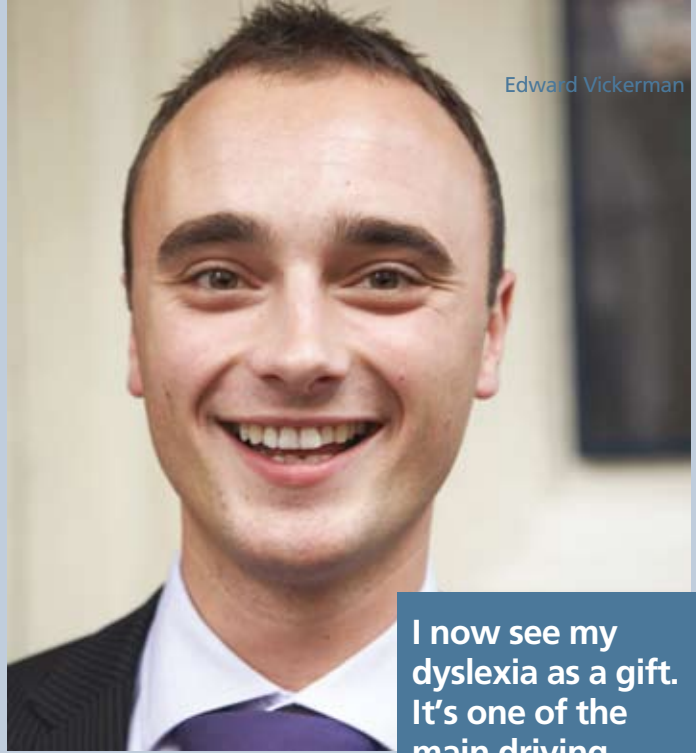


NUT member **Edward Vickerman** was told he could never be a teacher because of his dyslexia. Now he's head of business at The Freeston business and enterprise college in Wakefield and the proud winner of a 2009 Teaching Award – and he wants to say a few thank yous.



Edward Vickerman

I now see my dyslexia as a gift. It's one of the main driving forces behind why I wanted to become a teacher.

Don't write dyslexics off!

A couple of weeks ago I was named 'Outstanding New Teacher of the Year' at the national Teaching Awards. This was a great personal achievement for someone who was rejected from several teacher training institutions without so much as an interview because I suffer from dyslexia.

I now see my dyslexia as a gift, and it's one of the main driving forces behind why I wanted to become a teacher. The Teaching Awards are about saying 'thank you' and there are several people I have to thank for helping me on the journey to becoming a teacher and receiving the award.

My primary education was a bit of a rollercoaster journey. I had some amazing teachers who taught me in so many ways and understood that I was not 'stupid' or 'lazy'. They recognised that there was a large gap between what I was able to do and what I was able to write down, and helped me develop skills and tactics to cope in the classroom.

One teacher especially turned me back on to school in Year 6. I still use some of her tricks in the classroom. For example, she brought in objects,

so there was always something to look at and touch in her lessons, not just words to read. She also engaged us by relating what we were learning to her own personal experiences and things from real life.

I had to be re-engaged with education after a spell with one teacher (who has now left the profession) who had totally shattered me over the previous few years. In a strange way I need to say thank you to her for showing me how never to teach young people and for giving me a desire to want to prove her low expectations of me wrong.

At high school I struggled, not because I did not understand, but because I did not perform well in exam situations. It was here I had the privilege of being taught by an amazing English teacher whom I adored. She was a no-nonsense character who enthused us with her passion and love of the subject. I always think of her when I teach or plan a lesson. I ask myself: "Is this going to be exciting and, if not, then how can I make it exciting?"

At high school I also discovered vocational education. I was put on a BTEC course and spent one day a

week in industry. I worked in hotels, starting on reception and eventually becoming duty manager.

What I particularly liked about vocational education was that it was assessed continually in a variety of ways. I did presentations and made videos and tapes, as well as submitting written reports. It allowed me to demonstrate my ability and understanding without the pressure of having to sit a final exam. And having that real-life work experience made me want to go on to university and develop my career options further.

I would like to say thank you to the teaching staff at Bradford college for taking me on and working with me when others would not even interview me. Together, we worked round all the problems that we could envisage in teaching. For example, using an interactive whiteboard eliminates the difficulties I might have writing on a blackboard, and I make sure my lesson plans always include a bank of spellings that students might ask for. I took both my college tutors to the Teaching Awards ceremony to thank them.

The biggest thank you goes to the school I now teach at, The Freeston business and enterprise college in Wakefield. I am privileged to work with an amazing group of staff and pupils, and grateful to headteacher Gill Metcalfe, who employed me as head of department after only one year's teaching experience and has continued to let me develop leadership skills at the school.

My advice for any teacher working with dyslexic pupils would be to let them record their work in their own way, whether that's pictures, films, mind maps or writing. Ask them which strategies work best for them. They'll know – but they may not feel confident to say unless they're asked. I also found the Dyslexia Institute (now Dyslexia Action) really supportive. The extra lessons I had from them helped immensely.

I hope one day to become a head myself, and I am sure by then there will be a lot more people I'll need to say thank you to!

Resources:

www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk

www.teachingawards.com