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Neurodiversity and work: A manager's guide

GAIN

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Foreword

It has been six years since we published our first guidance for managers who wanted to better support their neurodiverse employees. In that guidance, we focused on good practice when interviewing and managing individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Since then, the work of many organisations and individuals has helped insurance and financial services to establish a reputation for good practice in this field – for example, early in 2026 Insurance Times ran the headline: ‘Neurodiversity could be insurance’s talent success story’.

However, looking across the whole of the UK economy, it is clear that we cannot be complacent. In 2024, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) published a report that showed one in five of the neurodivergent employees they surveyed had experienced harassment or discrimination at work because of their neurodivergence. Only half of the neurodivergent employees that they surveyed felt that their organisation or team had an open and supportive climate. Similarly, a 2026 ACAS survey found that 35% of workers think that their employer is ineffective at training managers to support neurodiversity at work. We need to ensure that our work is underpinned by the best, most up-to-date insight.

For this completely new guide, we have worked closely with GAIN (Group for Autism, Insurance, Investment & Neurodiversity). GAIN is a community interest company that was set up in 2021 to improve employment prospects for neurodivergent people across insurance, investment and related sectors.

It became clear during our early conversations with GAIN that the scope of this work could and should far exceed our original guide. The result is a much more comprehensive and detailed guide. This guidance looks at a wider range of neurotypes, helping managers recognise behaviours and needs that may be associated with different neurotypes. It offers advice on building inclusive workplaces and helping individuals thrive and contribute fully. There is help here for managers who want to be inclusive when recruiting or onboarding new team members.

In this guide, we also offer our own experience of moving our office location and setting up a new hub with a stronger inclusivity approach front of mind.

One crucial lesson throughout is that we don’t need to wait for a diagnosis: managers can be proactive.

Our primary aim for this guide was to create practical, evidence-based support for managers, making an even more powerful case for neurodiverse talent inclusion in the workforce. The benefits – for individuals, teams and organisations – are significant.

Vivine Cameron, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Manager, CII Group

1. Introduction and understanding neurodiversity

1. Introduction & understanding neurodiversity

1.1 Introduction and how to use this guide

As a chartered body with a public interest mandate, the Chartered Insurance Institute provides a forum where stakeholders can collaborate on shared challenges. Our independence enables honest dialogue, facilitating the development of sector-wide guidance and recommendations that strengthen professional standards and deliver better customer outcomes.

1.1.1 The purpose

This guide is designed to help line managers, business owners, CII members, and individual professionals understand and support neurodivergent employees and candidates. It provides a foundation for exploring neurodiversity in the workplace, with practical tools, real-world examples, and guidance on what the current law says to support the recruitment, development, and inclusion of neurodivergent employees. It also highlights how awareness, tailored support, and inclusive practices can create a more effective and engaging environment for all. Recognising how different ways of thinking, processing information, and approaching tasks can contribute to better team and organisational success.

Why now?

Unlocking neurodivergent talent has now become a strategic imperative in today's digital, data driven economy. Tapping into this underutilised neurodivergent talent pool adds creative problem solving, pattern recognition, technology adopters (e.g. AI, data, cyber) and resilient innovators – skills critical to staying competitive¹¹¹. With only 30.2% of autistic people in employment in 2024 versus 54.7% for all disabled people or 82.0% of non-disabled people, shifting from awareness to collective action is key to the right business outcomes¹¹².

1.2 Exploring neurodiversity

1.2.1 What neurodiversity means

The term **neurodiversity** refers to individuals whose brain processes, learns, communicates and behaves differently from what is considered typical in society. This umbrella term can also be seen as a social movement or paradigm that seeks a fundamental shift away from the traditional medical model that views neurological differences as pathologies. Instead, it recognises that all minds are unique and come with challenges and needs, but that society currently supports and is arguably designed for some minds better than others. It is this difference in access or marginalisation, which creates or exacerbates many of the barriers and challenges that neurodivergent people face at home, in the world, and in their working lives.

Source 111: Jun 2025 EY Report [How can action on neuroinclusion accelerate business transformation?](#)

Source 112: DWP, [The employment of disabled people 2024, 20 June 2025](#), Table LMS003

1.2.2 *Spiky Profiles* and why individual differences matter

Traditional performance frameworks or team scorecards often assume linearity — consistent strengths across cognitive domains, predictable outputs given objectives, and uniform communication styles. This model fails to account for the reality of **spiky profiles**, where individuals can demonstrate both:

- Exceptional ability in some areas (e.g. pattern recognition, strategic thinking etc.)
- Pronounced challenges in others (e.g. executive functioning, sensory regulation etc.).

In the context of managing people, all individuals are often regarded to have areas of strength, and areas where they need support and development. For a neurotypical person, most skills tend to be within a consistent range. A chart mapping their skills would show a relatively flat or smooth line. For neurodivergent individuals, skill levels and support needs may vary more significantly, even in connected skills. If charted on a graph, the resulting line is “spiky”.

Example of a Spiky Profile



The Neurodivergent Spectrum

What is the connection between the spiky profile and the neurodivergent spectrum? The spectrum does not mean “everyone is on the spectrum”, and it does not mean a scale between “not at all neurodivergent” and “very neurodivergent”. Instead, it is a full range, where every neurodivergent person has a unique spectrum of traits related to their neurotype – the spiky profile and the spectrum are connected; they are both representations of how neurodivergent people have different presentations.



Take a single aspect for one neurotype - sensory processing in autistic people. One autistic person may be sensory-seeking, while another is sensory-avoidant. Another autistic person may be sensory seeking in some areas and not others. All three individuals are autistic but have variation in their sensory processing. The spectrum concept highlights that there is wide variation among neurodivergent individuals in terms of their traits, strengths, challenges etc.

These profiles are common among neurodivergent professionals, yet they are frequently misunderstood or penalised in appraisal, promotion, and recruitment processes. This can lead to:

- Misalignment between talent and role expectations
- Underutilisation of cognitive strengths
- Increased attrition due to lack of psychological safety

1.2.3 Reference to co-occurring differences

There are a variety of studies that shows how neurodivergence is interconnected with mental health, hormones and physical health. Neurodivergent individuals are more likely to have or develop co-occurring (comorbid) conditions¹²³¹. 50 to 70% of individuals with ASD also present with comorbid ADHD¹²³². Rates of hypermobile conditions like Hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (hEDS) are very high among autistic people and people with ADHD. Such comorbidities increase chronic pain, fatigue, mobility and other challenges¹²³³.

Co-occurring conditions are often difficult to diagnose due to lack of clinical understanding of causal links between symptoms, internal sensory processing differences and behavioural masking (social camouflaging). Being aware that neurodivergent individuals are likely to have other physical, hormonal and, or mental challenges and face difficulty in diagnosis is helpful for managers in supporting neurodivergent employees with more flexible working arrangements to help manage risks of higher absenteeism and burnout.

Source 1231: [Risk of physical health comorbidities in autistic adults: clinical nested cross-sectional study](#). BJPsyche Open. Megan Hunt, Jack FG Underwood, Leon Hubbard, Jeremy Hall.

Source 1233: The Relationship Between Generalised Joint Hypermobility and Autism Spectrum Disorder in Adults: A Large, Cross-Sectional, Case Control Comparison, Martin R Galins, Nils Thelin, Mats B Humble, Marie Elwin, Susanne Bejerot.

Medical Diagnosis

A medical diagnosis is not required for an employee accessing workplace adjustments or claiming protection under the Equality Act 2010, so long as they can demonstrate substantial and long-term adverse effect on day-to-day activities¹²³⁴. Respecting an individual's right to seek or not seek diagnosis, is important. Should an individual wish to seek a medical diagnosis, this can be sought via a GP referral or a private appointment.

For Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and ADHD, the ICD-11 (International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision, World Health Organisation) and DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition, American Psychiatric Association) diagnostic standards, are approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), for use in the UK by health professionals.

1.3 Neurotypes and the language of Neurodiversity

There are many different neurotypes, each with unique ways of thinking, processing information and interacting with the world. For the purposes of this guide, we will use examples from Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), ADHD and Dyslexia.

In this section we also cover the language of neurodiversity. Any descriptions and language should always be person-centred, respectful and reflective of the individual, recognising their strengths and preferences rather than defining them solely by their neurotype.

1.3.1 Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia and referencing others

Asperger's Syndrome as a diagnosis based on different diagnostic standard, has a complicated history and has been phased out. ICD-11 and DSM-5 diagnostic standards highlights autism is a spectrum, using the term Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Some neurodivergent individuals may still use the term "Asperger's" to describe autism without co-occurring learning disability¹, and some will find the history of the term uncomfortable and upsetting. It is important to respect neurodivergent individual's preferences around the language they use to describe themselves and this is covered in more detail in section 1.3.2.

Not all autistic people consider autism to be a disorder, nor consider autism to be a disability. For others, identifying as disabled is an important part of accessing medical support and diagnosis. The social model of disability recognises that individuals can experience impairments – differences or reductions in specific abilities that impact daily life – but that disability is often a product of the environment. Autistic individuals often have a strong sense of justice, honesty and integrity, high attention to detail, a good memory and concentration. The National Autistic Society estimated that 700,000 people living in the UK are autistic ¹³¹¹.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD, is a neurotype defined by 2 main groups of symptoms - inattention and hyperactivity. Diagnosis can be hyperactive, inattentive or combined. Inattention can include forgetfulness, getting easily distracted, difficulty switching off and relaxing, difficulty following instructions, switching between tasks or getting organised. Hyperactivity may involve feeling restless, fidgeting, interrupting conversations and talking frequently.

Source 1234: [Disability and Equality Act 2010](#)

Note 1: See section 1.2.3

Source 1311: NAS, How many autistic people are there?

It is very common for those with ADHD to exhibit both inattentive and hyperactive symptoms as well as other symptoms or issues that may not fall under “hyperactive” or “inattentive”. For instance, individuals with ADHD report problems with sleep and other issues with executive functioning skills. Someone with ADHD might also be “time-blind”, i.e. difficulty knowing how much time has passed or predicting how long a task will take to complete, which leads to difficulty with staying organised. Many individuals with ADHD possess cognitive flexibility or lateral thinking strengths alongside hyperfocus, multi-tasking, creativity, problem-solving skills etc.

Based on the **2025 Dyslexia Delphi Study**, the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) defines **Dyslexia** as a set of processing difficulties primarily affecting the acquisition of reading and spelling. Dyslexic people may have difficulty processing and remembering information they see and hear, which can affect learning and the acquisition of literacy skills. Dyslexia can also impact on other areas such as organisational skills. The BDA further clarifies that dyslexia is a neurological difference that is not linked to intelligence¹³¹². It often occurs alongside other conditions like ADHD and dyscalculia. Many individuals with dyslexia possess strengths in areas such as reasoning and creative problem-solving.

Other neurotypes

This guide has chosen to reference three neurotypes but recognizes that neurodiversity covers a range of differences from dyspraxia, Tourette’s, Dyscalculia, OCD, and others. Section 2 of this guide will help you with practical tools to use in the workplace that are applicable to universal design outside of the neurotypes highlighted in Section 1.

1.3.2 Preferred terminology and respectful communication

The Double Empathy Problem

Rather than seeing neurodivergent individuals as having “deficits” in empathy and communication, recent studies¹³² have shown that both neurodivergent and neurotypical people have different innate ways of experiencing and expressing empathy and communication. This leads to struggles with empathising between neurodivergent and neurotypical people on both sides of the divide. For example, someone with dyslexia might be exceptional with pattern recognition but struggle to explain their thinking, as to them it is just ‘obvious’. It is important to be aware of this in the workplace when considering how employees may interact with one another as well as implications of the double empathy problem in all aspects of an individuals’ career journey. We can explore this further in the case study below:

Double Empathy Problem Case Study

Anna, an employee, learns best when building from details to a big picture, using bottom-up processing like many autistic people. The rationale “why” is essential for Anna to be able to understand the task and perform it correctly. During training, Anna’s manager misinterprets her probing questions as a challenge to authority rather than a cognitive requirement. Her manager didn’t feel context is needed for the task and cannot understand how Anna can still be uncertain of what is required, despite believing instructions given to her were clear.

This is a classic double empathy problem where differences in cognitive and communication styles between parties can cause **mutual frustration**. To resolve this, managers could:

Source 1312: BDA [Dyslexia Factsheet](#)

Source 132: [Cross-neurotype communication from an autistic point of view: Insights on autistic Theory of Mind from a focus group study](#). Eleonora Marocchini, Irene Baldon,

- **Assume positive intent:** View questions as a tool for accuracy.
- **Lead with curiosity:** Ask what information is needed to support cognitive differences.
- **Prioritise context:** Understand some minds find the “why” foundational for the “how”.

The language of neurodiversity is continuing to evolve. Academic and medical communities mostly favour “**person-first**” language. For example, stating “a person with autism” or “a person with dyslexia”. However, there is a broad trend throughout both neurodivergent and disability groups to prefer “**identity-first**” language which means saying things like “an autistic person” or “a dyslexic person”.

The reasons for this vary both between groups and individuals, but many neurodivergent people explain it by saying that they aren’t a person “with” neurodivergence because there is no version of them that is a person “without” it. It is important to remember that individuals have their own preferences and a mixture of “identity-first” and “person-first” can be used when speaking generally. When speaking about a specific person, use the terminology they prefer, if known.

Sections 1.2 & 1.3 suggested good practice recommendations

- Seek training that explores the diversity within neurotypes (e.g., Spikey Profiles)
- Encourage personalised support plans that account for co-occurring differences
- Avoid diagnostic labels for capability, focus on individual strengths and needs
- Use inclusive language and avoid deficit-based framing
- Promote psychological safety to allow disclosure to line managers, without pressure
- Consider flexible adjustments (e.g., sensory or communication preferences)
- Encourage peer learning and allyship

1.4 Neurodiversity and the law

1.4.1 Overview of the UK legislation

Navigating legal frameworks around neurodiversity presents unique challenges for organisations. While laws exist to protect neurodivergent individuals, many firms struggle to interpret and apply these obligations effectively. *This section of the guide explores the current legislation around neurodiversity as in February 2026. However, legal information is subject to change, and it is recommended that this is not a sole guide for any legal determination on such matters.*

Recent increases in employment tribunals related to neurodiversity have highlighted the need for legal literacy and proactive inclusion. Organisations are facing scrutiny over their handling of neurodivergent employees, particularly around **reasonable adjustments** and **workplace discrimination**. Common challenges include:

- Misunderstanding legal obligations under disability and equality laws including when and how it applies for example in recruitment practises
- Inconsistent application of reasonable adjustments
- Lack of legal literacy among HR and leadership teams
- Fear of litigation leading to avoidance rather than inclusion

1.4.2 Equalities Act (2010)

Under The Equalities Act 2010 (which applies in Great Britain), a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This means that fluctuating conditions – ones which can change in severity over time – are included under the act. Where “day-to-day activities” are referenced, this can include examples like driving, personal care, preparing food and communicating with others.

The Equalities Act defines impairment as a reduction, or difference, in physical or mental abilities compared to most people. Citizen’s Advice (CA) offers two good examples of ways this can apply in practice. To quote CA on “checking if you’re disabled under the act” ¹⁴²¹:

- Jodi’s been struggling with everyday tasks since her partner left her a year ago. She can’t plan activities like shopping or following a recipe to cook a meal. She wouldn’t get up and dressed in the mornings if her daughter didn’t encourage her. She’s stopped going out because she doesn’t want to talk to people.
- Jodi has a mental impairment. It doesn’t matter if she’s hasn’t been diagnosed with a medical condition like depression - although that can help to prove she has an impairment. But she’ll need to show the impairment is long-term and has a substantial adverse effect on her ability to carry out day-to-day activities¹⁴².

And to quote a more direct neurodiversity example from CA ¹⁴²¹:

- Ahmed is autistic. He finds the world overwhelming and this causes him considerable anxiety. He also has difficulty communicating and interacting with other people.
- Ahmed doesn’t think he’s disabled as he’s not physically impaired. However, he has an impairment because the effect of his condition means he can’t do some day-to-day activities - like going to the shops alone and socialising.

An amendment made to the Act in 2023 expanded the “everyday activities” portion of the definition of disability, to provide more clarity. An individual is considered disabled under the Act if one of the ways their everyday activities are impacted is through limitations to their ability to participate “fully and effectively in working life on an equal basis with other workers”.

This clarification is pertinent for employers. An employer’s obligations to their employees should ensure equality of opportunities in all aspects of employment and access, from **recruitment** through to things like **training, bonuses** and **promotions**.

Other changes include **enhancing the protection against discriminatory recruitment conditions and practises** (including considerations around the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in screening and assessments¹⁴²²). The act now covers **discriminatory statements** (Section 60A)¹⁴²³ made by an employer about access to opportunities and counts regardless of whether active recruitment is taking place or whether there is a specific identifiable victim. For example, a manager expressing the opinion that they wouldn’t want to hire a dyslexic employee because of assumptions about their abilities or because the manager doesn’t believe in the validity of the diagnosis would fall afoul of the act regardless of whether any dyslexic candidate had applied for a role. Indirect discrimination also received recent clarity and confirmation within the act. A person is

Source 1421: [Check if you’re disabled under the Equality Act](#)

Source 1422: [The Fairness Innovation Challenge: Key Findings](#)

Source 1423: [Equality Act 2010: Amendments from January 2024](#)

protected against discrimination by association. In addition to being protected if they have a disability, an individual is also protected if they are **perceived as having a disability** or are **connected** to someone who has a disability¹⁴²³. For example, the parent of an autistic child.

A candidate at the start of an interview felt nervous and behaves in an introverted way, avoiding eye contact and fidgeting. Whilst performance improved throughout the interview, during hiring discussions, a panel member recommends against hiring the candidate, stating *“he’s obviously autistic or something, he couldn’t even look at me. We need people with good social skills”*. This is indirect discrimination against the candidate through an assumed neurodivergence.

It is not uncommon for employees and candidates to report that accessing adjustments often requires paperwork, doctor’s notes and medical evidence. However, this reliance on documentation by employers could also raise legal concerns related to the Equalities Act, especially if it is unclear why it is required. Disability Rights UK highlights that a person does not need a formal medical diagnosis of an impairment to be protected under the law ¹⁴²⁴.

1.4.3 Employer duties and reasonable adjustments

Not all adjustments need to go through a formal process. In fact, many of the most impactful changes are small, straightforward and entirely within a manager’s discretion like:

- Structured agendas or notes for meetings
- Task management tools
- Flexible working arrangements

A helpful structure for managers is to think in terms of:

- **Ask** – Ask about the nature of the challenges the employee is experiencing. Listen without judgement.
- **Accept** – Accept the personal truth you are being told. You do not need medical evidence to validate someone’s lived experience.
- **Avoid** – Avoid medicalising or formalising the situation unnecessarily. Keep the conversation human, supportive and grounded in day-to-day realities.
- **Empower** – Consider what decisions the employee can make for themselves. Autonomy is often just as important as the adjustment itself.
- **Experiment** – Be willing to trial different approaches and adapt them over time.
- **Endorse** – Act as an ally. If there is push-back or resistance from others when your employee seeks to access what they need, be prepared to advocate for them.

Ultimately, adjustment conversations should feel safe, practical and collaborative. They are not a test, a negotiation, or a legalistic process — they are an opportunity for managers and employees to work together to create an environment where everyone can thrive in.

Source 1423: [Equality Act 2010: Amendments from January 2024](#)

Source 1424: Disability Rights UK: [What is Physical or mental impairment?](#)

1.4.4 GAIN survey statistics

GAIN Individual survey for 2025¹⁴³¹ and 2024¹⁶²¹ highlighted:

Reasonable adjustments:

- Top three adjustments requested were remote or flexible working (73%), adjustments to in-office working location (53%), and changes to working hours, schedule and meeting participation (45%)¹⁴³¹.
- 19% of employees noted alternate working spaces lacked necessary equipment (i.e. focus rooms lacking standard desks, screens and laptop docking areas), and 12% stated such areas were often not fit for purpose (i.e., too small to use or located adjacent to conflicting spaces such as general meeting rooms being in the same area as quiet rooms)¹⁶²¹.
- 12% of line managers required a doctor's note for even minor adjustments, increasing the barrier to access for employees¹⁶²¹.
- Knowledge of adjustment processes and resources is not accessible. 59% of HR representatives could list more than 3 types of resource available to assist employees seeking adjustments (such as employee advocates, "own the way you work" schemes and self-service request processes), while only 27% of employees had the same knowledge. 63% of HR representatives said no formal process was in place - such as an adjustment passport system - to ensure consistency of approved adjustments throughout an individual's career ¹⁶²¹.

Bullying and harassment:

- 52% of neurodivergent employees experienced bullying in the workplace compared to 32% of neurotypical peers¹⁴³¹.

The table below shows the impact of perceived psychological safety at work and bullying disclosure rates of neurodivergent individuals versus neurotypical peers.

Table 1: Perception of safety with the prospect of complaining about bullying if it reoccurs

	Neurotypical			Neurodivergent		
	Not Bullied	Bullied, Complained	Bullied, Not Complained	Not Bullied	Bullied, Complained	Bullied, Not Complained
Very safe	32%	20%	0%	27%	15%	6%
Somewhat safe	47%	40%	50%	45%	27%	13%
Neutral	5%	20%	25%	12%	11%	25%
Somewhat unsafe	16%	0%	25%	14%	25%	44%
Unsafe	0%	20%	0%	3%	22%	13%

Source 1431: GAIN 2025 Individual Survey

Section 1.4 suggested good practice recommendations

- Provide legal training focused on neurodiversity, recruitment and workplace rights
- Collaborate with legal advisors to ensure compliance and proactive inclusion. This could lead to having a guide resource for managers or developing clear policies for reasonable adjustments and accommodations
- Empower managers with guidance on legal responsibilities
- Use case studies (e.g. recruiting, adjustments and performance reviews) to illustrate legal principles in action
- Encourage open dialogue about rights and responsibilities
- Enable employees and managers to self-serve some adjustments without a need for formal processes – such as with “own the way you work” schemes that operate on an assumption of employee trust and self-awareness.

1.5 Raising awareness of neurodiversity

1.5.1 Key individual behaviour and line manager approaches that build better understanding and acceptance

Managers play a pivotal and multifaceted role in the context of neurodivergent employees, as they act as key decision-makers, shape day-to-day employee experience, and translate senior strategy into actionable tasks. They need to balance meeting neurodivergent employee needs (wellbeing, learning support or training, career development etc.) and business demands (productivity, risk management, growth etc.).

Masking

Some neurodivergent people “mask” (or camouflage) their core traits, suppressing pain or distress from sensory information (like bright lights, noise etc.), self-regulatory behaviours like “stimming” (self-stimulatory fidgeting, rocking, hand flapping etc.), scripting responses, consciously altering body language, vocal tone or language, or overcompensating time at work to manage time-blindness etc. Primarily to avoid potential stigma, unconscious bias and negative treatment in the workplace, masking requires constant mental effort, even when it is not done consciously, and can result in increased cognitive load and impact mental wellbeing. This in turn can negatively impact work output and increase risk of sickness absenteeism.

Handling Disclosure

Disclosure can feel daunting for both employees and managers. Research shows neurodivergent employees often fear negative reactions, privacy breaches, or career consequences¹⁵¹¹. Many have had past experiences where support was promised but confidentiality or understanding was lacking. Line manager responses can have a lasting impact on both individual and team in others coming forward in the future.

Neurodivergent employees frequently delay disclosure until it is a necessity - for accessing workplace adjustments or to protect themselves against traits being misidentified as performance issues. Due to the deeply personal nature of this process, often tainted with past negative experiences, maintaining absolute confidentiality is critical.

Source 1511: [CIPD Neuroinclusion at work report](#)

1.5.2 GAIN survey statistics

- Only 7% of respondents in GAIN's Individuals survey¹⁶²¹ felt safe to unmask at work.
- 91% felt more exhausted when masking, 85% felt their mental health was worse when masking, and 85% found they were less able to focus and be productive when masking
- However, the same survey also found that 95% of respondents felt masking was necessary to grow and maintain a good reputation at work, and 67% agreed that not masking had resulted in social consequences in the workplace, such as bullying or mistreatment.
- GAIN Public Benchmark¹⁶³² showed that neurodivergent employees have very valid and grounded anxieties around workplace disclosure. Many workplaces still react negatively to employees who express the need for support or adjustments, and that some employees have had at least one, possibly several, very negative experiences when interacting with past line managers or at previous workplaces. Survey comments:
 - "Previous manager was extremely compassionate and supportive, but they have repeatedly disclosed my condition to colleagues and others as they felt it was in my 'best interest' to help me. I didn't feel safe enough to disclose to my teammates yet."
 - "Colleague complaint about my 'behaviour' led to me being forced to disclose to them as I couldn't see any other way to get them to understand. Not acceptable but I felt I had no other choice at the time."
 - "Recently made redundant after disclosing neurodivergence."
 - "I'm certain I won't receive any further promotions due to external disclosure of my neurodivergence."
 - "I have not received disciplinaries, but this year I have had 2 failed performance reviews (and was kept at the same level while my peers were promoted) due to reasons directly related to my disabilities."

Section 1.5 suggested good practice recommendations

- Approach employee support conversations with empathy and active listening
- Avoid jumping straight into problem-solving
- Acknowledge trust in disclosure, e.g. a simple "Thank you for telling me"
- Do not assume the employee has a formal diagnosis, and do not ask whether they do
- Avoid stereotypes or assumptions about what their neurodivergence "should" look like
- Seek education or advice, avoid placing the education burden on the employee just because of their expertise on their own personal needs
- Check language - when discussing neurodivergence with an employee, prioritise preferred language either identity-first or person-first
- From recruitment, onboarding, line support and throughout the career journey, always seek to identify what will help this person perform better, feel included and supported

Source 1621: [GAIN 2024 Individual Member Survey](#)

Source 1632: [GAIN 2024 Public Benchmark](#)

1.6 Benefits of a neurodiverse workforce

1.6.1 Innovation, problem-solving, creativity

Despite growing recognition, many organisations still struggle to understand and harness the benefits of a neurodiverse workforce. Common challenges include:

- Persistent stereotypes and stigma around neurodivergent conditions.
- Lack of inclusive recruitment and retention strategies.
- Underutilisation of neurodivergent talent in strategic roles.
- Limited awareness of the business case for neuroinclusion.

These barriers prevent firms from accessing the full spectrum of cognitive strengths that professionals with neurodivergence bring — including pattern recognition, systems thinking, ethical reasoning, and creative problem-solving.

Skills Alignment: Neurodivergent Talent and Insurance and long-term savings need

Individuals with neurodivergence have a unique balance of strengths and support needs, but some neurotypes tend to excel in areas that are highly relevant to the industry.

Autistic individuals may particularly demonstrate:

- **Attention to Detail:** Excelling in tasks requiring precision, useful in underwriting, claims processing, business analytics and insights, and quality assurance.
- **Strong Concentration:** Ability to hyperfocus on tasks of interest, enabling the completion of complex projects with dedication.
- **Problem-Solving Abilities:** Approaching challenges with unique perspectives, breaking down complex issues into manageable steps.
- **Process Discipline and Reliability:** Following structured processes meticulously and consistently, supporting operational efficiency.
- **Passion for Mastery:** Developing high levels of expertise in specialised areas, such as data analysis or technical documentation.

Dyslexic individuals bring complementary strengths:

- **Big-Picture Thinking:** Seeing overall patterns and connections across data points, valuable for risk modelling, strategy, market research, and emerging risk analysis.
- **Creativity and Innovation:** Generating original ideas and solutions, helping with product development and process improvement.
- **Visualising and Imagining:** Conceptualising complex concepts in intuitive ways, aiding communication and team problem-solving.
- **Resilience:** Embracing challenges and learning from failure, which supports adaptability in dynamic business environments.

Individuals with ADHD often contribute:

- **Creativity and Innovation:** Out-of-the-box thinking and problem-solving, valuable for tackling novel risks, content marketing, social media production and designing new products.
- **High Energy and Motivation:** Driving projects forward and inspiring teams, particularly in fast-paced digital or transformation initiatives.
- **Adaptability and Flexibility:** Quickly responding to changing priorities, navigating uncertainty, and embracing opportunities.

- **Strong People Skills:** Empathy and networking abilities, supporting client relationships and collaborative teamwork.
- **Hyperfocus:** Intense concentration on stimulating or high-interest tasks, leading to bursts of high productivity.

Other neurotypes such as dyspraxia, Tourette's, Down syndrome, dyscalculia, OCD, and more also bring diverse cognitive skills and problem-solving approaches.

Making the Business Case for Neuroinclusion

Investing in neuroinclusive recruitment and management can be a strategic response to the structural talent shortage. Benefits include:

- **Filling critical gaps:** Neurodivergent talent can meet demand in underwriting, claims, finance, analytics, and emerging roles.
- **Boosting performance:** Productivity and accuracy improve when employees are supported and matched to the right roles. Harvard Business review reported neurodiverse teams can be up to **30% more productive**¹⁶¹¹.
- **Enhancing retention:** Tailored support reduces turnover and the associated costs of recruiting and training replacements. Deloitte reported **higher retention rates** for neurodivergent employees¹⁶¹³ for successful programmes.
- **Strengthening culture and innovation:** Diverse thinking styles improve problem-solving, product development, and risk management. Neuroinclusive companies are **75% more likely** to see **ideas progress from concept to product**¹⁶¹².

Simple and effective enhancements to recruitment, onboarding, and management such as structured interviews, flexible work environments, tailored communication, and job-matched placements, covered in Section 2, can unlock the potential of neurodivergent employees, reinforcing **workplace culture of belonging** and create **measurable business value**.

1.6.2 GAIN survey statistics

Research from the GAIN Individual Survey¹⁶²¹ shared that:

- Where neurodivergent role models are present, workplace culture is rated significantly more inclusive. 73% of GAIN member employees identified at least one role model, and their presence was linked to lower intentions to leave the industry and stronger perceptions of company engagement.

Section 1.6 suggested good practice recommendations

To realise the benefits of neurodiversity:

- Inclusion by design – build access from the beginning. Consult and involve neurodivergent talent before decisions are made. Make inclusion the default, not an individual exception.

Source 1611: [Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage](#)

Source 1612: [Deloitte: The Neurodiversity Advantage](#)

Source 1621: [GAIN 2024 Individual member survey](#)

- Promote the value of cognitive diversity within areas like innovation and risk management.
- Highlight success stories of neurodivergent professionals.
- Integrate neuroinclusion into talent development and succession planning.
- Measure (e.g. Neurodiversity Metrics Dashboard or Impact Assessment) and report on neurodiversity as part of ESG and DEI metrics as well as impact on business outcomes.
- Encourage cross functional or team problem-solving approaches (e.g. innovation labs).
- Recognise and reward unique contributions.
- Foster inclusive team dynamics and advocates (e.g. Neurodiversity Champions Programme or Neurodiversity Ambassadors) as well as different communication styles .
- Consider expert career paths as a valid alternative to line progression when career planning.

2. Building inclusive workplaces

2. Building inclusive workplaces

2.1 Physical workplace considerations

Physical workplaces designed with **universal design principles** in mind, where even small adjustments are made, can significantly improve comfort, accessibility and productivity for neurodivergent employees. Where multiple adjustments may not be practicable, offering workplace flexibility like full-time remote working can also serve to meet a broad range of adjustment needs.

2.1.1 Sensory preferences within a small office environment

Sensory preferences refer to an individual's neurological responses and sensitivities to different types of environmental stimuli. These preferences influence how comfortable, focused, and productive an employee feels in their work environment, and they vary widely from one individual to another. In neuroinclusive workplaces, recognising and accommodating sensory preferences is essential for:

- Enhancing wellbeing and focus
- Reducing overstimulation and fatigue
- Improving retention and engagement
- Supporting disclosure and adjustment conversations

Common sensory profiles

Employees may fall into one or more of the following categories:

- **Sensory Seekers:** Thrive on high levels of stimulation (e.g. vibrant environments, movement).
- **Sensory Avoiders:** Prefer minimal stimulation (e.g. quiet spaces, soft lighting).
- **Neutral:** No strong preference; may tolerate a range of environments.
- **Mixed Profiles:** Seek stimulation in one domain (e.g. sound) while avoiding it in another (e.g. touch).

Sensory themes in the workplace

Themes	Examples in the workplace
Visual	Some individuals are highly sensitive to bright or flickering fluorescent lights, busy patterns, clutter, and may prefer natural or dim lighting, screen filters, minimalist vs. vibrant décor for some while others need bright task lighting or colourful, dynamic visuals to stay engaged.
Auditory	Quiet zones, ambient noise, noise-cancelling tools for hypersensitivity. Hyposensitivity/ sensory seekers prefer background noise, music, or a bustling environment.
Tactile	Texture of furniture, clothing, or shared materials.
Gustatory	Food textures/flavours in communal spaces.
Olfactory	Sensitivity to perfumes, cleaning products, or food smells.
Vestibular	Movement preferences (e.g. standing desks, movement breaks).
Proprioception	Body's subconscious ability to sense its own position, movement, and force in space without relying on visual input. Preferences for deep pressure/weighted items, stretching, etc. Requirements include ergonomic furniture, fidget toys.
Interoception	Internal cues (e.g. hunger, temperature, fatigue).

2.1.2 Encouraging open conversation and self-advocacy

Neurodivergent people could be considered the “*canary in the coal mine*” of the office environment. The things that pose challenges for neurodivergent employees are often the same things that make working life harder for everyone. While all employees need support at different times, neurodivergent employees whose cognitive differences and needs are not properly considered, often experience difficulties earlier and more acutely. Effective management requires open communication for implementing adjustments that employees are legally entitled to under the **Equalities Act 2010**, but many neurodivergent employees may lack self-advocacy skills particularly in negative scenarios to ensure equitable success in desired workplace outcomes.

2.1.3 GAIN survey statistics

The July 2025 GAIN Pulse Survey²¹³¹ on Self-Advocacy in the Workplace highlighted:

- 65% of neurodivergent employees were not confident to speak up in response to **micro-aggressions** versus 40% for neurotypical employees

- 55% of neurodivergent employees were not confident to self-advocate on accessing adjustments and support versus 25% for neurotypical responders
- 71% versus 50% were not confident of ensuring contributions are fairly recognised for neurodivergent compared to neurotypical employees¹⁴³¹

Source 16131: 2025 GAIN Pulse Survey

2.1.4 Remote and hybrid working

GAIN's 2024 Individual Member Survey¹⁶²¹ shows that 75% of neurodivergent respondents feel they perform better with flexible or remote working. Some roles require an amount of in-person attendance whilst fully remote working may not be possible for all. Additionally, some neurodivergent individuals prefer in-office working as it helps with body doubling - a technique some people use to increase focus and motivation. Consider typical office challenges and limitations of office and fully remote working depicted below:

Challenges of the office environment

Getting to the office	Social situations	The physical environment	Adjustments	Recovery
Sensory overwhelm	Continuous masking	Hot-desk pre-booking	Adjusted hours to avoid rush hour	After-work downtime reduced by commute
Unpredictable access	Interruptions from colleagues	Open plan office noise	Noise-cancelling tech	Exhaustion limiting social time
Unpredictable behaviour	Social time during breaks	Default lighting and temperature	Assigned desks	Exhaustion limiting hobby time
Time management	Cliques and harassment	Customising the space	Focus and quiet spaces	Strain of housework

Limitations of remote work

Team support	Team cohesion	Predictability	Home environment	Recovery
Impact on buddy systems	May increase risk of resentment from peers who commute	Rare office visits may be more stressful than regular ones	Not every home has suitable space and resources	Lack of built-in "off-switch" through location change
Delays to urgent support	Not as effective for collaborative work	Loss of familiarity with commute	Employees in abusive homes more vulnerable	Temptation to overwork
Reduced networking opportunities			Pressure to be available	Breaks may be skipped during hyperfocus
Lack of body doubling				

Source 1431: GAIN 2025 Individual Survey

Source 1621: [GAIN 2024 Individual member survey](#)

Section 2.1 suggested good practice recommendations

- Normalise adjustments discussions, e.g. “how to work with me” manual. Allows neurodivergent employees to list needs without it feeling like a formal medical disclosure e.g. “I need a signal before being interrupted even if I’m not wearing my noise-cancelling headphones” or “I need 24 hours to process queries”
- Provide an advocacy framework - can include adjustments menu, Q&A list framing what might help employees deliver their best, assign advocacy partners etc
- Support remote or hybrid work for environmental control
- Adjustment options, though not universally applicable or of equal benefit for all neurodivergent employees, could include:
 - Offering adjustable lighting and screen filters
 - Provide noise-cancelling headphones and acoustic panels
 - Offer options on office furniture e.g. smooth/ non-textured office chairs/ desks (manage tactile overwhelm)
 - Where possible, have areas of reduced foot traffic and better signage (or sensory maps)
 - Access to focus rooms or enclosed spaces to work (for migraine or visual overwhelm management as office lighting may always be too bright)
 - Access to a fan or a window that can be opened regardless of AC availability (Interoception and migraine management)
 - Implement fragrance-free policies in shared spaces
- Reviewing open-plan layouts and advance use of desk booking systems, having assigned desks or ability to have default booking for desks can help employees who struggle with changes to environments
- Enable flexible schedules to match sensory regulation needs
- Normalise sensory breaks (e.g. walks, quiet time)
- Deliver sensory awareness training for teams and managers
- Gather employee feedback on workspace design
- Notify employees of any planned changes to the office space far in advance e.g. share office and team layouts early, with space for feedback
- Create channels for clarifying questions and follow-up on hybrid working arrangements
- Maintain a shared resource deck/FAQ employees can refer to

2.2 How neurodivergence can affect employees at work

Executive functioning refers to the skills and processes involved in decision-making and action. The spiky profile of neurodiversity means neurodivergent people will have greater variance in skills than neurotypical people. Managers may find differences in task completion strategies where neurodivergent employees have leveraged their strengths, some examples below:

Executive function	Skills	Strategies
Self-awareness (Metacognition)	• Monitoring progress mid-task • Accurate self-assessed confidence • Noticing own needs during a task • Recognising when help is needed	• Schedule regular check-ins to step back and assess progress, such as hourly phone reminders to check hunger, thirst, stress etc. • Sending regular progress updates to a colleague with a feedback request • Breaking a task up over a longer period of time to allow processing time, such as completing a 'first draft' and 'sleeping on it'.
Inhibition	• Motor control, being able to hold back from a physical action • Attention control, resisting the lure of distractions • Behaviour control, preventing outbursts or reactive action	• Avoiding multi-tasking • Reducing distractions for large tasks by taking care of smaller, easier tasks first • Having a co-working buddy to work alongside and keep on task
Non-verbal working memory	• Recalling the route to a location • Recalling where an item was stored • Tracking the passage of time • Maintaining mental deadlines	• Wall calendars • Break tasks into smaller steps • Associate tasks together, such as always checking their inbox after lunch • Leave items in unavoidable places, like putting their bag in front of the door
Verbal working memory	• Recall and carry out a list of spoken instructions, e.g. route directions • Do mathematical sums and equations in their head • Remembering a sentence while writing it	• Asking to receive copies of verbal instructions or agreements in writing • Asking to have long pieces of verbal information delivered in smaller parts • Utilising checklists and flow-charts to manage processes, or having a visual reminder of what a successfully finished task "looks like" • Using paper to work out sums • Using tools that automatically take notes or record verbal information

Executive function	Skills	Strategies
Motivational regulation	• Self-directed learning and independent study • Starting an activity instead of deferring it or delaying it • Continuing a project to full completion	• Agreeing to send interim updates to a colleague • Structuring tasks alongside immediate rewards • Creating physical “transition” changes to mentally switch in and out of “work mode”
Emotional regulation	• Remaining calm under pressure • Managing despondency or anxiety when struggling with a task • Maintain team-oriented outlooks during group work	• Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) workbooks to develop emotional strategies • Use of breaks during stressful situations to avoid overwhelm • Engage in self-soothing behaviours such as stimming, which aids emotional regulation
Problem-solving skills	• Recognise and resolve issues preventing project progress • Notice patterns in interpersonal conflicts and reason the right approach • Identifying help needed from a colleague when struggling with a task	• Utilising guided frameworks for tackling situations where problem-solving reasoning is necessary • Using mind-maps, flow-charts and other visual tools help visualise problems • Starting from the desired result and working backwards in “if-then” exploration of a situation • Asking colleagues to help talk through the problem, or using the “rubber duck” method when a colleague is unavailable

2.2.2 Social communication

Section 1.3.2 touched on the **Double Empathy Problem** and how there can be communication breakdowns leading to mutual frustration between neurotypical and neurodivergent employees including between peers at the same level or between manager and team member.

Different groups of individuals will naturally have different ways of communicating and expressing themselves. Communication challenges come out of mutual mismatches in communication styles. Examples of communication style difference includes:

- Literal interpretation versus subtext
- Non-verbal cues and eye contact
- Processing speed and response time
- Social rules and small talk

Review the statement below and potential reasons behind it:

“In a recent team meeting I felt that Bethanny was not paying attention. She’s looking away and doodling in a notebook. She made no contributions to the discussion. That’s so rude! I need to bring this up in performance review.”

Auditory processing challenges might mean someone finds it easier to understand spoken instruction when not looking at the person speaking, or when lip-reading. Doodling can be a memory aid for active listening. Bethany may have a processing time difference where a simple 10 second pause before a prompt might help, or she should be given time to feedback later.

Effective managers continuously learn to refine their communication skills, adapt their approach to individual needs, practise empathy towards communication style differences, adapts feedback styles and actively work to overcome inherent biases.

It is worth knowing that some neurodivergent individuals may experience emotional dysregulation around actual, perceived or anticipated rejection, criticism or disapproval. This can be addressed by providing clear, objective feedback and explicit reassurance to minimise ambiguity like *“I’d like to be explicitly clear that I value your excellent work, this is a routine check-in to discuss the three bulleted objective points I had emailed you yesterday. Please let me know at any time if you’re feeling uncomfortable and we can take a break and come back to this discussion later”*.

A more severe form of rejection sensitivity is **Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD)**. It occurs when an individual’s sensitivity includes feeling severe anxiety and even severe emotional pain.

2.2.3 Environment and sensory processing

Section 2.1.1. covered the topic of sensory preferences and the 8 Sensory Themes in the workplace. This section considers the use of tools like an **environmental audit** that evaluates the interplay between the environment and sensory preferences such as lighting, acoustics and air quality to ensure the workplace aligns with universal design principles. A proactive audit can identify environmental barriers like flickering lights, or open plan noise that might increase cognitive load and risk of meltdowns, shutdowns and burnout longer term for employees with neurodivergence. Implementing simple structural adjustments like dimmable lighting, use of noise reducing headphones, low-sensory triggering quiet spaces and normalising frequent breaks for example, can go a long way in improving focus, productivity and thus foster a high-performing environment. Framing sensory needs as a standard for workplace excellence can transform an environment from a place of exhaustion to a space that supports collective wellbeing and retention.

2.2.4 Intersection with stress, burnout and wellbeing

Neurodivergent individuals are largely more susceptible to stress and burnout not as a direct result of their neurodivergence but because they are constantly having to overcome significant day-to-day challenges working with a system that is not built with them in mind.

- Environmental sensory overload
- Masking can cause chronic stress
- Lack of support or adjustments
- Social demands and unwritten rules
- Executive functioning challenges
- Internalised ableism/high expectations*

*such as holding themselves up to unrealistic neurotypical standards without adequate rest or self-care

It is important to be aware that neurodivergent employees experience and handle stress differently. Autistic burnout for example is distinct from other general stress related conditions and the symptoms include:

- Extreme exhaustion
- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Increased sensory sensitivities
- Loss of previously acquired skills
- Emotional dysregulation (meltdowns or shutdowns)
- Decreased attention to detail

2.2.5 Early support strategies

Early support strategies that can help mitigate risks of stress, burnout and improve wellbeing are:

- Safe early disclosure choice, perhaps offered as ‘working preferences’
- Predictable onboarding and role clarity (written role expectations, success criteria, examples of good work)
- Training managers to recognise misunderstandings, rather than performance issues (difference versus difficulty, clarity gaps) to replace judgement with curiosity
- Helping managers manage employee workloads to avoid burnout

2.3 People management the ND way

2.3.1 How to recognise and support different thinking, processing and communication styles

The GAIN Interim Public Benchmark survey¹⁶³¹ observed the *Dunning-Kruger Effect* particularly among line managers who self-scored 1.97 out of a possible maximum of 3 for awareness, but when assessed against actual knowledge, had measured closer to 1.32. Many managers still lack the confidence and knowledge to support neurodivergent colleagues and employees. Primary barriers include:

- Lack of understanding of neurodivergent experiences
- Fear of making inappropriate adjustments or saying the wrong thing
- Absence of neuroinclusion role models or champions
- Inconsistent messaging across departments

Section 1.3.2 touched on the **Double Empathy Problem** while Section 2.2.2 discussed how effective managers can adapt to difference in processing and communication styles alongside understanding differences in task completion approaches due to neurodivergent strategies for variations in executive functioning skills (section 2.21). The following sections discuss other tools helpful in managing neurodivergent employees.

2.3.2 Flexible coaching and communication styles

Flexible coaching moves beyond the traditional “deficit” model to being **strengths-based with collaborative design**. Employees are asked to co-create the coaching environment including the “rules” of the sessions. Centred around **active listening** and creating **psychological safety**, it is working with *their* brain perspective. Proactively

offering **multiple formats** (video, email, audio etc.), **sensory options** (low lighting, walk and talk etc.), **pacing** (allow processing time with long pauses or silence, questions in advance rather than on-the-spot), **structures** (visual aids, checklists etc.) to help with e.g. **executive functioning support** (section 2.2.1).

2.3.3 Setting expectations

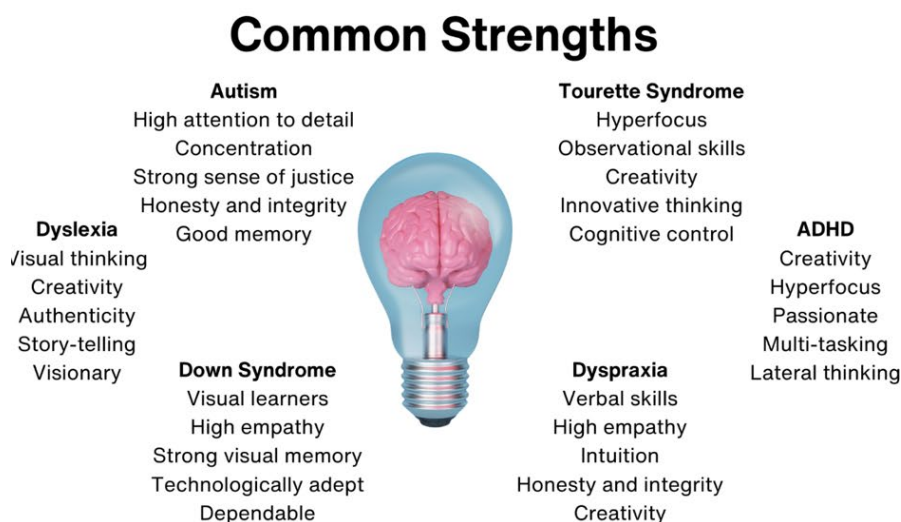
Setting expectations can help neurodivergent employees as it shifts from “*what you should do*” to “*what success looks like*”. Being individually tailored, specific and flexible - a “cognitive map” reducing potential anxiety that can trigger executive functioning challenges. Try to:

- Use **clear, precise language** (i.e. no idioms, sarcasm, metaphors)
- Provide **specific** step-by-step examples
- Be **explicit** about any “unwritten rules”
- Explain **context** i.e. how the expectations relate to the task or role and why the expectation is being set this way

2.4 Developing neurodivergent talent

2.4.1 Skills development

Section 1.6.1 highlighted the benefits of a neurodivergent workforce and examples of how ASD, ADHD and dyslexia neurotype skills align with skills needed in the sector. This section expands on specific strategies for managers, outlining practical approaches to develop specific skills in neurodivergent talent and unlock their full potential.



Source GAIN: The graphic above serves as an example of strengths-based approach and strengths listed under each neurotype may not be universally held strengths

Strengths based approach

- **Skills and task alignment:** Neurodivergent individuals may have specific considerations related to their spiky profiles affecting their skillset like communication skills, which is due to literacy and verbal perception differences, processing speeds etc. Focusing on identifying and capitalising on key strengths that aligns to skills development for the role would be a more equitable approach as opposed to trying to “fix” perceived weaknesses that are inherently linked to their protected characteristics of ASD, ADHD or Dyslexia. For example, employees with strong pattern recognition would likely thrive in developing skills in data analysis and statistics, risk assessment, financial modelling etc., all of which are desirable skills for e.g. underwriting tasks.
- **Role carve-outs/ re-shaping:** Managers can carve-out or redesign specific roles to leverage specific neurodivergent strengths and thus skills in creative problem solving, strong attention to detail etc. This can improve specialisation depth and drive innovation in teams.

Tailored development

- **Personalised learning:** Offering self-paced learning in different formats (audio, visual, textual or combinations).
- **Buddy system or shadowing:** Many neurodivergent individuals prefer task-based methods of working and allowing someone to “shadow” a colleague’s day-to-day work can be extremely helpful versus receiving verbal, potentially unclear instructions .
- **Supporting “Pivoters”/ “Cross-pollinators”:** Some neurodivergent employees like ADHDers can pick up skills quickly and, coupled with strong problem-solving skills can be “parachuted” into any role, team or situation. As a manager, knowing that supporting their progression is not a linear trajectory is important and allowing flexibility for employees to participate in broader team projects or planned secondments into other functions can be hugely beneficial for talent development but also allow room for team innovation.

2.4.2 Strength-based reviews

Section 2.4.1 covered skills development and it follows that reviews based on strengths would be more meaningful and helpful to neurodivergent employees. Work with the employee to adapt performance review process to include clear step-by-step instructions for self-assessment, avoiding open-ended questions, agree specific task lists or clear and achievable outcomes based on results and contributions rather than subjective behavioural based assessment of “teamwork”. Additionally:

- Offer asynchronous reviews e.g. recorded videos, shared documents or smaller sessions spread over several days
- Avoid on-the-spot feedback, send feedback in advance and allow for adequate processing time
- Consider sensory sensitivities and preferences

2.4.3 Continuous improvement and long-term capability building (neuroinclusive focus)

Continuous improvement ensures neuroinclusive practices are regularly reviewed, refined and informed by lived experience, data, and organisational learning. It represents an ongoing, evidence-led cycle that:

- Collects feedback from neurodivergent staff and managers
- Reviews what is working (and what is not) in adjustments, tools, and processes
- Iterates guides or policies, environments, and practices based on real-world use
- Normalises experimentation, learning, and adaptation rather than “one-off fixes”
- Neuroinclusion is never “done”, it evolves as people, roles, and contexts change.

Long-term capability building embeds neuroinclusion into systems, leadership, and culture- moving beyond individual adjustments to sustainable business competence. It is a deliberate investment in business capability that:

- Builds shared understanding of neurodiversity across all levels
- Develops confident, skilled managers who can proactively support diverse needs
- Embeds neuroinclusive design into recruitment, onboarding, performance, and progression
- Reduces reliance on individual disclosure by improving systems by default
- Shifts from reactive accommodations to proactive, inclusive design.

2.4 Developing neurodivergent talent

2.5.1 GAIN survey statistics

Research by GAIN in the 2024 individual member survey found that:

- In 60% of cases, line managers were the individuals ultimately responsible for whether an adjustment request was met
- The most common causes of dissatisfaction with the adjustment process were lack of knowledge by the key decision-makers and lack of proactivity in seeking out knowledge by those decision-makers. This aligns with the benchmark findings about the knowledge gap of line managers, who self-assessed themselves on average 33% more knowledgeable than measured, and who expressed significant anxiety and a lack of support and training in handling diversity, equity and inclusion matters.
- Over 30% of line managers included outward behaviours such as visible office presence, visible attentiveness during meetings and participation in team socials in their top 3 behaviours when judging employee performance. This means those criteria were rated more important than the actual quality of work being done
- 20% of neurodivergent employees have never been promoted and overall were more likely to be passed over for promotion multiple times versus neurotypical employees.
- Whilst no neurotypical respondents recounted any disciplinary or performance issues, 29% of neurodivergent employees have faced either one or multiple instances.

Case Study: CII Office Move from 20 Fenchurch St to 30 Old Broad Street

From Q4 2025, the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII) progressed the relocation of its London office through a collaborative and inclusive approach. A cross-department Property Project Working Group, with representatives from across the organisation was established. This was to ensure diverse perspectives informed the design of the new workspace and that both organisational and stakeholder needs were met.

The space to be selected was informed by limitations of the previous premises, including accessibility challenges for members and the need for a space better suited to modern ways of working. The new office would need to provide desk access for more than 200 UK-based employees, including remote workers who would be present from time to time.

Employee feedback highlighted the importance of creating an inclusive and accessible workplace for employees with both visible and non-visible disabilities. In response, a comprehensive accessibility review was undertaken, covering disability access, neurodiversity, sensory needs, quiet spaces, workplace adjustments, and adjustable-height desks. The resulting office design reflects an “inclusion by design” approach.

Recent eNPS survey results indicate that the new office has created an environment that supports seen and unseen disabilities; enables collaboration and strengthening team dynamics.

The CII remains committed to gathering ongoing employee feedback to ensure the workspace continues to be inclusive, accessible, and fit for purpose.

Case Study: Building a Neuroinclusive Workplace at QBE

Since 2023, QBE has partnered with GAIN to advance neuroinclusion, demonstrating a commitment to creating a more accessible insurance industry. The collaboration focuses on improving inclusion within QBE while supporting broader change to help neurodiverse talent enter and progress in the sector. In 2025, this work was recognised when QBE and GAIN won D&I Collaboration of the Year at the Insurance Post D&I Awards.

QBE’s strategy for embedding accessibility is built around three pillars: awareness, environment, and advocacy.

Building awareness

Developing understanding of neuroinclusion across the organisation has been essential. QBE introduced practical resources including a global Neurodiversity Workplace Guide, a People Leader Toolkit, and My QBE Passport, which supports conversations about individual working preferences without requiring disclosure. The passport is available to all employees, helping normalise discussions around accessibility.

QBE’s employee network, Workability, has further promoted awareness through events covering technology and neurodiversity, ADHD and menopause, and sessions for the People Team. These initiatives have helped build

Modern working environments

QBE has invested in workspaces that enable colleagues to perform at their best. Several offices, including Leeds, have been redesigned with accessibility in mind, featuring quiet areas, adjustable lighting and temperature, loop rooms, social spaces, and biophilic design elements.

The reasonable adjustments process was reviewed to address inconsistencies, with a dedicated project team implementing improvements to enhance clarity, consistency, and empathy. In addition, the Workability network launched WorkMates, a peer-to-peer support network, training 20 colleagues to provide guidance and signposting for those with accessibility needs.

Leadership advocacy

QBE has prioritised building inclusive leadership capability. Over 500 UK People Leaders completed experiential workshops in 2025, focusing on inclusive behaviours and active listening. A network of leadership advocates helps sustain momentum by role-modelling inclusive behaviours. Accountability is reinforced through QBE's bi-annual Inclusion Forum, chaired by CEO Jason Harris, bringing together senior leaders and network representatives to review progress and hear directly from colleagues.

Measuring impact

QBE became the first organisation to achieve a Level 2 rating in the GAIN Benchmarking Report in 2024, with strong recognition for culture. Disclosure of neurodiversity is rising across all levels, and inclusion workshops received a 4.7/5 satisfaction rating. Feedback also shows improved satisfaction with assistive request processes, including clarity, speed, and decision-making.

Key learnings

Embed accessibility for all, simplify processes, act on employee feedback, use storytelling to bring inclusion to life, and measure progress to support ongoing investment and accountability.

Section 2.5 Suggested good practice recommendations

- Support executive functioning strategies (see column in Section 2.2.1)
- Consider a proactive environmental audit including sensory needs
- Seek training for line managers to adapt to different communication and processing styles
- Offer “working preferences” and onboarding, as well as role clarify
- Seek training for strengths-based coaching
- Use strengths-based approach for task alignment and a buddy system or job shadowing for skills development
- Seek support structures and coaching that is most effective at helping neurodivergent people develop leadership ability
- Promote ‘working preference reviews’ during onboarding, role changes and periodically. ‘What else would help you to perform better’ is a great question during reviews’

3. Recruitment and onboarding

3. Recruitment and onboarding

Recent increases in employment tribunals upholding claims on discriminatory recruitment practises with regards to neurodivergent individuals (see also Section 1.1.4) has further informed what is expected for a fair, accessible and supportive process that allows all candidates to demonstrate their strengths. This involves reviewing job descriptions, adapting application and assessment methods, providing clear, predictable communication throughout and offering support including filling out application forms, or inclusive process alternatives. Organisations stand to attract diverse talent by removing unnecessary barriers, and ensure candidates are evaluated fairly on their skills and potential.

3.1 Inclusive job descriptions

Inclusive job descriptions use clear, straightforward language, focus on essential skills, and avoid unnecessary jargon or requirements, making it easier for neurodivergent individuals to understand the role and see how their strengths (see Section 2.4) align with the position.

3.1.1 Removing unnecessary barriers

The job advert, vacancies website and application process are all touchpoints in the recruitment process that can enable or hinder applicants, and barriers include practical accessibility challenges as well as issues with messaging, clarity and impact. Automated CV reviews timed online assessments and personality assessments (often built by and using neurotypical data) can also disadvantage neurodivergent candidates. Ways to improve your online website experience and application process includes:

Consistent and Clear Navigation

- Use uniform layouts and interaction patterns across all pages
- Position filters, search tools, and sorting options consistently throughout the site
- Ensure all links and buttons are clearly and consistently labelled

Minimise Sensory Overload

- Avoid auto-playing video or audio
- Limit flashing banners, looping animations, or fast-moving carousels
- Reduce distracting hover effects or micro-animations

Manage Time and Multi-Step Processes

- Extend session timeouts or allow easy resumption or save option
- Provide autosave for multi-page application forms and prevent data loss on errors
- Minimise repetitive data entry by allowing CV uploads to auto-populate fields

Provide Clear Instructions

- Clearly explain what is required in each field (e.g., guidance for “Summary”)
- Include file format, size, and Applicant Tracking System (ATS) compatibility instructions for uploads
- Sign-post process length, next steps and success criteria, explain purpose of any assessments, inform if there are delays, reduce ambiguity

While individual managers may not control the entire careers page, they can advocate for accessibility changes and must ensure their own job descriptions are highly accessible. It is easy to accidentally write job descriptions that filter out valuable neurodivergent talent. Avoid:

Inaccurate job description • Old description that has been re-used for years • Broad grab-bag of desired skills rather than accurately reflecting scope of role • Describes a role the manager would like to hire for, but does not reflect the day-to-day reality of the role	Difficult to understand • Over-uses jargon and internal acronyms • Has long blocks of text • Responsibilities and skills are jumbled together • Sentence structure and reading age inappropriate for role • Overly formal or corporate tone that obscures meaning
Vague job description • Uses terms like “fast-paced” or “resilient” without giving role context • Lists subjective traits as responsibilities, for example “must be proactive” rather than “responsible for monitoring and reporting on potential operational risks” • Randomly ordered outline of role with no clarity on proportion of responsibilities or “day-in-the-life”	Perpetuates the confidence gap • No differentiation between “essential” and “desirable” skills • “Graduate Calibre” with no clarity on what that means, or asks for qualifications regardless of necessity • No scope for training into the role specified

3.1.2 Focusing on skills, abilities, and outcomes

Improving job descriptions involves being specific about salary and flexible work options, clarifying the role's daily life, and structuring responsibilities and skills intelligently. It also requires streamlining qualification requirements to **essential skills** and detailing the hiring process and next steps. An example of adaption can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2 Selection considerations for neurodivergent candidates

When selecting neurodivergent candidates, it is important to create a recruitment process that is fair, accessible and inclusive. This can include using alternative assessment methods that better reflect individual strengths, providing clear and direct communication throughout the process, and ensuring predictability so candidates know what to expect. By considering these factors, organisations can more effectively identify and engage talented individuals while removing unnecessary barriers.

3.2.1 Alternative assessments

Typical assessments including personality profiling, verbal and non-verbal reasoning or psychometric tests are likely to filter out neurodivergent applicants due to the way they have been typically configured to neurotypical minds. Providing alternatives like:

- **Task based testing** related to the role e.g. producing a report or analysis, coding, collating information etc.
- **Role placements** – short term trials where candidates perform the actual role and daily tasks required
- **Cognitive simulation** where candidates can demonstrate certain aptitudes/ problem solving skills in actual work-based scenarios that have been simulated/ a form of “gamifying” which might be appropriate for certain roles.
- **Past work presentations** candidates can show a portfolio of actual relevant work that had been produced.

3.2.3 Predictability in process

Providing predictability in the recruitment process, such as sharing interview questions in advance, explaining who will be involved in the interview, and clearly outlining each stage of the process. This will help neurodivergent individuals prepare effectively and reduces unnecessary uncertainty.

3.3 Adapting hiring and interviewing practices

These list below are simple changes that can make a significant difference for neurodivergent candidates:

- Provide a list of questions in advance
- Offer transportation help and clear, step-by-step directions to the interview location including navigation whilst in the building
- Providing a named person (and/ or photograph of) who will meet the candidate once in the building and in the interview
- Ask for communication preferences in advance
- Ask for any other preferences e.g. sensory, information formats
- Offer flexibility in interview times allowing for less busy commute
- Ask if candidates would like to be accompanied or have a buddy assigned as it may be helpful to correspond or speak to someone in the company but not directly part of the interview process
- Train interviewers and hiring managers on neuroinclusive recruitment – emphasise that eye contact and body language differences are neutral, debunk and myth-bust unscientific claims about body language “tells” and emphasise that culture, neurotype, background and physical disabilities all alter how a person’s body language develops.

3.3.1 GAIN survey statistics

- GAIN’s survey¹⁶²¹ found that neurodiverse job applicants were unlikely to apply for jobs where interviews were a multi-stage process, half a day or longer, includes long personality tests or group project work.
- Whilst neurodivergent men reported earning under £35,000pa more than neurodivergent women, 31% of neurotypical people earned £100,000+p.a. versus neurodivergent (17%)¹⁴³¹.
- 90% of neurodivergent employees were not confident to **negotiate salaries** versus 55% for neurotypical employees.

Additionally, Zurich Employment survey in 2024³³³¹ revealed that:

- Half of neurodivergent adults had been discriminated against when looking for a role
- 26% struggled with elaborate application processes while 24% found some job descriptions vague and hard to relate to
- 27% said hiring managers had commented on their abilities
- 28% were turned down for subjective reasons such as communication style or team fit

Source 3331: [Zurich Employment survey 2024](#)

3.4 Management skills for successful hiring

Adapting hiring and interviewing practices for neurodivergent individuals ensures that recruitment processes are fair, accessible and focused on candidates' skills and potential. By making thoughtful adjustments can reduce unnecessary barriers, create a positive candidate experience, and identify talent that might otherwise be overlooked.

3.4.1 Adapting your interview style to help the candidate shine

When interviewing neurodivergent candidates, adapting your interview style can help them feel more comfortable and better able to demonstrate their skills, experience and potential. Simple adjustments to how questions are asked and how time and feedback are managed can reduce unnecessary barriers and ensure candidates are assessed fairly. The following approaches can help the candidate shine during the interview process.

- Avoid open ended questions, abstract concepts, metaphors, idioms, or literal traps.
- Prompt and seek clarity especially if candidates provide a brief answer, equally let the candidate know if you have enough information
- Ask one question at a time
- Allow for more processing time
- Ask to describe past related work, volunteering or consider skills-based assessments
- Query how the role aligns with skills they would like to develop
- Ask specific information about workflows and processes
- Consider work trials (hours/days) to help employers and candidates better understand role suitability)

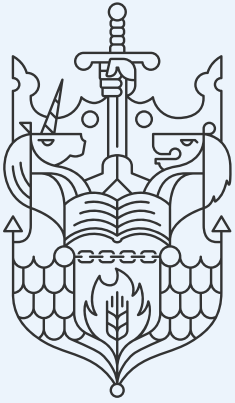
Conclusion

This guide is intended as a starting point and a practical resource you can return to whenever you need guidance on supporting neurodivergent employees. By applying the tools and guide, you can take your first steps towards helping neurodivergent people access work and thrive, enabling them to contribute their unique skills and grow in their roles. At the same time, your organisation benefits from the innovation, creativity, and problem-solving that diverse perspectives bring, creating a stronger, more effective, and inclusive workplace for everyone.

Glossary

- **Neurotype:** A simple shorthand term that means “a kind of mind”. ADHD, autism and dyslexia are all examples of different neurotypes
- **Neurotypical:** This is the term used to describe a person whose mind does think, perceive and behave in the ways considered the norm by society.
- **Neuroinclusive/Neuroinclusion:** For employers, being neuroinclusive means creating policies, practices and a workplace culture that actively recognise, respect and support the strengths and needs of neurodivergent individuals, while neuroinclusion is the ongoing practice of ensuring all employees can fully participate, contribute and thrive.
- **Neurodivergent:** Refers to a person whose brain processes, learns and behaves differently from what is considered typical in society. Those with suspected, undiagnosed and/or diagnosed neurotypes may be referred to as neurodivergent.
- **Comorbid conditions/Comorbidity/Co-occurring differences:** In the context of neurodivergence, refers to the presence of additional medical or psychological conditions that exist simultaneously with a primary neurodivergent diagnosis.
- **Executive Functioning:** The brain’s self-management system for planning, focus, and emotional regulation

This booklet is produced in collaboration with GAIN (Group for Autism, Insurance, Investment and Neurodiversity) with thanks to the GAIN team contributors, Marilyn Swinney, Mark Peterson, Vic Mazonas and Bea Richardson, alongside Vivine Cameron, Matthew Connell and Alex St John from the CII.



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