



Increasing Neurodiverse
talent in the workplace:
Pre-employment

FOREWORD



Over the years, Diversity and Inclusion has evolved into Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). It's not a new topic to the world but even as a recruitment agency working with businesses of all sizes and sectors, we can't say it's an area which is focused on much when there is a role to be filled. It's a buzzword that's been spoken about for years, getting mentioned in articles and other outlets, but there seems to be lack of tangible action in some areas of EDI when it comes to recruitment, outside of meeting basic legislative requirements.

The initial aim of this report was to create a document looking into the strategies and actions that organisations have put in place to attract and retain Neurodivergent professionals. However, through a blend of our own research and external studies, we've found that Neurodiversity is often overlooked. Answers showed little understanding of Neurodivergence and the workplace, and businesses hadn't made as much headway with inclusive recruitment as perhaps they should have. So we changed it up.

This report now explores Neurodiversity in the pre-employment stages of recruitment from an educational standpoint. Like everything in life, we need to understand before we can take action. Our next report will focus on the subsequent stages in the employee lifecycle—management and progression of neurodiverse talent.



Before we get into the body of the report, we also wanted to highlight the issue of unemployment amongst the Neurodiverse community and offer a way to address it. The UK government has been prioritising getting people back to work since the pandemic, and now amidst a cost-of-living crisis and recession. Despite high vacancy rates in certain sectors, many positions remain unfilled due to perceived talent shortages and skills gaps. If more businesses tapped into the unemployed neurodivergent workforce and leveraged their unique skills and traits, we could tackle both the job market issues and increase employment among neurodivergent individuals.

This is where Human Resource departments come into play and have a crucial role in leading DEI within organisations. As the primary touchpoint in recruitment, they focus on people and can influence an employee's lifecycle through talent attraction and management.

contents

- 4: Introduction
- 5: Neurodiversity & workplaces
- 8: The benefits of a diverse team
- 10: Attraction strategies
- 12: Interview stage
- 14: Insight from Jason Iyke
- 15: Conclusion
- 16: Resources
- 17: Sources

INTRODUCTION

The neurodiverse community accounts for 15–20% of the UK population [1] and 10–20 % globally [2].

As an umbrella term, Neurodiversity can be defined as neurological differences that impact how people interact with the world around them. These differences may present themselves in different ways like behavioural traits and the way information is processed.

For context, Neurotypical is defined as “people whose brain functions, ways of processing information and behaviours are seen to be standard.” [3]

As pointed out by Thomas Armstrong, the definitions surrounding Neurotypicality are highly contextual because “**there is no normal brain or mind**”. [4]

Within the spectrum of Neurodiversity, different neurotypes can be split into information processing/learning styles and behaviour/communication styles.

Here are the main associated types*:

AUTISM - a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviours, speech and nonverbal communication. Autismspeaks

ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) - an ongoing pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development. Symptoms can align with inattention hyperactivity and impulsivity. National institute of mental health

DYSLEXIA - a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. British Dyslexia Association

DYSCALCULIA - a specific and persistent difficulty in understanding numbers which can lead to a diverse range of difficulties with mathematics. British Dyslexia Association

DYSPRAXIA - also known as Developmental Coordination Disorder is a common disorder that affects movement and coordination. Symptoms affect areas of life like executive functioning (ex. working memory), organisation, speech and handwriting. NHS UK

*Tourettes syndrome is cited by a few sources but NHS lists the above under ‘Neurodiversity’

NEURODIVERSITY AND WORKPLACES

The conversation around Neurodiversity is gaining more traction in workplaces, but there is still disparity amongst businesses surrounding the level of support, processes, and policies that are being practised. Some businesses are not providing any support and/or considerations at all for example, **37%** of respondents from the survey we carried out for this report said their organisation doesn't factor in any of the neurotypes when it comes to their recruitment efforts. (FIG 1)

When we asked the same group, all HR professionals, **55%** said their workplace offered/provided training on EDI (FIG 2). However, if we take this survey and report out of the question for a moment and ask ourselves what our first thoughts would be if we were asked "What is included in EDI?", how many people would list Neurodiversity first if at all over other just as important minorities? Are we being truly inclusive in our understanding and business processes?

“ The CIPD puts it perfectly...

A lack of awareness and understanding of neurodiversity means it has rarely been considered in the design of workplace processes, management practices, environments or in the way work is organised. The norms and ways of working that emerge may therefore suit some but not others – perhaps as many as up to 20% of people who identify as neurodivergent in some way. Neurodivergent people may find themselves marginalised by organisation cultures, processes and technology that don't consider their thinking styles.



Bias and prejudice are the biggest issues impacting neurodiverse individuals in the world of work. It's not just about hiring and working alongside neurodivergent individuals; it's about accepting everyone for who they are and accommodating each individual's needs.

Let's touch on prejudice quickly: Only **3 in 10** Autistic people of working age are in employment. Added to that, did you know that autistic talent earns a third less than non-disabled people? [5]

50% of autistic people have said that support, understanding and acceptance would be the 3 biggest things in helping them into employment, and over three-quarters who are unemployed, want to be in work. [6]

This focuses on just one neurotype, but the fact of the matter is that every category within the neurodivergent spectrum deserves to be heard and supported in a way that promotes their growth.

Within workplaces, there are legal requirements to adhere to – The Equality Act 2010 – but this does not mean that creating an inclusive environment stops at the legislation. Just over 41% of those we surveyed said they had expanded their EDI policy past legislation whilst 28% said no and the other 28% said they were unsure.

There are many routes, some being inexpensive, that businesses can take to build an inclusive culture and workplace. The best implementations come from communicating with neurodiverse individuals and making knowledge-based, people-backed decisions.

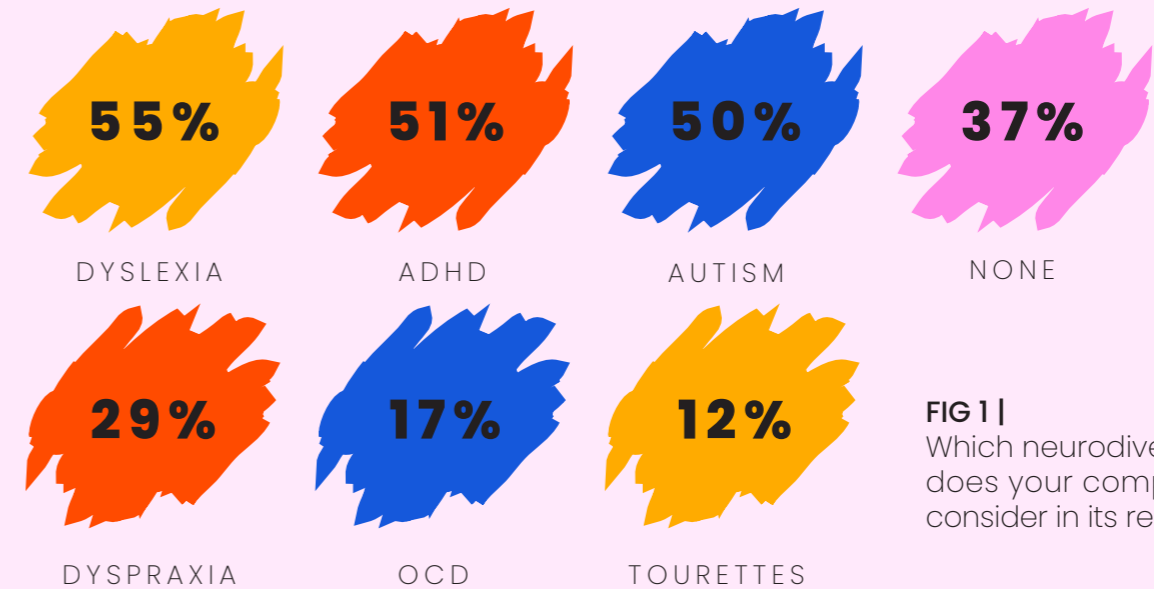


FIG 1 | Which neurodiverse conditions does your company actively consider in its recruitment efforts?



FIG 2 | Does your workplace offer/provide training on EDI?

*“Statistically **20%** of the UK population have a disability therefore it would make sense for companies to create steering groups of people that have a genuine affinity with the challenge of inclusion and allow them to discuss the challenge and create the solutions.”*

Steve Carter, Co-Founder and Director at The Ability People



It's worth noting that most of the changes brought to workplaces **for the benefit of neurodiverse employees also benefit neuro-typical employees**; a common example being flexible working.

NEUROINCLUSION:

Creating an inclusive environment that values and supports individuals with diverse neurocognitive abilities. – [Framery](#)



“Neuroinclusivity promotes equal opportunities, understanding and respect for individuals with neurological differences in various settings, including education, workplaces, and communities. It involves fostering an environment that celebrates neurodiversity, encourages open communication, provides reasonable accommodations, and ensures that everyone has an equitable chance to thrive and contribute their unique talents and abilities.”

Whilst Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) is not a new term, it seems businesses are yet to fully understand the pathways and their responsibility to be proactive. Following regulatory processes is not good enough. We as humans want and need more, particularly those who are neurodivergent, disabled, and marginalised.

In order for businesses to create an EDI-driven workplace, they must continually look into ways to support each and every human that they either wish to attract and retain or those who approach them. The process starts at the attraction and hiring stage and then moves through to onboarding, managing and growth strategies.

We know by now that how an employee experiences their day-to-day feeds into productivity and performance. Work is a big part of our lives and influences the hours outside of work too; wellbeing, social and financial health etc. So not only do we need to look after talent for business reasons, but also for the general wellbeing of the people that come and go.



THE BENEFITS OF A DIVERSE TEAM

Neurological differences do not make individuals unable to work. In fact, research has shown that neurodiverse individuals carry stronger skillsets in certain areas than neuro-typical people. These stronger skillsets support business function, team structure, culture and more.

Research from both **McKinsey and Accenture** shows that diverse workplaces perform better financially too.

28%

Higher revenue

30%

Greater economic profit margins

X2

Net income

FIG 3 |
Accenture, 2018

Qualities brought to workplaces by neurodiverse talent:

HYPERFOCUS:

Tasks, projects and other duties are tackled with high attention to detail and usually timelines are adhered to.

CREATIVITY & INNOVATIVE THINKING:

Approaching tasks and projects from a different angle to neuro-typical colleagues, new and interesting ideas.

PROBLEM-SOLVING:

Unique perspective, pattern recognition and spatial reasoning leading to quick and/or effective resolutions.

PRODUCTIVITY:

Linked to hyperfocus, with the right support from employers, productivity from neurodiverse employees could encourage others and lead to higher productivity team/company wide.

SOME OTHERS INCLUDE:

Detail processing, authenticity, visual reasoning and long-term memory.

Once again we called on the insight from HR professionals. We asked what benefits they'd seen Neurodiverse employees bring to companies and as you can see from the figure 4 on the following page, many of align with the list above that we cherry-picked from multiple sources like [The British Psychological Society](#), [pmac](#) and [UCL](#).



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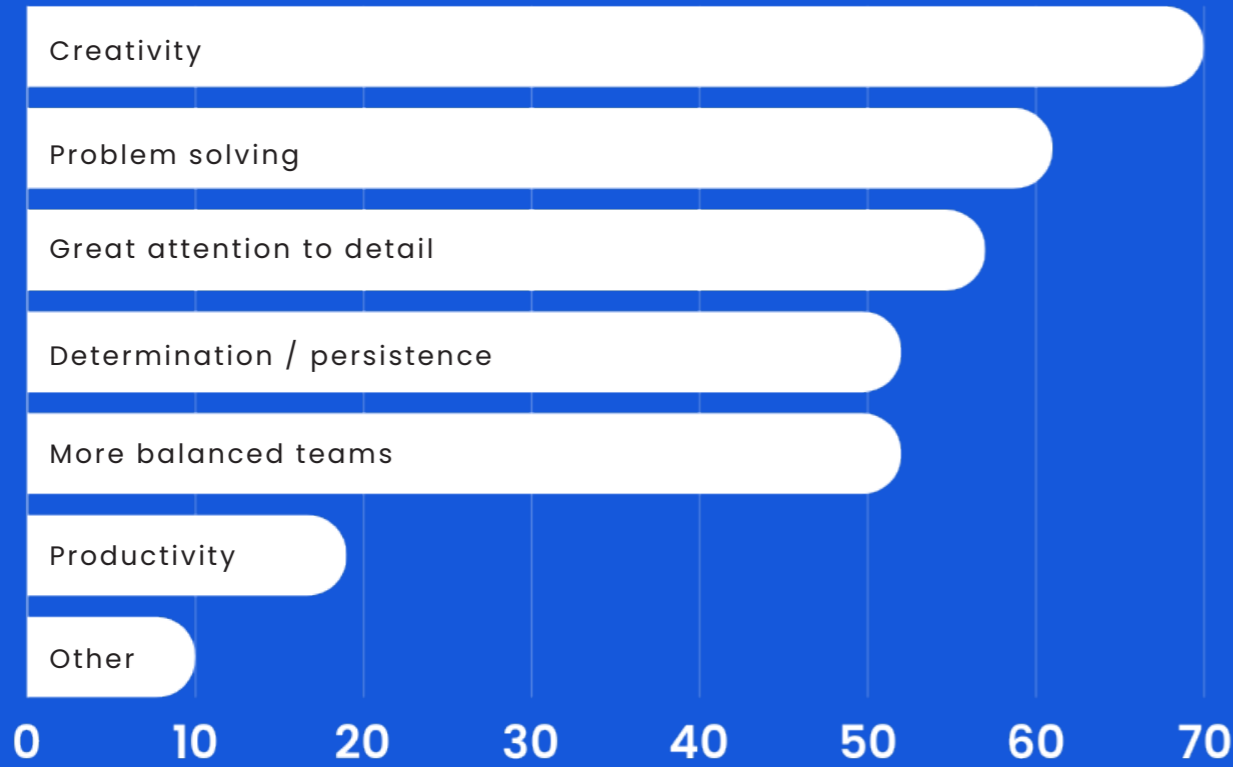


FIG 4 | What benefits have you seen neurodiverse employees bring to companies?

“For many neurodivergent people the biggest problem associated with getting the right job (or just getting a job) is the process itself. By trying to channel everybody through a singular, linear process you run the risk of excluding people because they may prefer to represent themselves by video, audio, portfolio rather than a CV. Similarly questions and the order of questions has a major impact on the results of any recruitment campaign as many people choose to drop out of the process before completing it simply because it becomes too difficult or borderline discriminatory.”

“Employers need to demonstrate that they are a ‘safe’ place for people to represent themselves authentically without fear & bias. This is more than just a statement on the website, it needs to be evidenced by testimonials from existing staff, having an accessible process, the way job advertisements are structured, the images used on social media, using ‘closed caption’ transcription on any videos and by providing multiple ways for people to apply so they have the opportunity to represent the best version of themselves.”

Steve Carter, Co-Founder and Director at TAP – The Ability People

ATTRACTION STRATEGIES

According to multiple sources, application and interview processes could be to blame for the lack of neurodiverse individuals in the workforce, particularly autistic talent which as of 2023 sits at just **29%**.

The first thing to do is to re-evaluate your EDI policy including any internal training, tangible and intangible support measures etc. and ensure you’ve updated it on your website, across socials and any other online/offline outlets. This shouldn’t be where you stop.

There are many ways that businesses attract talent; word of mouth, social media, positive experience of product or service, PR. Once an individual has found your business, they may do some research and figure out if their goals, needs and morals align with what you can provide as an employer. This is why as mentioned by Steve, it’s important you demonstrate in lots of different ways, not just through a policy, that you’re an inclusive and safe place for all individuals.

As you can see from the graph, there are quite mixed answers to the attraction strategy question. It does however show that it’s around a 50/50 split between those who’ve put something in place and those who haven’t, excluding the factors of extremity/consideration.

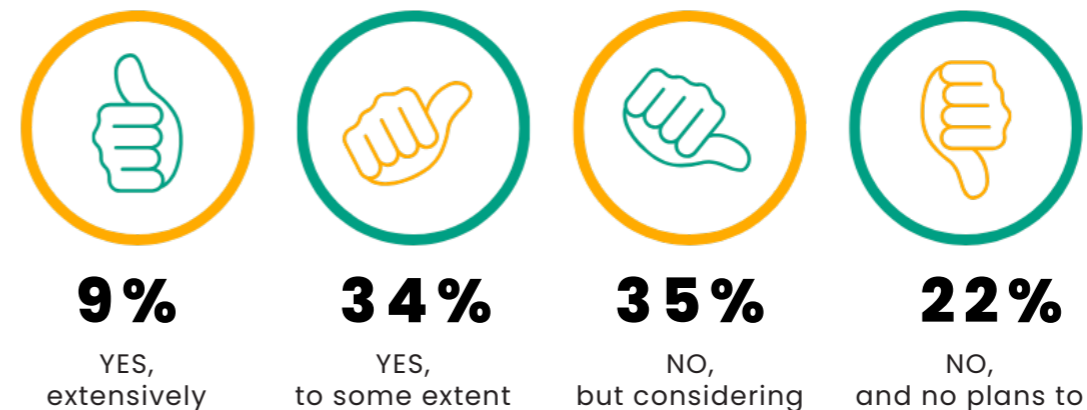


FIG 5 | Has your company implemented any specific initiatives and/or programs to attract neurodiverse candidates?

COMMON BARRIERS

Job adverts are usually the first thing a person will come across when starting a job search. Sometimes it’ll be the first time they may have come across a company/ brand.

For such a powerful way to attract professionals, there are a few common issues we see across job boards and websites. No ‘one’ format fits all and many organisations don’t necessarily factor in the recipient and/or accessibility measures. Businesses may include examples of how they’re able to support physical disabilities but forget or dismiss those with invisible disabilities and conditions.

We have to also remember, that there is a percentage of professionals in the market who won’t know they’re neurodivergent; some who are undiagnosed. Accessibility and inclusivity are therefore important so that every individual has an equal chance to present themselves to employers and interview.

*“Make it **easy** for people to identify the core skills required for the role. Keep language simple and rephrase questions into shorter sentences to get more complete answers from neurodivergent applicants.”*

Jason Iyeko, Founder and Director at Jumpstart Support

APPROACHES, ADJUSTMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Language is very important. Forget about jargon and watch the words you use (i.e. necessary) if you are open-minded to other attributes. This can deter people as they don't feel they fully match up to the criteria

- Adverts should be as concise and clear as possible. This avoids confusion for everyone and again doesn't put people off applying.
- The layout is also important for accessibility. Break down sections into clear subheadings and make use of bullet points.
- Be very clear about expectations of the role, must-haves VS desirables.
- Avoid packing out the advert and only include key information. By key information, we mean skills, characteristics, responsibilities, benefits etc.
- Include instructions on how to proceed and/or additional steps to take after applying.
- Think about other ways that people could apply other than just CV and cover letters i.e. task process, videos, voice notes.
- Make sure you mention your EDI policy and include a short paragraph that welcomes applications from neurodiverse individuals. You could even include examples of support measures already in place, and that you're happy to talk about personal needs and adjustments.
- Ensure you've outlined the touchpoints of the process i.e. estimated time for feedback, closing date for job applications, interview dates.

INBETWEEN THE APPLICATION & INTERVIEW STAGE

When choosing who to take forward to the next stage of the recruitment process, be mindful of how you're looking over applications. Try not to cast a judgemental eye over things like gaps and 'jumpy' job history, and grammatical and spelling mistakes (something dyslexic individuals struggle with).

This stage of recruitment is where task processes can be a great way for candidates to highlight their strengths, skills and abilities creatively and in a more reflective way other than a written letter and CV. This can be particularly helpful to neurodiverse candidates.

Not only is it a more inclusive way to go about selection, it can also complement neuro-typical people. It helps hiring managers and leaders make more informed decisions.



“Hire people who can actually do the job, instead of perform well.”

Director & ADHD Coach, Leanne Maskell

INTERVIEW STAGE

Before you hold any interviews...

If any interviewees have disclosed any needs, considerations etc. be sure to have handled these as it could impact their ability to be at their best for their allotted time with you.

We realise that if you are unaware of any conditions or adjustments, it can be difficult to accommodate. We suggest being as open-minded and considerate as possible during all interviews. We won't ever know how other people are feeling, what they're thinking or how they're coping with a situation in the moment, so it's important to be kind.

Nowadays, a lot of interviews [particularly first-stage] take place remotely so interviewees can decide their setup and can prepare in comfort without the anxiety or stress of a new environment.

Before any style of interview, you could provide interviewees with examples of questions and/or any information about task-based scenarios that you have planned.

Why do we suggest this? Interviews are notoriously nerve-racking and people don't always perform their best under pressure. Some neurodiverse individuals find it difficult to think on the spot and/or process information quickly, so having the questions beforehand allows individuals to pre-plan and compose answers that they feel confident with.



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Some individuals in the neurodiverse community might struggle with certain types of questions i.e. hypothetical, as they may be unable to imagine a circumstance they've not been in.

Therefore, there are a few things to consider:

- Be specific with your probes, try to ask questions that are more focused than generalised.
- Be aware of literal answers i.e. "How did you get to where you are now?" "By train and then walked."
- If you want more detail, ask for it. You may have to prompt during the interview.



POST-INTERVIEW

We want to double down on what we mentioned earlier about the individual differences that everyone presents. No two people are the same, neurodivergent or neurotypical.

When you're in the process of selection, just remember that some individuals aren't good at performance-based situations. Just because someone might not have had a great interview, it doesn't mean they won't be able to put their skills and abilities to use on the job. Some people may be great at interviewing, but not be able to reflect this in their day-to-day responsibilities at work.

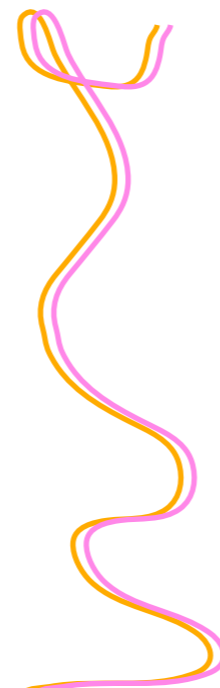
When you're reflecting on interviews, if there were any displays of awkwardness or other memorable moments, try to be open-minded and consider reasons for this i.e. anxiety or behavioural changes due to stimulation. Don't automatically jump to conclusions and instead remain focused on skillsets, strengths, what they can bring to the business, achievements etc.

A part of the hiring process for some organisations, usually post-interview and prepping for onboarding, involves a survey or some form of documentation for individuals to fill out. This could possibly include a self-disclosure section about disability, medical conditions and any other areas of consideration for employers to be aware of.

This should not and is mostly not used for prejudice, but some individuals may not feel safe and comfortable at the time to disclose such information.

For those who choose to disclose at the time, it's a great starting point for the employers to start putting adjustments and processes in place to support the employee and could lead to higher productivity, job satisfaction and overall retention.

Research from Birbeck University showed that of 1,117 neurodivergent people, 78.7% said they informed their employer through self-disclosure. However, the same report cited that the main challenge for employers when implementing adjustments was lack of disclosure (69.3%).



INSIGHT FROM JASON IYEKE

Jason Iyeye is the Founder of [Jumpstart Support](#), a consultancy which helps empower businesses to make their workplaces neuro-inclusive through training, workshops, reasonable adjustment support and innovation.



Jason has a background leading teams in several industries, from tech, energy, esports and more. He has also been the brains behind several social media companies based on Neurodiversity, including ADHDoers, an ADHD awareness media account with 1.5 million followers. As someone with ADHD, he is committed to making the world a more inclusive and accessible place.

> What have you found are the biggest pain points for neurodiverse talent and employers trying to engage/manage?

One of the biggest pain points right now is the struggle for employers to foster a psychologically safe environment for employees to disclose that they are - or might be - neurodivergent.

Disclosure presents a greater opportunity for employers to support their neurodivergent employees and a chance to collaborate with the employees to manage their struggles, maximise strengths and make reasonable adjustments. In addition, the neurodivergent employee will no longer be masking (i.e. trying to hide their neurodivergence).

However, recent estimates say that 65% of neurodivergent employees fear discrimination despite UK businesses promoting neurodiverse workplaces. This means that the biggest barrier to accessing adjustment - a lack of disclosure - remains intact.

HR Managers, line managers and supervisors desperately need to break this pattern through education, understanding and acceptance.

> What's the biggest oversight from employers when trying to foster an inclusive workplace?

The biggest oversight from employers when trying to foster an inclusive workplace is the misconception that any adjustments - i.e. changes made by an employer to remove or reduce a disadvantage relating to someone's disability - are expensive and time-consuming to put in place.

Reasonable adjustments are typically free or low-cost. The impact of making adjustments could be significant for the workplace in terms of future performance.



BEFORE WE CONCLUDE, LET'S TOUCH ON FEEDBACK

Share your thoughts and create a safe space for conversation. It's better to be open throughout the interview.

This doesn't take away from the importance of proper feedback when the interview has concluded.

> Provide your honest opinion and note positives and advice / takeaways. Don't forget to communicate about next steps with timelines and ask for their feedback too.

> **Interviews are a two-way process.** You are both out to impress and get to know one another. Their feedback may guide you to improve your process for others in the future.

> **Be kind to everyone.** Criticism can be a great tool for development but only when it's constructive.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this report, we've highlighted the significant value and potential of neurodiverse talent in the workforce whilst recognising the challenges that neurodivergent individuals face during the employment process. Neurodiversity represents a broad spectrum of neurological differences. These differences are often of great benefit to organisations that foster and help their employees grow. Examples include unique skills such as hyperfocus, creativity, problem-solving, and productivity.

The issue is bias, prejudice, and standardised hiring practices continue to exclude the neurodiverse community, often leading to higher unemployment rates and income disparities among them. Addressing these disparities requires comprehensive policies and training that recognise neurodiversity within the broader framework of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Employers need to re-evaluate recruitment and onboarding strategies to ensure clarity, accessibility, and accommodations at every step, including flexible application processes, pre-interview preparation, and interview environments sensitive to individual needs.

Creating a truly inclusive and supportive work environment involves active communication, open-mindedness, and a proactive approach to adjustments. There's no one-size-fits-all. Employers must demonstrate psychological safety to encourage self-disclosure, which will enable them to provide reasonable accommodations that can significantly enhance productivity, job satisfaction, and retention. Ultimately, a diverse and inclusive workplace benefits not only neurodiverse individuals but the entire organisation, promoting creativity, innovation, and higher financial performance.

We will touch on workplace adjustments, employer responsibility and the lifecycle of a neurodiverse employee in our second report which focuses on the latter half of a job seeker's journey; post-employment.

RESOURCES

"Access to Work is a publicly funded employment support grant scheme that aims to support disabled people start or stay in work. It can provide practical and financial support for people who have a disability or physical or mental health condition. Support can be provided where someone needs support or adaptations beyond reasonable adjustments."

An Access to Work grant can pay for practical support to enable your employee to start or stay in work, or to support you if you are self-employed."

[Employer guide here.](#)

Tangibles & Intangibles

- > Written, clear notes, agendas, instructions etc.
- > Noise cancelling headphones
- > Focus rooms/ pods
- > Fidget toys
- > Sensory tool kits incl. visual, auditory, tactile
- > Flexible and remote working opportunities
- > Replace high-intensity lighting for natural sources or warmer bulbs

Advice, consultative & training

- > [TAP – The Ability People:](#) is a consulting & advisory business founded by people with a disability to make employment more accessible. Their purpose is to create parity of opportunity and they are tireless in their pursuit of 'Making Difference Normal' through advice, education & change programmes.
- > [Jumpstart Support \(Jason Iyke\)](#)
- > [The Brain Charity Workplace Neurodiversity Training](#)
- > [ihasco EDI Training](#)
- > [acas D&I Training courses](#)

Website accessibility software

- > [Recite me](#)
- > [User Way](#)

Tech accessibility tools

Reading & writing

- > [Grammarly](#)
- > [Co:Writer](#)
- > [Read&Write](#)

Communication

- > [Microsoft teams](#)
- > [Tools from microsoft](#)
- > [Slack](#)

Task management, Visualisation & organisation

- > [GitMind](#)
- > [Trello](#)
- > [Monday.com](#)

Note-taking

- > [Fireflies.ai](#)
- > [Caption.Ed](#)
- > [Otter.AI](#)

Time management

- > [RescueTime](#)
- > [Toggl](#)

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- <https://www.problemshared.net/>



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