

Fertifa<sup>f</sup>

# HR Handbook: Understanding and supporting neurodiversity in the workplace



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# Understanding neurodiversity as an HR manager

# Understanding neurodiversity as an HR manager

This guide aims to help **HR teams and managers better understand neurodiversity, the impact neurodivergence can have on work lives, and how to support someone in the workplace.**

Each individual has a unique neurological makeup, leading to varied ways of thinking, perceiving, and interacting with the world. This perspective challenges the notion that there is a single, 'normal', or typical, type of brain.

Neurodivergence represents a spectrum of neurological differences, encompassing conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and more. Some estimations say that up to 20% of the population are neurodiverse.

These conditions often occur together and many of their symptoms overlap. Importantly, we shouldn't think of these conditions as disabilities, neurodivergent people can offer unique perspectives and enhance teams.



# What do we mean by neurodiversity?

There are lots of terms relating to neurodiversity that are used interchangeably and sometimes incorrectly. Using the correct definitions and language is a good way to show understanding and respect for neurodivergent people in your organisation.

## Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is a word that is used to explain the unique ways some brains work. It is simply the understanding that all human brains are naturally varied and different. It's a biological fact that no two brains are the same. This term includes everyone on the planet; we are all neurodiverse.

## Neurodivergent

A person is neurodivergent if their brain processes information in a way that diverges from what is considered typical. This is an umbrella term for specific conditions like autism, ADHD, and dyslexia. Whilst we are all neurodiverse, not everyone is neurodivergent.

## Neurotypical

A person is neurotypical if their brain and cognitive function fall within the societal standards of what is seen as 'typical'. The world is largely built for neurotypical people.

Neurodiversity refers to the different ways that we perceive and interact with the world. Creating a workplace that is **inclusive and supportive** of different ways of thinking is beneficial not only for those people who don't process information in the 'typical' way, but also for our workplaces, improving creativity and innovation.

# How neurodivergence can impact individuals at work

**51%**

Of neurodivergent employees have taken time off work due to their neurodivergence.

Willis Towers Watson

**50%**

Of neurodivergent people say they feel burnt out at work.

City & Guilds Neurodiversity Index Report

**45%**

Of neurodivergent employees have lost or left their job due to being misunderstood

National Autistic Society

**70%**

Of autistic people also experience mental health conditions.

National Autistic Society

**65%**

Of neurodivergent employees fear discrimination from management.

Birkbeck University

**45%**

Of neurodivergent employees find it difficult to stay focused during virtual meetings.

Virgin Media O2

# Understanding different neurodivergent conditions

# A quick overview of some of the most common neurodivergent conditions

## Autism

Autism is one of the most common neurodevelopmental conditions. Some people get diagnosed in childhood, while others get diagnosed later in life. People with autism often face some challenges in communication and social interactions. Common difficulties include trouble making connections and understanding emotions. Adults with autism might exhibit rigid thinking patterns and sensory sensitivities, social anxiety, and may require more time to process and understand information.

## ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition that influences a person's ability to concentrate and their impulse control. Adults with ADHD may have difficulty concentrating on tasks, organising their work, decision making, time management and planning. Some adults may also experience restlessness and challenges with emotional regulation.

## Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia affects a person's ability to understand and work with numbers. People with dyscalculia often face difficulties in understanding and manipulating numbers, leading to challenges in mathematical concepts and problem-solving.



4%

Of adults are estimated to have ADHD worldwide

Exceptional Individuals

# A quick overview of some of the most common neurodivergent conditions

## Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a neurological condition that affects the way someone processes language. It's important to recognise that dyslexia is not indicative of a lack of intelligence. Rather, it is a specific learning difference that can impact someone's ability to read, write, spell, and sometimes speak.

## Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is a neurodevelopmental condition that impacts a person's coordination, motor skills, and cognitive abilities. It can affect hand-to-eye coordination and spatial awareness, which can make it hard for people with dyspraxia to perform routine tasks like writing. People with dyspraxia may also have challenges with short-term memory, focus, and social interaction.

## Other examples

Other examples of how our brains process information differently (and sometimes fall under a neurodivergence umbrella) include cognitive functioning difficulties or executive dysfunction, dysgraphia, stammering and Tourette's syndrome.



**40%**

Of adults with dyslexia also have dyscalculia

Exceptional Individuals

# Supporting neurodivergent employees

# How you can support neurodivergence in the workplace



## Policy

Ensure you have up-to-date Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies that encompass a range of flexible provisions and reasonable workplace adjustments for all types of neurodivergent conditions. Consider implementing [neurodiversity policy](#).



## Training

Offer manager and staff training for neurodiversity. Use them to build awareness and understanding of neurodiversity and generate dialogue to encourage openness. If possible, work with senior employees in the company to help them share their own experiences.



## Medical appointments

Encourage members of staff to make and attend medical appointments by clarifying the availability of flexible hours to accommodate these priorities, especially emphasising that it is acceptable to attend appointments within working hours.



## Reasonable adjustments

Implement small adjustments to help neurodivergent employees. Examples include providing flexible work patterns, providing assistive technology such as speech-to-text software, and offering quiet office spaces in addition to noise-cancelling headphones.



## Communication considerations

Use clear communication styles. Introducing clearer styles of communication (both written and verbal), clarifying workplace guidelines and giving advance notice about changes in plan can be helpful not just for neurodivergent employees, but for everybody.



## Signposting resources

Make sure your employees know where to find trustworthy sources of information about their health. This could be done by creating an Employee Resource Group or a dedicated space on the intranet where resources and useful information are provided.

# What to do if an employee wants to discuss reasonable adjustments for their neurodivergence

If somebody approaches you asking for workplace support or reasonable adjustments for a neurodiverse condition, the most important thing you can do is to listen to their concerns and work with the employee to implement workplace support and reasonable adjustments that will allow them to perform their job role effectively.



## Step 1: Meet with the employee

Set up a confidential meeting between HR, the employee and their manager. This is an opportunity for the employee to tell you what they need in order to perform their role. Use this time to listen to their requests or difficulties in the workplace and offer solutions if you can. Keep in mind that the employee does not need a formal diagnosis in order to request reasonable adjustments for neurodiversity.



## Step 2: Workplace Needs Assessment

Initiate the Workplace Needs Assessment process for the neurodiverse employee. The cost of this should be covered by the employer or the cost may be covered by the Access to Work scheme. This is a grant the employee will have to apply for to help pay for practical support in the workplace.



## Step 3: Reasonable adjustments

Following the Workplace Needs Assessment, you and the employee will receive a report detailing the reasonable adjustments that will allow the employee to effectively perform their job. You should then work with the employee to implement these changes.



## Step 4: Review regularly

Check in with your employee and their manager at regular intervals to make sure the reasonable adjustments are working for them. Make sure to ask if there is anything else they need that was not covered in the initial workplace needs assessment.

# Some examples of reasonable adjustments for neurodiverse employees

## 1.

### Environmental adjustments

Adjustments to the sensory inputs a person is exposed to can be beneficial. For example, noise-cancelling headphones or priority to work in a quieter area of the office, a standing desk, a desk shield, anti-glare screen, blue light filtering software and non-fluorescent lighting.

## 2.

### Working arrangements

Flexible start and end times or working from home arrangements can help accommodate energy levels or sensory needs, for example by avoiding public transport during rush hour. Some neurodiverse people find unpredictability overwhelming, so a fixed workspace for office working, rather than hotdesking, may help decrease discomfort or uncertainty about coming to the office.

## 3.

### Communication adjustments

Many neurodivergent individuals prefer direct and explicit communication; try to avoid sarcasm or indirect requests. Allow the individual to use their preferred communication method, where reasonable. For example, this may be email or messaging rather than spontaneous phone calls. Providing clear, written instructions and agendas in advance of meetings to help everyone prepare, and ensuring frequent, structured feedback is important.

## 4.

### Technological aids

Access to specialised software can aid in day-to-day tasks. These can include speech-to-text software, instant caption software for virtual meetings, grammar checks, software to record and summarise meetings, or alternative display setups. Providing the individual with training on how to use these assistive technologies will also be beneficial.



Workplace adjustments can benefit everyone. A quiet space, clear communication, flexible working hours - these are all things that can enhance the wellbeing and productivity of your entire team, regardless of whether they are neurotypical or neurodivergent.

Holly Rowland, Fertifa Head of Clinical Services

# Why your company should consider a Neurodiversity Policy

Establishing a set of strong policies is essential for any company, especially when it comes to attracting and retaining top talent. Having the right support, guidance, and policies in place will ensure all employees feel valued and appreciated.

## It will guide your employees to the right support

Ensuring that neurodivergent employees have access to the right care and support when they need it is essential. A well-defined policy should offer simple and transparent guidance on how to access benefits you offer and how to request reasonable workplace adjustments.

## It builds a workplace that champions equality

A neurodiversity policy will help remove barriers many neurodiverse employees face. It should empower and support them to reach their fullest personal and professional potential.

## It's essential for employee wellbeing

Implementing a neurodiversity policy reinforces your company's commitment to all your employee's mental health and wellbeing whilst also demonstrating a dedication to neuroinclusion.

The screenshot shows a template for a Neurodiversity Policy. At the top, it says 'Fertifa' and has a '1' icon. The main title is 'Neurodiversity Policy Template'. Below that is a 'Policy summary' section with a note about neurodiversity being a natural variation in the way the human brain works. It mentions a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The 'Core commitments' section includes bullet points about reasonable adjustments, confidentiality, and time off. A note from Fertifa states they've included a policy summary in their internal neurodiversity policy for easy access. The 'Definitions and terminology' section includes a '1: Key definitions' section with a note about keeping language straightforward. At the bottom, it says 'Fertifa - Neurodiversity Policy Template'.

Download our Neurodiversity Policy Template to get started on your own.

[Free download →](#)

# Ensure positive health outcomes, beyond a policy

89% of companies that implement neuroinclusive policies and benefits see an uplift in employee engagement. Employees are now, more than ever, turning to their employers for vital health and wellbeing support.



## Education and awareness

Consider how you can raise awareness for neurodivergence and the support you offer in your workplace. Think about hosting lunch and learn sessions, webinars, manager training, and providing your team with access to reliable educational resources. Make use of awareness days throughout the year to start the conversation or host events.



## Wellbeing support

Recognise the correlation between neurodiversity and mental health and make sure everyone in your organisation has access to mental health and wellbeing support. This could be via an EAP, mental health apps, counselling, therapy, or a dedicated neurodiversity wellbeing support provider such as Fertifa.



## Assessment and clinical care

To provide a gold-standard neurodiversity support programme, access to diagnostics, workplace needs assessment, and treatment is vital. Consider working with a dedicated neurodiversity provider, such as Fertifa, which can offer your employees access to navigational advice, consultations, diagnostic assessments, workplace needs assessment, and specialist counselling and therapy for neurodivergence.

Great minds don't always think alike.

Inclusivity is not just a tick-box exercise, it's about building workplace environments and implementing support that actually works for everyone.

Get in touch with us at [enquiries@fertifa.com](mailto:enquiries@fertifa.com) if you have any questions.

