ADHD: raising awareness in the tax profession

General Features



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There are many ways that we can help those with ADHD to thrive in the workplace. Here are some good places to start, by Emma Barklamb, David Brodie, Ruth Punter and Matthew Spiller.

Inspired by the openness, success and gravitas of Susan Ball talking about dyslexia during her CIOT presidency, and in line with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee's plans for 2025, we held a webinar on 19 March which asked the question 'What is ADHD?'.

The Member Services Team are always looking out for topical issues relating to continuing professional development (CPD) but this was a bit different. The webinar was part of our Neurodiversity Week. It was a tough subject but attracted an enormous amount of interest. With over 700 registrations, it is clearly a topic that many of our members want to learn more about!

We realised very quickly that we weren't going to be able to do a lot more than scratch the surface – but it did give us a chance to explore what is meant by ADHD (or, to give it its full title, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). So why is awareness important? And why is it especially important to raise awareness in the tax profession?

If you missed the webinar you can catch up with it by registering at tinyurl.com/ATTCIOT and a link to the recording will be sent to your email address.

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a disorder that is defined through analysis of behaviour. People with ADHD may show a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity–impulsivity that interferes with day-to-day functioning and/or development. Guidance on this subject is very clear. It strongly favours formal diagnosis and guards against self-diagnosis. That being said, a formal diagnosis can take a long time, so no one is suggesting that there are easy answers here.

This article aims to raise awareness of ADHD, to signpost guidance and other resources, and to provide some hints and tips that can help you if you suspect that you have ADHD. We also hope that it will help you to support others who have a diagnosis and who might be with you at work.

ADHD is a neuro-developmental condition, so it develops as your brain develops in childhood. It is often associated with other neurodevelopmental conditions, such as dyspraxia, dyslexia, Tourette's syndrome and what are generally called autistic spectrum disorders.

This article includes the experiences of ATT member David Brodie, who was generous enough to share his story with us. We all hope that you find it as inspiring as we do!

Common workplace struggles and strategies

Whilst it is important to remember that the experiences and challenges posed by ADHD are different for everyone, it is useful to be aware of some common areas of struggle in the workplace and strategies that may help. Here are a few.

Time management and organisation: This can include difficulty with prioritising tasks, meeting deadlines, managing workloads and maintaining an organised workspace. Strategies for managing this include digital reminders, visual to-do lists, colour-coded filing systems, breaking large tasks into smaller steps and breaking up working time into intervals. The ‘Pomodoro Technique’, for instance, involves working for 25 minutes at a time, followed by a five minute break, with a longer break after four consecutive work intervals.

Maintaining focus and attention: It may be difficult to sustain concentration, with a tendency to get sidetracked, especially in busy or stimulating environments. A quieter work environment or noise cancelling headphones may help with this. Breaks and focus-enhancing techniques can also help to prevent mental fatigue and procrastination. In particular, ‘body doubling’ is where someone else works alongside you, doing their own work, in order to create accountability – and novelty.

Working memory limitations: It may be difficult for the person to remember instructions, follow multi-step processes and retain information that is shared verbally. To provide support, written instructions and summaries are helpful, as is repeating back communications to confirm understanding. Visual aids and memory tools, like checklists and flowcharts, can help too. Online calls can be easily transcribed and summarised using AI, so notes of actions and written summaries can be shared as a matter of general best practice – and is something that will benefit everyone!

We should take note of David Brodie’s advice: ‘From my experience of coaching those with ADHD, multiple tools and practices are combined through trial and error. While these can help, it is important to remain mindful of managing the potential for overload.’

How can we help?

Our Education Team are pleased to provide Alternative Arrangements and Special Considerations for our students who require additional time or support.

Students are required to fill out our application form: they should complete Part 1 themselves, and a GP or medical professional should fill in Part 2. (Students can also submit medical evidence, such as a diagnosis report or medical letter, instead of

asking their doctor to complete Part 2.)

Support for exams

CTA, Tax Pathway and ADIT: The application form for is at: www.tax.org.uk/extratime.

- We do have a deadline for CTA applications prior to the exam sitting, which is usually six weeks prior to the exam week. We cannot facilitate alternative arrangement applications past this point for CTA exams, as our third-party centre provider will have finalised their test centre sittings and operational requirements.
- ADIT applications would need to be completed a week prior to the exam sitting.

ATT: The application for ATT is at: tinyurl.com/yjpxh8hw.

- ATT applications would need to be completed before the last day of the week prior to the exam sitting.

Each application is assessed individually, with medical recommendations from professionals carefully considered to provide students with the best possible support.

However, please be aware that both institutions must adhere to their policies, examination regulations and the imperative of safeguarding exam integrity, which may limit the implementation of certain support recommendations.

Special considerations

We can also make offer special considerations to students. Candidates can apply for special considerations for issues and events that occur before or during their examinations. These considerations are most commonly, but not limited to, bereavement, sickness, life events, etc.

Applications are presented to the CIOT Examination Committee and the ATT Exam Steering Group; however, any decision made falls on the committee's discretion and does not guarantee additional marks.

We would like to thank Ruth Punter (RHP Coaching) and Matthew Spiller (Education Officer, CIOT/ATT) for their help with this article.

David Brodie: my own ADHD diagnosis journey

Dr Ned Hallowell, a Harvard-trained psychiatrist and leading expert in ADHD, talks about finding your ‘right kind of difficult’ – a challenge that sparks your interest, engagement and passion. For me, that challenge has always been taxation.

Even before I had the language to explain it, my neurodivergent traits fuelled my interest and strengths. I was curious, driven by complexity and constantly spotting connections in technical legislation. When I started as a graduate tax trainee in 2013, I quickly gravitated towards detailed areas like trusts and inheritance tax. My brain thrived on nuance and depth – the more intricate, the better. My neurodivergence, I believe, gave me the drive to deep-dive and hyperfocus. It helped me to excel.

But while I found the work intellectually stimulating, it wasn’t always comfortable. I didn’t understand why I often felt overwhelmed. I hadn’t heard terms like ‘neurodivergent’ or ‘executive function’. I just knew that I was constantly battling fluctuating energy, time issues, burnout, chronic pain and social fatigue – all while putting pressure on myself to keep up and fit in.

There was (and still is) no public health pathway where I live to explore adult ADHD or autism. For years, I was left without answers. Eventually, I couldn’t ignore the signs that something deeper was clearly going on.

Getting an adult ADHD diagnosis was a turning point but not a magic fix. It was the beginning of a long process of unlearning, understanding and adjusting. The diagnosis gave me access to the right information, language and frameworks, but it has taken over two years to fully process what it means and how it has shaped my life and career.

Since then, I’ve professionally trained as an ADHD coach and developed a much deeper understanding of ADHD and autism (AuDHD). I now support other neurodivergent professionals – particularly in tax, law and finance – who are navigating similar challenges around masking, burnout, executive function and misfitting in rigid work environments. These are complex, often overlapping conditions, and I’m always learning every week.
ADHD in the workplace isn’t just about difficulties with time or attention. It often comes with creative problem-solving, pattern recognition and a deep motivation to

master complexity. Intelligence doesn’t cancel out ADHD. They simply exist on their own spectrum.

If you’re a manager, colleague or employer, try to spot strengths first. Acknowledge what someone does well, then support them in the areas they find difficult. You don’t need to be an expert – just take a person-centred approach. Making reasonable adjustments can benefit the whole team. An adaptive employer won’t just improve wellbeing – they will also attract and retain great talent.
With more support, awareness and inclusion, neurodivergent professionals can stop masking, explore their unique strengths, start thriving and find their own ‘right kind of difficult’.

Heather Barnes: I'm just wired differently...

Throughout my life, I’ve always felt like I didn’t fit in even though outwardly I seemed confident. I thought everyone had a brain full of noisy squirrels 24/7, that we all had to fight not to talk over people in conversation, and use all of our emotional resources to recover from the devastation of what was just a minor criticism from our boss.

The penny dropped mid assessment when the psychiatrist nodded knowingly and said: ‘You’ve had a lot of short-lived jobs, right?’ It was a relief to have a professional reassure me that my brain was just wired a little differently to most and that I wasn’t a broken, unlikeable person.

It’s only been eight months and I’m still coming to terms with it and trying to find new coping mechanisms, but I’m optimistic that things will improve from here.

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Information for CTA and Tax Pathway students is at: www.tax.org.uk/special-considerations

Information for ATT students is at: www.att.org.uk/alternative-arrangements-extra-time-and-special-consideration

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