

DMA Talent: ADHD Employer Guide



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/ DMA Talent's Employer Guide Series

A diverse, skilled workforce can build better business outcomes through innovation, collaboration, loyalty, and a strong sense of community. To this end, diversity and inclusion are essential to DMA Talent's drive to attract the most gifted minds and fresh thinkers into the data and marketing industry.

Our Neurodiversity Initiative is one of many campaigns that we spearhead to discover and nurture talent by providing the roadmap, skills, and connections to kick-start a career.

DMA Talent's Neurodiversity Initiative has provided training and guidance to hundreds of organisations across the UK since 2017, helping them to attract and support a diverse workforce. Using insights from neurodiversity consultants, NHS health experts, brands, and leading industry figures, some with neurodevelopmental conditions themselves, the initiative has expanded and grown from strength to strength.

This year, in addition to the DM Trust, we have partnered with organisations like Make A Difference (aka MAD World) to support mental health awareness for people with neurodevelopmental conditions, as well as our online training workshops on reasonable adjustments that employers can make to recruitment processes, the workplace environment, and support networks.

Our ADHD Employer Guide is the latest in our Employer Guide series, following 2019's Autism Employer Guide and 2020's Dyslexia Employer Guide. Our guides, alongside our workshops and lobbying, have helped to develop a forum to raise awareness and understanding of neurodiversity across the data and marketing industry.

While this guidance has been developed to assist the creative, data, and marketing industries, much of the content is pertinent for all organisations and sectors. With the help of leading consultants, new case studies, and best practice, this guide will help employers to understand ADHD and what they can do to make their workplace more inclusive and supportive.

In addition, it features case studies written by current industry professionals with ADHD and even those in a supporting role within their organisation. They provide advice on useful coping mechanisms that can be applied to potentially problematic areas and how skillsets can be enhanced to help individuals to thrive. We recognise that each person with ADHD is different, the guide is intended to act as a starting point for employers to make positive change within their organisation.

Kate Burnett

General Manager, DMA Talent

/ Definitions and Terminology

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a term which is essentially used to describe people who think differently from the majority. It is often used in relation to neurodevelopmental conditions including autism, attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and Tourette's syndrome. It is important to note that individuals may have more than one condition, as they can often co-exist and there can be overlaps in the manifestations.

There have been many neurodivergent individuals throughout history who have made remarkable breakthroughs in business, science, mathematics, art, music, and sport. Some of the most well-known people who have publicly discussed their ADHD include Sir Richard Branson, Bill Gates, Ikea founder Ingvar Kamprad, actress Emma Watson, and musician Justin Timberlake.

Today, there is increasing recognition of the unique skills that 'people who think differently' possess. For example, many ADHD people are hugely innovative, intuitive, creative and 'switched on' – able to bring a unique perspective when generating ideas and are adept problem-solvers. They can also have an impressive energy, drive, and determination.

Neurodevelopmental conditions fall on a spectrum, and so it is important to recognise that each person has their own individual pattern of strengths and weaknesses.

Employers have a vital role to play, particularly as the Equality Act 2010 makes it a legal requirement for employers to make 'reasonable adjustments' for people with disabilities. The legal framework provides protection for those with ADHD and related conditions.

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a complex neurodevelopmental condition that is characterised by a persistent and pervasive pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity, present from childhood, that interferes with or reduces the quality of functioning in daily life. It can be experienced in multiple settings (e.g., home, school, work) and the symptoms will often affect the quality of social, academic, or occupational behaviour.

People with ADHD often speak of having an overactive mind, being unable to stop or control, or even filter out their thoughts so they are constantly distracted by their

mind wandering. It is as if they are unable to switch off the background brain activity to focus or concentrate on a particular task or activity.

They can also get bored quickly, have difficulty following presentations or reading material, and struggle to absorb details when spoken to directly. Other characteristics include distractibility, disorganisation, forgetfulness, poor time management, and a tendency to procrastinate.

It should be noted that these symptoms are pervasive and do not only occur during periods of anxiety, depression, or other mental health disorders.

Conversely, and another characteristic of ADHD, is the tendency to 'hyper-focus', giving attention to just one activity with everything else around going unnoticed, particularly where there is an activity of intense interest, or where the demands of the activity require an immediate response. Although this high level of energy and focus can of course also be a great strength.

In fact, the description of 'attention deficit' is sometimes misleading, as challenges can also include the ability to maintain, as well as vary the attention levels required during a normal day.

Symptoms will normally have been clear before the age of 12, although occasionally the condition may only become evident in late adolescence when more self-management is expected – perhaps in circumstances where a highly structured and supportive upbringing previously masked signs.

In general, adults with ADHD are more likely to present with the inattentive symptoms of ADHD and commonly they experience problems with maintaining attention.

While the hyperactive-impulsive symptoms are usually (but not always) less obvious in adults, with the problems of inattention dominant, there may be subtle signs of motor restlessness. For example, fidgeting with hands and feet, experiencing impatience when waiting, and a tendency to talk over people or talk excessively.

While people with ADHD may bring exceptional gifts and skills to their work, it can also be the reason for underperformance across a variety of areas. In summary, the challenges most often reported in training and the workplace environment include:

- Remaining focused when reading, writing, or listening
- Unable to stop the activity of the mind, often leading to poor sleep
- High levels of energy – both mental and physical
- Difficulty structuring or planning daily life, time, work tasks
- Being inconsistent in daily performance
- Procrastinating over challenging tasks
- Working slowly to avoid mistakes – requiring extra time to complete tasks
- Being tired/exhausted, with the effort of trying to maintain concentration and also perhaps due to additional anxiety

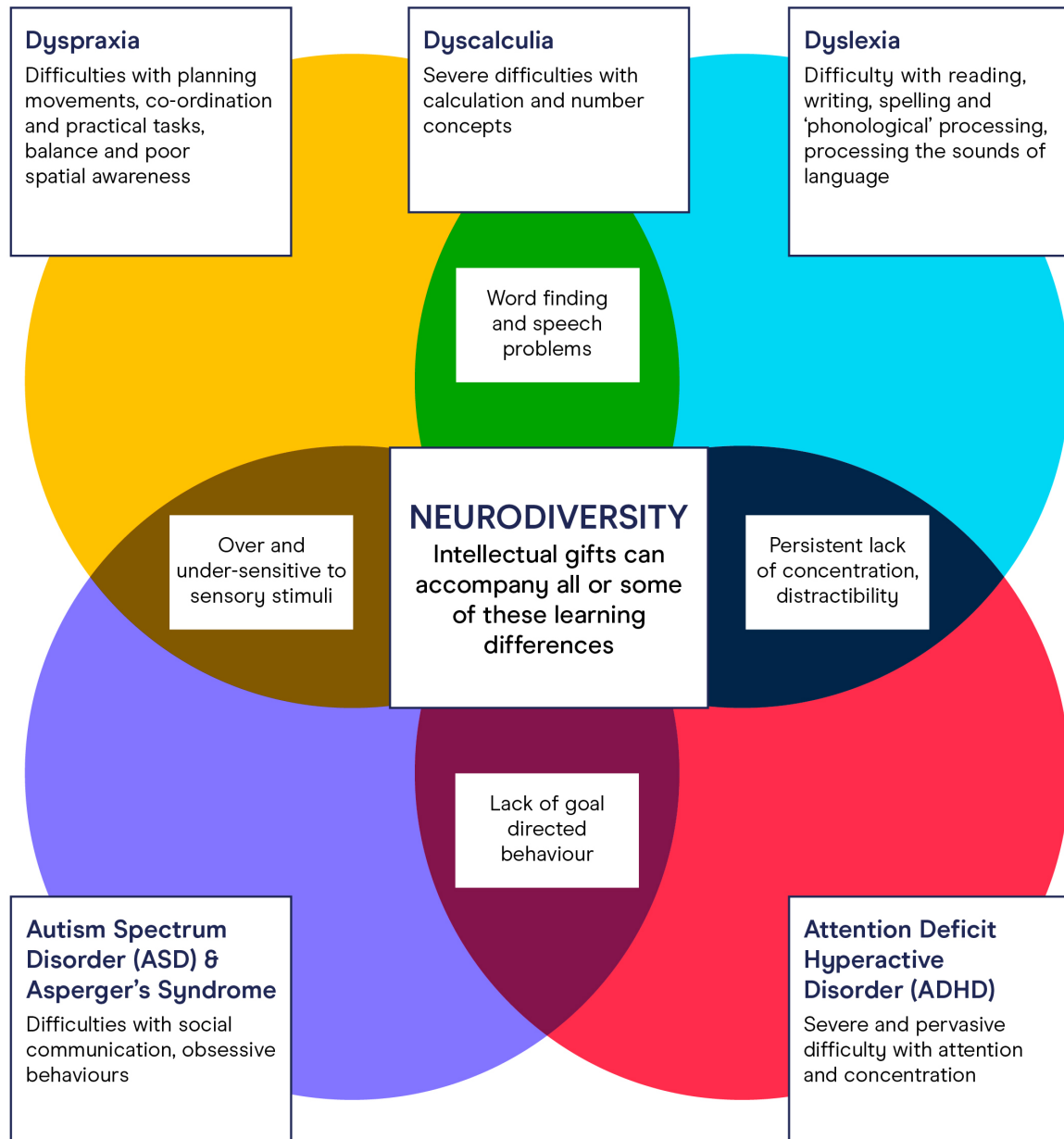


ADHD is not a passing diagnostic fad, a myth, social construction, or reaction to hectic lifestyles or a multimedia environment. It does not just 'go away' with age, although it is common for the hyperactivity presentation to lessen in adulthood. Each and every person is different in some capacity, so we need to embrace our uniqueness in the culture of an organisation, so that all employees are able to work to the best of their abilities.

Katherine Kindersley,
Co-Author, ADHD Employer Guide

/ The Makeup of Neurodiversity

Specific learning differences are complex and interrelated



Adapted from Neurodiversity in Higher Education: Positive Responses to Specific Learning Differences. Edited by David Pollak. Wiley-Blackwell Publishers.

/ Seeking a Diagnosis for ADHD

There are two different routes to gaining a diagnosis of ADHD. This is because ADHD is conceptualised as being both a medical condition and a neurodevelopmental condition, with features relating to mental health and specific learning difficulties.

ADHD is recognised by the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) in the UK and worldwide in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-5, published in the United States. It commonly co-exists with other conditions such as dyslexia/dyspraxia and it can also co-occur with other medical conditions including mood disorders (especially depression) and anxiety disorders.

A medical assessment will confirm the diagnosis and may open the way to being offered specific medications for ADHD as well as other forms of non-pharmacological intervention and treatment.

To gain a medical diagnosis and as appropriate, medical management, there would need to be a referral into the specialist medical services, normally an adult ADHD clinic with specialist psychiatric services.

The waiting lists for medical referrals can be very long (months or several years) in many parts of the country and some regions still do not provide a diagnostic or treatment service for adults with ADHD. A medical assessment can also be gained through a private consultant (see Further Information & Reading section of this guide).

However, if the difficulties with attention and focus can be managed by workplace adjustments without intervention from medical services, then practitioner psychologists and specialist teacher assessors (holding current registration Health Care and Professions Council - HCPC and Assessment Practising Certificates - APCs) can help. They can identify the specific learning difficulties and patterns of behaviour that indicate the presence of the characteristics of ADHD in adulthood.

Assessors would use current recognised formal screening scales. In this situation they can make relevant recommendations for adjustments and support in the workplace, including programmes of professional job skills training.

Diagnostic assessments should always be commissioned from a specialist organisation, where assessors have received specialist training in ADHD and where there is expertise of ADHD in the workplace; there are some services recommended at the end of this guide.

Seeking a diagnosis is a personal choice, but a diagnostic assessment will provide important and accurate information about both the strengths and challenges for a particular individual. It also enables effective adjustments to be implemented more easily.

Therefore, many people find that having a formal assessment is a very beneficial process and feel a huge sense of relief that their challenges can be given a name and they can understand themselves better. Others may feel that they do not need or want a formal diagnosis. Some even fear being 'labelled' and the preconceptions that can go with this. Yet a diagnostic assessment will explore how an individual processes information, reveal the underlying causes for any difficulties being experienced and offer a clear route forwards for support and appropriate adjustments.

An assessment should include the following components:

- Review of developmental, educational, and occupational history
- Detailed screening of the characteristics of ADHD, using a recognised formal screening tool/scales
- Comprehensive assessment of cognitive abilities. E.g. verbal and visual skills, memory, and processing
- Analysis of a range of reading comprehension skills and writing
- Consideration of emotional problems related to difficulties
- Evaluation of how all of the above relate to the employee's difficulties in the past and current working environment
- Suggestions for general ways of working and adjustments
- Recommendations for a Workplace Needs Assessment which would specify the adjustments and different ways of working (see below)

In an employment situation, it is usual practice for a Workplace Needs Assessment to follow a diagnosis of ADHD and most employees would benefit from such an assessment. It is usually organised through Human Resources (HR). The purpose of the assessment is to consider the information of the employee's particular role and job description and to explore the adjustments that would support at work. This assessment should also be conducted by a specialist in neurodiversity with expertise in the workplace.

A workplace assessment would also consider whether technological tools might enable the employee to work with increased confidence and efficiency. Such items would be discussed as part of the bespoke Workplace Needs Assessment so that they are tailored to the specific needs, the situation, and job role.

For example, one beneficial adjustment often considered is for individual specialised training/job skills coaching. This would focus on developing strategies and different ways of working, helping the employee to manage more efficiently at work.

What are the Employer's Responsibilities?

An employer has responsibilities for all their employees and where there are difficulties, they should explore the reasons for this and ways of supporting them; a person should not need a formal diagnosis to be supported in the workplace. However, a diagnostic assessment can provide an understanding for a targeted

approach to the specific challenges and, in this way, can help employers provide more effective support.

Employers should:

- Ensure that all staff have ‘hidden’ disability awareness training to promote understanding and knowledge
- Have a well-informed HR and OH team
- Offer in-house learning materials and have a neurodiversity representative/s, so people know who to contact if they would like to access a diagnostic assessment
- Provide clarity on who will be responsible for any costs associated with a diagnostic assessment
- Give reassurance that there will be no stigma or discrimination if a positive diagnosis is given
- Encourage open and honest dialogue to agree how best to support staff – have set performance reviews or ‘catch-ups’ across the organisation to facilitate this

HR personnel and line managers may not be able to identify traits of ADHD, as difficulties can arise in the workplace for a wide range of reasons. A diagnostic assessment can separate these out, so the reasons are clear.

If you think someone may have ADHD and it is affecting their performance, but don’t know how to approach them and think it would be beneficial to discuss, do this sensitively and carefully. Provide information rather than just your opinion, ask the person if they can relate to any symptoms, and offer them advice on next steps if they wish to be referred for an assessment or request additional information.

Be aware that the person could have low self-esteem about issues surrounding this or lack of understanding about ADHD, so present information in a balanced way that doesn’t just focus on notable difficulties, but also includes associated strengths.

The prevalence of ADHD is similar in men and women. However, while there is no ‘typical’ ADHD person, it is possible that women are better at masking their distractibility and inattentiveness.



Symptom masking may be a key reason why ADHD is thought to be under-recognised in females. Women are more likely to have undiagnosed ADHD and are less likely to be referred for an assessment. As a result, this could mean that they receive an incorrect diagnosis of another mental health or neurodevelopmental condition.

Katherine Kindersley,
Co-Author, ADHD Employer Guide

/ Qualities Associated with ADHD

As with all neurodevelopmental conditions, ADHD falls on a spectrum, so there is a danger of becoming rigid and expectant with any challenges and strengths associated with it.

However, people with ADHD often possess qualities and skills that make them valuable assets to any organisation, including being:

- Typically, creative and curious, with an innate ability to think in an original way and 'outside the box'
- Strong problem-solving skills
- Very perceptive, able to see connections others do not
- High levels of energy
- Spontaneous and willing to take risks
- Persistent and determined, with an ability to hyper focus, especially on activity seen to be highly rewarding
- Aspirational and keenly motivated to achieve

While people may share certain characteristics with each other, it is important to recognise that everyone is different.

/ Simple Ways to Modify the Recruitment Process

Job Advertisements

A job advertisement is essential for any organisation trying to recruit. Try not to put applicants off by asking for skills and experience that aren't required or relevant for the role.

Businesses should clearly state that they encourage applications from all candidates with the right experience and qualifications. They should also encourage individuals to request reasonable adjustments that will help them to perform to the best of their abilities and make them feel more comfortable.

To be an attractive employer to candidates, make it known that your organisation has neurodiversity policies and training in place, and give assurances of a supportive and inclusive workplace.

It should always come down to how well the applicant can do the job. Any accidental, unconscious bias or miscommunication will only limit the talent pool, which could include the most promising candidates. This all starts with the job advertisement.

Work Trials and Skills Testing

Some employers find that informal interviews combined with a work trial or skills testing of essential skills is a better and more accurate way of assessing a candidate's compatibility than a formal interview.

Interviews – Before, During, and After

Making reasonable adjustments during an interview could be essential to allow candidates to portray their skills and competencies to their full potential. This will help to ensure that you are making an informed choice about who to recruit.

Generally, if an adjustment is possible in the job itself, then prospective employers should allow that adjustment in an assessment/recruitment process.

Interviews rely heavily on social and communication skills. Most people with ADHD have excellent communication skills and tend to thrive when talking to someone directly.

However, candidates may find certain parts of an interview more challenging, such as:

- Waiting for questions to finish before answering, especially if questions are long or contain multiple clauses
- Focusing during a series of long-winded questions
- Sitting still in a formal setting for long periods of time
- Auditory memory (e.g. listening to a new task / holding onto and remembering details)
- Individuals could have slower information processing speeds

They may also be prone to:

- Interrupting conversations or explanations
- Speaking too much or straying off the topic
- Appearing distracted or disinterested
- Looking away from the speakers (to aid concentration and be less distracted)
- Requiring questions to be repeated (if they have lost track or direction)

Some candidates will be aware that they require consideration at interview. Others will be less aware that their difficulties are likely to cause underperformance or not even know that they display some of this behaviour. It is best to implement best practice either way.

Things to consider before the interview

Some useful examples of accommodations that you might want to consider:

- Provide a list of interview questions in advance of the interview
- Notify interviewees that notes can be brought into the interview as prompts (allow time for the interviewee to look at them during the interview)
- Send over, in writing, any case studies or scenarios that will be used in the interview
- Avoid using non-specific questions. Try to use questions that are more direct and focussed. For example, instead of 'Can you expand on that?', they could ask 'What was your role in the project?'
- Try to limit technical jargon. This can be off putting for someone under pressure who may not regularly use similar terminology.
- Offer candidates the chance to fill in a brief questionnaire asking:
 - If the interviewer should avoid asking about specific dates or times that may be hard to recall, and if instead, they should put questions in context with references
 - If the interviewer should avoid asking long or multiple questions, and instead keep to shorter, singular questions
 - If the interviewer should use full titles and names, avoiding acronyms and initials

Sensory distractions:

- What might be going on in the room, or in and around the building on the day of the interview that could act as a distraction?
- If a candidate has problems with visual or auditory distractions, consider ensuring the interview room is free of background noise and movement to allow for better concentration. E.g. other staff talking or moving visibly across the office
- Check the interview room's temperature. Ask the candidate if the room is okay and not too hot or cold.

Things to consider during the interview

The general adjustments suggested below do not give an advantage to candidates; they remove the barriers that may prevent some candidates from demonstrating their suitability for the job.

- Give the candidate questions in advance. Many people have difficulty retaining verbal information, especially when experiencing anxiety, which will likely occur at a job interview
- The interviewer should be aware that people with neurodevelopmental conditions can become verbally muddled when asked to give details or describe a situation, so perhaps ask them if they would like to make notes before providing an in-depth response
- Allow the candidate to make notes on key points they'd like to discuss – this may help them to remember the details/direction of the question
- Be ready to repeat questions or parts of questions

Clear signals and prompts:

- Verbally prompt the candidate if they have given sufficient information
- When sourcing information from a CV, the interviewer should provide a copy or prompt if asking about specific knowledge and experience

Body language:

- If a candidate has difficulty with answering directly or with organising the structure of an answer, encourage them to pause and gather their thoughts before answering
- Allow and encourage people to use any strategies they have in place to manage anxiety. E.g. deep breathing exercises

Preparation for the First Day

Reasonable adjustments do not need to be complicated or expensive. Making a few simple changes can improve productivity and reduce anxiety and stress for many employees.

Implementing as many of the above points, as much in advance as possible, should help reduce the anxiety someone could experience in the lead up to starting work. This will give them the best chance possible to commence employment effectively. Again, it is simply a case of removing potential barriers to success.

Prior to employment commencing, it is important to deliver high quality training to line managers, colleagues, and HR personnel.

It is important to determine:

- The nature of the individual's ADHD, which should be obtained from their diagnostic assessment
- The demands and expectations of the role itself, and any related task and competency requirements
- The working environment and practices that could impact performance
- Are there requirements for relevant training and assessment? This will help to identify job and training options that are likely to be the most successful in mitigating any areas of difficulty

Line managers to provide in advance:

- A timetable for the first day or week
- A map of the building/office, including a clear seating plan
- A mentor/buddy or support from a suitable colleague to be the 'go-to' person if the individual has any questions/issues
- Flexible working arrangements (where possible), enabling the employee to take advantage of quieter hours in the office

Prior to the first day, managers should prepare for difficulties an employee may encounter and their effects, both practical and emotional, and accept that individuals may need to work in different ways.

First Day at Work

On the first day of employment, the following arrangements would benefit most individuals, particularly those with ADHD:

- A brief introduction to any employee that they will be working with directly – try not to inundate staff with new faces all at once across the organisation
- Ask if they would like other team members to be told that they have ADHD ahead of the first day
- Consider asking employees to complete an online profile of themselves on the staff intranet, including name, job title, likes, dislikes, and responsibilities.

This also provides visual prompts for introductions and helps with initial conversations.

- Directions and orientation around the workplace environment – highlighting project work areas, social and creative/discussion zones

Sensory Environment

While not everyone experiences sensory differences, many neurodivergent people are acutely sensitive (hyper) or under sensitive (hypo) in one or multiple senses. People with ADHD are predominantly hypersensitive.

When employees can reduce the negative impact of their physical working environments, they become more productive and experience less work-related stress.

Be aware of sensory differences and adverse sensory environments. E.g. open-plan offices that have lots of background noise and lights.

Some useful recommendations to think about:

- Check the employee's position in relation to entrances/exits, photocopiers, the kettle, lift lobbies, etc. Perhaps offer seating in a corner or 'quiet' area to help.
- Supply desk partitions and low lights in certain places
- Telephones that light up for an incoming call instead of ringing out loud
- Provide noise-cancelling headphones
- Arrange flexible working zones – having a quiet space / project zone to work in may increase productivity of all staff
- Show staff how to adjust the colour or contrast of their computer screen background
- Have adjustable lighting at workstations
- Ensure staff have access to both print and digital materials. E.g. they have the option of printing notes for meetings and writing on Post-It notes for organisational practices
- Offer flexible working hours
- Consider separating teams more sales-focused away from others who are project driven



Inclusive workplaces are those where there is a whole organisational understanding that adjustments may be needed to support people who have difficulties or who work differently. We need to embed the understanding of difference in the culture of an organisation, so that adjustments are accepted as the norm and all employees are able to work to the best of their abilities.

Katherine Kindersley,
Co-Author, ADHD Employer Guide

/ Managing ADHD in the Workplace

ADHD Awareness

It is understandable that not everyone can be an 'expert,' but try to:

- Become informed about ADHD and its effects, both practical and emotional
- Remember that employees may find long periods of concentration more challenging than others; where possible allow for variety in activity
- Recognise that it may be difficult to maintain attention during presentations, training courses and long meetings. Allow these to be recorded where possible. Build in breaks so people can move about at regular intervals.
- Appreciate that some individuals find sitting still for long periods of time challenging
- Encourage employees to talk to you and others about workplace difficulties
- Allow absence from work for related training

Staff and Structure

Most employees benefit from a structured working environment. Therefore, it would be beneficial to consider:

- Using shared timetables, calendars, and lists as visual reminders. Encourage the use of shared planners that visually highlight appointments and deadlines
- Offering support on planning and prioritising workloads and scheduling daily work tasks
- Breaking down large tasks into small, manageable tasks with clear deadlines
- Having robust reminder systems in place
- Offering guidance and support with new or difficult tasks
- Trying to limit approaching staff with surprising questions and email them in advance
- Ensuring staff know how often they should take breaks and where they can go to relax
- Giving advance notice of tasks whenever possible, rather than setting sudden deadlines

Feedback and Appraisal

Give direct, constructive, and regular feedback. If a problem occurs, it is important that it is addressed at the time, not in an appraisal three months later. Ensure that ongoing, proactive support from HR or OH is booked in regularly and not used as a last resort.

When giving any criticism try to provide constructive feedback that highlights issues and possible solutions, as many people with ADHD will hyper focus on negativity.

Communication

Always be clear, concise, specific, and include information, such as how long a task should take, and the quality expected (with a concrete example of what this quality looks like) in the outcome of a task.

Verbal communication

- Try not to be publicly critical if you are interrupted. People with ADHD often interrupt others without meaning to be rude. This is a result of having rapid thought processes, eagerness, and impulsivity. Suggest different ways of capturing information so it is not forgotten (notebooks/digital recorders /quick checklists etc.) Perhaps even suggest hand raising or more discreet solutions for highlighting an interest in making a point.
- Give full, clear instructions and take time to explain things properly – check back to clarify accuracy of understanding
- Repeat things, as necessary
- Give written, taped or oral instructions, as necessary to provide back up
- Avoid setting multiple tasks when possible, but if you do, write down a clear order of task priorities

Written communication

Reading:

Present written instructions in a clear format or visual diagram, which allows the use of text-to-speech software. Those with ADHD will not have problems with reading but they may well find that their attention is held more successfully if they can listen to information as it is read.

Allow extra time for reading tasks; the person with ADHD will generally be a fast and proficient reader, but they will need additional time to absorb information.

Writing:

Provide speech-to-text software if needed. This could help the person with ADHD write more effectively, as their typing or handwriting may not be as proficient compared with their speed of thought.

Allocate additional time for writing tasks, incorporating time to develop a structured approach and for proofreading details.

Recommend spending time after notetaking to check the accuracy and completeness of notes. They may be good at notetaking, but they could have missed details, especially if something distracted their focus.

Training Courses

Be aware that reluctance to ask or apply for training courses may be linked to fears of stigma, and the possible exposure of weaknesses during training. Ensure that in-house courses have a policy in relation to ADHD trainees, consider:

- Active listening training – that helps with visual prompts for turn taking during conversation
- Public speaking guidance – to help those who speak quickly or circuitously
- Time management training – this should help with prioritising and multitasking

Allow training sessions to be recorded with access to the information for a sustained time period.

Best practice for all staff training includes:

- Providing in advance a clear outline of relevant course material
- Giving visual aids to assist learning
- Encouraging engagement and participation through learning activities
- Repeating key points throughout the session or summarise towards the end
- Leaving a few minutes at the end of a session for questions and to check if people have understood the main points
- Sending contact details for post-learning opportunities

Career Development

People with ADHD often express concerns that a confirmed diagnosis could hold them back for promotion, or a fear of being underestimated when being considered for taking on increased responsibilities. It is essential to ensure that there is career progression and equal development opportunities for all staff. It can simply be a case of putting together a plan that identifies and targets an individual's strengths.

For example, some management personnel with ADHD express concerns about keeping a well-balanced overview of projects and time management, especially when required to keep track of others. Their curiosity and enthusiasm may mean that they become distracted by non-essential topics or become over-absorbed in one activity.

It is important to have balance across any organisation to account for strengths and weaknesses – look across team members and assign responsibilities according to strengths and consider delegating to others – even outside the team where it would be helpful.

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology is any item, piece of equipment, software, or system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of an individual/s.

These devices can help people who have difficulty planning, staying focused, typing, and holding onto and remembering instructions and information.

Assistive technology can include digital recorders to record discussions and meetings, voice recognition software, spell checking apps, software to read text aloud, as well as programmes to help organise and prioritise ideas and activities.

These include:

- OneNote, a Microsoft Office tool, also has a Dictaphone feature
- Mindnode is a mind-mapping and brain-storming tool useful for those who like to visualise multiple ideas at once
- Time Timer is designed for those that easily lose track of time or get distracted in what they are doing
- Basecamp helps individuals and teams to work more efficiently. Key features include project management mapping, a built-in calendar to manage schedule and plan for upcoming work, setting reminders and send in messages in one space
- Grammarly is a tool for spellchecking and proofreading. It is a web-based interface meaning that it can be used from most computers without installing software
- Google Keep is an app to capture notes, lists, photos, and audio
www.google.com/keep/
- Forest is an app to help maintain focus within timeslots: <https://www.forestapp.cc>
- Notely is free organisational software that includes a scheduler, calendar, note-taker, and planner: <http://www.notely.net/>

/ Support Networks

Ongoing Staff Support

It is important to provide ongoing support to all staff for their mental and physical wellbeing, ensuring employees feel included in social aspects of the workplace. It can be hugely beneficial to get to know staff, what they enjoy or dislike about their roles, or even their hobbies and interests. This can be a key communication tool for making the workplace more inclusive, growing staff loyalty, and even increasing attendance to work-related social events.

An employee may require additional support if they encounter unprecedented challenges or a change in their lifestyle. It is important to recognise symptoms of increasing struggles with mental health, and signpost staff to appropriate services or their GP.

Unexpected changes to personal circumstances or loss of a loved one can happen to anyone, so it is essential to have a support network in place for staff to communicate concerns.

Peer Support

If there are multiple people who identify as neurodivergent in the workplace, it is important to encourage and provide resources for peer-support systems to be established. Many people find it more beneficial to speak with neurodivergent peers, rather than HR professionals, line managers, or colleagues, who do not experience the world in the same way.

It can be helpful for staff to have a platform to share strategies and experiences with others, as well as a neurodiversity network in the workplace. E.g. an intranet information hub, or even the encouragement to attend awareness raising training.

This could be done through:

- Electronic communication. E.g. email
- Group meetings
- Lunchtime networking events
- External events and conferences. E.g. The Future is ND events and Diverse Minds conferences in London



When an employee is not performing to expectations, it is important to consider whether the person may have an unidentified neurodevelopmental condition or ‘hidden’ disability before moving forwards with a performance management process.

Katherine Kindersley,
Co-Author, ADHD Employer Guide

/ Case Study: Multiple Neurodevelopmental Conditions

Martin was diagnosed with dyslexia during his childhood, but it recently became apparent that he needed a current assessment for the workplace to help with ongoing challenges he was having. He currently works as a marketing contract and procurement manager for a cloud-based data platform.

During the assessment, as well as dyslexia, Martin described further challenges that he thought might be consistent with an attention-related difficulty. He wished to improve his understanding of his current learning strengths and weaknesses and to receive advice about the support and strategies that he might find helpful for work and everyday life.

Exploration of Attention Related Difficulties

Attention and Focus

Martin said that since childhood he has experienced difficulty sustaining attention and concentration, particularly when reading. This was a constant issue at school – he was ‘borderline disruptive’ - and staff were often allocated to him to make sure that he stayed ‘on task’. Conversely, he finds it much easier to concentrate and retain information from auditory sources and often listens to the radio or podcasts when at home.

Without background noise, he is easily distracted by his mind wandering to other thoughts when working. He enjoys tackling interesting tasks that required sustained mental effort, but he feels less motivated and often makes errors or becomes distracted when carrying out more routine or repetitive tasks.

Martin also described considerable difficulties in childhood with forgetfulness and organisation and he relied heavily on support from parents and teachers. These areas have improved in adulthood, but he still finds organisational tasks quite challenging, such as keeping track of notes, so he spends considerable time and effort trying to compensate for this.

Hyperactivity and Impulsivity

He described himself as a highly active child who was happiest when receiving a high level of attention and stimulation from friends and adults. He was often reckless, impulsive and would take considerable risks during play activities with little

thought given to the potential risks or consequences. This could be quite disruptive educationally; he was often reprimanded at school. Martin is less conscious of these difficulties now, but he described a continuing tendency to fidget. He is popular and sociable but is aware that he can talk excessively in social situations without fully listening to others or gauging their responses.

Visual Disturbance

Visual disturbance is a condition not assessed in a standard eye test. However, it can cause visual problems when reading, including visual fatigue and the blurring, or skipping of words and lines. As is standard practice in an assessment of specific learning difficulties, Martin completed the Visual Difficulties Screening Protocol to help assess whether he might perceive difficulties in this area that could be affecting his reading and need further assessment by an optometrist. These areas were explored further in our interview and Martin highlighted concerns including the following:

- Often losing his place; skipping and misreading words
- Becoming tired and easily losing concentration when reading
- White backgrounds are glaring, particularly when reading from screens; he prefers dim light for reading and he has noticed that reading is easier when he reduces screen brightness

Impact on work

Martin is capable of high-quality writing but his weaknesses in spelling and grammar will make him more prone to accuracy errors. Similarly, his challenges with attention and working memory increase the time and effort that he needs to plan, structure, and proofread his work. Martin can read and understand complex documents to a high level, but his slower pace of reading, and his need to re-read to correct minor errors and improve his memory for specific details, will increase the time and effort needed.

In addition to the impact upon literacy, Martin's dyslexia and attention-related difficulties may affect other areas relevant to the workplace. For example, although he has confident speech and interpersonal skills, he may sometimes encounter difficulties with memory and word selection that may lead him to feel under pressure in conversations or meetings when 'put on the spot' to recall specific details. Additionally, although he is highly conscientious and has taken steps to improve his organisational skills, this is an area that may still need some support.

As is common in ADHD, Martin's difficulties with attention and concentration have lessened considerably in adulthood, but sustained concentration, particularly when reading and completing more routine tasks, can require very considerable effort on his part. He finds it easier to concentrate and focus where his working patterns are well structured. For this reason, working at home during the coronavirus pandemic has caused him particular challenges. He also has issues with video calling as he fears he inadvertently interrupts colleagues due to limited visual prompts on a call.

He has found that he concentrates much better in a busy office environment and the requirement to work from home has increased his tendency to make errors and then become self-critical and anxious. He also finds it difficult to motivate himself to start monotonous types of less engaging activities unless he is under time pressure. This has always been the case but has been exacerbated by the lockdown as his work time is less structured by office hours.

Assessment Outcome

Martin's background information and his results in the assessments of ability, literacy, and cognitive processing confirm that he has a specific learning difficulty, dyslexia combined with the characteristic features of ADHD.

Martin is a highly intelligent and articulate person and his score for verbal abilities in this assessment places him in the top 5% of the population. Martin grasps complex concepts easily and he is able to apply his intellectual strengths to solve tricky problems. He has a strong ability to communicate and interact with others. He particularly enjoys teamwork and the interpersonal aspects of his job.

In contrast, he has specific weaknesses in the areas of auditory and working memory, information processing speed and phonological awareness. These factors have affected his development of specific language and literacy skills. He continues to experience challenges with spelling and grammar, and the speed and accuracy of his reading and writing.

Solutions to Martin's Challenges

Martin was advised to seek a comprehensive assessment from a suitably qualified optometrist, with experience of visual reading difficulties. A comprehensive eye test looks for other conditions that can affect reading, such as visual stress and tracking problems. His optometrist may be able to offer this service, but alternatively The Institute of Optometry run specialist clinics and can advise upon suitable practitioners.

The brightness and contrast have been reduced on his computer screen. Martin now uses a second screen to view multiple documents at the same time to help with drawing information from multiple sources/references, so he doesn't have to use energy trying to remember content. Text to Speech software has also been installed on his computer so he can listen to his emails and documents.

To manage difficulties with his organisation, such as finding relevant notes. He has recently started using an iPad at home and Basecamp at work to keep all of his projects in one place – they have helped considerably. He has also replicated equipment at home that is present in his office space.

Martin has now scheduled in daily morning catch ups with his team, as he works best as part of a team and has found the lockdown's social isolation detrimental to his motivation. Martin has found a digital voice recorder very useful for certain meetings where confidentiality issues are not an issue, so that he does not miss the details of discussions.

Martin sets alarms/vibrations on his phone for reminders of appointments and at regular intervals during the day, so he is aware of how much time has passed and to improve the structure of his working day. He has recreated the structure of his typical working day at home, including getting up in the morning, getting dressed for work; start and end times; taking a walk in the morning before work (where he used to walk to work); coffee and lunch breaks; moving from his desk to a different room/ outside for breaks.

Martin likes listening to podcasts dedicated to ADHD that include helpful tips on improving organisation and how to accept differences and make them work for you. He also uses mindfulness strategies to relax and feel calmer. This helps him to move forward in a positive way rather than dwelling on any negative thoughts. He uses: www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/.

/ Living with ADHD: Individuality is your own Personal Brand

Naveen Kirby, Planning Executive,
McCann Manchester

I've always known I was different in some way, but as I've gotten older certain characteristics of mine have become less tolerable and started to have a profound impact on my life.

Key areas of life like my concentration, mental health, and sleeping habits were not improving, so I decided to seek an explanation in 2018. I was diagnosed with ADHD in November 2020 – after waiting around two years for an assessment.

There are many common stereotypes associated with ADHD that just aren't true. For example, ADHD doesn't guarantee someone will experience physical hyperactivity, but they may experience brain hyperactivity. To some extent, most people with ADHD will present symptoms such as fidgeting, but not all of us will be bouncing off walls all the time.

People with ADHD can be very self-critical. This is particularly the case for many women with ADHD, so I feel there is added anxiety for those working in creative industries where you are primarily judged on ideas and creative thinking.

It can also be difficult to organise your thoughts. You may know what you want to say but can have difficulty expressing it in a way that others will understand.

I don't think ADHD affects your level of intelligence, but it does affect the way you learn. It can take me longer to read and write than the average person, especially if it's something I'm not particularly interested in.

I often have to read a paragraph several times because I can get distracted by the world around me (also by the rapid thoughts that circulate in my mind at the same time).

Reading and writing can be stressful tasks and if I wasn't such a determined person, that was willing to sacrifice additional time to get it right, then I don't think I would have achieved academically. But it wasn't an easy journey.

A Newfound Passion for Learning

ADHD had a major impact on my education when I was younger. I didn't do well at school, largely because I was not very well behaved so I would miss out on quite a lot of schoolwork. I lacked motivation to do academic work, always preferring active tasks. I excelled in P.E but unfortunately my other GCSE results suffered.

After leaving school, I managed to get an NVQ in sports. Although I then dropped out of college during a BTEC Sports Science course because I was too impatient to work through certain written assignments. I was undiagnosed back then so didn't realise there could be support made available to me (there was little information available publicly).

I went on to manage a sole trading business for a couple of years, and I also organised and promoted club nights in Manchester City Centre. Due to having such a small budget, I had to do my own branding and advertising. This was something that I was really interested in, so plucked up the courage and enrolled on a college Access course to study business.

I was now in my late 20's and had discovered a newfound appreciation for learning.

Marketing was my favourite unit on the course, so I applied to do a BA in Advertising and Brand Management and then went on to do a MSc in Marketing (Creative Advertising).

During my degree, I had visited my current employer, McCann Manchester, as part of DMA Talent's Creative Data Academy in 2019. I'd also met some of the creatives at a couple of student events like the DMA's Big Book Crit, so I felt like I had a bit of an insight into the agency work culture. For me, this was a deciding factor in my decision to apply for a role here.

Making the Right Career Choice

Since getting my diagnosis, I've been doing research on ADHD and I've come across some online guidance that advise people like me to go into creative roles (presuming that we are all creative thinkers). Had I received my diagnosis prior to me choosing to go into a career in planning, then the existing advice may have influenced me to go into a creative role.

While I would say I am a creative person, I'm also super observant of people's behaviours and mannerisms. This is because I've often had to closely analyse other people's behaviour towards me, as I can sometimes misunderstand moods and tones. This has made me interested in people and their behaviour, which I guess is perfect for my planning role.

Therefore I think healthcare professionals and organisations should be careful not to put a stereotype on neurodivergent people and label them. Instead, we should look at the individual's strengths and offer a choice of relevant careers/roles based on the evidence.

I love my role because every day is different. Monotonous tasks would be less appealing to me. Planning allows me to 'hyper focus' on certain tasks. I use insights to analyse the challenge at hand, then apply creative and problem-solving skills to find a solution.

Challenges of Working Remotely

I started at McCann the day before the first national lockdown, so getting to grips with a new role, and having to work remotely with colleagues I've never met in person, has been challenging.

Video calls are also hard to navigate sometimes and have become much more prevalent during the lockdowns. It's more difficult without visual prompts to know when someone has finished speaking and to not interrupt them. I sometimes feel like people may think I'm being rude as I can interrupt conversations without realising (which adds to my anxiety), but people with ADHD aren't intentionally rude we are just often impulsive.

As most people will be able to relate, lockdown and working from home has had a significant impact on my mental health. It has also exacerbated my ADHD symptoms which has affected my work/life balance.

Thriving in My Current Role

As someone with ADHD, I have lots of thoughts all of the time. This can be very overwhelming because you feel like you can never switch off. Although, on the flip side, it means I bring a lot of ideas, energy, and enthusiasm to my role. Essentially, I have a million and one thoughts that have a good chance of being beneficial.

I tend to be curious about things that are new or different, and I can also fixate on little details that others may not notice. The way I look at the world is unique in many ways, so I feel like I bring a distinct perspective to the role and the company. Thankfully, McCann believe my uniqueness is an asset and they encourage me to excel within the role.

My best advice to someone with ADHD is to always be yourself. Having ADHD makes us different and it's best to embrace that difference and own it, rather than trying to hide it.

I'd even suggest that you make it part of your own 'personal brand' and showcase your unique way of thinking to potential employers. Give employers an insight into your life and your mind – make it your USP.

/ Living with ADHD: Time to Start Changing Perceptions

Johnny Kirkham, Copywriter, MRM

My trip towards an ADHD diagnosis was painlessly short, but it took 34 years to start.

It may sound strange – especially to people who know me – but for those 34 years I felt so dim.

Less academic than my high achieving friends. Less focused than my colleagues. And less capable than my parents, who provided me with a great start.

I knew what success looked like, but I was always a few steps behind.

I had an immaturity that wouldn't let up. Being disruptive in school morphed into a childishness at work.

I didn't know it, but I was struggling with everything. From focusing on my job and meeting friends on time to maintaining adult relationships and simply being happy.

Then, one day, ADHD came up on the radio. I learned that adults who go untreated rarely reach their full potential. It felt like a hammer blow.

The guest on the radio asked questions that I had answers to: Did I have trouble with complicated projects? What about sitting still? Did I wait for my turn to speak? Did I show up to everything I planned? No? How often did I flake?

I began to see a pattern of behaviour that set the ADHD shaped ball rolling.

Medication is the Magic

So, one evening in November, after hours of testing and questions from a psychologist, I was given a score and a diagnosis of moderate to severe ADHD. Ironically, the highest test score I've ever achieved meant bad news. Go figure.

Medication would be the order of the day.

ADHD is a complicated condition – one I struggle to put words to – so it's strange that the treatment is simple and effective in so many ways.

I crossed the border between the hazy world of ADHD and this new crisp, clear world one morning in December 2020. My mind seemed to un-fog minutes after taking my first little red pill.

It was then that I realised that I'd spent my life with the mental equivalent of a hairdryer blowing into my ear.

Once the magic of a clear mind became routine, there were plenty of psychological shifts to appreciate.

Things that have been out of my reach for 34 years are now close enough to pick up and hold. I have a memory, I turn up on time, I sit still, and I finish projects. I'm confident and comfortable presenting – I've always faked that. (It turns out that if you employ the 'fake it till you make it' tactic, you can never actually stop faking it.)

It's a long time since my mind went to a dark place. My personal relationships now feel like easy fun, rather than complicated drama. And where's that constant anxiety? Banished.

I can control who sees what parts of my personality at work; I'm myself when I want to be.

The connection between having aspirations and being able to achieve them feels so strong. That's one of the most potent feelings: progress.

Time is on My Side

My new ability to plan and focus means I really get it done. Simply put; there seem to be more seconds in a minute and more minutes in an hour. As the days stretch out, I fill them with work, projects, and hobbies. Very rarely do I peer at my phone in search of distraction.

In my old world, I lived day-to-day – preoccupied with keeping my head above water. But now I'm free to plan and progress without wasting energy cartwheeling from one moment to the next. I know what I want to have achieved in the next few years, how to achieve it, and simply that I'm capable.

I no longer feel vulnerable. If people want to talk to me about ADHD then I'm happy to share. I don't broadcast it, but I'm proud of who I am, and I have hidden my flaws for way too long anyway.

What Next?

My newest passion project? To celebrate the mind-stuff that makes us different from one another. To help create a culture where empathy and understanding outfoxes the people and places who don't care about progress.

If agencies take ADHD seriously then they, their people, their clients, and the wider world will be richly rewarded.

And, after all, this is a wonderful time to start changing perceptions.

/ Further Information & Reading

- DMA Talent's Neurodiversity Initiative: <https://dma.org.uk/article/dma-talent-neurodiversity-initiative-1>
- ADDISS offer a range of books and support available to those who experience difficulties related to attention and concentration. ADDISS is the acronym for Attention Deficit Information Support Service: www.addiss.org.uk
- AADD-UK is a site created by people with ADHD. It offers a support service for adults who have ADHD (with local support groups), information about ADHD and solutions to living with ADHD: www.aadduk.org
- Matthew Trerise Neurodiversity Training & Consultancy: www.matthewtrerise.com
- CIPD 2018 Study: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/150218-neurodiversity>
- Commercial Break: <https://www.commercialbreak.org.uk/>
- Access to Work: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>
- NICE (for ADHD): <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng87/chapter/Recommendations#recognition-identification-and-referral>
- <https://www.thedsm5.com/the-dsm-5/>
- The disorder of geniuses, Dr Hallowell – a film about ADHD and how it affects people: www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsiJgEG22no
- Dr Hallowell hosts a website to help with managing the symptoms of ADHD: <http://www.drhallowell.com/adult-adhd-50-tips-of-management/>

Relevant Reading Material

- **Answers to Distraction**, Edward Hallowell and John Ratey (2010), Bantam Books
- **Driven to Distraction**, Edward Hallowell
- **ADD-Friendly Ways to Organize your Life**, Judith Kolberg and Kathleen Nadeau (2016), Brunner-Routledge
- **That's the Way I Think: Dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and dyscalculia explained**, David Grant (2017), David Fulton Publishers
- **Mindfulness a practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world**, Mark Williams and Danny Penman (2011), Piatkus

/ Notes on Authors

Katherine Kindersley, Director, Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy

Katherine Kindersley is the director of Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy (DAC), an organisation which has long specialised in working with adults in employment. DAC works with private and public companies, government organisations, as well as individuals, providing assessment, training, job skills coaching and advice on reasonable adjustments. Katherine and her team offer training courses for professionals on employment consultancy work and for managers on 'hidden' disability and neurodiversity awareness.

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Kate Burnett, General Manager, DMA Talent

Kate's mission, alongside the DMA Talent team, is to inspire young people to join the growing data and marketing industry by increasing awareness and creating clear career pathways. She is passionate about educating and enabling the next generation of marketing talent with the skills they need to succeed.

James Davis, Insight & PR Manager, Data & Marketing Association

Special Mentions

Matthew Trerise, Autism & Neurodiversity Consultant,
Training & Liaison Lead, Bristol Autism Spectrum Service

Johnny Kirkham, Copywriter, MRM

Naveen Kirby, Planning Executive, McCann

/ About the DMA

The Data & Marketing Association (DMA) comprises the DMA, [Institute of Data & Marketing \(IDM\)](#) and [DMA Talent](#).

We seek to guide and inspire industry leaders; to advance careers; and to nurture the next generation of aspiring marketers.

We champion the way things should be done, through a rich fusion of technology, diverse talent, creativity, and insight – underpinned by our [customer-focussed principles](#).

We set the standards marketers must meet in order to thrive, representing over 1,000 members drawn from the UK's data and marketing landscape.

By working responsibly, sustainably and creatively, together we will drive the data and marketing industry forward to meet the needs of people today and tomorrow.

www.dma.org.uk

About DMA Talent

DMA Talent champions young people as the future of our industry.

Our goal is to attract a new generation of fresh thinkers by raising awareness and showcasing the sector's inspiring and dynamic range of career opportunities.

We nurture aspiring marketers by providing the roadmap, skills and connections to kick-start their professional journey, and by instilling our customer-first principles, we drive our industry forward in a responsible and sustainable way.

About DM Trust

The DM Trust has been established from the merger of the DM Foundation and IDM Trust to serve the whole direct, digital and data marketing industry. The main function of the Trust is to distribute funds in support of projects and activities which contribute to the future growth and governance of the data driven marketing sector.



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