

APPG on Modernising Employment:

Removing Barriers in Work for Neurodiverse People

In collaboration with:



Foreword



Julie Dennis,
Head of Inclusive
Workplaces at Acas.

The Importance of Neurodiversity in the Workplace.

Standfirst: In the evolving world of work, embracing neurodiversity is not just a matter of fairness – it's a strategic imperative.

Employers who aren't neuroinclusive miss out on a wide range of talent in the workforce, and don't benefit from the creativity, innovation, and unique perspectives that neurodivergent employees can bring.

Inclusive workplaces thrive when they recognise and support the full spectrum of human diversity. Research and practice consistently highlight the importance of psychological safety, tailored adjustments, and culturally competent strategies in fostering neuroinclusive environments. Managers play a pivotal role in this transformation, yet many lack the training and/or confidence to support neurodivergent colleagues effectively. Bridging this gap requires proactive investment in education, resources, and leadership.

As Head of Acas Inclusive Workplaces, I have seen firsthand the benefits of embedding neuro-inclusion in organisations. Here are some of the lessons I can share:

- Adopting universal design principles such as flexibility, simplicity, and fairness should guide your workplace practices. This will attract the most diverse talent and maximise your skills base.
- Trust your people and their lived experience. You don't need a formal diagnosis to be open to reasonable adjustments for all. Prioritising psychological and physical safety can transform workplace culture.

- Intersectionality matters: neurodivergence often overlaps with other identities. And this breadth of experience can feedback into your organisation.
- Line managers need help to manage. Think about the skills they need as line managers (as well as their technical role). Be clear on expectations and give them the training to hold authentic conversations and implement reasonable adjustments.
- Have a culture that shows you mean it. For example, regular awareness campaigns, neurodiversity training for leaders, supporting staff networks or incorporating inclusion metrics into manager performance reviews can all send a strong message.

I am delighted that the conversation on neuro-inclusivity is finally being heard. In particular:

- Through government initiatives such as the Connect to Work framework
- Through realising the benefits to neurodivergent people from the wider 'Making Work Pay' agenda
- The changing more inclusive narrative around neurodivergence (rather than condition-specific titles)
- The work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Modernising Employment

Neurodiversity is not a niche issue – it is a cornerstone of modern inclusion. By embedding neuroinclusive practices into core HR policies and leadership behaviours, organisations can unlock the full potential of their workforce. This is not only the right thing to do – it's the smart thing to do.

Introductions



Keith Rosser

Chair of the Better Hiring Institute
& Director of Reed Screening

Whilst estimates vary, it is widely believed that approximately 20% of the population are neurodivergent. More than 1 in 5 people with neurodivergent conditions are not in employment.

This equates to a number in the millions. Without doubt neurodiverse individuals experience barriers in the hiring process and in the workplace, many of these barriers could be easily avoided.

A core mission of the Better Hiring Institute is to make UK hiring the fairest in the world, essential to this mission is developing a hiring process that is inclusive and supports neurodivergent candidates. This report, developed out of the Parliamentary session with experts such as ACAS, the BBC, CIPD, and neurodivergent experts themselves, outlines the change that we require if we are to make UK hiring fairer.

These changes centre around increasing organisational knowledge, creating neuroinclusive workplaces, and making the hiring process inclusive.

There are many practical, tangible steps organisations can make to ensure their hiring and recruitment processes are more inclusive. Helping everyone, no matter their background, find work is essential if we are to boost productivity, grow the economy, and improve wellbeing across the country.

Purpose

This report has been developed from the APPG on Modernising Employment: Removing Barriers in Work for Neurodiverse People meeting that took place on 15th July 2025.

The meeting was chaired by **Lee Barron MP** and had over 150 delegates in attendance.

The panel of speakers at the event consisted of:

Lutfur Ali
Senior Policy Advisor, CIPD

Viki Carpenter
Founding Director, Association
of Accessible Employers

Sean Gilroy
Senior UX Principal Inclusive
Design & Accessibility, BBC

Ruhel Ahmed
Senior Strategy and Policy Advisor, Acas

Keith Rosser
Chair of the Better Hiring Institute &
Director of Reed Screening

Introduction

Evidence shows that neurodivergent workers are hugely underrepresented, misunderstood and seemingly overwhelmed in our workplaces having a significant impact on the workers themselves, and the organisations that employ them.

This APPG supports the need for clear, easy, accessible guidance and training to encourage employers to provide a collaborative and supportive work environment and to support frustrated yet hopeful neurodivergent people to not only find employment, but to develop and thrive in their chosen careers.

According to the CIPD (2024), 55% of employers say the culture of their organisation is neuroinclusive.

[Neuroinclusion at work report 2024.](#)

It is estimated that around 1 in 7 people (equating to almost 10 million people) are neurodivergent.

[Support for neurodiversity | Equality, Diversity & Inclusion | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.](#)

More than 1 in 5 people with neurodivergent conditions are not in employment.

[Neurodivergent employment rates poor, Heston Blumenthal finds.](#)

Doubling the employment rate of autistic individuals in the UK could result in an estimated total economic benefit of £900 million to £1.5 billion per year.

[Neurodiversity Inclusive Postings Are Rising, but Untapped Potential Remains in the UK Labour Market - Indeed Hiring Lab UK | Ireland.](#)

Key themes

The key themes emerging from the discussions closely align with the core findings highlighted in the statistics below, drawn from the CIPD Neuroinclusion at Work Report 2024.

- Over 83% of managers state that wellbeing is a key priority.
- 70% of managers say that equality, diversity and inclusion within their workplace is a critical priority.
- 60% of managers say that neuroinclusion is a focus within hiring.
- Around 3 in 10 workers haven't told their managers that they are neurodivergent.
- 44% said it was a private matter.
- 37% were concerned about people making assumptions.
- A third (34%) said that they were concerned about too much stigma being attached.
- 29% said they were concerned about the impact it may have on their career.



Key themes

It was clear from the session that there were 6 key themes that must be considered as part of this discussion and must drive the recommendations moving forward. These were:



01. Understanding/awareness/attitudes

Language and terminology used is incredibly important to develop baseline awareness and understanding in this space. A common mistake is confusing neurodiversity and neurodivergence which are not the same thing.

- **Neurodiversity** is a concept or framework that recognises and respects neurological differences as a natural and valuable form of human diversity.
- **Neurodivergence** refers to individuals whose neurological development and functioning differ from what is considered typical.
[The Future Of Clinical Trials Is Neurodiverse](#)

Some individuals are not aware or are not ready to share a neurodivergent condition which employers must be mindful of when initiating conversations.

Not all neurodivergent people are protected by the Equality Act 2010 and therefore may have reservations when discussing their needs. Alongside this, not all want to be known as being ‘disabled’.

There remains a concern that some individuals within organisations can stereotype, make assumptions and have misconceptions about capability which can mean that neurodivergent individuals don’t feel supported throughout their employment journey.

Consideration must be made when discussing neuro-inclusion being condition-centred and in theory people having to either explain or understand conditions or symptoms. Conversations should be around what the challenges are, rather than pinpointing it to a condition.

While 55% of employers claim to be neuro-inclusive, this is widely disputed by public opinion. With potential gaps in understanding, what does it actually mean to be a “neuro-inclusive” employer and how can businesses actually achieve it alongside all the other pressures that come with running a successful operation?

Key themes

02. Training

Workplace inclusion for neurodivergent individuals doesn't begin and end with recruitment, it lives (or dies) in the day-to-day culture. One of the biggest barriers isn't the talent pool, it's the pressure on line managers, outdated expectations, and interview practices that haven't been challenged in years.

The right support can make or break inclusion efforts. If someone is in a position of leadership, mandatory inclusive leadership and neurodiversity training shouldn't be optional. It should be the baseline. Only then can we start dismantling the hidden barriers that are still keeping talented, neurodivergent people out of work.

If you are not neurodivergent, it may be hard to understand the barriers and challenges that are faced by those that are, in what would be considered a 'normal' work environment. Therefore, training needs to focus on not what neurodivergent conditions are, but instead what they mean. What the things others may see that they don't understand could be connected to core challenges that cross multiple conditions and how they can impact everyone and give tools that help remove that misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Organisational training must include culture, policy (from recruitment to performance management) and organisation-wide strategy long-term. One-off training does not have an effective impact on culture.

03. Workplace culture/trust

Models of leadership here in the UK are crucially important in influencing positive organisational cultures. If there are no neurodivergent leadership models, the likelihood of neurodivergence being embraced by the organisation is slim.

It is important for neuroinclusion to be embedded into workplace culture, and this must fall into organisational Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies and action plans and form part of wider business practices. It must be a top-down approach and take into account governance and accountability at all levels.

The entire employee journey, from attraction, selection, progression to leaving must be considered to ensure not only can the right talent be attained in the first place, but the full journey encompasses the same positive action.

If you are not neurodivergent, it may be hard to understand the barriers and challenges that are faced by those that are.



Key themes

04. Education

One of the biggest barriers is education or more to the point lack thereof. Understanding of conditions (not just being labelled as disruptive or badly behaved) and basic education is required to be able to compete in the modern workplace. Not just Maths and English but also digital skills too.

05. Recruitment/hiring process

A lack of inclusivity post-hire leads to short-term tenures, it needs to be present for people to be able to belong.

Standard hiring processes do not suit neurodivergent individuals. Offering other assessment processes must be explored to suit all needs.

AI recruitment systems massively penalise neurodivergent applicants. This includes facial analysis technology for first stage interviews and algorithm-based CV sifting technology.

06. Reasonable adjustments

There is a common myth that these are costly and unachievable to business, but this is just not true. Simple, low-cost solutions can be implemented.



Barriers/Challenges



“

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.

”

Research and statistics

At present there is not sufficient research that ‘proves’ the benefits of neurodivergent people in the workplace. Studies that exist were taken over short duration, limited to people with one condition, always exclusively autism and as yet there are no large-scale, long-term studies and evidence that support the claims about increases in profit and productivity. This could be a factor in the lack of knowledge and understanding of employers.

It’s important to point out that most inhouse talent teams only monitor gender stats in their workplace. If we are to be intentional in bringing more neurodiverse talent in and show companies long term success metrics, we must have a legally compliant way to track success.

Barriers/Challenges

Government initiatives

Access to Work is a scheme that can help those with a physical or mental health condition or disability that can provide grants for practical support with work, support with managing mental health at work and help with communication support at job interview. Whilst all good intentions, reports have shown that the process is timely and has unnecessary red tape, hugely affecting those it is looking to support. Alongside this, proposed welfare reforms announced this year could have a significant impact on this.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is due to conclude on 31 March 2026 which will end a key part of funding for organisations trying to support neurodivergent (amongst others) back into work.

Considerations made in this report should be considered in the Keep Britain Working review and also built into local Get Britain Working plans.

Unemployment

According to [Personnel Today](#), more than one in five neurodivergent people are not in employment.

This highlights the challenge for those who are neurodiverse who don't personally feel ready for work. Many are willing but due to diagnosis are not able to. Early support and care is fundamental day to day in order to get them to a preparedness stage.



Recommendations

Organisations are under a lot of pressure to do the right thing, whilst maintaining a profitable business.

Whilst some of these recommendations are more significant, even making small changes could result in a powerful difference to attracting, retaining and promoting neurodivergent talent.

Recruitment/hiring process

In job adverts, clearly explain which skills and experience are essential for the role and which are only desirable. Ensure they aren't filled with recruitment jargon and instead have clear language that is specific to the role.

Some neurodivergent people do not see themselves as disabled.

It could be worth caveating that being neurodivergent will often amount to a disability under the Equality Act 2010, even if some people may not see themselves as disabled

Make it clear that applicants can ask for reasonable adjustments, without the need for a diagnosis.

Give examples of reasonable adjustments.

Rather than a traditional interview, work trials or performance-related tasks could be a suitable alternative. Also, where possible, allow applicants to see the questions before the interview.

Hold interviews or assessments in suitable, quiet spaces away from other distractions.

Neurodivergent people should be part of the recruitment process and could consider the following:

- Reviewing of application forms to ensure they aren't too lengthy. Also consider alternative ways to complete the form.
- Being part of the interview/selection process to allow for a broad range of opinion on new hires.
- Consider an alternative to timed aptitude tests which may not be a suitable platform for all.

Recommendations

Training and awareness

Training should be co-created with neurodivergent individuals to ensure it is fit for purpose.

It should be aimed at all levels within an organisation, from entry level to top management in order for awareness and an inclusive workplace culture to be fully embedded.

The training should be broad, inclusive and not condition specific.

Key topics should include:*

- Appropriate language/approach to use.
- Conflict resolution.
- Reasonable adjustments as tools for productivity.
- Pre-approved adjustment catalogues.
- Positive communication.

**it is important that these are regularly reviewed to ensure the content is up to date.*

Training should be broad, inclusive and not condition specific.



Separate and ongoing sessions should also be delivered to management level staff to include:

- Managing emotional demands.
- Implementing reasonable adjustments.
- Team dynamics.
- Introduce a session where team members are encouraged to come up with workable solutions/reasonable adjustments which could empower both themselves and their colleagues.
- Train interviewers in how to avoid making assumptions based upon an applicant's body language or social behaviour.
- Think outside of the box – could the training be delivered in an alternative method e.g. interactive games, virtual reality or experience films to capture different ways of learning.
- Nominated individuals within the organisation should run regular awareness campaigns for all staff and ongoing training and support for leaders.

Recommendations

Ongoing support

Introduce the idea of a ‘workplace buddy’ (ideally someone who is also neurodivergent and therefore has lived experience) who could offer invaluable support, advice and workplace guidance.

Formal/informal coaching or mentoring are a great way to help build and develop executive function skills and self-awareness.

Design specialist career pathways for workers with specific talents and therefore harbouring skillsets of all types.

Consider introducing stress and routine management tools including stress management apps, visual schedules and weighted items to support self-regulation.

Regular performance reviews/appraisals are incredibly important as neurodiverse needs can change over time. Therefore, any adjustments made will need to be reviewed regularly. Regular appraisals can also minimise RSD (Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria).

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are voluntary, employee-led groups that bring together people with shared identities or interests. They're great for building inclusion, offering peer support, and helping employers understand the real experiences of their workforce. ERGs can boost belonging, raise awareness, and influence positive change in workplace culture and policy.

Introduce the idea of a ‘workplace buddy’ who could offer invaluable support, advice and workplace guidance.



Recommendations

Reasonable adjustments

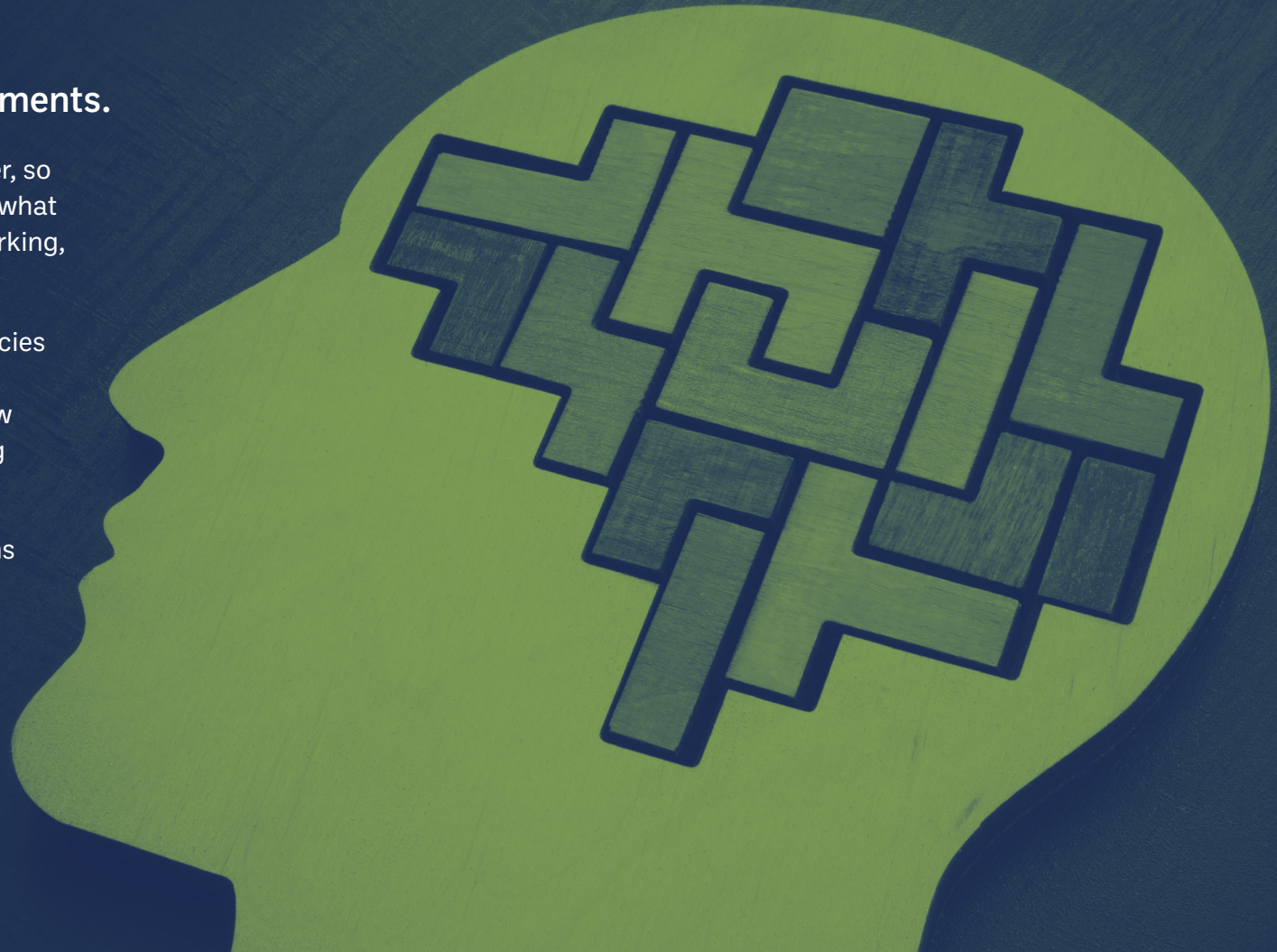
It is important to note that there is no 'one size fits all' for reasonable adjustments.

What works for one person may not work for another, so it's important to have ongoing conversations about what adjustments might be helpful, how well they are working, and whether any further changes are needed.

As an organisation, it is important to have clear policies and guidance in place for workers on how to make a reasonable adjustment starting from initial interview stage to the point of recruitment, and on an ongoing basis thereafter.

Introducing standard processes and practices means that every employee can make a request through simple forms which removes the burden from line managers, particularly when they are not experts. Therefore, not turning people off from the start.

Guidance on this is available from Acas [here](#).



Recommendations

It is key to understand that all reasonable adjustments don't have to be costly.

They can be simple, easily accessible adjustments to the workday/environment that don't require formal diagnosis and universal accommodations. Some examples of this are shown below:

Flexible working

- Flexible start/finish times.
- Regular breaks to manage fatigue and sensory overload.
- Quiet spaces.
- Managing break times and workloads – this can help with hyperfocus and ADHD overload.
- Avoiding sudden meetings or schedule changes.

Tailored communication and feedback

- Clear, direct communication with regular feedback loops to build understanding and confidence.
- Allow and give line managers confidence to have earlier conversations e.g. “How do you work best?”.
- Non-verbal communication – ensuring important things are said clearly, not communicated via silent expectation or hints. Avoiding jargon is also important.
- Having live transcript and off camera option for online meetings.

Workplace equipment/technology

- Ear defenders.
- Quiet rooms (with acoustic design and panels).
- LED lighting.
- Technology including transcript software, automated workflows, transcript highlights, bionic typeface.
- Helpful guidance on the above and other considerations to the work environment can be found [here](#)

Accessible learning options

- Offering slower-paced inductions, electronic handouts in advance and visual learning aids to support processing.
- Providing information in different formats e.g. not just verbal.

Contributors

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CEO at Neurospecial

Provides both training and consultancy to help organisations make meaningful, sustainable changes across hiring, onboarding, getting people in employment, day-to-day processes and workplace culture.

For further information, click [here](#).

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Director of External Affairs and
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Train employers and careers professionals, facilitate internships and offer a range of consultancy services on breaking down barriers to being an Autism Confident employer.

For further information, click [here](#).

About Us



[The Better Hiring Institute \(BHI\)](#) is a not-for-profit social enterprise driving the development of a modern, agile UK labour market, accelerating economic recovery.

Working closely with all the major UK industries, The BHI is driving standardisation, best practice, and digital innovation to reduce hiring times, enable portability, and improve safeguarding. Cross industry themes include digital standardised referencing, open banking, digital right to work checks, education credentialing, and digital identity.

The BHI is already working with many of the UK's largest, household names making UK hiring the fastest globally.



[Reed Screening](#) are the leading specialists in pre-employment vetting and are at the forefront of influencing regulation and industry change.

Reed Screening are the only UK, onshore screening company who are open 24/7, they are family owned and give 20% to charity. Their business never sleeps so if you ever need them, they're available.

Their vision is to 'pioneer the future of hiring' by collaborating with government bodies and industry leaders to bring about change.



Acas is the leading authority on workplace relations and dispute resolution in Great Britain. We provide free, impartial advice to employers and employees on workplace rights, rules and best practice.

We also provide training and tailored support for businesses that can help them succeed. Acas is a non-departmental public body that is governed by an independent Council made up of employers, employee representatives and independent members

About Us



BBC CAPE is dedicated to fostering an inclusive, supportive, and accessible work environment that recognises, values, and empowers neurodivergent employees.

Through our commitment to accessible and inclusive design, we strive to break down barriers and stigma surrounding Neurodivergency, while promoting understanding and empathy to inspire positive change across industries and communities.



Association of
Accessible
Employers

The Association of Accessible Employers CIC is a not-for-profit organisation that supports organisations build truly inclusive and accessible workplaces. We provide innovative training, workplace audits, and practical resources that support employers in embedding accessibility and inclusion into their everyday operations.

Our work is shaped and led by a team of accredited accessibility professionals, all of whom have lived experience of disability and neurodivergence, ensuring our approach is authentic, relevant, and impactful. Every penny of profit is reinvested into delivering our high-impact training and consultancy services, which not only transform business practices but also improve the working lives of people with access needs.

We offer a range of membership packages, from general access to practical resources and guidance, through to tailored consultancy and training.

Whether you're just starting out or looking to deepen your accessibility commitment, we provide the tools and support to help you take meaningful steps forward.