



ICAEW Workplace guidance for supporting neurodivergent employees

This resource is intended to provide practical information to help firms reflect on their existing practices and identify where proportionate improvements may be possible. It is the first in a series of resources informed by data from our biennial diversity monitoring survey.

UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSITY

A dignity-led approach to inclusion

A dignity-led approach means respecting employees' autonomy and recognising that individuals are best placed to describe their own experiences and support needs.

"Dignity, respect and autonomy are foundational. Without them, even well-intentioned neuroinclusion efforts can become infantilising, degrading and disempowering"

Danielle Gleicher-Bates, Emma Llanwarne, Co-Chairs neurodiversikey®

There is no 'official' definition of neurodiversity. It describes the fact that we all think, learn, communicate and process information differently, and includes everyone. The term 'neurodivergent' is commonly used to describe people whose neurotype differs from what is regarded as typical. This can include a wide range of neurotypes, for example, autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette's among others.

People with the same neurotype can have very different experiences and support needs. A useful starting point is to avoid assumptions and if an employee raises a support need simply listen to what would help them work effectively.

Why inclusive workplace practices matter

An inclusive workplace can help employees contribute effectively and can support positive workplace culture, employee wellbeing and retention. Including neurodivergent employees at work is called 'neuroinclusion'.

Neurodiversikey® describes a neuroinclusive environment as one that is *"welcoming, supportive, accommodating and understanding of all neurotypes"*.

ACAS identifies a range of potential benefits from neuroinclusive working practices, including attracting a wider range of skills and experience, supporting employee wellbeing and reducing the risk of workplace disputes. Many practical measures are relatively simple, low cost and may benefit all employees more broadly.

FIVE AREAS TO CONSIDER FOR AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

The following areas draw on research and examples of good practice to provide a practical starting point for firms considering how to develop a more inclusive workplace.

1. Leadership and workplace culture

Leaders and managers play an important role in creating a workplace where employees are treated with dignity and respect.

Questions to consider

- Do leaders demonstrate inclusive and respectful behaviours in practice?
- Do employees know where to go if they need support?
- Are employees encouraged to raise concerns or suggest improvements?
- Is neurodiversity considered as part of wider equality and wellbeing activity?

Practical steps might include:

- Encouraging respectful and open conversations about different working styles;
- Challenging inappropriate language, stereotypes or assumptions;
- Making clear that employees can raise support needs without having to disclose more information than is necessary; and
- Seeking feedback from employees about their workplace experience.

2. Communication and management

Clear and consistent communication can reduce unnecessary barriers and uncertainty.

Questions to consider

- Are expectations, priorities and deadlines communicated clearly?
- Do managers feel able to have constructive conversations about support?
- Are employees given appropriate opportunities to ask questions or clarify expectations?
- Are meetings and training accessible to different communication and processing needs?

Practical steps might include:

- re-checking or asking whether instructions and expectations are clear
- circulating meeting agendas in advance where practical;
- summarising decisions and actions following meetings;
- allowing reasonable time for questions and follow-up; and
- using clear, accessible language in workplace policies and communications.

3. Recruitment, performance and adjustments

Some recruitment and performance processes could unintentionally create barriers.

Questions to consider

- Could recruitment or assessment processes create unnecessary barriers?
- Are expectations within performance management processes clear?
- Is there a clear and accessible process for requesting workplace adjustments?
- Are adjustments reviewed where circumstances change?

Practical steps might include:

- focusing recruitment and assessment on the skills and requirements of the role;
- considering whether adjustments to recruitment processes are appropriate;
- providing clear expectations and objectives;
- considering individual requests for workplace adjustments carefully and proportionately;
- reviewing adjustments with the employee to establish whether they remain effective.

4. The working environment

The physical and digital working environment can affect how different employees work.

Questions to consider

- Are there unnecessary sources of noise, distraction or sensory pressure?
- Is there access to quieter or alternative working arrangements where feasible?
- Does workplace technology support accessibility?
- Are hybrid and remote working arrangements considered where appropriate?

Practical steps might include:

- providing quieter working spaces where feasible;
- considering lighting, noise and screen glare;
- allowing flexibility in workspace arrangements where appropriate;
- considering the impact of hot-desking; and
- ensuring that workplace technology and digital information are accessible.

5. Awareness, feedback and support

Awareness can help reduce misconceptions about neurodiversity but should be accompanied by meaningful workplace practices. Employees should not be expected to disclose their neurodivergence to contribute to discussions about workplace accessibility.

Questions to consider

- Do employees know where they can obtain support?
- Do employees have opportunities to provide feedback about workplace practices?
- Are awareness activities informed by the experiences of neurodivergent employees?
- Does the firm review whether its inclusion measures are effective?

Practical steps might include:

- providing appropriate awareness training for managers and employees;
- signposting relevant sources of information and support;
- supporting employee networks or peer groups where appropriate
- seeking feedback about workplace experiences; and
- involving employees in developing relevant workplace initiatives.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

For smaller firms

Firms do not need a dedicated specialist team or extensive resources to consider whether their workplace is inclusive. ACAS guidance highlights that neuroinclusion is most effective when embedded across everyday workplace practices and it can benefit all employees. Practical improvements may include for example flexible working, clearer communication, supportive management conversations and accessible workplace processes.

Small firms may wish to start by asking:

- Do employees know who they can speak to if they need support?
- Are our management and communication approaches clear and flexible?
- Could small changes to our workplace or processes remove unnecessary barriers?
- Do we respond constructively when employees raise support needs?

The Equality Act 2010

Neurodiversity itself is not a protected characteristic under the [Equality Act 2010](#). However, a neurodivergent condition may meet the statutory definition of disability depending on its effect on the individual. A diagnosis is not required. In such cases, employers have legal duties to avoid discrimination and to consider [reasonable adjustments](#) where appropriate. The application of the Equality Act 2010 is fact specific. Firms can refer to [ACAS guidance](#) where necessary.

CONCLUSION

Our diversity survey highlighted that many individuals who identify as neurodivergent may feel unable or reluctant to disclose this in the workplace. Creating supportive environments does not mean expecting employees to share this information but ensuring that those who choose to seek support feel able to do so safely and confidently.

We will continue to explore the reasons for non-disclosure in our 2027 diversity survey to better understand the experiences and concerns that may influence employees' decisions about whether to disclose.

Acknowledgements

ICAEW would like to thank neurodiversikey® for their valuable contributions to the development of this guidance.

This resource does not provide employment law advice or create new regulatory requirements.