



# NEURODIVERSITY AWARENESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Your toolkit



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# Welcome to Your Toolkit

Everyone is entitled to work in a safe and healthy environment. A workplace where people feel valued and that they belong; an environment where people are able to be their authentic selves and thrive.

More organisations are beginning to recognise that a neurodiverse workforce brings new perspectives and viewpoints, where people can use their different strengths and unique talents to optimal effect in the work environment. Such strengths and talents may include innovative problem-solving, multi-tasking, the ability to work under pressure, creativity, and lateral thinking.

This **Neurodiversity Awareness in the Workplace Toolkit** has been developed to raise awareness about neurodiversity across the workforce, and to emphasise the many benefits that neurodivergent individuals can bring to the work environment.

The aim is to inform and support you in being able to make meaningful and positive change around neurodiversity in the workplace and to create inclusive work environments that embrace and encourage those with neurodiverse differences.

Your Toolkit offers essential guidance to support both employers and employees in the work environment, helping to shine a light on areas that may not be openly discussed at work.

## Your Toolkit includes:

- An overview of neurodiversity in the workplace and types of neurodiverse differences
- Key vocabulary
- Neurodiversity facts and figures
- Neurodiversity and co-occurrences
- Key challenges and strengths for neurodivergent individuals
- Case studies and shared experiences from those working in the automotive sector
- Guidance on small changes and adjustments to support neurodivergent individuals in the workplace
- Best practice ideas and strategies for working with and/or managing neurodivergent individuals
- Creating a neurodiverse-friendly inclusive work environment
- Further support and resources

This Toolkit should not be used as a diagnostic tool. Rather, the intention is to provide the reader with high quality information and lived experiences to help educate others and raise awareness about neurodiversity in the workplace. We encourage you to share this Toolkit widely with other managers, your peers, and colleagues.

**Raising awareness about neurodiversity within the workforce and across the sector is an ongoing learning process and journey.**

We'd love to hear your shared experiences and feedback on what has worked well, and what the challenges have been.

Get in touch with us at: [imiversitytaskforce@theimi.org.uk](mailto:imiversitytaskforce@theimi.org.uk)



**Diversity  
Task Force**

**Committed  
to making  
positive change**

**DIVERSITY | EQUITY | INCLUSION**



**Become an ally and  
show support for  
an inclusive and  
diverse workforce**

**Sign your pledge  
and commit to making  
positive change**



To find out more or to get involved, contact the IMI Diversity Task Force at [imidiversitytaskforce@theimi.org.uk](mailto:imidiversitytaskforce@theimi.org.uk)

**#CommittedToMakingPositiveChange**

# SECTION 1

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## Neurodiversity Awareness in the Workplace

# What is neurodiversity?

**Neurodiversity** is a term used to describe a range of **neurological differences** that exist in the human population. The word 'neurodiversity' was first coined in 1998 by Judy Singer, an Australian sociologist, who used the term to recognise that everyone's brain develops in a unique way.

The term 'neurodivergent' is derived from the related term 'neurodiversity'. **Neurodivergent** individuals may **think, feel, behave, learn, and process information** differently to what is regarded as typical in society.

Individuals who are neurodivergent usually have one or more neurodiverse conditions or neurological differences, which are 'co-occurring'. For example, an individual may have autism and dyslexia.

For some individuals, neurodiverse condition(s) or neurological difference(s) may be regarded as a disability under the Equality Act (2010). So, it is important for employers to be aware of neurodiversity in the workplace and to make any reasonable adjustments to support neurodivergent employees.

## *Having a neurodiverse condition should not be seen as a 'label' or a 'deficit'*

Be mindful that when talking about neurodiversity, we simply mean **neurological difference** or **neurodifference**. Try to avoid inadvertently compartmentalising people.

Note that some neurological differences are medically recognised as 'conditions' or 'disorders' and so it is appropriate in these instances to use these particular terms. However, where it is possible to do so, rather than using the term 'condition' or 'disorder', consider using 'difference' i.e., referring to a person's 'neurological or neurodiverse difference', is a more positive approach.

Many people who have a neurological difference often describe it as their '**super-power**' and directly attribute their difference(s) to success in their own career.

Having a neurodiverse condition should not be seen as a 'label' or a 'deficit'.



# Key vocabulary

**Neurodiversity** recognises that there are neurological differences in brain function and variations in behaviours which exist in the human population, and these account for differences in the way people perceive, think, feel, behave, experience, and interact with the world around them.

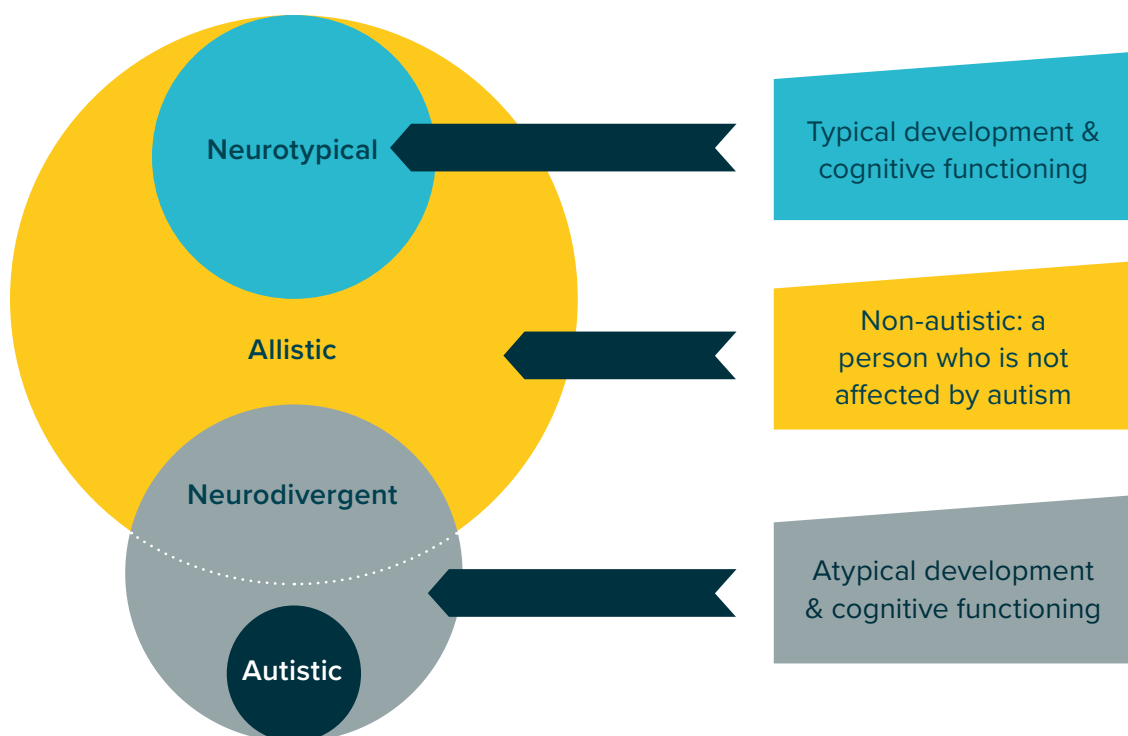
A group of people are **neurodiverse**, an individual is not.

A **neurodivergent** individual will have different ways of perceiving and processing information.

**Neurotypical** individuals are best defined as ‘not being neurodivergent’.

Most neurodivergent conditions are **neurodevelopmental**, which means that people are born with their condition(s), and these are usually lifelong. However, people can get much better at coping with their particular symptoms and traits.

In 2016, a study conducted by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research for the UK Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) found that there is a tendency for neurodivergent individuals to be stereotyped according to the more well-known characteristics of their condition. However, it’s important to appreciate that not all individuals with autism are mathematical geniuses, and not all individuals with dyslexia will experience huge difficulties with functional literacy.



The term ‘**neurominority**’ may be used to describe a group of people who share the same neurological difference(s).

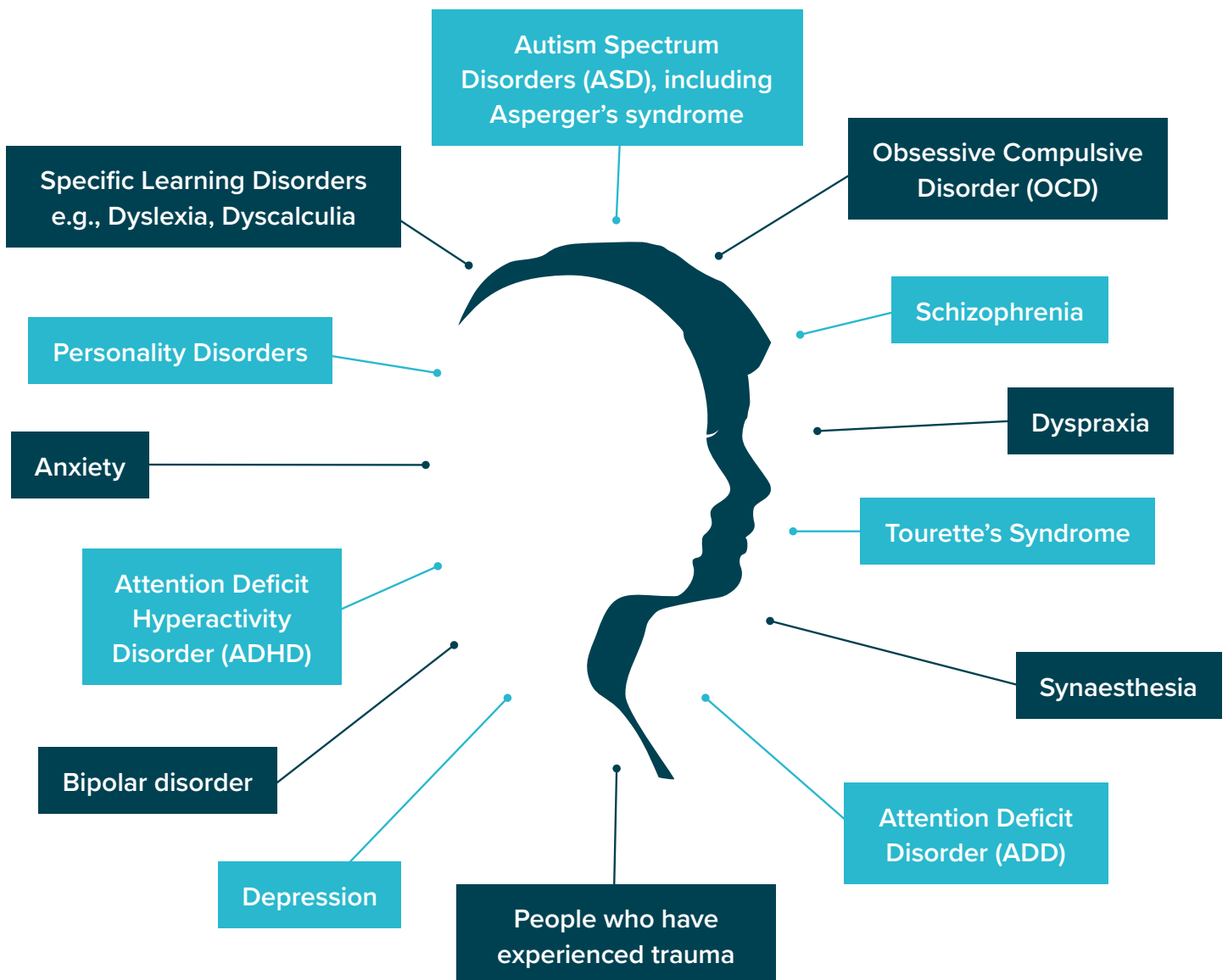
**Neurodivergent individuals** may develop effective coping mechanisms which can help them to mask or hide their neurodistinct characteristics and behaviours in order to try to fit into society’s neurotypical standards. This is called ‘**neuronormative**’.



# Types of neurodiverse differences

Neurodiversity or neurological difference is a spectrum.

Types of neurodiverse differences include:



When referring to neurological differences, some specialists recommend using 'person-first' or 'person-centric' language rather than 'identity-first' or 'condition-first' language (i.e., not to lead with the neurodifference). An example using person-first language would be to say: 'A *person with autism*', rather than saying, 'An *autistic person*'. However, it is always best to check with the person what language and approach they would prefer you to use.

# Neurodiversity facts and figures

**Autism**  
Approximately  
**700,000**  
adults and children in  
the UK are autistic<sup>1</sup>

**Neurodivergence**  
It is estimated that  
**1 in 7**  
people (around 15%  
of people in the UK) are  
neurodivergent<sup>2</sup>

**Dyslexia**  
In the UK, at least  
**1 in 10**  
people are thought  
to be dyslexic<sup>3</sup>

**Autism**  
**1 in 68**  
young people are now  
diagnosed with autism,  
with many more people  
likely to be undiagnosed<sup>4</sup>

**DID  
YOU?  
KNOW**

**ADHD**  
Worldwide, it is  
estimated that  
**3 in 100**  
adults have ADHD<sup>5</sup>

**Invisible disabilities**  
**90%**  
of disabilities are  
invisible<sup>6</sup>

**ADHD**  
Approximately  
**4%**  
of the UK population  
have ADHD<sup>7</sup>

**Tourette's Syndrome**  
**1-2%**  
of the population  
have Tourette's<sup>8</sup>

**Dyspraxia**  
At least  
**1 in 17**  
people are thought to  
be dyspraxic. Famous  
people with dyspraxia  
include actor Daniel  
Radcliffe and musician  
Florence Welch<sup>9</sup>

**Mental Health**  
**14%**  
of the population have  
mental health needs<sup>10</sup>

## Sources:

1 Left Stranded: The Impact of Coronavirus on Autistic People and their Families in the UK. National Autistic Society ([www.autism.org](http://www.autism.org)) September 2020

2 Neurodiversity in the Workplace. ACAS ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk))

3 Neurodiversity in the Workplace. ACAS ([www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk))

4 Neurodiversity at Work: Guide. CIPD (February 2018) [Neurodiversity at Work | CIPD](#)

5 ADHD Institute (<http://adhd-institute.com/burden-of-adhd/epidemiology>)

6 Neurodiversity in the Population. Genius Within ([What is Neurodiversity? – Genius Within](#))

7 Neurodiversity in the Workplace. ACAS ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk))

8 Neurodiversity in the Population. Genius Within ([What is Neurodiversity? – Genius Within](#))

9 Neurodiversity at Work: Guide. CIPD (February 2018) [Neurodiversity at Work | CIPD](#)

10 Neurodiversity in the Population. Genius Within ([What is Neurodiversity? – Genius Within](#))

# Neurodiversity and co-occurrences

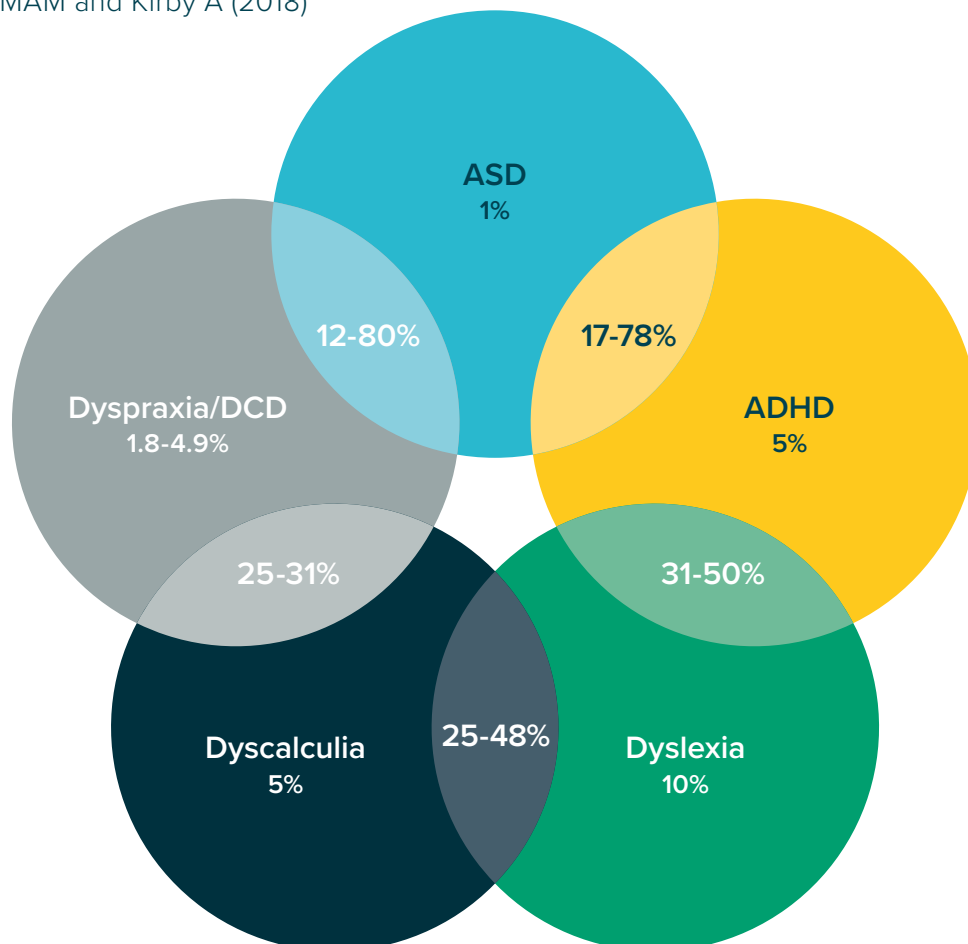
Prevalence of neurodiverse conditions varies globally, and it appears that some neurodiverse groups may be more highly represented in the automotive retail sector than in the general population (IMI Diversity Task Force Report, 2022). The impact of neurological differences on an individual is usually lifelong and will depend on the degree of overlap or co-occurrence of neurodiverse conditions (Kirby & Cleaton, 2018).

The diagram below shows examples of how neurodiverse differences in the human population can overlap. For example, dyslexia often co-occurs with dyscalculia (25-48%) and with ADHD (up to 50%).

More research is needed to fully understand the prevalence and impact of neurological differences among different groups in the general population.

## Co-occurrence of Neurodiverse Differences

Cleaton MAM and Kirby A (2018)\*



### Key:

**ASD:** Autism Spectrum Disorder

**ADHD:** Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

**DCD:** Developmental Coordination Disorder

\*Cleaton MAM., and Kirby A. (2018); Why Do We Find it so Hard to Calculate the Burden of Neurodevelopmental Disorders? *Journal of Childhood & Developmental Disorders*. Volume 4 No.3:10.

# What barriers may neurodivergent individuals experience at work?

People with neurological differences may experience a range of barriers and challenges in the workplace.

For example, barriers that may relate to a general lack of neurodiversity awareness across the workforce and other particular challenges which people may experience if they work in an office environment. These barriers and challenges may include:

## **Lack of awareness and education**

- A lack of awareness about neurodiversity in other people, which can lead to bias, assumptions, and stereotypes
- Misunderstandings and stigma about neurological differences, people may not feel safe to talk openly about their differences in the work environment, creating a culture of general mistrust
- Line managers or supervisors may incorrectly think that an employee is incompetent or incapable without knowing their background
- Other colleagues may incorrectly perceive someone as chaotic and disorganised due to how they like to approach work tasks/projects
- A person's unique strengths and talents may not be known and will therefore not be used to best effect in the workplace
- Different ways of working and different approaches are not recognised, appreciated, or valued. This stifles innovation and creativity in the workplace
- Opportunities are not available to use or promote different preferred methods of communication and different thinking styles

## **Office environment**

- Noisy 'open plan' office spaces mean that people may find it difficult to focus on their work
- Last minute changes to plans or daily routine tasks can cause stress and anxiety
- Not providing timings or materials in advance of meetings can cause stress and anxiety
- A range of sensory and environmental factors can impact negatively on working life
- Ableism (discrimination against people who have visible and/or invisible disabilities) is embedded into organisational systems and processes

**People with neurological differences may experience a range of barriers and challenges in the workplace**

# Key challenges for neurodivergent individuals

Everybody on the neurodiverse spectrum is unique. No two people with the same neurological difference(s) or neurodiverse condition(s) will have the same experiences or the same strengths and challenges. So, what are some of the more common challenges that neurodivergent individuals might face?

Examples of Neurodiverse Conditions	Definition	Challenges
<b>Anxiety</b>	Anxiety is a feeling of stress, panic or fear that can affect a person's everyday life both physically and psychologically. Prolonged anxiety can lead to panic attacks.	Anxiety affects a person's mind, body, and behaviour in different ways. For example, having trouble sleeping, feeling tired, restless, or irritable. Being unable to concentrate or make decisions at work.
<b>Asperger's syndrome</b>	Since 2014, Asperger's syndrome has been brought under the broader definition of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).	See Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
<b>Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)</b>	Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is a term used for people who have excessive difficulties with maintaining attention and concentration – without the presence of other ADHD symptoms (such as impulsiveness or hyperactivity).	Daydreaming, being forgetful, and getting easily distracted. Maintaining mental effort or attention over a period of time can be challenging. A person may be unable to pay attention to detail and may not seem to listen when spoken to directly. Difficulty organising work tasks, and following instructions.
<b>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)</b>	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a developmental condition that affects attention, impulsivity, and activity levels.	Speaking/acting before thinking, and interrupting others. Being restless and fidgety, difficulty sitting still. Poor organisational skills e.g., prioritising tasks, meeting deadlines. Poor sustained concentration on tasks, easily distracted. However, a strength can be the ability to 'hyper-focus' and maintain concentration and interest in a task/activity over an extended period of time.
<b>Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</b>	Autism is a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience and make sense of the world around them.	Difficulty maintaining eye contact, understanding 'office politics', and reading non-verbal cues. Altered sensory perception, which can affect concentration and anxiety. Difficulty in dealing with change. Increased anxiety, especially in social situations.

Examples of Neurodiverse Conditions	Definition	Challenges
<b>Bipolar disorder</b>	Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition that can affect a person's mood state. It used to be known as 'manic depression'. People with bipolar disorder have episodes of depression (feeling very low), followed by episodes of mania (feeling overactive and very high).	During episodes of depression, a person may have difficulty concentrating, they may lose interest in everyday activities, and experience self-doubt and pessimism. They may also have delusional, disturbed, or illogical thoughts.  During manic episodes, a person may talk very quickly, feel very happy and self-important, be easily distracted, and make decisions or say things which are out of character. A combination of treatment is usually helpful, including lifestyle changes, and learning to recognise the triggers or signs of an episode.
<b>Depression</b>	Depression is a mental health issue which is characterised by feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and a person may lose interest in activities that they used to enjoy.	Depression can be complex and can vary greatly between individuals. A person may have low self-esteem, be tearful, lose motivation, become intolerant of others, and find decision-making difficult.
<b>Dyscalculia</b>	Is a Specific Learning Disorder (SLD), characterised by persistent difficulty in a person's ability to understand numbers.	Dyscalculia can be hereditary and can lead to a range of difficulties in a person's ability to work with numbers and understand mathematics.
<b>Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder, DCD)</b>	Dyspraxia is a Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) that affects fine and/or gross motor skills, coordination and balance. It may also affect a person's speech.	Difficulties with skills requiring balance. Poor short-term working memory and slow processing speed, including reading and speech. Difficulties with handwriting, and with tasks that need fine and accurate movements. Poor organisational skills e.g., prioritising tasks, meeting deadlines. Sensory sensitivity/altered sensory perception, which can affect concentration.
<b>Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)</b>	OCD is a mental health condition where a person has obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours.	Frequent obsessive thoughts (which can cause the person anxiety and feelings of unease) and compulsive (possibly repetitive) behaviours.
<b>Personality disorders</b>	A person with a personality disorder thinks, feels, behaves or relates to others very differently from a neurotypical person. There are several different types of personality disorder.	For example, Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), a person may have disturbed ways of thinking, show impulsive behaviours and have problems controlling their emotions. Personality disorders may have a genetic link and may also be influenced by early childhood experiences.
<b>Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)</b>	PTSD is an anxiety-related disorder caused by very stressful, frightening or distressing events. For example, being involved in or witnessing an accident.	A person may experience feelings of isolation, guilt, anger, have problems sleeping, and difficulties concentrating, all of which can impact significantly on their daily life.

Examples of Neurodiverse Conditions	Definition	Challenges
<b>Schizophrenia</b>	A mental health condition which changes how a person thinks and behaves.	Withdrawing from the world, showing no interest in everyday social interactions, and may often appear emotionless. Change in behaviour or thoughts, such as hallucinations or delusions.
<b>Specific Learning Disorders (SLD), e.g., Dyslexia</b>	Dyslexia is a developmental condition that mainly affects reading, writing, and spelling. It can also affect short-term or 'working' memory, processing speed, and the ability to organise thoughts and tasks.	Difficulty reading quickly and accurately, slow processing speed. Making spelling errors or missing out information/key words in written documents, difficulty structuring writing. Poor organisational skills e.g., prioritising tasks, meeting deadlines. Poor short-term working memory.
<b>Synaesthesia</b>	A condition in which stimulation of one sensory pathway (for example, hearing) leads to automatic experiences in a second sensory pathway (such as vision). For example, hearing music and simultaneously sensing the sound as patterns of colour.	People who have synaesthesia are called synaesthetes; these individuals have a special perception of the world due to a 'blending' of their sensory pathways. They tend to be creative thinkers who are capable of experiencing vivid mental imagery.
<b>Tourette's Syndrome</b>	A condition that causes a person to make involuntary vocal sounds and/or physical movements (tics).	People with Tourette's syndrome can experience mood and behavioural problems, including anxiety or depression, ADHD, or OCD.

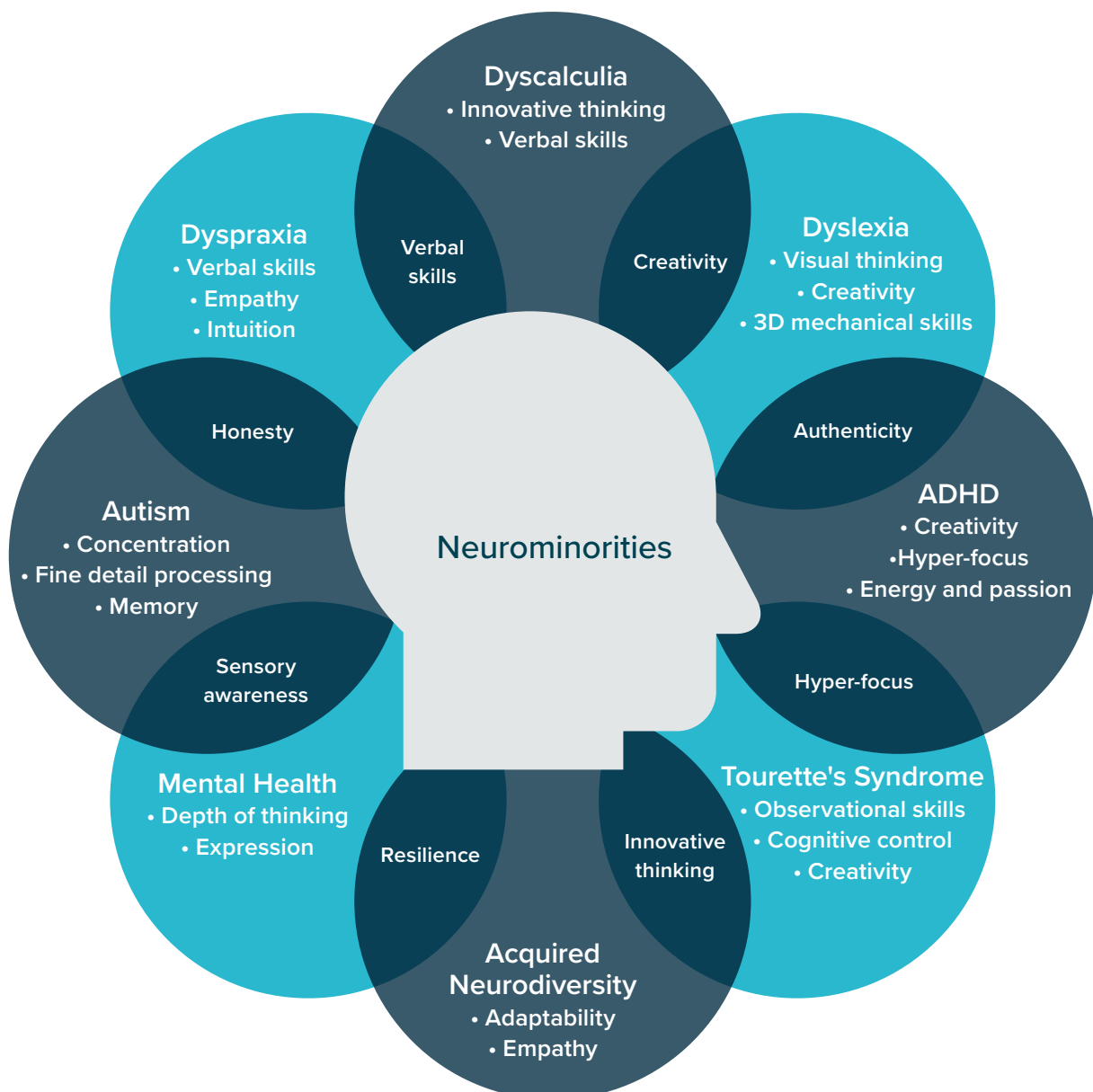
Table adapted from:

- Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Trust Neurodiversity Guide
- NHS UK, Mental Health Issues

# Key strengths for neurodivergent individuals

With openness, understanding, and the right support in place, people with neurodiverse differences can flourish in the work environment, enabling them to make the most of their unique attributes, strengths, and talents.

The diagram below shows some examples of the strengths and benefits that neurodivergent individuals can bring to the work environment. Note that these key strengths and overlaps may vary significantly between individuals.



Source: Genius Within



Regardless of their condition(s), common characteristics of neurodivergent individuals include:

- Sensitive
- Creative
- Honest
- Loyal
- Hardworking
- Highly motivated
- Innovative
- Good at solving problems
- Mental health issues
- Difficult experiences early in life
- Difficulty fitting in
- At risk of being manipulated
- People-pleasing
- Behavioural issues
- Masking (concealing neurodiverse traits so that they can 'fit in')
- Differences in processing or understanding information

Symptoms can vary depending on what level of support is in place, the individual's own coping strategies, and other factors (for example, stress or life changes).

Given the right context, neurodivergent individuals can bring unique perspectives to certain situations, contributing to competitive advantage.



# DID YOU KNOW?

**MANY FAMOUS PEOPLE ATTRIBUTE THEIR SUCCESSES TO THEIR NEURODIVERSE CONDITION(S)**

## Examples include:

### Actors

- Jennifer Aniston, (Dyslexia)
- Stephen Fry, (Bipolar disorder)
- Sir Anthony Hopkins, (Dyslexia)
- Keira Knightly, (Dyslexia)
- Daniel Radcliffe (Dyspraxia)
- Peter Sellers (Asperger's Syndrome)

### Business entrepreneurs

- Richard Branson (Dyslexia)
- Bill Gates, Co-founder Microsoft, (ADHD & Dyslexia)
- Steve Jobs, Co-founder Apple, (Dyslexia)
- Elon Musk, Co-founder PayPal & SpaceX (Autism)

### Film director

- Tim Burton, (Autism)

### Musicians and Singers

- Susan Boyle, (Autism)
- Cher, (Dyscalculia & Dyslexia)
- Billie Eilish, (ADHD)
- Florence Welch, (Dyslexia & Dyspraxia)

### Models

- Cara Delevingne, (ADHD & Dyspraxia)
- Emma Watson, (ADHD)

### Activists

- Daryl Hannah, (Autism)
- Greta Thunberg, (Autism)



Jennifer Aniston



Tim Burton



Florence Welch



Greta Thunberg

Based on historical evidence, specialists believe that these accomplished people were also likely to be neurodivergent:

Who?	Famous for?	Possible neurodiverse condition(s)	Evidence
<b>Marie Curie</b>	Nobel Prize-winning chemist and physicist	Autism (Asperger's Syndrome)	Marie Curie was a reserved individual who consistently struggled with social interaction and conversation. She was known to be extremely systematic in her approach to work.
<b>Charles Darwin</b>	Science	Autism	Darwin actively avoided social interaction. His preferred method of communication was in writing.
<b>Albert Einstein</b>	Nobel Prize-winning theoretical physicist	Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia	Evidence shows that Einstein experienced difficulties with social interaction, he was prone to repeat phrases and had extreme focus on work.
<b>Michelangelo</b>	Art	Autism	Evidence shows that Michelangelo consistently adhered to strict routines, he had a narrow set of interests, and also showed eccentric behaviours.
<b>Alan Turing</b>	Mathematics	Autism (Asperger's Syndrome)	Turing had difficulty understanding social norms and experienced issues with social communication. He also had many restrictive/repetitive and obsessive behaviours.
<b>Vincent Van Gogh</b>	Art	Bipolar Disorder	Bipolar Disorder: Through written letters, we know that Vincent experienced periods of high energy and productivity, followed by episodes of depression and extreme fatigue, which could show that he had bipolar disorder.  Bipolar disorder can also cause other symptoms, which Vincent reportedly had, such as: insomnia, memory problems, and psychosis (when a person loses contact with reality, they may perceive or interpret reality in a different way from those around them).
		Borderline Personality Disorder	Borderline Personality Disorder: Affects mood state and a person's behaviour. Throughout his life, Vincent showed signs of impulsivity, fear of abandonment, and unstable self-image.
		Synaesthesia	It has also been suggested that Vincent might have had synaesthesia, which is a condition or trait linked to blending or stimulation of several of the senses.

# Have you ever thought about?

Neurodivergent individuals may exhibit their conditions in many different ways due to their race, gender, and culture

Dr Pam Phillippo,  
Product Specialist, IMI

It's not unusual for people to discover much later on in life that they have a neurodiverse condition, and for others to never find out that they have a condition.

Barry Williams, End Point Assessment Manager, IMI



Some people may think that they have one or more neurological difference and may identify as being neurodivergent, even if they don't have a formal diagnosis.

Staff need to be aware of neurodiversity in the workplace so that assumptions are not made, and stereotypes are not formed based on inaccurate or incomplete information about a person's neurodiverse condition or neurological difference.

People don't always bring their whole background stories to work. You may not be aware of the challenges and barriers they face.

So, when you are working with others, take time to build trust and rapport, actively listen, encourage people to be open and to share if they feel comfortable to do so.

# Neurodiversity is a spectrum

Neurodiverse differences are '**spectrum-based**', this means that an individual with autism may be affected in different ways compared to other autistic individuals who are also on the spectrum. Some characteristics may be shared, but each individual will be impacted in a slightly different way.

Approximately half of those who have dyslexia, ADHD or autism will also have depression and/or anxiety. This may be due to an individual suffering a range of negative experiences due to their symptoms or traits, and even if they don't have a diagnosed condition, they may still be carrying some emotional 'baggage'.

*Because neurodiversity spans the spectrum of neurology, everyone will appear somewhere on the 'neurological spectrum'.*

As highlighted in the 'key vocabulary', neurodiversity isn't just limited to 'neurotypical' and 'autistic'. The span across the entire neurodiversity spectrum is huge. People may be creative, gifted, or autistic, others may find communication or certain situations very challenging, such as working in open plan office environments where noise levels can be higher.

Neurodiversity accounts for everyone's neurology being different and unique. These differences should be **acknowledged**, **valued**, and **celebrated** in the workplace.



# Know your workforce

It is highly likely that an organisation or business will have several neurodivergent individuals on their workforce. You may also know individuals within your own family or social circle who are neurodivergent.

Neurodivergent individuals will have **specific needs**, and most will require or benefit from **reasonable adjustments** in the work environment. Some people may not want to disclose their neurodiverse difference(s) and others may be unaware that they actually have a neurodiverse difference – this tends to be more prevalent the older the person is.

Being neurodivergent should not be considered as a deficit; it's simply a difference in the way in which an individual perceives and processes the world around them. Make a commitment to better understand your workforce and to create a neurodiverse-friendly inclusive work environment.

## Join the Diversity Task Force Members and commit to taking five key steps:

- 1**  
**Strategic Importance**  
 Signal your commitment to the whole business by putting diversity, equity, and inclusion on every Board and Senior Leadership team agenda.
- 2**  
**Know your Workforce**  
 Many people choose not to share information about disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity etc., with their employer. Make a commitment to understand your staff through better data collection and communication.
- 3**  
**Small changes, big difference**  
 Many workplace changes or adaptations require very little investment but can significantly improve someone's ability to perform their job. Commit to asking your staff what changes would make a big difference to them.
- 4**  
**New Perspective**  
 Commit to reviewing everything through a new 'lens' of diversity, equity and inclusion. Look at your policies, procedures, website, customer journey and ways of working, and collaborate with your colleagues to create an inclusive environment.
- 5**  
**Change Perceptions**  
 We need to clearly demonstrate that great automotive career opportunities are open to all. Commit to proudly showcase a diverse senior leadership team and use diverse role models.

It is highly likely that an organisation or business will have several neurodivergent individuals on their workforce

# Small steps, big difference

It is important to raise awareness about neurodiversity in the workplace to help breakdown any barriers and stigma surrounding neurodivergent individuals.

## SUPPORT NEURODIVERSITY AND TAKE STEPS TO FOSTER A MORE INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE

### What steps can you take?

- 1. Create psychological safety** in the work environment, where people can be encouraged to share their experiences and openly discuss their differences in the way they think and process information. An effective way to do this is to raise awareness of neurodiversity across the workforce by implementing training programmes or awareness days for all employees. Creating a more understanding workplace will also help to attract and retain neurodivergent individuals, as well as helping to create a workforce that is inclusive and diverse.
- 2. Make reasonable adjustments.** Neurodiversity will have a significant impact on the way in which a person communicates with others, has physical contact, perceives light, sights, and sounds in the work environment, which can be over-whelming. Some people will have increased sensitivity to factors that other people would not give a second thought to. For example, lighting and noise levels in the workplace, particularly if the work environment is more open plan.

Employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to reduce or remove substantial disadvantages faced by neurodivergent individuals. An employer may need to introduce quiet working periods or quiet desks, allow the use of noise cancellation devices, and ensure noticeboards/presentations don't contain vibrant images/colours and are clutter-free. Because the impact is different for each individual, it's best practice to meet with each employee to determine what adjustments they need.

- 3. Consider appropriate ways in which work projects and tasks can be made accessible to all.** For example, providing visible and easy-to-follow instruction sheets for workplace equipment such as printers or clearly outlining tasks and timelines so there is no ambiguity about carrying out work-related tasks. It is in the interest of employers to put in place relevant support and procedures to help encourage and promote an inclusive, neurodiverse workforce. Consider implementing a neurodiversity taskforce or lead who is responsible for acting on neurodiversity issues and ensuring the organisation will continue to meet their commitments to inclusivity.
- 4. Set-up neurodiverse information sharing sessions and networks.** For example, implementing a mentoring programme for neurodivergent employees with a safe space to express their feelings and seek advice and further support if they are facing particular issues, barriers, or challenges. Having input from a specialist advisor who can provide guidance to the workforce could also be helpful.

This all comes back to the need to create an organisational culture where people feel safe sharing information and are empowered to use their unique strengths and talents to the best of their potential. Making small changes to the workplace and increasing awareness will create a more understanding and accepting work environment for neurodivergent individuals.

**Beneficial outcomes include:** improved staff morale, and improved mental health and wellbeing across the workforce, which contributes to making the work environment a happier and more productive place, where people can flourish.

**Consider your work environment:****WORKPLACE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Review workplace policies and procedures to ensure fair recruitment practices. Be clear about the type of support available to employees with neurological differences.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AT WORK**

Establish a psychologically safe work environment, where individuals feel able to discuss and disclose their support needs.

**DO PEOPLE KNOW WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?**

Ensure employees clearly understand what support is available to them in the work environment.

**NEURODIVERSITY AWARENESS, EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Implement neurodiversity awareness training across the workforce to ensure that everyone has an understanding of neurological differences that exist so that they can offer colleagues allyship and support.

**MAKING REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS**

Understand reasonable adjustments that might be needed to support employees with particular challenges. For example, offering flexible working hours, implementing additional breaks, help with planning/organisation, using personal software programmes, and having additional time to complete tasks.

Introduce formal/informal strategies to help create a sense of trust and autonomy within teams, benefitting both employer and employees. (When employees have job autonomy they report high levels of self-efficacy, lower work-related stress and job burnout, and are therefore more likely to manage day-to-day challenges). Identify job demands that are more likely to overwhelm an employee, leading to potential burnout. Counter potential burnout by giving the person greater autonomy, ensuring effective support from managers and work colleagues. Take steps to implement reasonable adjustments, and offer awareness training to help inform the entire workforce.

**PUTTING A SPOTLIGHT ON STRENGTHS**

Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE) are work environments where neurodivergent individuals feel safe to be themselves, engage with their strengths, are able to work effectively, and can form positive working relationships, be well, and thrive. It is important for employers to be aware of the benefits and strengths that neurodivergent individuals can bring to the work environment, the value in employing individuals who have specific needs, and the ways in which their unique talent can be supported.

So, take the time to ask a work colleague or team member, 'What CAN you do?'... It's such a small thing to do but can make a BIG difference to that person. Because you're recognising, valuing, and allowing that person to connect and use their strengths, so that they have meaning and purpose (ikigai), and can thrive in the work environment. And, through your actions you will also be helping to develop a culture and sense of belonging, and therefore an inclusive workplace.



# Case Study 1:

## What is an ‘inclusion passport?’

### Did you know?

Analysis of Office for National Statistics (ONS) data has revealed that there are proportionately more disabled individuals in senior roles in automotive retail (15%) compared to those working in senior roles outside of the sector (12%), albeit the difference is quite marginal. However, individuals with disabilities are still under-represented when compared to 20% of the working population who are currently registered as disabled.

It appears that automotive attracts more people with hidden disabilities, such as dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and other areas of neurodiversity than other comparable industry sectors.

Many employees are hidden by organisational cultures that don't promote openness and discussion about the topic. Small changes to working practices can give the opportunity to unleash the full potential of these employees for both their own benefit and that of the organisation they work for.

This case study is taken from real-life experience; however, names and places have been changed to protect the identity of those involved.

**Name:** Amar Pavey

**Position:** Amar is a Marketing Manager for a car dealership

Amar hated his school years. He was seen as extremely disruptive in the classroom and a bad influence on other learners. He had poor concentration skills, found it difficult to read and write, and was eventually kicked out of school.


In his later years, Amar was finally diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD. Amar believes that you don't need a business case to be kind and respectful to others in the work environment.

“Everyone has strengths and areas that they can improve on. Playing to your strengths is all about understanding how best to engage with people and what you can do to get the best out of them. At school, I had ADHD and dyslexia, although this went undiagnosed for several years. Even now, for example, I can't produce or read huge reports or work through data; I'm just not suited to it, my brain doesn't work that way. However, I'm really comfortable engaging with people verbally and regularly deliver training on-site.”

“The company I currently work for have recently introduced ‘**Inclusion Passports**’. This is a great idea for people in the workplace who are neurodivergent i.e., those with invisible disabilities”.

“These ‘invisible disabilities’ could be, for example, having dyslexia, epilepsy, bipolar disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Asperger's syndrome, anxiety/depression, or a personality disorder”.

“People often find it difficult to talk about their neurodiverse condition in the work environment, and some people don't want to talk about it at all. Having an ‘Inclusion Passport’ means that your line manager, and others in your team, are aware of your condition and the challenges you face and are aware and informed about the simple steps they can take to make you feel included and supported. For example, using your preferred communication methods”.



“I don’t like talking about my neurodivergence. So, the other great thing about having the Passport system in place is that when I move between different departments for example, I don’t have to keep going back to square one and having those initial conversations about my neurodiverse conditions and adaptations that I need in the workplace”.

“By using the **Inclusion Passports** system, relevant information can be shared efficiently and discreetly to best effect”.

“Having improved awareness has also meant installing software that can help me with grammar. Small workplace changes and adaptations have made a big difference for me”.

“Equality, diversity, and inclusion can’t be seen as a tick list or as a side-project that an ‘ED&I’ team of people in an organisation are working on. It needs to be an agenda that **everyone** in the organisation is on-board with. Developing an inclusive culture and work environment is an ongoing collaborative process which involves us all, it doesn’t have a project deadline”.

*Taking positive small steps will help to make a big difference, driving change*

# Case Study 2:

## Putting a spotlight on remote meetings

### Delivering remote meetings: Key considerations for neurodivergent individuals

This case study is taken from real-life experience; however, names and places have been changed to protect the identity of those involved.

**Name:** Stewart James

**Position:** Sales Executive

Stewart works for a motor dealership; he has autism and Tourette's syndrome.

Last week, Stewart attended remote online training which was delivered in-house by the company he works for.

At the start of the session, the trainer asked all participants to raise their digital (virtual) hand if they had any questions.

At the end of the training session, Stewart wanted to ask a question and was the first to raise his virtual hand. Despite this, the trainer proceeded to give other participants the floor first, some of whom only had general comments to make, rather than posing a question. This situation made Stewart's blood boil!



What steps could the trainer have taken to avoid Stewart becoming confused and agitated?

### To avoid any confusion or doubt, the trainer should have:

- Asked participants to raise their virtual hand if they had a comment or a question or a different viewpoint that they would like to share.
- Informed participants that they may not come to people in the order in which they raised their virtual hand.
- Assured participants that all those raising their hand would be given an opportunity to make their comment or ask their question.
- Given everyone a fair chance to participate by alternatively inviting questions, comments or thoughts via the online chat function.

Providing clear instructions in this way would have avoided any ambiguity around how the feedback would be handled, which can be a trigger for individuals with autism.

# SECTION 2

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## On Air: Automotive Shared Experiences

# Judith Chapman (Make UK)



## Introduction

Make UK champions and celebrates British manufacturing and manufacturers, building a platform for the evolution of manufacturing in the UK.

**Here, Judith shares her own experiences of neurodiversity in the work environment, highlighting the huge strengths that people with neurodiverse conditions can bring to the workplace and the importance of raising awareness.**

I've worked in Human Resources since 1977, across the Public, Private and Not-For-Profit sectors as well as for a Venture Capitalist and in Defence & Aerospace. I've worked at a strategic level, and in operational roles, all within HR. I love engaging with people and building rapport.

I have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and can get bored very easily. But I love working for Make UK. I joined the organisation in 2021, and find that every day is different, which really suits my character and personality. On one day I could be training First Line Managers and on the next day I'm working with the Chief Executive or Chief Finance Officer, building on and using my skills and experience to help and support other people.

## Tell me more about ADHD and your own challenges in the workplace

I've always had poor short-term memory; exams were a nightmare for me... I'd crash and burn! I achieved my A levels but didn't reach the grades I was predicted; however, they were sufficient to enable me to study part-time to gain my professional qualifications at college.

I've never taken medication for my ADHD, but over the years, I've learnt coping strategies and I'm able to effectively self-manage my condition.

In my younger days, when I was working in London, I remember doing something different every night of the week. I was a Royal Navy reservist, so dedicated some time to that, I was also in the Young Farmer's Association, and out socialising... I was going at such a pace! I was so full of energy all the time and think that people probably found this over-whelming.

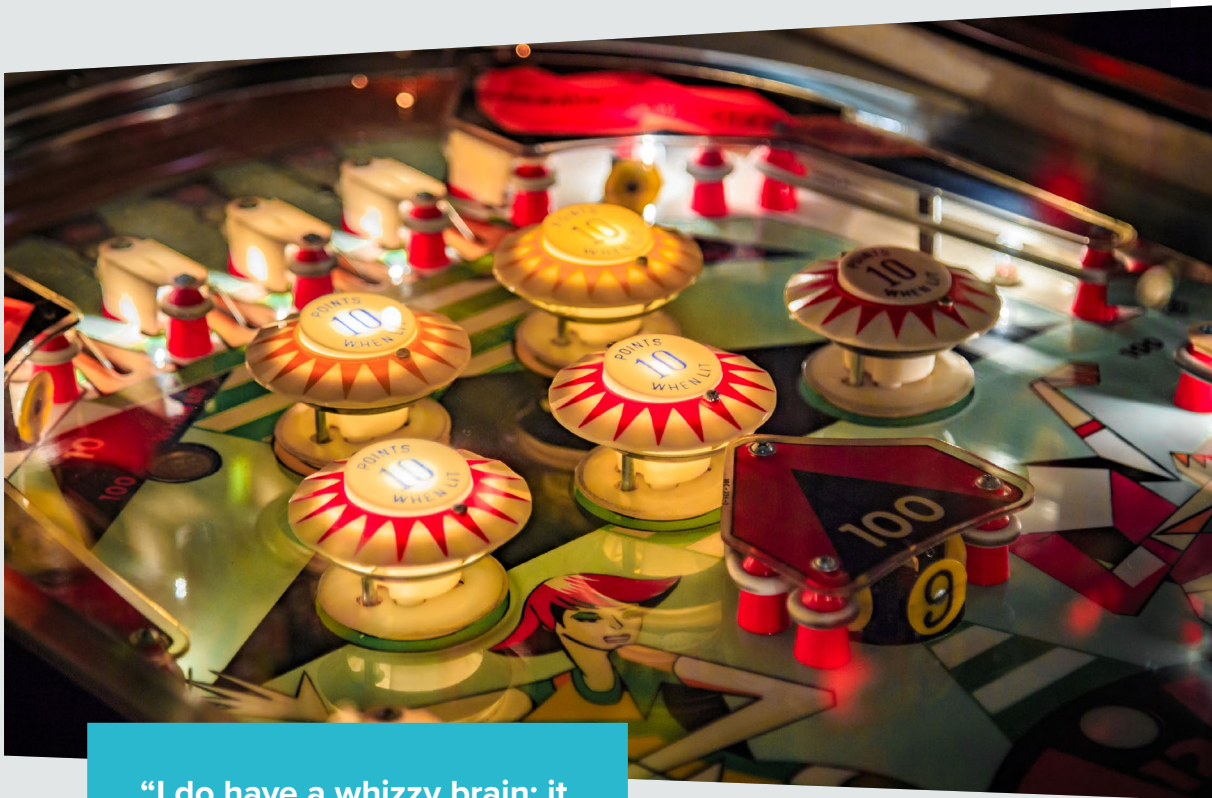
With age comes wisdom! Over the years, people have found it hard to cope with my condition and I've had to work really hard on being able to 'put a lid on it' so that people are not over-whelmed.

Make UK have been the only company that I've been able to be open with about my neurodiverse condition.

My short-term memory is poor, so for example, I like to take notes in meetings so that I can read and recall the outcomes and actions that need to be picked-up.

I used to think that I procrastinated, but I now recognise that this is my mental processing time. I can be hyper-focused on work-based tasks or activities, and this means that I don't realise the time; I get so totally absorbed by what I'm doing that I don't stop to eat or drink! I've recently been running several weeks of executive coaching sessions, and in preparation for this spent time researching... My husband had to constantly remind me when it was time to stop for dinner!

My ADHD is like a pinball machine! The two buttons are behind my ears, and the balls are whizzing around in my brain and pinging-off the paddles.



**“I do have a whizzy brain; it goes into over-time and can be mentally exhausting.”**

I'm fortunate in that my line manager has great awareness and can play to everyone's strengths in the team. When I love what I'm doing I'm totally engaged and focused. I don't indulge in groupthink, but I'm still able to put my thoughts across in a supportive and constructive way.

Everyone is competent and capable, and we're all different. Being aware of individual strengths in a team means that a manager will be able to get the best out of you, and also get the best for the business.

It is important for employers not to fall into the trap of thinking that taking on a person with neurodiverse conditions will be a pain. We don't need labels. We're all different and we all have different support needs. As a matter of course, regular one-to-ones, team meetings, areas for

development, career development conversations should all be happening in the workplace.

It's also important for employers to have better awareness about neurodiverse conditions. For example, people with ADHD can have low self-esteem, if they get a knock (e.g., negative feedback) it can really damage self-confidence and lead to anxiety or depression. Therefore, managers need to be sensitive to that and consider how constructive feedback is given and the language they use, so that this isn't damaging and doesn't cause undue distress or anxiety.

### **Supporting others with neurodiverse conditions**

In a previous organisation, we had a Senior Administrator who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

They experienced a personal situation, which could have been the trigger, and their personality changed completely. They went from being quiet and reserved to outspoken and provocative i.e., the other end of the scale. We referred them to Occupational Health, and it took some time to work out what medication would work best. But the medication helped to even out their traits and helped them to manage their condition.

Previously known as manic depression, '**Bipolar Disorder**' is a mental health issue which affects mood state. An individual can go from experiencing periods of depression and lethargy, where they feel extremely low to a state of mania, where they are overactive, have lots of energy and feel extremely high. Symptoms will depend on the individual's mood state, which can last for several weeks (or longer). Treatments aim to control the effects of an episode, enabling the person to live life as normally as possible.

With many neurodiversity challenges there are peaks and troughs. So, it's important that relevant help is sought to 'even out' those peaks and troughs, and therefore make the condition more manageable – both for the individual and for the people they work with.

I would really like it if a manager were to come to HR and say, 'I've got a member of my team who has a neurodiverse condition, what do I do?' Hallelujah! That's the point you want to get to! Neurodiverse conditions can manifest in different ways for different people. We can't all have extensive knowledge of everything. Ask others for help and support.

### **What are the challenges and issues around neurodiversity in the workplace?**

There's a general lack of understanding about neurodiverse conditions and more needs to be done to help raise awareness. ADHD was always seen as the 'naughty child' syndrome. You know you're different. But I like to think of my condition as my super-power!

Firstly, there's acceptance of the condition, and secondly managers may need training (with a neurodiversity specialist). If an employee has a physical disability, then a health and safety risk assessment is completed. So, how to manage people with invisible disabilities? Sit down and risk assess together (from a neurodivergent perspective). What works? What doesn't work? Talk it through with the individual and show understanding about that.

Some people may have been diagnosed with ADHD but have not yet sorted out their coping strategies. What are the triggers? View these as challenges to be overcome, rather than time-consuming 'problems'. Be aware that some people may choose to mask or hide their condition, particularly if they don't feel psychologically safe or comfortable bringing it to the attention of others in the workplace.

### What have been the wins?

Recognise the strengths, those 'super-powers', that individuals with neurodiverse conditions can bring to the workforce. My personal strengths include determination and creative problem-solving. Neurodiverse conditions or 'challenges' can be viewed by some as scary and/or time consuming to manage in the work environment. People need to appreciate that neurodivergent individuals will face certain challenges in the workplace because their brains work differently to those of neurotypical individuals. More needs to be done to raise awareness of neurodiversity, both for employers and employees.

In a previous organisation I worked for, we employed a person who had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This person had huge difficulty with communication and social skills, and they preferred their own office space to work in, which we accommodated.

However, they were excellent at problem-solving, and were very quickly able to solve a problem that the company had been working on for 2-years! They were a valued member of the team and blossomed in the work environment.

### Recommended top priorities/actions for employers?

- 1 Implement awareness training about invisible disabilities** for employers, managers, and business owners. When I deliver ED&I training, I share a picture of myself and ask participants, 'Does this person have a disability?' Participants might say 'eyesight', because I wear glasses, but what is their perception of invisible conditions, those 'unseen' disabilities and challenges that people might have in the workplace? This activity encourages people to think differently.
- 2 Hold two-way problem-solving discussions** (between manager and individual). Conversations should be open and honest. Risk assess to ascertain the individual's support needs and small workplace adaptations that might be necessary. Discuss the individual's strengths, do they have a super-power that the manager is unaware of?
- 3 Signposting (to manager and individual) additional support and guidance that is available.** We are all here to learn. Nobody is expected to know everything about neurodiversity in the workplace and neurodiverse conditions. Speak to others in your organisation to seek relevant help and support.



# Karen Cole (Motorcycle Industry Association)



## Introduction

Karen Cole is the Director of Road Safety and Rider Training at the Motorcycle Industry Association (MCIA).

**Here, Karen shares her personal experience of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), the importance of being open and raising awareness of neurodiversity in the workplace, and treating everyone as individuals.**

I left school with a handful of O Levels, but since school days, have gone on to complete Open University courses. It's just that with my ADHD, I found school lessons boring, they didn't hold my interest and didn't teach what I was interested in. Back then I was a bit of a wild child! But as you grow and mature, you start to recognise and take stock of why you're doing the things you are and start to calm down. Continuing on that path would only lead to self-destruction. I started to mask what was going on and take positive steps to deal with it.

I've been at the MCIA for almost 23 years but was only diagnosed with ADHD a few years ago. My diagnosis occurred somewhat by chance. My grandson is autistic and has ADHD. So, we went through a diagnostic process with a practitioner, and during that process they also recognised that as well as my grandson, both myself and my daughter have ADHD. So that's how the diagnosis came about.

**ADHD** is a developmental disorder which means that symptoms of the condition can start to be noticed in early childhood. ADHD affects a person's behaviour, so a person can have difficulty focusing or concentrating on tasks and/or can exhibit hyperactivity and impulsiveness. Other conditions often co-exist alongside ADHD, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Anxiety and Depression. The exact cause of ADHD is unknown, but the condition has been shown to run in families.

I always thought it was just a quirk of my personality... I've always been impulsive and I'm an interrupter! I have to work hard at trying to hold back... during conversations and not to jump in too quickly.

For me, having ADHD means that I'm impulsive, I like to crack-on and push forward with whatever task or activity needs to be done. And I'm good at adapting to take on tasks outside my skillset, which can be tremendously helpful. There is a balance to be found though. And everyone is different.

As well as being diagnosed with ADHD, I also have dyslexia, sensory-based issues and possibly dyspraxia too... If there's a pen flying across the office, it's probably come from me! It's noticeable that I can be quite clumsy.

Looking back over the course of my career, I can see where I've mitigated and made changes which have been organic. And as a Senior Manager, I've engineered changes that have helped me to manage (and to some extent mask) my condition, rather than conscious decisions being made.

For example, I tend to get easily distracted, so have my own office space. And I have my own way of working, which might look chaotic to others, but it works for me. I like to work with paper – it's very satisfying to write a list down and then once it's done to screw that piece of paper up and throw it away! So, there's always a lot of paperwork on my desk; it might not look like a workable system for others – it probably looks chaotic, but it's what works for me! Other people need to be prepared for the fact that neurodivergent individuals will have different ways of doing things, which may look odd to neurotypical individuals, but it's so important not to judge people on that.

With my dyslexia, I have bad days when I simply can't write. My spelling and grammar will be awful etc. And there are other days when I don't have an issue. For example, I've been involved in writing strategies at government level. I'm lucky in that I'm able to recognise when I'm having an issue/bad day. Before my diagnosis, I just put it down to my quirky personality!

### **Do you think there's a general reluctance for people with neurodiverse conditions to want to talk about their condition(s) and support needs?**

People may believe that being given a label (i.e., a diagnosis), is a hinderance. But it's not a hinderance; having a label can help you! We need to be able to talk openly about our challenges and our support needs. Let's be open and honest about it. But I think getting real change like this (across society) will take time. It's a start to just get people to be able to talk about their condition, this will get other people interested, and this will lead to improved understanding. However, people are not willing to take the risk. They are probably wondering, will talking about it affect my career? Will opening-up about my condition negatively impact on wanting to progress my career?

At some point in our lives, everyone is likely to experience mental health issues, whether it's our own mental health or the health of someone else who we know. It is so important that people feel comfortable to be able to talk about their neurodiverse condition(s) and support needs. We need to get the conversation going... About 5-years ago, the MCI had a change in CEO, and initially I didn't disclose my conditions to him. After a while I was invited to join the Diversity Panel (for disabilities) and it's then that I got talking with my boss about my ADHD. And since then, I've been able to be open and honest about my condition.

### What are the challenges and issues around neurodiversity in the workplace?

The biggest challenge is believing that people will accept it. I think there's still some stigma around this. It's important that people don't feel frightened about talking about their challenges. If your company is smaller, like ours, then it probably doesn't have a Human Resources department and so the workforce is less likely to be aware of neurodiversity.

If a person has ADHD or autism for example, employers may be of the belief that the changes required in the workplace to accommodate an individual's needs are too big. It's true that the person may require interventions and support needs, but with the right work placement, the employer will get massive benefits and rewards from taking on that person and harnessing their input. Employers should be looking at the job and thinking about who they need. Neurodivergent individuals can bring such a different approach, their minds work in different ways, like having an amazing memory or great attention to detail, and it's about unlocking that.

### What adaptations or support could employers provide to people who have neurodiverse conditions?

Small changes in the workplace can make such a big difference to a person with neurodiverse conditions, not only in terms of their ability to thrive in the workplace but also to how they feel. It's not always about having to carry-out a big risk assessment.

Having a clock on the office wall or setting an alarm on my phone makes a difference, otherwise I could miss a meeting. If you're working with people who have neurodiverse conditions, then ask people what changes they need.

For example, it might help to have meetings which have a short break, this can help with attention span. Or, enabling a person to wear headphones to block out surrounding office chatter can help with concentration; other people may prefer to listen to music. Make sure people have sufficient space in a team meeting so they're not directly facing others, or they may prefer to sit next to the wall, as this is less distracting. These are not big changes to make. Don't make judgements about how others prefer to work. My mind isn't tidy, so neither is my desk space!

### Recommended top priorities/actions for employers?

- 1** **Treat everyone as individuals.** Don't try to treat people as a tick box exercise. You can read-up about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Bipolar disorder, or ADHD, but it won't prepare you for the person.
- 2** **Listen to what the person's needs are.** What simple changes/adaptations can be made in the workplace? Help dispel the myth that all support needs will be costly.
- 3** **Have sensitivity when managing people who have neurodiverse conditions.** Make changes and allowances in the work environment in a sympathetic manner. Remember to retain confidentiality and levels of sensitivity when having these conversations.

### Mental Health Motorbike

Aside from her role at MCIA, Karen also volunteers for Mental Health Motorbike, a charity which was established during lockdown to support bikers with mental health issues and form a sense of belonging and community around a shared love of motorbikes. The charity now has about 2000 members, supporting bikers who may have a range of mental health issues including bipolar disorder, ADHD, autism, and ex-forces personnel who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as well as the depression and anxiety that most of us face at one time or another. For bikers of all types, their support, events, activities, and partnerships are based in or around the motorbike community.

I've found that through knowledge and management of my own neurodiverse conditions, I'm able to connect with others. Sometimes that's just allowing people to open-up, recognising and appreciating differences. Because it's a lovely safe community, people are also able to support each other in confidence, and talk about coping strategies, it's stunning what information people feel able to share.

**Mental Health Motorbike** exists to create meaningful opportunities so that together we grow the greater wellbeing of the motorbike community. Our ultimate aim is to reduce suicide amongst bikers in the UK.

Want to find out more?

SCAN ME



Our ultimate aim is to reduce suicide amongst bikers in the UK

# David (The IMI)



Information is taken from real-life situations and experiences; however, some names and places have been changed to protect the identity of those involved.

**Here, David talks candidly about his personal experiences growing-up and shares his experience of neurodiversity in the workplace and the importance of educating others.**

## Early childhood experiences

I have always suffered with anxiety and depression; I think I was born with it. At nursery school, I had infant anxiety, I didn't like being left, it gave me a feeling of abandonment. Nursery was my first experience of mixing with other children, and I didn't like it, the day would just drag.

At primary school, I could not get my head around maths and writing. In those days, dyslexia wasn't well understood or recognised and I was described as 'slow' in arithmetic and English. I found the learning difficult to grasp. Teachers treated everyone the same and this made things worse.

It's around this sort of age when other children can start to look for weaknesses in others. I started to become the class clown, and I used to do impressions of people. I started to get noticed and recognised... I was able to make people laugh! That became a kind of drug for me. But underneath it all, I felt very lonely and low in my life, which started to become the norm. At the end of primary school, everyone had a 'buddy', but I had no-one.

## Secondary school

At secondary school, my anxiety levels were high. Anxiety can be debilitating and can lead onto other issues, which for me was not wanting to leave the house (agoraphobia). I couldn't go on school trips, I felt so alone. I lacked skills in communication, and I didn't believe in myself.

In those days, Specific Learning Disorders (like dyslexia) were still not well understood or investigated. My parents and my teachers didn't understand my disorder. My confidence was beyond low, and the little I had, was gone. I couldn't cope as everything seemed alien to me. I didn't have any friends, so no support system in place, and I wasn't confident enough to approach other children.

I had 3-years of very dark days and was in a state of depression. I knew I couldn't stay like that and had to work hard to make changes. Every day at school was a struggle and I wanted to be elsewhere. It was only when I got home each day that I felt more able to be myself and feel happy. Being at home felt safe.

Three teachers at my school (Mrs Spendley, Mr Riddle, and Mr Binxs) helped me a lot. They picked-up on my anxiety and depression. And they concentrated on what I was good at, rather than the things that I found challenging.

Mrs Spendley gave me after school tuition and Mr Riddle got me into Groundsmanship (sports & amenities), this boosted my confidence as I was working with adults.

### **Being in my own world**

I didn't have any friends to go and play with, so I was just in my own world. I would go off on my own and build camps in the garden, to be with nature. My comfort zone was being with adults.

Dad realised that I had an interest in all things outdoors; trees, birds, animals, nature. During the summer holidays, I used to sit in the truck and watch my dad at work. I was taking it all in and learning lots from those experiences. At a very young age, I could start the tractor, and I watched and learned about how to maintain machines etc. All this practical experience was realistic and real to me, and I could understand it. Making or mending or working in the garden, taking measurements, adding-up money, these were all practical activities that I enjoyed and was good at.

### **A turning point**

One day, I was sitting on the curb on the school premises, when the boy who was the bully in my year came over and sat beside me. This was a shock – as we usually fought like cat and dog! He saw that I was looking at some magazines on garden and farm machinery. He then told me that he too liked working with tractors, lawnmowers, and garden machinery. Due to our shared interests, we formed a connection. He also suffered from dyslexia and found literature very difficult. He had a magazine on chainsaws! And from that day on he became my best buddy, my best friend. We are still friends today; he left school early and is now a qualified Tree Surgeon.

Studying was not for me, and I also left school 2-years early without any formal qualifications. The feeling of being useless and not understood damaged my confidence and even in certain situations now, I can still feel uncomfortable.

### **Struggling with anxiety and depression**

With my anxiety attacks I was unable to eat or sleep and I found it difficult to concentrate on anything. I was advised to have a chat with my GP, and they prescribed antidepressants, which saved my life. I was lucky to have some good people around me. I went to counselling, and that helped to get me back on my feet.

With the help and support of the counsellor, I was able to understand what was going on in my body and mind. I understood how the chemicals in my brain and body had become imbalanced, which is why I needed medical intervention i.e., to help rebalance. Depression is more talked about nowadays and is much better understood.

**Clinical depression** is a mental health issue, a person may feel hopeless and lose interest in things that they used to enjoy. Depression can occur for lots of different reasons. Symptoms can be psychological (e.g., low self-esteem, anxiety), physical (e.g., loss of appetite, insomnia), and social (e.g., avoiding people). People may try to cope with their symptoms because they may not realise that they're unwell. A person should seek help from their GP if they are experiencing symptoms of depression daily for more than two weeks.

### **Establishing a mini business**

Leaving school boosted my self-confidence because the adult world is my safe place.

My dad and I would get his garden machines out and pop around to people's houses to cut their lawns. Working with my dad gave me confidence, as I was working with an adult.

I took on two allotments and grew cut flowers and vegetables. I sold vegetables to shops and flowers were bought by the local florist. I made an income from this and used the money to buy my first car.

During the winter, I helped the local milkman on his rounds, and I also worked on a local farm. I was reliable and hardworking. My parents were a great support, they didn't fully understand what I was going through, but they backed me on my businesses and didn't push education on me.

I was never at home; I was always working on something or for someone. Because I felt comfortable working and being around adults, and being able to deal with different personalities, this helped to develop my skills and boosted my confidence. My anxiety started to dissipate.

Nowadays it's true to say that my anxiety is always with me, but I've now got it under control. I have to avoid burnout. I can recognise the symptoms, and I'm proactive in dealing with those types of situations, so I'm able to keep my anxiety levels under control.

### **My career journey**

When I left school, I worked on the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), which was a government scheme to help youngsters gain employment. The YTS included a day release at college, and although there was no foundation in place for support, it was through the college that I was diagnosed with dyslexia.

I found work as a landscape gardener, groundsman, and I've also worked as a mortuary technician. I have a lot of compassion for people who have lost someone. The hospital where I was working closed, so I worked as a Care Assistant, but because I was unable to study to become a State Registered Nurse (SRN), the job became less about caring for people and more about cleaning.

I've also worked for Age Concern – I'm good with people and customers. And for the last 20-years I've been working for the IMI. When I joined the IMI, it was quite a small organisation, since then it has grown, and my job specification has also evolved over time.

### **What was the greatest moment you have had; something that was a triumph for facing your fears and anxieties?**

About 34 years ago, I passed the Proficiency Test for Flying a Fixed-Wing Aircraft. I had an examiner for the practical test who assessed my ability to fly a model aircraft. I was 'in the zone' when I took the assessment, as I felt so comfortable and confident. Passing this assessment boosted my confidence even more.

### Listening First Aider

In my spare time, I'm a listening first aider. I undertake suicide watch, it's just being there at the end of a phone, so that people know they can call me for help and guidance.

I can connect and understand what the person might be going through, because I know what it's like to be in a bad place. I'm currently a listening first aider for a man who has Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and also another individual who has traumatic anxiety due to money concerns. Sometimes the people who contact me have no other support system in place.

### What are your neurodiverse strengths?

- **Philosophical approach to life.** I have a philosophical approach to different situations, based on the experiences I've picked-up throughout my life.
- **Listening skills.** I'm a good listener and I don't judge.
- **Emotional Intelligence.** I have high emotional intelligence and empathy for the issues that people might be facing.

### Are there any challenges or issues around neurodiversity in the workplace?

- It's about education and knowing how to approach people and different situations.
- Better awareness of neurodiversity in the workplace and mental health awareness. There needs to be compassion and empathy.
- You need to build up safety and trust, so people feel comfortable and able to share their issues and experiences.
- Managers should know about neurodiverse conditions, know how to react, how to manage that person and provide the support they need. This includes knowing which external organisations can provide necessary help, guidance, and support.

### Recommended top priorities/actions for employers?

- 1 Improved education,** so that employers feel confident about following a certain approach.
- 2 Be aware of and know how to deal with neurodiverse conditions.** Accept that you have a duty of care to employees.
- 3 Understand that chemical imbalances can account for changes to mental health,** and as people age, mental health and wellbeing can change.
- 4 Know your staff.** Think about the small changes that you might be able to make in the workplace so that the environment is more inclusive for those with neurodiverse conditions.



# Daksh Gupta (Former CEO Marshall Motor Holdings plc)



## Daksh Gupta

Former CEO Marshall Motor Holdings (MMH) plc and IMI Vice President



### Introduction

Daksh Gupta is the former CEO of Marshall Motor Holdings (MMH) plc. Since his appointment in 2008, Daksh led MMH to be one of the fastest growing companies in the European Automotive Industry, with revenues growing from c£300m to c£4bn. He is hugely proud of the workplace culture that has been firmly established. According to the Great Place to Work Institute, the company was ranked 11th best employer in the UK and has also recently achieved the award of Best Retailer in the industry.

In addition to his extensive experience in the automotive sector, Daksh is the Vice Chairman for the industry charity Ben and is a Fellow of the IMI.

### Here, Daksh shares his own personal experience of neurodiversity in the workplace and the importance of raising awareness.

I was not the most academic at school, probably because I did not apply myself properly. Having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) meant that I needed to find the learning interesting and stimulating, otherwise I wasn't really motivated and had a lack of focus. I didn't really enjoy school because I knew I wanted to run a business.

I loved Maths though, and was passionate about numbers... I still am! Give me a budget review meeting and I know the numbers inside-out.

**ADHD** can cause mental and physical problems that can negatively impact on working relationships and affect productivity of individuals who have this type of neurodiverse condition. For example, ADHD may mean that a person has poor time management, lack of motivation, forgetfulness, fatigue, or restlessness. But the nature of neurodiversity means that people can be affected in very different ways.

### For Daksh though, having ADHD is not a disability, it's more like having a super-power!

Whilst it could be considered as a disability, I see ADHD as a strength. Having ADHD means that if I'm stimulated and interested in what I'm doing, then I am 'hyper-focused'.

It can make you quite intense as a person! I'm typically great at multi-tasking, which can be really helpful in a busy role. Because I'm task and goal-orientated, it's far better if I have written lists to work from, this works well for me. I thrive on life and really enjoy the challenge of learning, work, and working with other people.

However, the downside is the perception from other people's viewpoint might be that I am not focused. But I'm actually able to complete lots of different tasks at the same time. I think people may see me as a workaholic. I find that I can work for long hours and keep focus. For me, having ADHD is not a disability, it's a strength!

### **Are there any challenges or issues around neurodiversity in the workplace?**

Organisations should try to put structures and relevant support in place for people who have neurodiverse conditions. Small adaptations or changes in the workplace can make a big difference. For example, moving a desk area away from a window so that the individual can maintain better focus. It's important to talk about it though! Neurodiverse conditions are not something to be embarrassed or ashamed about.

### **What have been the wins?**

We need meaningful conversations to take place, so that managers can fully understand what changes they can implement to help better support the individual. This will help the person to be more productive and happier in their workplace, and it will help the employer, the organisation, and all stakeholders.

In the automotive industry, and in wider society, the diversity, equity, and inclusion agenda is growing and gaining momentum. Organisations are now looking closely at their own culture and the ways they work and are taking positive steps to become more diverse and inclusive.

### **Recommended top priorities/actions for employers?**

1

**Examine your workplace culture.** What kind of workplace culture do you have? How do you know? Is that what you think as a leader or has this been independently verified e.g., by employee engagement? Do you have a culture where people can genuinely speak their mind without fear of recrimination?

People don't talk about neurodiversity in the workplace. Employers need to be able to have open and meaningful conversations across the workforce, so they know their staff, their individual needs and how best to support them. For this to happen, the culture needs to be one of positivity and trust, where people feel comfortable to be able to talk about it.

2

**Training programmes.** Implement management training to help raise awareness and enable people to identify neurodiverse traits.

3

**Have authentic conversations.** Have open and honest conversations with people and put support structures in place where relevant.

# Sarah Hayward (Sparshatt Academy)



## Introduction

Sarah Hayward is the Academy Support Officer for Sparshatt Academy. Here, Sarah shares her experiences of working with and supporting young people with specific learning disorders (SLD) and other neurodiverse conditions, as well as sharing her own personal experiences of the challenges she has had to face in her own career.

## My career journey

After 20-years working in the control room for Kent Police, I started to suffer with hearing issues and was subsequently diagnosed with deafness. This was before the Equality Act 2010, and I was subsequently deemed unable to work in the control room and in 2005 was constructively dismissed from my post. Having had such a successful career with the Police, suffering discrimination like this caused me extreme anxiety and distress.

I took a temporary role working for M&S in Canterbury. I really enjoyed working with the public and serving customers. Because I could sign, this helped when communicating with customers who had a hearing impairment, and I felt like I was making a difference.

My next career move was to the NHS to do training and at this time my hearing deteriorated rapidly. I had Access to Work support (and through this, access to a personal loop system). However, the managers there had no idea of how to deal with a deaf person. I remember being asked, *'How are your ears today?'* And, *'You don't sound deaf!'* Outlook from senior management was that they were simply not willing to spend the time and/or effort looking into how or what workplace adaptations needed to be made for someone with my impairment. This is the perception they consistently portrayed. My capability was brought into question regarding my ability to answer telephone calls and feeling unsupported, I soon left.

It's disappointing that my personal career journey has been so heavily impacted and negatively affected by the ignorance of others. People seem to make inaccurate assumptions based on how they perceive your disability.

### Move into education

I trained and qualified as an Assessor for Catch22 – a large charity and social business which designs and delivers services that build resilience and aspiration in people of all ages and within communities across the UK. Senior management at Catch22 had learned to do things differently, and things were fine for a while but after being referred to Occupational Health (who were concerned about my migraines and my ability to work from home or drive – despite suffering from these for over 30 years), I took the decision to leave. I really enjoyed working as an Assessor for Catch22 and covered a large area of the country, helping young people who didn't want a traditional academic environment and those who struggled to find routes into work.

I'm now the Academy Support Officer for Sparshatt Academy and have been working for them for about 2 years. The organisational culture at Sparshatt is one of respect and support. There are other members of staff at the Academy who also have impairments and/or specific support needs.

An example of one adaptation in the workplace is that in team meetings, people have to talk on an individual basis, rather than several people talking at once or talking over others. This is a good thing as it forces people to be in the moment and really listen to each individual contribution!

*Disability is a condition; it doesn't define who you are. I'm not being difficult; I'm just asking to be considered.*

### Working with and supporting young people with specific learning disorders, for example dyslexia

Because I'm conscious of my own disability, the approach I take is to always try to get the best out of people. I've completed Dyslexia Awareness training, and that has been helpful in raising awareness and being able to identify individuals who may struggle to learn because they have dyslexia (which has not been diagnosed previously).

**Example 1** to **Example 3** are from real-life situations and experiences in the work environment, however, names have been changed to protect the identity of those involved.

#### Example 1: Kai

We have several apprentices who have specific learning disorders (SLD), for example dyslexia. When Kai joined Sparshatt Academy, his dyslexia was undiagnosed. I noticed that he was struggling to read test questions and he also had issues with fine motor skills.

Some young people will be reluctant to openly talk about the learning issues they face and their support needs. Kai told me that he had to read each test question about four times in order for it to start to sink in. I.e., he would get to the end of the question and then forget what the first part was asking. He also struggled with word recognition, and this made certain text unreadable.

Kai was assessed for SLD, and dyslexia was diagnosed. Kai now knows that his issues were not down to what he perceived as a lack of ability, and that he now has assistance and relevant support in place. For example, this includes having a reader and extra time for tests.

**Example 2: Ellie**

Ellie struggled to read text and tended to miss-out words. We arranged for Ellie to be assessed for specific learning disorders, and she was diagnosed with dyslexia. Since being allocated a reader and having extra time, there's been such a change in Ellie! Her outlook on life is totally different; she now has a really positive 'can do' attitude. I think that having a formal diagnosis and being able to put relevant support in place has given Ellie a renewed self-confidence. If anyone comes into the workshop, you wouldn't see her as an apprentice, you'd see her as a qualified technician.

We like to enable learners to take accountability for their learning and to build-up self-resilience. For example, apprentices are encouraged to proof-read their write-ups for their qualifications, review with an assessor if necessary, and they can then use grammar software as a final check. This learning process and review cycle helps to develop independence in learning and will help them to establish quality processes that can help them in other different situations throughout life.

**Example 3: Faisal**

Faisal is a learner who has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). His condition means that he often has difficulty maintaining focus and concentration and this can be accompanied by hyperactive behaviours. Making small adjustments in the workplace can make such a big difference. For example, undertaking an online test with an invigilator on a one-to-one basis in the learning environment, so no other learners present. Checking and making small adjustments to the surrounding environment, like removing posters, lowering the level of lighting, just small changes like these can remove distractions and this helps Faisal to remain focused on the task.

**Are there any challenges or issues around neurodiversity in the workplace?**

It's a shame that so many young people are going through the education system without having a proper diagnosis. And without a formal diagnostic assessment, their individual support and learning needs cannot be addressed.

It's true that there is extra time, meetings, and paperwork involved in getting the person the right level of support in place, but non-visible conditions and support needs must not be ignored and simply 'passed down the line' for the next person to deal with.

That support need could be for a member of staff or a learner, and it's so important to be able to have a safe working environment where people are able to have those authentic conversations with others to openly discuss their challenges and support needs.

Overcoming people's pre-conceptions and assumptions about neurodiverse conditions is key. People incorrectly assume that there's no help available to support the individual. But help is available! They also assume that making the adjustments that people need are going to be costly, and that's also a myth. Small changes can be relatively cost-free, and there's help available if the necessary adjustments involve expenditure.

### What have been the wins?

If you suspect that a learner has an undiagnosed specific learning disorder or other neurodiverse condition, arrange for them to be formally assessed. Because without that diagnosis, you're powerless to be able to put in place the support that they need.

Seeing learners flourish and gain their qualifications because as part of their journey they have had access to the relevant support is a BIG win!

### Recommended top priorities/actions for employers?

- 1** **Look at the person, not the condition.** Treat every person as an individual. People with neurodiverse conditions will all have very different support needs.
- 2** **Attracting a more diverse workforce.** Don't over-look or mis-judge talent in the workplace. If a person doesn't meet every skill that you're looking for, remember that they may exceed in other areas.
- 3** **Speak to people, know your workforce.** Make sure that relevant adaptations are put in place and people have access to the support that they need to be able to flourish and reach their true potential.



# Andy Kent (Former MD of Andy's Kars Ltd)



## Introduction

Andy Kent, a retired business owner of over 25 years, has specialised in opening doors to employing and facilitating training for people with challenges who would otherwise struggle to gain employment in the automotive sector. Alongside all the services a customer would expect from their local garage, his business specialised in developing and installing bespoke vehicle adaptations for people who would otherwise not be able to drive.

In 2015, Andy received the IMI's Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement. His life story is inspiring and is captured in his biography 'White Light'.

**Here, Andy shares his own personal experience of neurodiversity in the workplace and the importance of giving people the opportunity to talk about their challenges.**

Examples are taken from real-life situations and experiences; however, names have been changed to protect the identity of those involved.

## EXAMPLE 1: People who have experienced trauma

It's important that each individual is able to face their own demons. People with neurodiverse conditions, for example Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), may not exhibit any noticeable visible symptoms or traits. It's only when the person is placed in a certain situation, or when they experience stress, or have a certain trigger (like hearing a loud sound in the garage), that they experience their own challenge. And every challenge is different.

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** is an anxiety-related mental health disorder which a person can develop after experiencing an extremely stressful or frightening event, for example military warfare or a major road traffic accident. PTSD can occur straight after the event and can last for many years. After experiencing a traumatic and distressing event, approximately 1 in 3 people will go on to develop PTSD. It's not clear why some people develop PTSD following trauma and others don't. There may be a genetic link to PTSD and people who have previously suffered from anxiety or depression may be more pre-disposed to developing the condition. Some people experience PTSD immediately following the event, whilst for others the onset is delayed.

### Sharing personal challenges

One of the ways in which we encouraged staff to share their experiences was over tea-breaks; everyone had a break at the same time to allow opportunity for this. We were there to facilitate. Each person had the opportunity to 'open the door' for themselves. Some of our staff experienced PTSD because they were ex-Forces, others because they had experienced other major trauma such as a serious car accident. If a person has lost a limb in a car accident, then the trauma of how a life-changing injury can affect that person later in life is sometimes secondary to their PTSD.

It's important that the person understands how their PTSD can affect them, and this is an individual experience. When they experience pressure or anxiety, is the member of staff going to hide in the back office? Are they prone to losing their temper? Minds work in different ways; we all remember things differently.

We had a member of the team, a young woman called Teresa, who had been involved in a serious car accident. Her boyfriend was driving the car when he lost control of the vehicle and it careered off the road down into a ditch, and a fence post went through the windscreen. Teresa suffered a skull injury for which she needed a titanium plate. The trauma from the accident meant that she suffered memory issues, and she had a severe lack of confidence in believing in her own abilities.

To assist with her memory issues, Teresa had a volunteer helper in the garage. They shadowed her when completing tasks, and over time Teresa remembered more things independently, so the additional support was no longer needed. Her ability to remember everyday things, like what needed to be bought from the shop or working with money, also improved greatly – we found that writing lists certainly helped her with this. Over time, Teresa was slowly able to re-train her memory, and this really boosted her level of self-confidence. After a 6-month trial, it was fantastic to see how much she was doing for herself and how much more she could do.

Following vehicle repairs she accompanied a member of staff on a test drive, and this proved too much though. Going at speed on the motorway caused flashbacks, and she didn't have the coping mechanisms to be able to deal with her emotional response. That was a prime example of a specific situation that was a trigger for her PTSD. Teresa understood what she needed to work on, and with the help of her medical professional support team (physiotherapist and occupational therapist) she was able to develop coping strategies.

We offered Teresa a further 6-week trial – she really wanted to work in the automotive industry. She now has a full-time job working in the automotive sector as a service advisor for a main dealership.

### EXAMPLE 2: Anxiety

Anxiety is a hidden disability/challenge that is faced by 90% of people at some time in their lives. For me, it is another challenge I personally experience daily for many different reasons.

At the age of 18, I was given just two years to live, I'm now in my mid-sixties. During this time, I have lived everyday as if it was my last. I never planned for more than a week or so in advance due to the anxiety those words meant and because at the age of 24 my wife was told I would be nothing more than a vegetable because of a life changing incident. This is just a small snippet of what and why anxiety is life-changing.

The number of times I've asked myself why I was the one who survived a life limiting episode not once but four times, or, 'Have I done right by all concerned?'... because I sometimes cannot



hear the full conversation. This is because I found out only recently that I am almost deaf in my right ear. I had been compensating for this without even realising myself! These are two examples of anxiety that happen without others even being aware of it.

The effects of anxiety can be mild from just asking yourself the question to a full breakdown, where you have to find somewhere to hide away and cry. It can last for a moment to several days.

Anxiety can and does affect everything you do, to the point that your reaction is seen by others as your 'normal behaviour,' when you know and feel that you can be much better. (If only you could find someone who would understand and listen to you, someone you can trust who you can talk to and who will not judge you). It can become a vicious circle to a point of no return sadly. Thankfully, I'm still here and able to pass on my experiences.

My experiences are not unique but can be seen in most workplaces. You don't need to be an expert to just take time to listen without judgement.

Should you see a fellow work colleague sitting with their head in their hands, don't ask the question, "*Late night?*" Maybe change it to, "*Is there anything I can help with?*" Or, "*Would you like to talk it through?*" So simple when it's said like this but can mean so much more to both parties.

However, you must listen to them and not tell them the answer – as they must find it with your help. It is not your place to find it. If you feel it is over your head, do not tell them that, instead suggest and signpost them to the right place, and do not forget to follow-up with them to show true interest. You will get more from your staff and yourself if you truly support and understand your team.

### **Are there any challenges or issues around neurodiversity in the workplace?**

The reason I didn't remain working in dealerships was that the approach back then was very much one of 'employ, target, dismiss'. I set my business up in the right way as I saw it... You can give everybody the chance to prove themselves. It was about being profitable enough to sustain the next year – and my business sustained that approach for over 20-years, helping over 600 students.

We had an 'open door' approach, which meant the environment and culture was one of trust and support. It's a case of giving the facility for staff to talk about their challenges. This is where 360° feedback comes in and supports well; people may be more comfortable talking to their peers or subordinates, rather than to their boss.

A boss may see a person's challenges as a weakness, but challenges are not weaknesses, they can be used as strengths. It's important to be aware that people with neurodiverse conditions have a different way of thinking, a different way of seeing the world around them. And you need to be aware of that and need to be able to react in a different way.

When it comes to managing those with neurodiverse conditions, there's a 50/50 responsibility on the employer and the employee. The company should be giving the manager the tools to assist the employee in the work environment, and the employee needs to share relevant information with their manager so they can react and offer the necessary support. It's about recognising people's strengths and then being able to offer the tools to help each other. You can't force someone to take their condition onboard. The condition must have ownership.

### What have been the wins?

- Establishing a workplace culture which instils safety and trust, so people feel able to share their challenges.
- Initial identification of neurodiverse conditions; with acknowledgement on both sides. I.e., the individual acknowledging the fact that they have a challenge, and acknowledgement by the business about what support the person needs to be able to thrive in the work environment.
- Thinking outside the box. Recognising that each individual will have different support needs, even if their condition has the same name.
- Identifying the strengths and skills that everyone brings to the workplace and employ for the benefit of the business.
- Training and development for staff to raise awareness and give equal opportunities to all in the workplace.

### Recommended top priorities/actions for employers?

- 1 Take ownership.** Take ownership of the fact that identification of the condition (and individual support requirements) is needed. Invite two-way communication rather than dictation.
- 2 Have an open-door policy.** Let staff and customers know that you have an open-door policy to all suggestions and challenges.
- 3 Establish a culture of belief.** For people with specific challenges, the business has got to instil a culture of belief. Belief that the employee can do it, rather than thinking that they can't. And show that belief to them. Change the terminology to encourage better performance. Instead of pin-pointing targets (which can be missed), set goals i.e., wider objectives that can be achieved.

# Andy Turbiefeld (Halfords Autocentres)



Andy Turbiefeld has worked in a variety of different roles at Halfords Autocentres, including in operations, training, learning and development, and centre management. Andy is currently Head of Quality at Halfords Autocentres.

In 2017, Andy won the IMI Award for Contribution to Automotive. He has also recently completed a Masters in Senior Leadership, via an Apprenticeship at Loughborough University (through the School of Business and Economics). The apprenticeship was effectively built into his job role, enabling Andy to draw on work-based projects, which contributed to the evidence required to meet the standard.

**Here, Andy highlights the importance of being able to offer people different methods and innovative ways to access learning, and provides examples of simple adjustments that can be made in the work environment to support people who have neurodiverse conditions.**

## Introduction

I was born with a mechanical background. My father ran a village garage, and his father before him; the garage had been in our family since the 1920s. Growing-up, I really enjoyed working in the garage alongside my father and grandfather. But I didn't see running the garage as a future career route. I left and went to college, where I studied Engineering. In 1993, I joined Halfords as a car mechanic. Since then, I've worked in a variety of roles, including operations and compliance. In 2014, I moved into the People Team leading our Learning and Development department. This opened-up my eyes to exploring new and innovative training opportunities for the company and implementing more diverse training methods to better reflect our diverse community of people. In 2016, and with the support of the IMI, I developed our technician's training programme and a year later, established four training academies across the UK. Since 2019, my focus has turned to my current role as Head of Quality in ensuring that Halfords delivers the highest standards of quality that our customers expect.

***Andy is an advocate of Virtual Reality (VR) training programmes which can remove barriers to learning, enabling access for all.***

## How did you first get involved with the charity First Step Trust (FST)?

About 5 or 6 years ago, Steve Nash (CEO, IMI) visited our Support Centre in Redditch Worcestershire and suggested that I make contact with Ronnie Wilson (CEO, FST).

In the following years, Halfords Autocentres supported FST with training. We had a training team and the materials. Ronnie was working with individuals who couldn't find a route into education, and over time we were finally able to offer one of Ronnie's learners, a young man called Lio, employment at one of our Autocentres in Woolwich. This was an innovative and unique collaboration, and followed Lio's participation of the First Step Trust 10-Module Learning Programme. Working with Ronnie's learners gave us great insight around what adaptations or adjustments we might need to make to provide access to learning.

When I worked in Learning and Development, we explored ways in which we could remove barriers to allow learners improved access to the training environment. For example, our online training now includes links to gamification. Removing barriers gives the person the confidence to have a go and access the learning, without any pressure and without fear of ridicule.

So, for example, when the person is changing a tyre, replacing it with a new one and re-balancing the wheel, they are working with the tools and experiencing the sounds that will be heard in the garage, which helps overcome fear and gives self-confidence. The virtual learning environment translates directly to the garage in Woolwich.

We maintain strong focus on keeping in touch with advances in technology through effective communication with industry experts and a whole host of sector-based industry panels.

### **A lack of diversity in the automotive sector**

Vehicle technology is changing at such a rate, and the sector isn't attracting enough young people, so we're struggling on skills, which is a major concern. There's still a perception of what working in automotive will be like, and it's not accurate, the industry is making changes!

Young people see Phil Mitchell in Eastenders, all grubby and working in a stereotypical image of what a garage used to be like 20-years ago. That perception of working in automotive can be a 'blocker'... it's not seen as an attractive career option! Our communities are telling us that the industry is very much male-orientated and for those of a particular age group. But things are changing on that front.

We need to find a way of opening-up automotive as a viable career route for young people and make sure their parents are well-informed too. We need to find more diverse ways of attracting young people to the workforce. And we need a better reflection of the community that it serves. That means offering opportunities to people with physical disabilities and those with non-visible disabilities i.e., people with neurodiverse conditions, for example.

### **Working with neurodivergent individuals: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

We have a car mechanic who has ASD. Because of his disorder, it's essential that every day, they are given information about exactly what jobs they will be working on and what their responsibilities will be. There can be no changes to this. Any changes to the daily plan or routine means that they will get emotionally very upset. They don't deal well with change.

So, we always follow a strict protocol. Every day they are informed of what tasks are booked in; they are clear about exactly what they need to do and are left to get on with completing those tasks. (Any impromptu walk-ins are given to other colleagues in the team).

This colleague's attention to detail is second to none, and because of this, the centre needs to make allowance for additional time that may be required for task completion. As such, to help them manage their autism and challenges, it's very much a collaborative team approach that's required.

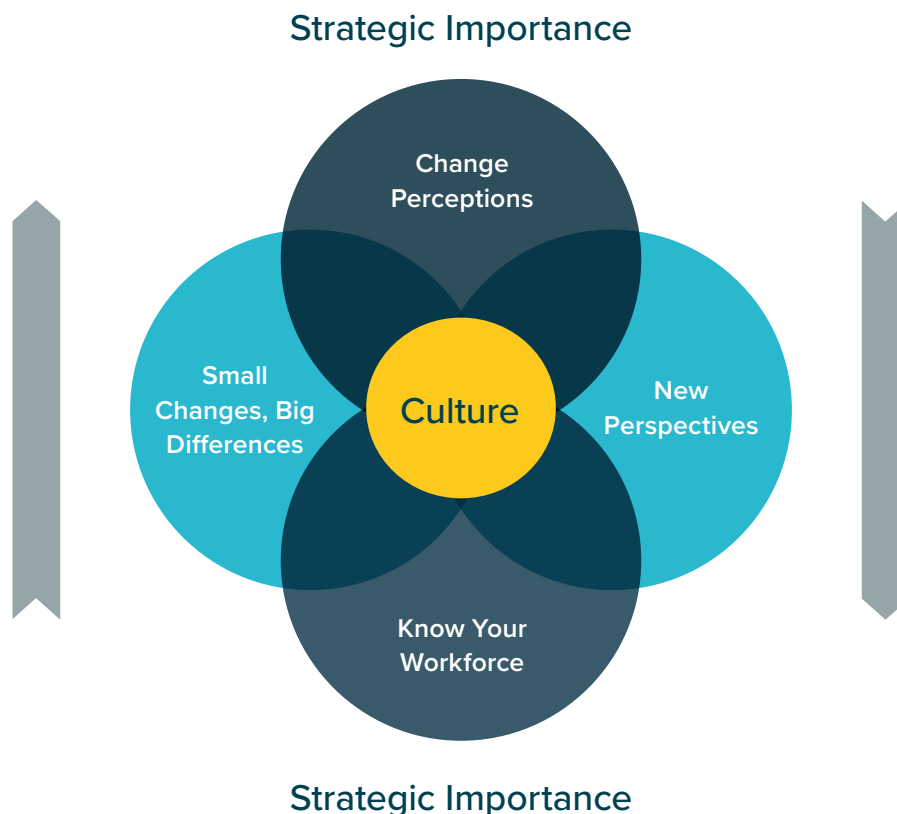
The Centre Manager, Front of House, Regional Manager and Support Manager, are fully aware that adjustments need to be in place. And other colleagues working in this colleague's team also need to make small adjustments themselves to help accommodate their working preferences and work routine.

**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people think and experience the world around them. I.e., how they communicate, behave, interact with others, and learn. Scientists think that both environment and genetics can play a role in ASD. The word 'spectrum' highlights that autism is experienced in different ways by different people.

### Working with neurodivergent individuals: Specific Learning Disorder (Dyslexia)

During our work with Ronnie and FST, we have supported Ronnie's learners in attending our training sessions. One of Ronnie's students who passed the MOT Qualification, suffered from Dyslexia which we did not know at the time. A lot of our PowerPoint slides, which we use as a teaching aid, had different coloured text. Ronnie's learner brought to our attention that due to the different colours, they found the text on the slides difficult to read.

As a result of this, we changed all our training materials. PowerPoint presentations now have the same format i.e., black text on a white background. It also transpires that some of our colleagues also have dyslexia, and this change has helped them too. Without Ronnie's learner stepping forward and highlighting the issue we wouldn't have made these important changes.



### What are the challenges and issues around neurodiversity in the workplace?


The challenge is having the guts to deal with it. It's so easy to say that there's not enough time to make necessary adjustments and support that individual etc.

It's also about the organisational culture i.e., opening your eyes to your own working environment and finding ways to encourage more diverse talent to join the industry.

Changing organisational culture takes time though, it doesn't happen overnight. Organisations can make a positive start by changing lots of little things over time. There needs to be buy-in from senior leaders. Culture is behaviour multiplied by time. To build trust and confidence with your customer base, you must first do so with your own colleagues.

### Recommended top priorities/actions for employers?

- 1 Representing the community.** Having an organisation that represents the community that it serves is fundamental to success. Diversity and inclusion need to be embedded.
- 2 Leadership model.** Having a leadership model that believes and engages with a diverse and inclusive business strategy, and this is seen by your workforce. Working with people who have neurodiverse conditions helps to create an environment for this to happen. There needs to be collaboration, you can't do it on your own. Where necessary, bring in other experts, organisations, professional bodies.
- 3 Adaptation and support.** Being able to adapt and put processes and support in place for neurodivergent colleagues. People need to feel integrated in the work environment. Providing help and support stops people feeling excluded, it makes them feel included.



Having an organisation  
that represents the  
community that it  
serves is fundamental  
to success

# Ronnie Wilson MBE (First Step Trust)



## Introduction

Ronnie Wilson is the Chief Executive of First Step Trust (FST) and the pioneer behind introducing an innovative virtual reality (VR) learning environment for people with problems and other disadvantages.

The FST SMaRT Pathways® model and industry-friendly framework for learning is a powerful tool. It has the potential to remove barriers to learning, enabling access for all, and has been designed with productivity in mind.

**Here, Ronnie shares his lived experiences and successes from the VR programmes that have been developed, the positive impact that being able to access learning in this way has had on users, and First Step Trust plans for future roll-out and further development.**

## My career journey

Growing-up was tough, I came from a deprived background and circumstances were difficult. I left school early with no qualifications and ended up taking a variety of different jobs from being a milkman, and a coalman, to working on a building site, then an apprentice butcher. When I was 19, I took a job at ICI, and this was a turning point in my life. Within a couple of years, I was elected as a shop steward for the Transport and General Workers Union and then as the Deputy Convener at the factory. I'd always wanted to be a mechanic, but I was behind with reading, writing, and maths. Being a union rep forced me to improve in these areas as I had to write reports and so on. In 1982, I got the chance to go to Ruskin College where I completed a 2-year Diploma in Social Studies, and then went onto study Industrial Relations at the University of Kent.

Under Margaret Thatcher, institutionalised care for people with severe and enduring mental health problems and a range of other disabilities for example, learning disabilities, was starting to be phased out and asylums were closing. The responsibility for care was shifting instead towards Care in the Community – a 'community-based approach'.

First Step Trust was established in 1994. The charity provides opportunities for people with severe mental and enduring health problems and other disadvantages. FST use virtual reality programmes to help people learn marketable skills in a virtual garage using the range of equipment found in most garages. Trainees are offered the opportunity to do a work placement at our garage in Woolwich SE18 to further develop their confidence and to learn skills in a range of tasks.

The innovative learning environment and creative approach to learning helps people to overcome some of the symptoms that affect employability. I.e., technology is used to overcome the impact of symptoms on their learning.

Users may have a range of different conditions including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Trauma-related issues, Anxiety/Depression, and Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) for example, dyslexia. A significant number of people accessing FST experience difficulty with literacy/numeracy, anxiety and other issues that make it difficult to get a job.

### **Did you know?**

- 40% of the FST workforce left school with no formal qualifications
- More than 95% of the FST workforce have been unemployed for 1 or more years, 50% have been unemployed for up to 10-years, and 17% have never worked.

In society today, the perception still exists that people with mental illnesses are scary and/or dangerous individuals. These are unreasonable prejudices and fail to recognise that mental ill health and other conditions can affect anyone. FST does not offer clinical services e.g., therapy or counselling. Our approach is about supporting and enabling people to improve their quality of life by helping them develop marketable skills and competence. Our relationship with the people we want to support is based on good employment practice so that they know how to handle the pressures and responsibilities of working life when they move on to open employment.

### **Removing barriers to learning**

SMaRT Pathways® uses existing technology in a practical way. A range of media is used, including the internet, videos, on-the-job training, and one-to-one support supplemented by a virtual garage where skills, knowledge, and competence can be assessed without the need for written examinations.

People quite literally gasp when they put on the headset and step into the VR world for the first time! If a person lacks confidence and/or has anxiety issues, these are overcome as they become immersed in the virtual world and engage in the process e.g., changing a tyre.

### **How the virtual garage works in practice**

Our key aim was to keep the overall design simple! Users wearing VR headsets are able to enter the virtual garage using two-hand controllers to move around. They can pick-up tools, operate equipment e.g., vehicle lifts, use spanners, set torque wrenches etc. whilst doing basic garage tasks. Virtual environments are safe and allow people to use expensive tools and equipment without causing damage to themselves or others. SMaRT Pathways® also provide new ways for employers to improve productivity.

Using technology such as VR enables individuals to overcome their access issues, engage with the learning, and demonstrate their skills. This is a first for the automotive sector, and FST's plan is to extend the reach to the catering sector and the construction sector to allow other people to benefit from access to learning. The technology can also lend itself to training people where English is not their first language.

### **Our FST Virtual Reality: Opening Doors**

We're helping people to overcome their mental health issues and other learning disabilities to gain the skills, confidence, and knowledge they need to get paid employment. By accessing the VR learning environment, we find that users are less anxious and fearful of the learning, which improves productivity. There's no pressure, they can pick up tools in a safe environment. So, our approach helps to establish equity for those with hidden (neurodiverse) conditions as well as those with visible disabilities.



## **Virtual Reality is the future of learning and FST is developing three VR programmes:**

### **1. Our Virtual Garage®**

Helps people to learn the steps involved in removing a used or damaged tyre then replacing it with a new one and re-balancing the wheel so it is ready to go back onto the vehicle.

The Virtual Garage is an accurate copy of FST's garage in Woolwich. Anyone completing the VR programme will come to the garage to practise their skills using the appropriate tools and equipment.

### **2. Our Virtual Kitchen®**

Our Virtual Kitchen will help people to build-up the skills and knowledge needed to be able to gain a Level 2 Food Safety in Catering certificate.

The Virtual Kitchen mimics the kitchen used at Abbevilles – our restaurant in Clapham.

### **3. First Step Trust – Virtual Construction Site®**

FST's Virtual Construction Site has been designed to help learners know about the dangers of working on any building site. The programme helps people to identify hazards such as slips, trips, and falls, what protective equipment to wear and when. Learners also have the chance to drive and operate an excavator.

## **What are the challenges or issues around neurodiversity in the workplace?**

The challenge is being able to remove barriers and allow people to engage with the VR learning environment. All you need is the headset, and the VR programme will do the rest. You don't need to be able to read or write as you are not required to take any kind of test. Our aim is to eliminate as many barriers as possible so that access remains open to anyone.

Where individuals have learning difficulties and where they have challenges such as getting to a classroom or issues with learning in specific situations or environments, the use of virtual reality can help to overcome these barriers and provide the first steps to help engage learners and give them access to learning.

## **What have been the wins?**

My whole ambition has been to take away the fear of learning. FST is based on my own experiences; what has stopped me from learning in the past and how can we accommodate this? For our users, issues with literacy and numeracy tend to be secondary to the fear of learning itself.

We've overcome barriers to allow neurodivergent individuals access to an engaging, relatable learning environment and experience; that's a success story! All the information is accessed via the VR headset.

Our innovative approach embeds knowledge and brings learning to life in the work environment. We remove barriers to learning because we can offer users a variety of different ways to access the learning.

Our programme has proved to be a positive gateway for those progressing onto a work trial, work placement, or onto an employment opportunity.

FST helps people overcome issues that arise as a result of the impact mental ill health and other disadvantages have on self-confidence, self-esteem, hopes and ambition. Most of us experience these issues at some point but not to the extent that we are unable to get on with our lives.

One of the most interesting aspects of SMaRT Pathways® has been the extent to which people with ‘hidden disabilities’ e.g., dyslexia, respond to virtual reality training. We recognised this from the very outset when we did some work with the IMI, Halfords Autocentres, and others during the prototyping phase.

### **Example 1: The use of virtual reality to transform the learning experience for individuals with mental health conditions.**

- Patsy Fung: Joint Clinical Lead
- South London Mental Health & Community Partnership
- South London Partnership (SLP) Assertive Rehabilitation Pathway

Our Virtual Garage training was offered to service users in the assertive rehabilitation pathway whose length of stay extended beyond 2-years in a secure setting.

A six-month pilot was rolled out across three South London partnership sites which provide a range of specialist mental health services; River House; Shaftesbury Clinic; and Bracton Centre. In addition to this, the pilot also included a small number of service users from the assertive rehabilitation pathway who were from the independent sector – Cygnet Black Heath and Battersea Bridge House.

The plan was to engage with 15 service users across the five sites.

Over the course of 10 weeks, the pilot engaged with 43 service users, (across three sites), as well as training 36 staff in this innovative new way of working.

*“This new way of accessing learning was so well received by users – we had people queuing-up to attend training! This is impressive, particularly with this population who have had the longest length of stay and been in institutions for a number of years, often disengaging in their therapeutic programmes because they've lost that sense of hope. This new way of working provides a sense of hope and opportunity for the hardest to reach and the most difficult to engage service user population in the forensic mental health services programme, for people aged 18 to 65 years.”*

Patsy Fung (Joint Clinical Lead)

### **Example 2: Lio's story**

Lio joined First Step Trust (FST) in February 2022 after being referred to us by his support worker. When he came to us, Lio had been through a difficult couple of years following a traumatic personal event just before the pandemic. This affected his self-confidence and his final years of education.

Lio had a strong interest in becoming a mechanic and spent some time on FST's Virtual Garage where he had removed and replaced a tyre, before rebalancing the wheel ready to go back onto the vehicle. He proved to be an enthusiastic learner despite a severe lack of confidence with literacy and numeracy. Within a few weeks of joining FST's SMaRT Garage in Woolwich, Lio had overcome his initial difficulties and was thriving.



Lio was enrolled onto FST's 10-Module Training Programme, which is flexible and person-centred so is suitable for anyone with a SLD e.g., dyslexia. Lio thrived in this situation and within a few weeks was thinking about his future options. FST has a strong relationship with Halfords Autocentres and by the end of May, Lio felt confident enough to accept an offer of a work placement at a Halfords Autocentre, initially doing 1-day a week, which then increased to 3-days a week.

The Halfords Autocentre Manager and Lio's mentor were very impressed with his skills and depth of knowledge across a number of areas in the workshop, and Lio quickly became a valued member of their team.

In June 2022, Lio was offered a full-time position at Halfords. This example demonstrates that people can overcome disadvantage and can thrive in the work environment when they are given a fair opportunity to do so.

Lio's experience has also helped FST and Halfords Autocentre better understand how the 10-Module Training Programme can be developed to make it easier for Halfords and other employers to tap into a new source of potential recruits.

### What next for FST?

There are so many possibilities for the future, for example, using VR in different training settings and sectors, users being able to link virtually with other learners, all accessed via the headset. Once a person understands how to set-up the headset then it's possible to train others to learn.

We would like to work with the IMI to gain recognition for our 10-Module Training Programme, which is designed to equip disadvantaged learners with the skills, confidence, and competencies across a range of workshop skills, giving them a fair chance to gain employment. And then link this to the VR programme, so that the workbook can be accessed with the VR headset. The training could be rolled out anywhere in the world. There's huge potential... the scope is massive!

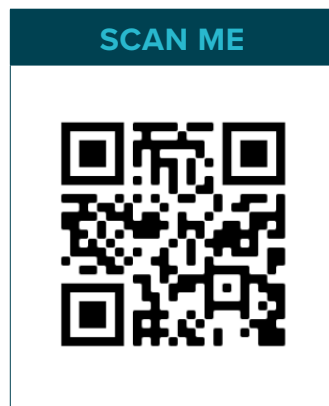


### Recommended top priorities/actions for employers?

- 1** **Recognise that the person with neurodiverse conditions could be you, or your son, or your daughter, or another loved one.** Everyone deserves to have access to opportunities in life and you can be the person to give that person an opportunity and open that door. In my life, I've had people who have been there at the right time to help point me in the right direction. How can you give entry points which will open doors for people and allow them to develop?
- 2** **Making reasonable adjustments.** Balance support and delivery with productivity. Reasonable adjustments don't have to cost a fortune, but they can make a big difference. Employers often overlook disabled and disadvantaged people. This is a big mistake as the evidence shows that people from this background appreciate and value the opportunity to work. With a bit of support and (possibly) some minor adjustments to the way jobs are done, great things can be achieved.
- 3** **Speculate to accumulate.** If a person expresses an interest, why not give them a chance? If possible, why not offer that person a work trial? Or how about providing a garage 'open hour' every month, so that introductions can be made? This can potentially lead onto a valuable learning experience, which benefits both the learner and the employer.

*First Step Trust – “Our learning pathways treat every individual with respect enabling independence and dignity.”*

Want to find out more?



# SECTION 3

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## Managing Neurodiversity in the Workplace

# Guidance on adjustments to support neurodivergent individuals

There are three key stages in managing neurodiversity in the workplace. The first stage is being aware of neurodivergence and how neurological differences can affect individuals in the work environment i.e., Do you know your workforce? The second stage is ensuring psychological safety, so that people feel able to share their experiences, challenges, and their individual support needs. And the third stage is being willing and flexible to accommodate their support needs and to make reasonable adjustments. In addition to accommodating differences, it is also important to recognise and build-on a person's strengths, talents, and preferences, without unduly challenging their weaknesses.

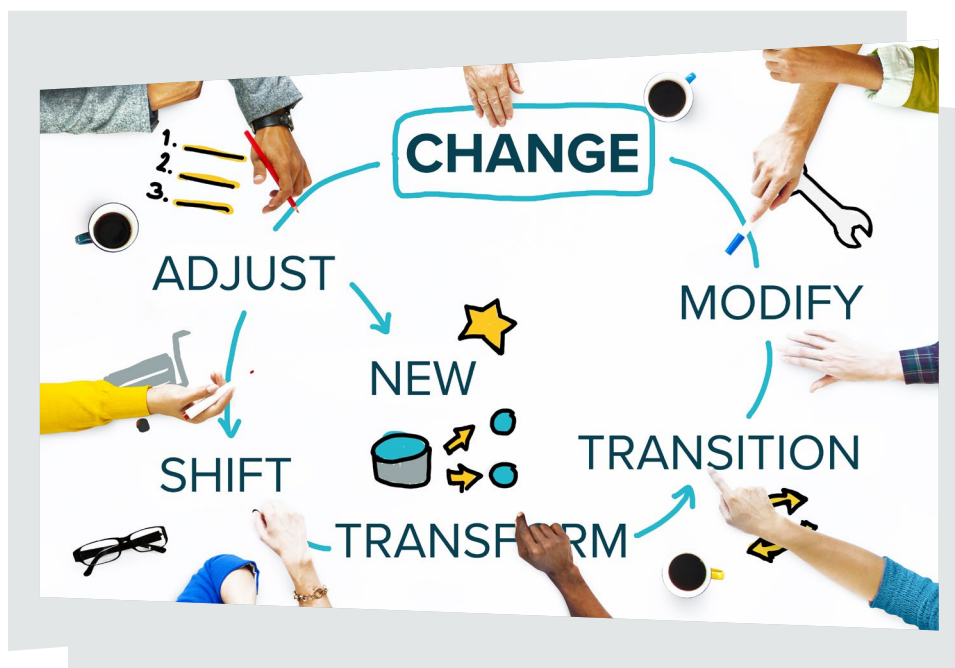
The following workplace adjustments and accommodations may be useful for people across the workforce, but in particular, for individuals who are neurodivergent. Any workplace adjustments should be discussed and agreed with the individual before implementation, and regular reviews should then be carried out.

Some people in the work environment may have similar challenges to those experienced by neurodivergent individuals, but they may not have a formal diagnosis in place, however, they may still find these suggested approaches beneficial. It is always important to be person-centric or person-led. What do they prefer? What do they need?

This section outlines some of the most common workplace adjustments, which together with the [11 STEPS to Create a Neurodiverse Inclusive Environment](#), should provide a good starting point for your discussions.

## Workplace adjustments will cover:

- Environmental adjustments
- Sensory adjustments
- Distraction items
- Work environment
- Communication adjustments
- Meetings
- Planning, prioritising, and organising
- Flexible support.



### **Environmental adjustments**

Neurodivergent individuals may require a range of different environmental adjustments to meet their needs. Examples include:

- Decluttering walls, corridors, and noticeboards.
- Considering the colour of rooms.
- Consistent layout of office furniture.
- Lowering lighting levels.
- Providing desk lamps or access to natural light.
- Introducing a quiet area or quiet space within the work environment.

### **Sensory adjustments**

Neurodivergent individuals may require sensory adjustments to lower stimulus and therefore reduce their stress and anxiety levels in the work environment. Examples include enabling individuals access to:

- Tinted glasses and eye masks to reduce brightness.
- Noise cancelling headphones, ear defenders, or earplugs.
- Alternative food options.
- Clothing without seams or labels.
- Providing fidget items or pens and paper for doodling.
- Adjust brightness and contrast controls on monitors. Reduce visual stress by introducing coloured filters or being able to change background colours and font.

### **Distraction items**

Examples include enabling individuals access to:

- Stress balls or small foam 'squeeze' footballs/equivalent items.
- Fidget items such as cubes and tangles.
- Distraction packs including puzzles, crosswords, doodle-pads.

**Reduce visual stress by introducing coloured filters or being able to change background colours and font**

## Work environment

Working in a busy open plan office environment can be challenging for neurodivergent individuals. Here are some workplace adjustments that can make life easier:

- Adapting working hours i.e., allowing additional breaks, or allowing people to travel to/from work at quieter times.
- Locating a desk away from the main flow/walk through of people in the office.
- Using desk dividers.
- Using different ways for people to let other colleagues know whether it is a good time to approach them in the office. For example, displaying colour-coded wooden blocks on their desk. (Red – Signalling to other colleagues that they are engrossed in a particular work task and so it's not a good time to approach); (Yellow – You may approach, but questions/conversation will need to be direct and concise); (Green – Signalling that it's a good opportunity for conversations and discussions to take place).
- Allowing home-working or hybrid-working arrangements.
- Avoid hot desking (which can cause anxiety and confusion). Keep the office environment consistent.
- Placing a desk away from windows (or near a window), depending on whether the individual finds this is a distraction or not.

## Communication adjustments

There are many ways in which communication can be adapted to benefit people with neurological differences. These include:

- Walking people through scenarios using a step-by-step approach.
- Providing clear explanations with no jargon.
- Finding out about people's thinking styles and preferred communication styles.
- Finding out about people's barriers and challenges.
- Finding out about people's talents and strengths.
- Offering explanations verbally rather than in written form (or vice versa, depending on preferences). Also, consider using pictorial representation to support instructions etc.
- Increasing time allowances for reading written work and providing materials in advance of meetings.
- Undertaking checks to see if the person has understood the task/activity/project requirements.
- Using bullet points to inform, rather than lengthy paragraphs of text.
- Making sure there is sufficient time for the person to process information and to ask any questions.
- Providing magnifiers, coloured overlays, and reading rulers.
- Providing procedures in different formats for inclusivity and accessibility.
- Providing templates for written work/projects etc.
- Providing screen filters and screen-reading technology. Encouraging use of spell-checking, proof reading, and text-to-speech software to support reading and writing.
- Ensuring materials or support aids are in a dyslexia-friendly format. A Style Guide is available from the British Dyslexia Association (BDA). Please refer to [Section 5: Further Support and Resources](#).



## Meetings

Group meetings can be particularly uncomfortable for neurodivergent employees and can cause stress and anxiety. So, you might consider:

- Providing clear advance communication about the purpose of the meeting.
- Providing the meeting agenda in advance together with any materials, so people have opportunity to read these and digest them. As far as possible, adhere to the agenda.
- Providing fidget items/doodling materials.
- Not putting people directly on the spot or asking them to contribute in the meeting without fair warning.
- Establishing a buddy system for neurodivergent individuals, and carefully consider seating arrangements. This is particularly important if the meeting is a larger event or conference. Placing people next to exit points might be preferable but check with each person what arrangements they would like.
- What additional information you might need to provide for effectively managing remote online meetings. For example, the use of digital/virtual hands, use of the chat function, and how to manage these to best effect enabling everyone to contribute.
- Identifying other ways in which neurodivergent individuals can contribute to group discussions and decision-making. Often, their voices go unheard in large group discussions.
- Enabling people to turn their cameras off when participating in remote online meetings.
- Providing sufficient breaks during meetings.

## Planning, prioritising and organising

Neurodivergent and neurotypical people can experience a range of challenges when planning and organising their own workload. To support people with this, you may consider the following:



**Flexible support**

Neurodivergent individuals may also benefit from flexible support in the workplace, such as:

- Respecting their personal space and work routines.
- Allowing more time to explain things and for information to be processed.
- Scheduling regular one-to-one meetings, which are longer in duration.
- Adhering to regular routines, i.e., try to avoid any last-minute changes to plans as this can cause people undue stress and anxiety.
- Keeping the work environment consistent i.e., room layout etc.
- Providing people with advance warning about any proposed changes to routine work plans or conditions.



# SECTION 4

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## Best Practice Ideas

# Top tips for employers

In the automotive retail sector, and in wider society, the equity, diversity, and inclusion agenda continues to grow and evolve, gaining momentum. Organisations and businesses are now looking closely at their own culture and the ways in which they work and are taking positive steps to become more diverse and inclusive.

We need to find a way of opening-up automotive as a viable career route for young people and to find more diverse ways of attracting different people to the workforce. We also need the sector to better reflect the community that it serves. And that means offering opportunities to people with visible disabilities and those with non-visible disabilities i.e., people with neurodiverse differences, for example.

Gathered through shared experiences of those directly working in the sector, here are your best practice ideas and top tips for creating and supporting a neurodiverse-friendly inclusive work environment.

## What you've told us about...

### **The importance of psychological safety in the workplace and having meaningful conversations**

- Create a safe space for neurodivergent colleagues. What changes can be made to be a better colleague or manager? How best can people work together? What would help that person flourish in the workplace?
- We need meaningful conversations to take place, so that managers can fully understand what changes they can implement to help better support the individual. This will help the person to be more productive and happier in their workplace, and it will help the employer, the organisation, and all stakeholders.
- Be aware that some people may choose to mask or hide their condition, particularly if they don't feel psychologically safe or comfortable bringing it to the attention of others in the workplace.
- It's a start to just get people to be able to talk about their neurodiverse differences, this will get other people interested, and this will lead to improved understanding. However, people are not willing to take the risk. They are probably wondering, will talking about it affect my career? Will opening-up about my condition negatively impact on wanting to progress my career? Establishing psychological safety in the workplace is key here.
- People may believe that being given a 'label' (i.e., a diagnosis), is a hinderance. But it's not a hinderance; having a label can be helpful! We need to be able to talk openly about our challenges and our support needs. Let's be open and honest about it.
- You need to build up safety and trust, so people feel comfortable and able to share their issues and experiences. Have open and honest conversations with people and put support structures in place where relevant.
- It's so important to be able to have a safe working environment where people are able to have those authentic conversations with others to openly discuss their challenges and support needs. Take ownership of the fact that identification of the condition (and individual support requirements) is needed. Invite two-way communication rather than dictation.

## What you've told us about...

### Examining workplace culture

- Consider your organisational culture i.e., open your eyes to your own work environment and find ways to encourage more diverse talent to join the industry.
- What kind of workplace culture do you have? How do you know? Is that what you think as a leader or has this been independently verified e.g., by employee engagement? Do you have a culture where people can genuinely speak their mind without fear of recrimination?
- Establish a workplace culture which instils safety and trust, so people feel able to share their challenges.
- Changing organisational culture takes time though, it doesn't happen overnight.
- Let staff and customers know that you have an open-door policy to all suggestions and challenges.
- Organisations can make a positive start by changing lots of little things over-time. There needs to be buy-in from senior leaders. Culture is behaviour multiplied by time. To build trust and confidence with your customer base, you must first do so with your own colleagues.
- People don't talk about neurodiversity in the workplace. Employers need to be able to have open and meaningful conversations across the workforce, so they know their staff, their individual needs and how best to support them. For this to happen, the culture needs to be one of positivity and trust, where people feel comfortable to be able to talk about it.

### Managing neurodivergent individuals

- So, how to manage people with invisible disabilities? Sit down and risk assess together (from a neurodivergent perspective). What works? What doesn't work? Talk it through with the individual and show understanding about that. Some people may not yet have sorted out their coping strategies. What are the triggers? View these as challenges to be overcome, rather than time-consuming 'problems'.
- Treat everyone as individuals. Don't try to treat people as a tick box exercise. You can read-up about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Bipolar disorder, or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), but it won't prepare you for the person.
- It is important for employers not to fall into the trap of thinking that taking on a person with neurodiverse conditions will be a pain. We don't need labels. We're all different and we all have different support needs.
- Have sensitivity when managing people who have neurodiverse conditions. Make changes and allowances in the work environment in a sympathetic manner. Remember to retain confidentiality and levels of sensitivity when having these conversations.
- The company should be giving the manager the tools to assist the employee in the work environment, and the employee needs to share relevant information with their manager so they can react and offer the necessary support. It's about recognising people's strengths and then being able to offer the tools to help each other. You can't force someone to take their condition onboard. The condition must have ownership.

## What you've told us about...

### Seeking help and support

- Neurodiverse conditions or neurological differences can manifest in different ways for different people. We can't all have extensive knowledge of everything. Ask others for help and support.
- Hold two-way problem-solving discussions (between manager and individual). Conversations should be open and honest. Risk assess to ascertain the individual's support needs and small workplace adaptations that might be necessary. Discuss the individual's strengths, do they have a 'super-power' that their manager is unaware of?
- Signpost (to manager and individual) additional support and guidance that is available. Nobody is expected to know everything about neurodiversity in the workplace and neurodiverse conditions. Speak to others in your organisation or business to seek relevant help and support.
- You need a leadership model that believes and engages with a diverse and inclusive business strategy and is seen by your workforce. Working with people who have neurodiverse conditions helps to create an environment for this to happen. There needs to be collaboration, you can't do it on your own. Where necessary, bring in other experts, organisations, professional bodies.



## What you've told us about...

### Being aware of people's strengths

- Recognise the strengths, those 'super-powers' that individuals with neurodiverse conditions can bring to the workforce. What is the person great at? What interests do they have?
- Everyone is competent and capable, and we're all different. Being aware of individual strengths in a team means that a manager will be able to get the best out of everyone, and also get the best for the business.
- Employers should be looking at the job and thinking about who they need. Neurodivergent individuals can bring such a different approach, their minds work in different ways, like having an amazing memory or great attention to detail, and it's about unlocking that.
- Identify the strengths and skills that everyone brings to the workplace for the benefit of the business.
- An employer may see a person's challenges as a weakness, but challenges are not weaknesses, they can be used as strengths. It's important to be aware that people with neurodiverse conditions have a different way of thinking, a different way of seeing the world around them. And you need to be aware of that and need to be able to react in a different way.

### Knowing your workforce

- Know your staff. Think about the small changes that you might be able to make in the workplace so that the environment is more inclusive for those with neurodiverse conditions.
- Think outside the box. Recognise that each individual will have different support needs, even if their neurodiverse condition has the same name.
- Should you see a fellow work colleague sitting with their head in their hands, don't ask the question, "Late night?" Maybe change it to, "Is there anything I can help with?" Or, "Would you like to talk it through?" So simple when it's said like this but can mean so much more to both parties.
- Look at the person, not the condition. Treat every person as an individual. People with neurodiverse conditions will all have very different support needs.
- Don't over-look or mis-judge talent in the workplace. If a person doesn't meet every skill that you're looking for, remember that they may exceed in other areas.
- Speak to people, know your workforce. Make sure that relevant adaptations are put in place and people have access to the support that they need to be able to flourish and reach their true potential.
- For people with specific challenges, the business has got to instil a culture of belief. Belief that the employee can do it, rather than thinking that they can't. And show that belief to them. Change the terminology to encourage better performance. Instead of pin-pointing targets (which can be missed), set goals i.e., wider objectives that can be achieved.

## What you've told us about...

### Implementing awareness training

- There needs to be better awareness of neurodiversity in the workplace and improved mental health awareness too. Implement awareness training about invisible disabilities for employers, managers, and business owners.
- Awareness training is about education and knowing how to approach people and different situations.
- Improved education will mean that employers feel more confident about following a certain approach. Accept that you have a duty of care to employees.
- Managers should know about neurodiverse conditions, know how to react, how to manage that person and provide the support they need. This includes knowing which external organisations can provide necessary help, guidance, and support.

### Workplace adjustments

- Employers may be of the belief that the changes required in the workplace to accommodate an individual's needs are too big. It's true that the person may require interventions and support needs, but with the right work placement, the employer will get massive benefits and rewards from taking on that person and harnessing their input.
- The challenge is having the guts to deal with it. It's so easy to say that there's not enough time to make necessary adjustments and support that individual etc.
- Listen to what the person's needs are. What simple changes/adaptations can be made in the workplace? Help dispel the myth that all support needs will be costly.
- Balance support and delivery with productivity. Reasonable adjustments don't have to cost a fortune, but they can make a big difference. With a bit of support and (possibly) some minor adjustments to the way jobs are done, great things can be achieved.
- Small changes in the workplace can make such a big difference to a person with neurodiverse conditions, not only in terms of their ability to thrive in the workplace but also to how they feel.
- It's not always about having to carry-out a big risk assessment. For example, moving a desk area away from a window so that an individual can maintain better focus. It's important to talk about it though!
- Overcoming people's pre-conceptions and assumptions about neurodiverse conditions is key. People incorrectly assume that there's no help available to support the individual. But help is available! They also assume that making the adjustments that people need are going to be costly, and that's also a myth. Small changes can be relatively cost-free, and there's help available if the necessary adjustments involve expenditure.
- Be able to adapt and put processes and support in place for neurodivergent colleagues. People need to feel integrated in the work environment. Providing help and support stops people feeling excluded, it makes them feel included.



# Considerations for a neurodiverse-friendly work environment

To ensure your work environment is neurodiverse-friendly, you may like to take on-board these **10** key considerations:

- 1** **Sensory factors**  
Consider sensory factors such as lighting (is it too bright?), smells (too intense?), and sounds (too loud?). Such factors could mean that an individual is unable to concentrate in the work environment.
  - Ask the person how they find the current work environment and whether they would like any changes to be made.
  
- 2** **Giving instructions**  
Neurodivergent individuals may interpret instructions literally and may misinterpret what they are being asked to do.
  - Be very clear about how you give instructions (say exactly what you mean). Allow sufficient time for the person to process information and to be able to ask any questions or to seek further clarification.
  
- 3** **Clear beginnings and endings**  
An individual may experience issues or challenges around starting certain tasks in the workplace, and this could be for a number of different reasons. For example, they may feel very anxious about undertaking the task, or they may not know how best to make a start. Neurodivergent individuals may also struggle with ending a task or how to end a conversation in the workplace.
  - Make sure that the person is offered relevant support, be clear about what is required (this information could be split into stages or use a stepped approach) and offer encouragement.
  
- 4** **A note about perfectionism**  
Neurodivergent individuals may not offer a response to a question or complete a task because they set themselves very high standards and they may feel angry or embarrassed if they fall short of their own high standards/expectations that they have set for themselves.
  - Provide reassurance and give some perspective to the work-related situation or context. Highlight their positive achievements at work and reinforce the expected standards. Focus on the good progress they have already made.

**5****Processing information**

Neurodivergent individuals may take longer to respond to questions or to different situations, especially when they are put directly on the spot. They may also develop anxiety around this.

- Avoid putting people on the spot, or in situations where this approach is used. Make sure people are aware about what will happen so that they can prepare effectively.
- Promote the use of digital hands in remote online meetings, and ensure (with use of a spotter), that everyone is given an opportunity to contribute should they wish to do so. (It is usually best practice to approach people in the order in which they raised their digital hand). If a person doesn't want to respond verbally, then you could ask them to contribute via the online chat function.
- If you would like an answer to a question, then you must allow sufficient time for the person to process their response or to complete the task/activity. If you perceive silence as awkward, then change your own perception! Do not fill the silence with more talk. Allowing silence is important because it signals that you are giving the person sufficient thinking time and processing time.

**6****Personal work/office space**

In an office environment, you may need to consider where people are situated (e.g., desk location). In remote online meetings, be aware that some people may prefer to turn their camera off (for anxiety reasons, background distractions, not wanting to see their own face, being distracted by others etc.).

- Ask people where they would like to sit in the work environment and check whether there are any other workplace adjustments that could be made which would help them. For example, removing clutter, moving a desk away from a window, removing busy noticeboards, providing noise-cancelling headphones etc.
- Reassure people that they do not have to turn their camera on when participating in remote online meetings.

**7****Asking for help**

Some neurodivergent individuals may find it difficult to ask for help (because they see asking for help as a weakness), or they may not know how to put a question forward. They may also be concerned that they will be reprimanded or belittled for asking questions.

- Provide reassurances that people can ask for help whenever they need to do so, and that they will not be perceived negatively. Suggest different ways in which people can request relevant help and support.

**8****Taking regular breaks**

Many neurodivergent individuals require more breaks or longer breaks than neurotypical individuals. These breaks are essential for their own health and wellbeing.

- Please consider being flexible about allowing regular breaks and ask people what works well for them.

9

**Flexible work environments**

Flexible work or training environments work well for many neurodivergent individuals. For example, allowing some flexibility around start/finish times etc.

- Ask people what workplace adaptations they need to allow them to perform to the best of their ability.

10

**Clear expectations**

Be very clear on office etiquette/office work clothing etc. that people will need as well as any other work-related requirements which are in place.

- Explain exactly what is required (what people need to do or bring). Provide sufficient opportunity to discuss any issues or challenges that people may have or to answer any questions.

A woman with blonde hair, wearing safety glasses and black gloves, is focused on working on the engine of a car in a workshop. She is wearing a dark blue polo shirt. The background is a blurred industrial setting.

Change your thoughts and you will change your world

# Taking steps to create a neurodiverse-friendly workplace

## 11 STEPS to Create a Neurodiverse Inclusive Environment

Encouraging people to talk about their differences and their individual workplace support needs must be via two-way conversation and discussions can only take place when the individual feels safe, comfortable, and ready to do so. Neurodiversity includes **everybody**, whether people are neurodivergent or neurotypical. So, everybody will be somewhere on the 'neurodiversity spectrum'.

Let's start conversations about creating a neurodiverse-friendly environment so that discussions encompass and embrace different challenges that many people may experience in the work environment. These conversations can include **everyone**.

Adapted from work undertaken by The University of Bath (*Centre for Applied Autism Research*), these **11 STEPS** provide a general structure to support your discussions and will help employers and managers to reflect and evaluate their current work environment. This form has been designed to provoke workplace discussion in areas that may not previously have been considered.

The **11 STEPS** structure for discussion covers the following five areas:

**S**ENSORY  
**T**IMELY  
**E**XPLICIT  
**P**REDICTABLE  
**S**OICIAL

By thinking of reasonable adjustment '**STEPS**', you can consider the extent to which your work environment is inclusive for everyone across these five areas: Sensory, Timely, Explicit, Predictable, and Social.

### Use the 11 STEPS document to:

- Give structure to your workplace conversations and discussions
- Help evaluate your current work environment
- Highlight and agree any individual support needs
- Create a neurodiverse inclusive work environment.

## 11 STEPS to Create a Neurodiverse Inclusive Environment

### SECTION 1: ADAPTING THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

#### 1. Sensory Environment

Does everyone have a place to work where they feel comfortable? Are the ambient sounds, smells, and visuals tolerable? Is the lighting suitable? Have individual environmental sensitivities been considered e.g., strong perfume – and do others understand why this matters? Has the office layout been considered? Can any steps be taken to create a more comfortable work environment? Can noise-cancelling headphones, computer screen filters or room dividers be made freely available for those who need them?

#### 2. Timely Environment

Has appropriate time been allowed for completion of projects, tasks, and activities? Are timescales realistic? Have they been discussed and agreed? Has sufficient time been allowed for reflection and evaluation of completed projects, tasks, and activities? Are there explicit procedures to follow if projects, tasks, or activities are finished early or if additional time is required? Is there a system to track/record time spent on projects, tasks, and activities? Does everyone know how to use the system? Is everyone able to use the system effectively? If not, are alternative arrangements available to track/record time spent? Is additional time management support available for those who require it? Are requests to 'work quickly' kept to a minimum? If it is a requirement to work quickly or respond rapidly, are such requests kept to a minimum? Has sufficient planning for requests been allowed to avoid any sudden changes to plans (without reasonable explanation)?

#### 3. Explicit Environment

Are requirements to complete a project, task, or activity made explicit? Is it clear which projects/tasks/activities should be prioritised over others? Is there an explicit procedure for asking questions should they arise (e.g., a named person, supervisor, manager, or mentor to ask in the first instance)? Is there an explicit procedure for seeking further support or guidance?

#### 4. Predictable Environment

How predictable is the work environment? Is it possible to maximise predictability? (Uncertainty in the work environment can cause anxiety. A predictable environment can help to reduce anxiety enabling people to focus on their work). Have regular meetings or one-to-ones been scheduled? Are procedures clear for when expected events (such as regular meetings) are cancelled, with a rationale provided for any changes or alterations? (Any uncertainty or sudden changes to work plans or scheduled work arrangements can cause anxiety). Can resources and materials for any meetings be sent in advance? Have meetings been set-up with everyone in mind? (E.g., if meetings are remote online, are arrangements clear for participation? For example, use of digital hands, ability to turn cameras off, ability to use chat function, not putting people on the spot etc.).

## 5. Social Environment

Does the work environment have social occasions and is everyone keen or reluctant to participate? Are these essential social occasions or is participation voluntary? Can group activities be adjusted to enable everyone to participate? For example, issuing a clear invitation to a specific, time-related event. Does everyone in the workplace recognise that reluctance to engage socially does not imply dislike or rudeness? Would people benefit from having a traffic-light system (e.g., green, yellow, or red post-it notes or wooden blocks) to signal their willingness/ability to interact with others at certain times in the work environment or to make others aware of their current stress/anxiety levels? (Note: Predictive personality-style tests and other psychometric surveys designed to predict, for example communication preferences, often result in skewed and invalid outcomes for neurodivergent individuals. Fundamental differences in how neurodivergent individuals may approach questions/process information can put them at odds with these types of tests and surveys, leading to an incomplete picture and invalid results).

### Section 1: Overall comments/Actions



## SECTION 2: PROVIDING SUPPORT

### 6. Psychological Safety

Mutual trust and respect are integral to psychological safety at work. I.e., without psychological safety, people may not feel that they can be themselves, share experiences or speak-up about neurological differences, or discuss their support requirements, challenges, or needs. Do people feel welcome in the workplace, how do you know? Are questions asked in an inclusive way, inviting contributions from everyone? Are there different ways in which people can contribute (e.g., verbal, non-verbal), depending on their communication preferences? Are overall timings and the format for meetings shared and as far as practicable effort is made not to deviate from this? (Late changes to meeting timings/format can give rise to increased stress, pressure, frustration, disengagement, and anxiety). Is sufficient opportunity and time given for people to process information and to formulate any questions or comments? Are expectations for the meeting/session/event clearly communicated? Is it made clear that people will not be unexpectedly put on the spot (for contribution or responses)? Does everyone have an opportunity to be heard? Are people asked to raise their digital hand during remote online meetings and is this managed effectively so that everyone has opportunity to contribute? Has any guidance been issued on the role of language in helping to create work environments where everyone feels welcome and included? Is use of language person-centred or person-led? (It is important to be respectful and ask people what language they prefer. Some people are very proud of their neurodiverse difference(s), and this can impact on their preferences around use of language. It is also helpful to acknowledge that people are still learning about the language around neurodiversity and so may not always get it right). Is there any evidence of in-groups/out-groups in the work environment? What is the workplace culture like? Do people challenge inappropriate behaviour? Are people interested in the different experiences of other people? Are there opportunities for people to share (and celebrate) their different experiences? Do senior managers actively role model positive behaviours and values? Does the organisation/company recognise and value contributions from different people? Do people feel that there is allyship in the workplace? Do people support each other? Do people trust and respect their line manager/supervisor and colleagues? What evidence exists to support this? Do people feel safe discussing differences in the workplace? What more can be done to improve respect and trust in the workplace?

### 7. Disclosing Differences

Are people willing to disclose their neurological differences to other colleagues, and if so, how would they like to manage this? Are Inclusion Passports available? Would colleagues benefit from neurodiversity and inclusion awareness training, or an opportunity to ask questions? If so, can training be delivered in-house via open and friendly discussion? Alternatively, can an independent specialist/external trainer deliver a training session? If an individual does disclose to their colleagues, are they willing for those colleagues to share the information more widely, or is this privileged confidential information? Using autism as an example, if autism comes up in a conversation, what language does the person prefer? (E.g., An autistic person/ A person with autism/ Autistic).

## 8. Project Management

Does anyone experience difficulties with planning, flexibility in undertaking or completing work, sustained attention, or procrastination? What triggers these difficulties and how can they be minimised? Are there digital tools available (e.g., time management Apps, shared calendars, management systems) which can provide extra structure? Which employees prefer using planning systems which are non-linear (e.g., mind-maps, sketch notes), or linear (e.g., Gantt charts, 'to do' lists) and can these preferences be accommodated? Which people prefer to be immersed in a specific project/task, or to have a selection of different projects/tasks with intermediate timelines, and can these preferences be built into project planning or the project management system?

## 9. Communication Styles

Does anyone prefer literal, specific language? And if so, can their line manager/supervisor and colleagues be reminded to use this? Do people prefer written communication, or face-to-face communication, or remote online? Are there any preferences on making/receiving telephone calls? Do line managers/supervisors and colleagues cultivate an atmosphere that enables people to ask for help if needed?

## 10. Wellbeing and Work-Life Balance

Are there any concerns around mental health and wellbeing? Are meetings scheduled at times that suit personal routines? Can people work from home or have flexible working hours and breaks? Is there a culture which encourages openness and discussion? Does anyone require leave to receive treatment or therapeutic support? Do people need support or advice from external services like Access to Work or Ben (the charity which supports the automotive community)?

## 11. Troubleshooting

Do managers/supervisors have regular one-to-ones with everyone to discuss what is working well and what isn't? Are there coping strategies that are used in other settings that could be used or adapted here? Could tasks falling within the job role be altered? Could work tasks be shared between colleagues so that each person can play to their strengths? Is there an 'open door' policy or other arrangement in place for employees to engage regularly with senior managers and/or human resources? Can you work together to come up with new solutions to issues or challenges that haven't been solved, and address new difficulties should they arise?

### Section 2: Overall comments/Actions



# SECTION 5

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## Further Support and Resources

# Further Support and Resources

Neurodiversity Awareness in the Workplace: Support and Resources	
Articles and Websites	<p><a href="#">Neurodiversity Resources for Employers – Neurodiversity Hub</a> Neurodiversity Resources and Hub for Employers (www.neurodiversityhub.org)</p>
	<p><a href="#">UK Neurodivergent Employees Fear Discrimination at Work, research finds – Genius Within</a> Two Thirds of UK Neurodivergent Employees Fear Discrimination at Work (https://geniuswithin.org)</p>
	<p><a href="#">Neurodiversity in the Workplace – Government Analysis Function (civilservice.gov.uk)</a> Neurodiversity in the Workplace Catherine Bean tells her personal story of working in the Office for National Statistics (2021). (analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk)</p>
	<p><a href="#">How to Talk about Neurodiversity in the Workplace – Expand the Circle</a> How to Talk about Neurodiversity in the Workplace (www.expandthecircle.co.uk)</p>
	<p><a href="#">Autistica Workplace Adjustments for Autistic Staff   Autistica</a> Workplace Adjustments for People with Autism (www.autistica.org.uk)</p>
	<p><a href="#">Employers: Changing your Workplace to Better Support Neurodiversity   ACAS (nationalarchives.gov.uk)</a> Employers: Changing your Workplace to Better Support Neurodiversity (www.acas.org.uk)</p>
	<p><a href="#">The Autistica Neurodiversity Employers Index   Autistica</a> Creating a Neuroinclusion Index for Employers (Autistica Research Project) (www.autistica.org.uk)</p>
	<p><a href="#">Communication Tips (autism.org.uk)</a> National Autistic Society: Communication Tips (www.autism.org.uk)</p>
	<p><a href="#">Autism-friendly Guides</a> National Autistic Society: A Range of Resources to Support People with Autism (www.autism.org.uk)</p>
	<p><a href="#">Cambridge University's Jason Arday becomes Youngest Black Professor – BBC News</a> Diagnosed with Autism and Global Development Delay, Jason Arday was unable to speak until he was 11 years old and could not read or write until he was 18 (www.bbc.co.uk, February 2023)</p>
	<p><a href="https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/">https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/</a> Information and Support from the NHS about Mental Health Conditions (www.nhs.uk)</p>
	<p><a href="#">Dyslexia – British Dyslexia Association (bdadyslexia.org.uk)</a> Understanding Dyslexia (www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)</p>

<b>Neurodiversity Awareness in the Workplace: Support and Resources</b>	
<b>Articles and Websites</b>	<p><b><u><a href="https://bdadyslexia.org.uk">Neurodiversity and Co-occurring Difficulties – British Dyslexia Association (bdadyslexia.org.uk)</a></u></b>  <b>British Dyslexic Association: Neurodiversity and Co-occurring Difficulties</b>            (www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)</p>
	<p><b><u><a href="https://www.madebydyslexia.org">Workplace – Made By Dyslexia</a></u></b>  <b>Empowering Dyslexic Thinking in Every Workplace</b>            (www.madebydyslexia.org)</p>
	<p><b><u><a href="https://www.madeofmillions.com">Why We Need to Change the Conversation Around Tourette’s Syndrome   Made of Millions Foundation</a></u></b>  <b>Changing the Conversation Around Tourette’s Syndrome</b>            (www.madeofmillions.com)</p>
	<p><b><u><a href="https://www.icaew.com">How to be an Ally: Managing Neurodiverse Teams   ICAEW</a></u></b>  <b>How to be an Ally: Managing Neurodiverse Teams</b> (www.icaew.com)            Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW Insights) (March 2022)</p>
	<p><b><u><a href="https://nationalarchives.gov.uk">Managers: Managing Staff with ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and other forms of Neurodivergence   Acas (nationalarchives.gov.uk)</a></u></b>  <b>Managing Neurodivergent Staff (ACAS)</b>            (www.acas.org.uk)</p>
	<p><b><u><a href="https://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com">Hidden Disabilities (hiddendisabilitiesstore.com)</a></u></b>  <b>What is a Hidden Disability?</b>            (hiddendisabilitiesstore.com)</p>
	<p><b><u><a href="https://neurodiversityweek.com">Neurodiversity Celebration Week (neurodiversityweek.com)</a></u></b>  <b>Neurodiversity Celebration Week</b> is a worldwide initiative that challenges stereotypes and misconceptions about neurological differences. Resources and how to get involved (www.neurodiversityweek.com)</p>
	<b>Guides (PDF)</b>
<p><b><u><a href="https://bupa.co.uk">Neurodiversity Managers Guide (bupa.co.uk)</a></u></b>  <b>Supporting Neurodiversity in the Workplace: Guide (2022)</b>            (www.bupa.co.uk)</p>	
<p><b><u><a href="https://squarespace.com">Managers Toolkit .pdf (squarespace.com)</a></u></b>  <b>Hiring Managers’ Toolkit for Neurodiversity (2020)</b>            Dublin City University Centre of Excellence for Diversity and Inclusion in partnership with Indeed (www.neurodiversityhub.org)</p>	
<p><b><u><a href="https://www.cipd.org/uk">Neurodiversity at Work   CIPD</a></u></b>  <b>Neurodiversity at Work: Guide (2018)</b>            (www.cipd.org/uk)</p>	
<p><b><u><a href="https://www.cuh.nhs.uk">Embracing Neurodiversity Toolkit.pdf</a></u></b>  <b>Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Trust: Neurodiversity Guide</b>            (www.cuh.nhs.uk)</p>	
<p><b><u><a href="https://www.expandthecircle.co.uk">Neuroinclusive-Language-Guide--Expand-the-Circle.pdf (squarespace.com)</a></u></b>  <b>Expand the Circle: Neuroinclusive Language Guide</b>            (www.expandthecircle.co.uk)</p>	
<p><b><u><a href="https://www.expandthecircle.co.uk">Neuroinclusive-Language-Guide--Expand-the-Circle.pdf (squarespace.com)</a></u></b>  <b>Expand the Circle: Neuroinclusive Language Guide</b>            (www.expandthecircle.co.uk)</p>	

## Neurodiversity Awareness in the Workplace: Support and Resources

### Films

<p><a href="#">What is Neurodiversity? – YouTube</a>  <b>What is Neurodiversity?</b>          British Dyslexia Association, YouTube 2017 (1-minute)</p>
<p><a href="#">Championing Diversity and Inclusion from an Organisational Perspective – YouTube</a>  <b>Championing Diversity and Inclusion from an Organisational Perspective</b>          HCLTech, YouTube 2021 (6-minutes)</p>
<p><a href="#">How Do You Create Psychological Safety at Work? Interview with Amy Edmondson – YouTube</a>  <b>How Do You Create Psychological Safety at Work? Interview with Amy Edmondson</b>          myHRfuture, YouTube 2021 (3-minutes)</p>
<p><a href="#">What Can We Do To Promote Psychological Safety? – YouTube</a>  <b>Promoting Psychological Safety</b>          Cerebration, YouTube 2020 (4-minutes)</p>
<p><a href="#">ADHD and Late Diagnosis – My Tips and Experience – YouTube</a>  <b>ADHD and Late Diagnosis</b>          Jodie Hill (Thrive Law), YouTube 2022 (16-minutes)</p>
<p><a href="#">Kate Griggs: The Creative Brilliance of Dyslexia   TED Talk</a>  <b>The Creative Brilliance of Dyslexia</b>          Tedx Brighton (15-minutes)</p>
<p><a href="#">Jess Thom: How I Turned my Tourette's Tics into Art   TED Talk</a>  <b>How I Turned my Tourette's Tics into Art</b>          Tedx Albertopolis (11-minutes)</p>
<p><a href="#">Overview – Clinical depression – NHS (www.nhs.uk)</a>  <b>Experience of Clinical Depression</b>          NHS worker Lawrence talks about his experience of clinical depression (2021, 3-minutes)</p>
<p><a href="#">Living With #OCD   Samantha Pena   TEDxYouth@TCS – YouTube</a>  <b>Living with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder</b>          Tedx Talks (14-minutes)</p>
<p><a href="#">10 Reasonable Adjustments in the Workplace to Support Neurodiverse Individuals. – YouTube</a>  <b>Reasonable Adjustments in the Workplace to Support Neurodiverse Individuals</b>          It's Time 2 Thrive, YouTube 2022 (1-minute)</p>
<p><a href="#">Workplace Adjustments explainer- voice over animation – YouTube</a>  <b>Making Workplace Adjustments</b>          Equality and Human Rights Commission, YouTube 2019 (2-minutes)</p>
<p><a href="#">By 2030 Public Spaces will be More Accessible for Neurodivergent People   Autistica's 2030 Goals – YouTube</a>  <b>Accessibility for Neurodivergent People: 2030 Goals</b>          Autistica, YouTube 2021 (6-minutes)</p>
<p><a href="#">First Step Trust</a>  <b>SMaRT Pathways Technology</b>          First Step Trust, YouTube 2019 (3-minutes)</p>

<b>Neurodiversity Awareness in the Workplace: Support and Resources</b>	
<b>Podcasts</b>	<a href="#"><u>Thinking Differently about Neurodiversity   Acas</u></a> Thinking Differently about Neurodiversity: Podcast (ACAS, 24-minutes, 2020)
	<a href="#"><u>Tourette's Podcast on Apple Podcasts</u></a> Tourette's Podcast Apple Podcasts (100 episodes)
<b>Reports</b>	<a href="#"><u>IMI Diversity Task Force   Institute of The Motor Industry (theimi.org.uk)</u></a> IMI Diversity Task Force Report (IMI, March 2022)
	<a href="#"><u>Neurodiversity at Work   Acas</u></a> Neurodiversity at Work: Research Report (ACAS, 2016)
	<a href="#"><u>Automotive Council: Driving diversity, equity &amp; inclusion in the UK automotive industry</u></a> (Automotive Council UK, September 2022)

**Please note:** External links are reviewed on publication. The IMI is not responsible for the content and maintenance of external sites, which can be changed without our knowledge.

## The crazy ones

*“Here’s to the crazy ones, the misfits,  
the rebels, the troublemakers,  
the round pegs in the square holes...  
the ones who see things differently  
– they’re not fond of rules...  
You can quote them, disagree with them,  
glorify or vilify them,  
but the only thing you can’t do is ignore them  
because they change things...  
they push the human race forward,  
and while some may see them as the crazy ones,  
we see genius,  
because the ones who are crazy enough  
to think that they can change the world,  
are the ones who do.”*

Jack Kerouac, American novelist and poet

If you have an unusual thinker in your life, in your organisation, in your team, nurture their strengths and their genius.

Gently help and support them to overcome any challenges and barriers and to bring their differences to life. Enable people to navigate their way in a sometimes-disapproving world.

Celebrate difference and what makes people unique. Encourage and support people to be authentic and to flourish in the work environment. That’s allyship. That’s what inclusive managers do.



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