

Employer guide · October 2026

Neurodiversity at Work

A practical guide to understanding, recruiting and supporting neurodivergent people.



IN THIS GUIDE

Contents

01	What is neurodiversity?	The basics	03
02	Myths, strengths and your responsibilities	Understanding	04
03	Inclusive recruitment	Hiring	05
04	Communication and the working environment	Everyday support	06
05	Supporting working parents	Families	07



THE BASICS

What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity describes the natural variation in how people think, learn, focus, process information and communicate. People whose brains work differently from what is considered typical are described as neurodivergent. Almost every team includes neurodivergent colleagues, whether or not they have a diagnosis or have chosen to share it.

15–20%

of people worldwide are estimated to be neurodivergent¹

2.5m

people in England may have ADHD, NHS England estimates, including many who may remain undiagnosed²

1.8m+

pupils in England have special educational needs, around 1 in 5 (2025/26)³

Common neurodivergent profiles

● ADHD	Differences in attention, focus, activity levels and impulsivity.
● Autism	Differences in social communication and sensory processing.
● Dyslexia	Differences in reading, spelling and processing written information.
● Dyspraxia (DCD)	Differences in physical coordination, organisation and planning.
● Dyscalculia	Differences in understanding numbers and calculations.
● Tourette's syndrome	Involuntary sounds or movements, known as tics.

Profiles often overlap, and every person's experience is different. Strengths and challenges vary from one individual to the next.

1. Kantar MONITOR 2024, cited in Understood.org research report.

https://cdn-assets.understood.org/pOqf7j048iOq/3zl4Crb9YEvXsau3W7sMhr/43fc7f30eb96f3561e4fa1d0a7a655a9/Kantar_Report_-_Hub.pdf

2. NHS England Digital, ADHD Management Information, May 2025. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mi-adhd/may-2025>

3. DfE, Special educational needs in England 2025/26.

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2025-26>

UNDERSTANDING

Myths, strengths and your responsibilities

Common myths

- **"Everyone gets distracted sometimes."**
Everyone's brain is different, but that does not mean everyone has ADHD
- **"Neurodivergent people cannot do complex roles."** Many excel in demanding, senior positions
- **"You can tell by looking."** Most neurodivergence is invisible
- **"Adjustments are expensive."** Many cost little or nothing

Strengths people often bring

- Creative, original problem-solving
- Deep focus on areas of interest
- Pattern spotting and attention to detail
- Fresh perspectives that challenge groupthink
- Strengths vary by person, so avoid stereotypes

What the law says

Some neurodivergent employees may be protected under the Equality Act 2010 when and if their condition meets the legal definition of a disability. This depends on the extent and impact of the condition: it must have a substantial and long-term negative effect on normal daily activities.¹ Where it does, employers must make reasonable adjustments so disabled workers are not put at a substantial disadvantage.² Acas advises that:

- People should not need a diagnosis to receive support under a neurodiversity policy³
- Job applicants should know they can ask for adjustments without a diagnosis³
- Support offered to everyone, such as quiet spaces, does not replace adjustments the law requires³
- Employers should take steps to prevent bullying and harassment related to neurodivergence⁴

A simple rule of thumb

Focus on what helps the person do their best work, not on the label. Ask, listen, agree adjustments together and review them regularly.

1. GOV.UK, Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010. <https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>

2. GOV.UK, Reasonable adjustments for disabled workers. <https://www.gov.uk/reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-workers>

3. Acas, Making your organisation neuroinclusive. <https://www.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity-at-work/making-your-organisation-neuroinclusive>

4. Acas, Neurodiversity at work. <https://www.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity-at-work>

HIRING

Inclusive recruitment

Traditional hiring can screen out capable people for reasons that have nothing to do with the job. Vague adverts, unstructured interviews and time-pressured tasks tend to favour one way of thinking. Acas recommends reviewing recruitment so it does not exclude neurodivergent applicants, including being clear about which skills are essential and which are desirable.¹

1. Advert

- Use plain language and short sentences
- Separate essential skills from nice-to-haves
- Say clearly that adjustments are welcome

2. Application

- Offer more than one way to apply
- Avoid unnecessary forms and long free-text boxes
- Explain each step and the timescales

3. Assessment

- Share interview questions or topics in advance
- Ask direct, specific questions rather than hypothetical ones
- Offer work trials or practical tasks as alternatives

4. Offer and onboarding

- Ask every new starter what helps them work well
- Provide written information about the first weeks
- Assign a buddy and schedule early check-ins

Train the people who hire

Interviewers and hiring managers make the biggest difference. Short, practical briefings on neurodiversity and adjustments help them assess candidates fairly and with confidence.

1. Acas, Making your organisation neuroinclusive. <https://www.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity-at-work/making-your-organisation-neuroinclusive>

EVERYDAY SUPPORT

Communication and the working environment

Many workplace misunderstandings come down to communication style rather than effort or attitude. Small, thoughtful changes to how teams share information, and to the spaces and routines people work in, can unlock a great deal of potential.

Inclusive communication

- Send agendas before meetings and written actions after
- Be direct and specific; avoid relying on hints or sarcasm
- Offer a choice of channels: in person, call, chat or email
- Agree team norms for feedback and response times

Adapting the workplace

- Quiet zones, noise-cancelling headphones or adjustable lighting
- Flexible start times or hybrid working
- Task lists, reminders and assistive software
- Regular one-to-ones with clear priorities

Help that is available

- **Access to Work** can provide practical and financial support for people with a disability or health condition, alongside the adjustments employers make¹
- **Flexible working**: all employees can request flexible working from their first day in a job²

QUESTIONS MANAGERS CAN ASK

- What helps you do your best work?
- Is there anything about how we communicate that could work better for you?
- Are there times, places or tasks that you find harder, and what would help?
- How would you like us to check in on how things are going?

1. GOV.UK, Access to Work. <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

2. GOV.UK, Flexible working. <https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working>

FAMILIES

Supporting working parents

Supporting a neurodivergent child through school can be demanding for parents who are also managing a job. In England, 14.8% of pupils receive SEN support and a further 6.0% have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, together close to 21% of all pupils.¹ Parents may need time for assessments, school meetings and appointments.

- Be flexible about time off for school meetings and assessments
- Make sure parents know about unpaid carer's leave: up to one week every 12 months from day one, which can be used to care for a dependant with a disability²
- Signpost information on SEN support and EHC plans from the child's school and local authority
- Remind parents and carers about any EAP or family support included in your benefits

Make the most of your employee benefits

Your existing benefits may already offer more than people realise. Some EAPs and wellbeing platforms include neurodiversity resources, coaching or advice for parents and carers, and a clear benefits portal helps people find support without having to ask. Benefits work alongside reasonable adjustments and Access to Work, not instead of them.

Your neuroinclusion checklist

- ✓ Share basic, myth-busting information with all staff
- ✓ Make it clear that adjustments are available without a diagnosis
- ✓ Review recruitment adverts, application routes and interviews
- ✓ Brief managers on supportive conversations and common adjustments
- ✓ Offer some support to everyone, such as quiet spaces and written follow-ups
- ✓ Take steps to prevent bullying and harassment related to neurodivergence
- ✓ Review adjustments regularly and ask what is working
- ✓ Check what your benefits include and make sure employees know how to access it

1. DfE, Special educational needs in England 2025/26.

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2025-26>

2. GOV.UK, Carer's leave. <https://www.gov.uk/carers-leave>

LET'S TALK

Let's build a more inclusive workplace

Through our HR, Employee Benefits and International Payroll expertise, we help employers create practical wellbeing strategies that support employees throughout the year. Instead of juggling separate providers, you get joined-up support under one contract, with one point of contact.

1

One partner for HR, employee benefits and payroll

2

Benefits broking, benchmarking and an employee benefits portal

3

Since 1996, 800+ clients in 165 countries and territories

PHONE +44 (0)1432 272787

EMAIL enquiries@blackmountainhr.com

ONLINE blackmountainhr.com/contact-us

