the work support but problems with my line manager had lead to a performance review.



**Figure 11.** How would you rate your career wellbeing at the present time?

**Table 3.** Additional comments regarding your experience of workplace dyslexia support and the impact it may or may not have had please add here.

6a	The strategies have not only impacted my work life. They have helped outside of work both directly but also as a consequence of improving my work life balance and reducing some of the stressful aspects of my job.
8a	I have appreciated the opportunity it was more helpful than what I'd previously experienced.
10a	I found I had a strong emotional tie to being dyslexic and being able to talk about how dyslexia affects me reduced the rumination and baggage associated. This has greatly facilitated moving to a more accepting and happier place.
11a	I think having workplace dyslexia support is excellent and very much hope that it will continue.
12a	A better understanding for work colleagues to know what people with dyslexia go through would be beneficial and I think should be mandatory for everyone. I was very grateful for the support I had with the few sessions and to be able to talk to them about any problems I had.

emotional connection with dyslexia and the view that dyslexia awareness would be beneficial to everyone.

### 6.9. If You Knew One of Your Colleagues Needed Support but Were Reluctant to Seek Help for Their Dyslexia-Type Challenges, What Would You Say to Them Based on Your Own Experience?

**Table 4** shows that all respondents believe it is important for colleagues who may be experiencing challenges to feel able to speak to someone and be able to make informed decisions about seeking support.

## 7. Discussion

Overall the study reveals that the current program of support being provided at Imperial College is resulting in improvements for all those who have accessed it. Furthermore, it demonstrates that employees from a cross section of different departments (working at different levels) have been supported during the past 3 years. However, we should not be complacent as there is still work to be done. It is important to ensure that individuals feel safe, comfortable and supported

**Table 4.** If you knew one of your colleagues needed support but were reluctant to seek help for their dyslexia-type challenges, what would you say to them based on your own experience?

1	I would strongly encourage them to seek support and reassure them. I would let them know that from my own personal perspective the support given was life changing and has really helped me to not only cope with tasks at work better but ultimately really boosted my confidence.
2	Have an initial chat with someone who can offer help. You don't have to commit to anything you're not comfortable with. You owe it to yourself to get as much information as possible to help you make the right decision for you.
3	Please do not let this opportunity go by. You can do something about it by letting your employer know that you are dyslexic.
4	I would let them know that it will help them in the long run for all aspects of their life; not only in the workplace and that it is well worth it.
5	That the training has given me the confidence to speak openly about my dyslexia and that I am no longer worrying unnecessarily that the problem is because I am useless, rather I can see how to use tools to help me progress through periods of uncertainty.
6	I would certainly encourage them to seek help and to take up the offer of coaching if it were offered.
7	I would speak about my own experience and what a difference seeking support really made to my work and my confidence.
8	I would explain that in my experience even very small inconspicuous changes can make a big difference, sometimes the stigma we place on ourselves is worse than what others might think.
9	I would encourage them to contact the Equality Team for a confidential chat.
10	The support is confidential and allows you to review your current position, review and improve your coping strategies and talk to someone who understands what it is to be dyslexic.
11	I would very much encourage my colleague to seek help. I would also make it clear that dyslexia does not prevent you from achieving your goals as long as you are willing to ask for support when needed.
12	I would recommend having the support as it would be beneficial and would help them at their job and to get support for their department.

throughout their support journey. The EDIC at Imperial College encourage all staff to follow best practice by referring to the guidance provided and seeking help when necessary. The ultimate goal is to be able to authentically state that Imperial College is “dyslexia/neuro-divergence friendly” work environment.

However, it would appear, at the present time, the decision of the individual as to whether to make contact EDIC to explore support options, is greatly influenced by having a colleague they could confide in, as this was noted as the most popular “sign-poster” listed in the questionnaire survey. As we understand that individuals can feel vulnerable and may have concerns about disclosure, having an informal discussion appears to be an important “first step”. This does however bring into question how much accurate information these trusted colleagues have in the area of dyslexia and neuro-divergent “conditions”. Therefore, we need to consider whether something can be done to augment this making it a

more robust conduit.

From the data collected it would appear the group overall had little information shared with them previously about their own “processing differences” and they all said they benefitted from having greater self-awareness during the formal process of support. With relation to developing more effective coping strategies and gaining in confidence each of the individuals showed significant improvements as their program of coaching came to an end. However, as always noted in their summary reports, it can take up to 6 months for new coping strategies to become second nature—therefore, with practice, even greater improvements are likely to ensue.

The recorded outcomes, at the time of completing the program of coaching, indicates that the support process being utilised for staff at Imperial College is resulting in personal growth in the 3 key areas and this diagram demonstrate this. (It was not seen as practical to use this type of diagram in this report for every participant, however the data is available.)

Figure 12 shows a “before” (blue) and after (red) diagram of the impact of a programme of support. It is provided here to demonstrate personal growth following a programme of tailored support.

The second part of the study (12 individuals) revealed that prior to undertaking the program of support 6 individuals rated their career wellbeing as “struggling” and 5 rated this as “suffering” with only 1 individual rating it as “Thriving”. However, at the time of the questionnaire survey the number who were “thriving” was 8, which was a significant improvement. (The others who rated themselves as “suffering” at the time of the survey gave additional information which showed that it was mostly external factors affecting them at that time).

When asked about their experience of coaching 7 individuals rated this as “Very Satisfactory” and 5 said it had been “Life Changing”. When asked to comment on what difference the support had made to them there were some very positive comments such as;

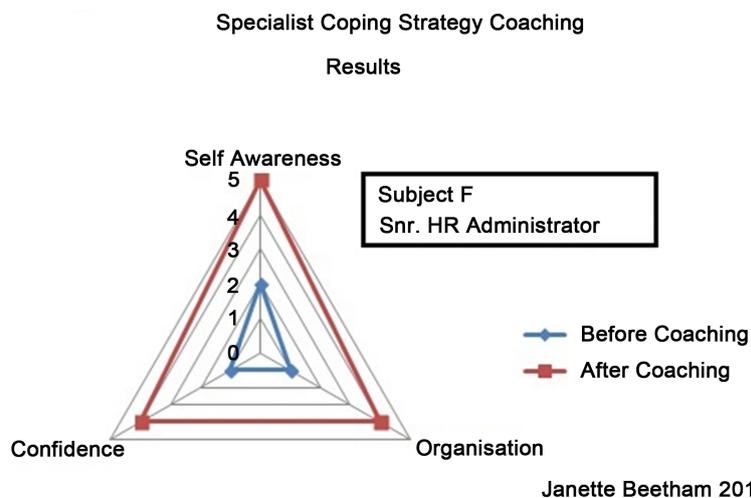


Figure 12. An overview of the impact of specialist coping strategy coaching, in all 3 areas, on one individual.

“I have really good strategies for dealing with my work and the support really boosted my confidence. I don’t put off tasks and have finally found the answer to why I find certain tasks more difficult than others”.

“Thinking things through a little more rationally and not having panic attacks”.

“I’m definitely doing things I wouldn’t have thought I could ever do before. Shortly I will be making a presentation at The National\*\*\*\*\*—which is unbelievable”.

When asked whether they felt their work performance had changed, once again there were very positive responses including: “There has definitely been an improvement in my confidence and overall work output. This has also been commented on by my line manager which is reassuring”.

However, the following comment serves to demonstrate the need for support, guidance and awareness for all staff: “My line manager has struggled to understand my dyslexia and there have been many problems over this. My work has improved due to the work support but problems with my line manager had led to a performance review”.

Those surveyed said their experience of dyslexia (& SpLD) support had been very positive and their new-found strategies and confidence has resulted in increased career wellbeing. They said that if they knew a colleague was struggling at work yet was reluctant to get help for dyslexia (or other processing difference either suspected or otherwise) they would encourage them to seek the help that is being made available. There was also mention of the fact that the individual needs reassurance, that the initial contact with EDIC was confidential and that they found it helpful to speak to someone who truly understands dyslexia.

## 8. Conclusions

There is a risk that neuro-divergent individuals (estimated at 15% - 18% of the population overall), who have not received appropriate specialist workplace related support (either through lack of awareness or fear of disclosure) could be struggling with their workload. As a result, they may be underperforming and longer term they may experience negative mental health (and chronically, physical ill health). However, the streamlined (flow charted) process of specialist support now available from EDIC at Imperial College, and searchable via the website, would appear to help these individuals access the help they need within this particular workplace. This process is simple to use & “accessible” and those seeking support appear to be able to book support quite successfully.

The support provision itself is tailored to help meet the needs of each individual, yet it follows a consistent method, which is proving to have positive results in all areas as evidenced in the post coaching review and the follow up survey. This support, which is designed to encourage longer term self-reliance, is helping an increasing number of employees gain self-awareness, feel empowered, suitably equipped and able to start to fulfill their potential. The results have shown that it is not the amount of support that is key—rather it is that

these individuals have access to the right resources which are tailored to fit their individual needs.

However, it is recognised that widespread awareness raising, of all neuro-divergent “conditions”, needs to be ongoing and line managers in particular need to have access to appropriate guidance related to this.

As a result of undertaking this study, it is seen that implementing a streamlined “accessible” process which enables and encourages “neuro-divergent” employees to access tailored, specialist, workplace-specific support increases engagement & productivity as well as enhancing career wellbeing.

## 9. Recommendations

1) This process of accessing support and guidance, although working well, would be enhanced by further awareness raising—in addition to having an increased number of truly knowledgeable and approachable staff members who can act as an impartial “first step” in the guidance and support process.

**Action:** as a result of the findings of this study, a new initiative was officially launched in January 2017 to address this and ensure this work is embedded throughout the organisation. For further information on this please visit: [www.dyslexiachampions.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiachampions.org.uk).

2) The qualitative and quantitative results have been built on a foundation of data collected from work undertaken within a cross-section of other organisations, between 2009-2016, which also evidences that the particular process of one to one support being used here is effective for neuro-divergent individuals.

**Action:** this one to one coaching/training methodology is being developed and will be piloted as a “train the trainer” programme with suitably qualified/experienced individuals (British Dyslexia Association Level 4 or above). This will enable the methods used in the study to be replicated more widely.

3) The continued provision of awareness training and guidance for managers is an ongoing area of work. This is especially important to moving towards a dyslexia/neuro-divergence friendly workplace as these individuals are influencers of workplace culture on a micro level. Line managers are an access point for support and they are key to the provision of an accessible, supportive work environment.

By providing dyslexic/neuro-divergent individuals with the right resources during their education and in their working years there is the potential to kick-start a new-age of enterprise, productivity and discovery.

Think the same, do the same, stay the same.

Think differently, do differently, advance.

## About the Authors

“**Janette Beetham**, senior consultant to BDA (British Dyslexia Association), who is an inspirational coach for dyslexic individuals. She developed the processes at BDA for the provision of workplace coaching. She is also the lead tutor on the workplace assessors programme for BDA as well as working indepen-

dently to support dyslexic individuals in the workplace” (DYSLEXIA IN THE WORKPLACE, MALPAS 2012).

**Leyla Okhai**, is the Head of the EDIC at Imperial College, where she has worked for the past four and a half years. Leyla is also the lead for staff disability in the College and runs the Calibre disabled leadership programme with Dr Ossie Stuart. She has spearheaded mental health and wellbeing initiatives at the College and beyond.

## References

- [1] Hagan, B. (2013/2014) Dyslexia in the Workplace. A TUC Guide.
- [2] British Dyslexia Association. <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexic/definition>
- [3] British Dyslexia Association. Code of Practice for Employers. <https://www.thedyslexiashop.co.uk/british-dyslexia-association-code-of-practice-employers>
- [4] No to Failure Report 2009, Recommendations Section 8.2.
- [5] Brunswick, N. (2012) Supporting Dyslexia Adults in Education and the Workplace. Wiley Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119945000>
- [6] Silberman, S. (2015) NeuroTribes.
- [7] Bamber, M. (2011) Overcoming Your Workplace Stress. Routledge.
- [8] American Psychological Association (2017). [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)
- [9] ACAS (2016). Mental Ill-Health in the Workplace Is Costing UK Employers Billions. <http://m.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=3915>
- [10] Hughes, G. (2016) University of Kent. <https://www.kent.ac.uk/news/kentlife/9205/national-launch-of-the-dyslexic-academic-network>
- [11] Dyslexic Academic Forum, DAF. <https://www.facebook.com/Dyslexic-Academic-Forum-586652408150171/>
- [12] Rath & Harter (2010) Wellbeing. The Five Essential Elements. GALLUP Press.
- [13] Wood (2008) Job Characteristics, Employee Voice and Well-Being in Britain.
- [14] Harter, *et al.* (2002) Wellbeing in the Workplace and Its Relationship to Business Outcomes.
- [15] Patterson, *et al.* (2004) On the Validity of Subjective Measures of Company Performance.
- [16] Kirby, Professor Amanda (2014) How to Succeed in Employment with Specific Learning Difficulties: A Guide for Employees and Employers. Souvenir Press.
- [17] Al-Atabi, M. (2014) Think Like an Engineer. Creative Commons.
- [18] Logan, J., Hendry, C., Courtney, N. and Brown, J. (2008) Unlocking the Potential of the UK's Hidden Innovators. CASS Business School, Microsoft.
- [19] Malpas, M. (2012) Dyslexia in the Workplace. British Dyslexia Association.
- [20] Patterson vs. Chief of the Metropolis (2007). <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldjudgmt.htm>

**Submit or recommend next manuscript to SCIRP and we will provide best service for you:**

Accepting pre-submission inquiries through Email, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.

A wide selection of journals (inclusive of 9 subjects, more than 200 journals)

Providing 24-hour high-quality service

User-friendly online submission system

Fair and swift peer-review system

Efficient typesetting and proofreading procedure

Display of the result of downloads and visits, as well as the number of cited articles

Maximum dissemination of your research work

Submit your manuscript at: <http://papersubmission.scirp.org/>

Or contact [jss@scirp.org](mailto:jss@scirp.org)