

DRAFT



NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE GUIDANCE

FOR CONSULTATION - APRIL 2025





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INTRODUCTION

THE AIM OF THIS GUIDANCE IS TO OUTLINE COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT TO PROMOTING EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS, WHILST RECOGNISING AND CELEBRATING THE DIVERSITY THAT EXISTS AMONG OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

It will also outline the duties we must uphold and the corporate framework within which we operate. This guidance applies to workers, and potential workers, who are neurodivergent, or who believe that they may be neurodivergent. It is also a document to give guidance to managers of neurodivergent staff.

The scope of this guidance covers conditions including but not limited to: Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and Tourette Syndrome.





WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

The term “neurodiversity” is a combination of the words “neuro” (relating to the brain) and “diversity” (variety).

It refers to the natural variations in human brain function and behaviour. At its core, neurodiversity recognises that every person’s brain is unique – no two are exactly alike and we all bring individual experience, strengths, and assets to a situation.

While we are all considered “neurodiverse” to some degree, the term “neurodivergent” specifically describes individuals whose brains function differently from what is considered the “neurotypical” or average brain.

Neurodivergence covers a wide range of areas each presenting in different ways, including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism, Dyspraxia, Tourette Syndrome, amongst others.

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)

ADHD affects both children and adults. It is characterised by persistent patterns of attention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, which can impact with daily functioning in various aspects of life, including, work, relationships, and home activities.

AUTISM

Autism may affect how individuals communicate, interact socially, and perceive the world around them.

DYSLEXIA

Dyslexia is a learning difference which primarily affects reading and writing skills. However, it does not only affect these skills. Dyslexia is about processing information.

DYSPRAXIA

Dyspraxia may affect motor coordination and planning. People with dyspraxia may have difficulty performing movements in a smooth, coordinated way, which can affect their ability to carry out everyday tasks.



TOURETTE SYNDROME

Tourette Syndrome is characterised by involuntary and repetitive movements or sounds known as tics. These tics may vary in type, frequency, and intensity over time. Tics can increase with stress, anxiety or excitement and can be painful and tiring.

Neurodivergent individuals exhibit differences in areas such as social preferences, communication styles, sensory processing, learning abilities, and environmental perception.

It’s estimated that up to 20% of the population is neurodivergent, highlighting the significant diversity in human brain function.

The language society uses around disabilities and neurodivergence is often shaped by stereotypes and negativity. The words we choose matter greatly, as they can either foster inclusion or create exclusion. Neurodivergence is just one part of a person’s identity.





NEURODIVERSITY AND THE LAW

Whilst there is a moral and business case for being a neuro-inclusive employer, there is also a legal one that all Councils should be aware of. Although many neurodivergent employees will not think of themselves as being disabled, it is likely that they will satisfy the legal definition of disability and are therefore protected under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). Further information on the DDA duties is available from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland¹.

To amount to a disability under the DDA, a condition must be a 'physical or mental impairment' that 'has a substantial and long-term adverse effect' on a person's 'ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.'

DDA, discrimination in employment occurs when:

- *A disabled person is treated less favourably than someone else on grounds of his/her disability - direct discrimination.*
- *A disabled person is treated less favourably than someone else and the treatment is for a reason relating to the person's disability, and this treatment cannot be justified - disability related discrimination.*
- *A disabled person is subjected to victimisation - a disabled person is treated less favourable because they have complained about an instance of discrimination.*
- *A disabled person is subjected to harassment for a reason which relates to their disability.*
- *There is a failure to make reasonable adjustments for a disabled person.*

¹Copy of DisEmploymentCOP05.pdf



FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE GUIDANCE:

- *'Long-term' impact means a condition that has lasted, or is likely to last, for twelve months or more. Neurodivergent workers are likely to automatically satisfy this aspect of the definition as the conditions covered by this toolkit are lifelong in nature.*
- *A 'substantial effect' means something that is more than minor or trivial.*
- *There is no comprehensive list of 'normal day-to-day activities and Tribunals tend to adopt a broad definition of what this may mean.*

PRINCIPLES OF THIS GUIDANCE

- *A diversity of cognitive approaches is a source of great strength and value within a genuinely inclusive workplace.*
- *All employees deserve opportunities, encouragement and support to realise their full potential.*
- *All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that policies, practices and culture do not discriminate against neurodivergent employees.*
- *Each employee is unique and there can be a high degree of overlap among neurodivergent people, e.g. some may be both autistic and ADHD. Consequently, any support needs must be identified and implemented on the basis of personal evaluation and individual consultation – not assumptions or stereotypes.*
- *Employees must not be subject to unfavourable treatment if they choose to disclose that they are neurodivergent.*

CHALLENGES FACED BY NEURODIVERGENT EMPLOYEES

Despite the valuable strengths and unique perspectives that neurodivergent employees can bring to the workplace, they may face a range of challenges in the workplace, which can vary depending on the individual and their specific neurodivergence.

Some common challenges include:

Workplace Environment and Sensory Sensitivities

- Open-plan offices can be overwhelming due to noise, lighting, or other sensory stimuli.
- Difficulty concentrating in busy or distracting environments.

Communication and Social Interactions

- Challenges with understanding or interpreting social cues, sarcasm, or indirect instructions.
- Difficulty with verbal communication, especially in fast-paced discussions or meetings.
- Misinterpretation of tone or body language, leading to misunderstandings.

Task Management

- Struggles with time management, prioritisation, or staying organised.
- Difficulty transitioning between tasks or handling unexpected changes in workflow.

Workplace Expectations and Culture

- Pressure to conform to traditional workplace norms that may not align with their needs.
- Bias or misconceptions from colleagues and managers about neurodivergence.
- Lack of understanding or support from leadership.

Performance and Career Progression

- Being overlooked for promotions due to differences in communication or work styles.
- Struggles with self-advocacy, leading to unmet needs or underutilised skills.
- Anxiety around performance reviews that focus on traditional measures of success.

Access to Reasonable Adjustments

- Hesitancy to request accommodations due to fear of stigma or negative repercussions.
- Lack of clear policies or understanding from employers on how to support neurodivergent employees.





STRENGTHS OF NEURODIVERGENT EMPLOYEES

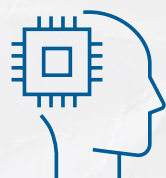
Neurodivergent employees bring overlooked skills, making them invaluable assets in any workplace. Integrating their unique abilities not only promotes inclusivity but also significantly contributes to the overall success and growth of the Council.

When given the right support and opportunities, these unique strengths can lead to remarkable contributions and innovations.



Attention to detail

Accuracy.
Thoroughness.



Absorb and Retain Facts

Exceptional memory and recall.



Integrity

Dedication.
Loyal.



Deep Focus

Intense concentration.
Freedom from distraction.



Expertise

In dept knowledge.
High level of skills.



Creativity

Distinctive imagination.
Expression of ideas.



AS A MANAGER, OR COLLEAGUE, WHAT CAN YOU DO

There are so many things a manager or colleague can or could do, and there is no right or wrong way to go about it. Identify how to support them and implement reasonable adjustments.

Some tips are:

- Allocate work and manage them to their strengths.
- Allow them a dedicated 'safe space'.
- Ask them to pick a challenge or two.
- Be cautious of feelings and trigger words.
- Be patient.
- Ensure you give advance notice of changes to allow time to prepare and organise.
- Let them help you.
- Manage your and their expectations.
- Offer flexible working arrangements.
- Provide clear communication, structured tasks, written instructions or flowchart of instructions.
- Training and development (mentorship or support programmes).
- Recognise when they are needing time away from the stimulant.
- Hold regular one-to-one meetings to provide a structured opportunity for discussion and feedback, allow the employee the opportunity to be accompanied by a companion for support.
- Give advance notice of up-and-coming team meetings.
- Allow employees the opportunity to ask questions.
- Establish who to contact in the event of emergencies, for example, family members, employment support workers, if relevant.

Things managers or colleagues should do.

- Don't assume that an employee is neurodivergent.
- Don't make assumptions on how an employee's neurodiversity impacts them as conditions impact everyone differently. With the appropriate support they can develop ways to manage this, but neurodiversity is part of an individual's neurological make up.

If there are performance or conduct concerns, managers should offer the employee the opportunity and support to explain reasons behind the issue (as their neurodiversity may be related to this) before considering whether to escalate this matter further. As with all performance concerns this should not be delayed until a formal performance meeting. Identify how to support the employee and implement reasonable adjustments to ensure that any performance or conduct issues are resolved.



EXAMPLE OF SUPPORT AVOIDING PERFORMANCE PROCEDURES

Sam regularly gets distracted in the office and misses deadlines. Sam's manager talks to them about this. Sam agrees they're struggling and thinks they might have ADHD.

Sam and the manager discuss what might help. Sam asks for a quiet space to work and regular check-ins to support with time management. Sam's manager agrees for Sam to use a meeting room whenever it's available. They also get noise-cancelling headphones and start weekly catch-ups to check work is on track.

Sam's performance improves. If Sam's manager had started a performance procedure, this could have caused Sam stress and made work more challenging. And it might not have addressed the poor performance issue.

EXAMPLE OF WHEN A FORMAL PROCEDURE IS APPROPRIATE

Lesley is autistic. Lesley has a designated room to go to when they need time out during the day.

Lesley is annoyed because their football team lost a match. During a team meeting, Lesley shouts abusive language at another employee. Even after some time out, this behaviour continues.

Lesley's manager starts a disciplinary investigation, as this behaviour is considered misconduct.

Lesley already had a reasonable adjustment in place that could have helped in the situation. It is appropriate for Lesley's manager to start an investigation.

Managers are not expected to micro-manage neurodivergent employees but rather to provide the necessary support and reasonable adjustments that enable them to thrive. It is important to recognise that managers have a range of responsibilities and must balance the needs of all employees within their teams. The focus should be on fostering an inclusive and supportive environment where neurodivergent employees feel empowered to work autonomously while having access to the guidance and accommodations they may require.



IF A MANAGER SUSPECTS AN EMPLOYEE IS NEURODIVERGENT

A manager might notice that an employee is having difficulty with certain things at work. They might suspect an employee is neurodivergent.

The manager should approach this situation sensitively. They should not ask directly about what they suspect. They should:

- *Talk to the employee about what they've noticed.*
- *Frame the conversation positively by focusing on what support and reasonable adjustments might help.*
- *Keep anything, discussed confidential, unless the employee agrees otherwise.*

USING APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE AND MANAGEMENT STYLE AROUND NEURODIVERSITY

Language can affect how employees feel. Using appropriate language when talking about neurodiversity can:

- *Make employees feel more comfortable during conversations.*
- *Avoid causing someone distress.*

Everyone should be sensitive in the terms they use.

For example, when talking about neurodivergence, avoid terms like 'suffering from' or 'symptoms'. These can suggest a condition is an illness when it is not.

Language in this area is constantly changing, and some employees will have different preferences. It can be tricky to know what's appropriate. Some good ways to know what language to use include:

- *Asking someone what terms they prefer.*
- *Listening to what neurodivergent employees say.*
- *Matching a neurodivergent employee's language when appropriate – for example, in a one-to-one conversation.*



Managers and employees can show respect and sensitivity around language by:

- *Being open about not knowing things and making the effort to learn.*
- *Acknowledging if they get it wrong and taking steps to resolve it.*
- *Remembering that every neurodivergent person is different.*

A one size fits all management style will not get the best from employees. Managers should adopt a flexible and individualised approach to managing and supporting neurodivergent employees. Managers should ask neurodivergent employees about their preferred communication methods e.g. some neurodivergent employees may prefer email or Teams video call. On the frequency of one-to-one meetings, some may prefer weekly check ins over daily check ins.

CONSIDER THE WIDER WORKING TEAM

It can be helpful if the rest of the team know that a colleague is neurodivergent, and what can be done to support them. If the individual is happy for the rest of the team to know they are neurodivergent it's important to know:

- *How they want to tell colleagues (if they want to talk to their colleagues themselves or for you to share the information on their behalf).*
- *What they do and don't want their colleagues to know.*

Managers must not tell other employees about an employee's neurodivergence without their agreement.



HOW TO CREATE A NEUROINCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Making your Council more inclusive for neurodivergent employees can have many benefits.

It can:

- *Improve employee wellbeing.*
- *Reduce absence levels and employee turnover.*
- *Attract employees with a wider range of skills and experience.*
- *Reduce the risk of disputes and legal claims, for example in relation to discrimination.*

It can also make employees feel comfortable talking about neurodivergence.

Discuss with the employee what barriers exist in the office environment or within their role which present challenges and explore together how they could be overcome through the implementation of reasonable adjustments. Reasonable adjustments will be specific to the employee - you should not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach.

There is no legal or professional obligation for an employee to share their neurodivergence – it is up to them to decide how much personal information, if any, they share with you. The aim is to create an inclusive workplace to foster an environment where neurodivergent employees can thrive!

Celebrate achievements and profile neurodivergent employees, with their consent.

CONTINUOUS SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

- *Consider providing training modules on the Skills Gate Portal to create a better understanding for all employees on neurodiversity.*
- *Be flexible.*
- *Help to structure their day so they can work on tasks which need more concentration during quieter periods.*
- *Mentorship can also provide valuable guidance and support.*
- *Provide templates which can be reused or can provide guidance.*
- *Provide software or online tools i.e. screen readers to help with processing reading material.*
- *Regular check-ins with managers.*



FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

- *Examples include flexible working hours, remote working options and personalised workspaces.*
- *Allowing employees to work in environments that minimise sensory overload and other stressors can significantly enhance an employee's productivity and wellbeing.*
- *Allow for regular short movement breaks throughout the day.*
- *Provide time and space if employee feels stressed to reduce anxiety.*

FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

- *Creating a truly inclusive culture requires commitment from all levels of the Council, especially senior leadership.*
- *Leaders should model inclusive behaviours and ensure that neurodiversity is a visible part of the Council's diversity and inclusion strategy.*
- *Employee resource groups (ERGs) focused on neurodiversity can also play a pivotal role in promoting understanding and advocacy within the Council.*
- *Senior leaders need to ensure that culture changes from the bottom up; without all employees buying into change, true inclusivity will never be achieved.*

INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

- *Ensure interviewers are trained in neurodiversity awareness to reduce bias.*
- *Offer candidates the option to request adjustments during the application process.*
- *Provide clear instructions and ample preparation time to help neurodivergent candidates showcase their true abilities at assessment centre and interview stage.*

RAISING AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

- *Create a positive work environment that encourages open communication, collaboration, mutual respect as this helps in reducing stress and increases job satisfaction, leading to lower absenteeism rates.*



REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

The Council recognises neurodivergent applicants and employees may require extra support in relation to their employment. The Council is committed to upholding its values on transparency, equality and innovation, and valuing its employees.

Therefore, where reasonable adjustments are necessary, and can be accommodated, the Council will support these. Reasonable adjustments are about being inclusive and fulfilling our duties under the DDA. Reasonable adjustments aim to 'level the playing field', by removing any substantial disadvantage a disabled colleague may face when compared to those who are not disabled.

Reasonable adjustments will be made on a case-by-case basis and will be agreed with line managers in relation to an employee's job role. These may include specific work-related software or equipment, differently presented documents, documents in a larger font size, finding different ways to carry out tasks, allowing extra time to complete tasks, flexibility in working hours/patterns or other recommended adjustments. Reasonable adjustments can generally be low or no cost:

- *Examples include providing noise-cancelling headphones or specialised software that assists with reading and writing.*
- *Offering workplace mentoring and counselling can help neurodivergent employees develop strategies to cope with challenges, enhancing the employee's ability to thrive.*
- *Use clear and straightforward language in job advertisements.*
- *Offer alternative methods of assessment (such as practical tests).*
- *Offering extra time for interviews and practical tests.*
- *Allocating job duties which align with the employee's strengths as much as possible.*

Agreed reasonable adjustments are subject to regular review as this will ensure they continue to meet the needs of the employee and the Council. Often, minor adjustments to a colleague's work environment or conditions can make a significant impact, enabling them to perform their job effectively and remain in or return to work.

In recent years many organisations have offered a reasonable adjustment passport scheme. The passport scheme provides a confidential live record of adjustments agreed with the Council. The passport is for employees to keep and share with anyone they think may need to know about the barriers they face within or outside the workplace and the adjustments that have been agreed to prevent or reduce its impact in the workplace.

For the purposes of this guidance, further information on the TUC Reasonable Adjustments Disability Passport – Model Passport can be accessed by clicking on the below link.

[Reasonable_Adjustments_Disability_Passports_2019_WIP5_Model_Passport_secure.pdf](#)



RAISING AWARENESS OF NEURODIVERSITY

Raising awareness of neurodiversity can help make talking about it feel normalised and comfortable. This can reduce problems and lead to more employees getting the support they need.

To raise awareness of neurodiversity:

- *Include in mandatory training.*
- *Run awareness days and campaigns.*
- *Set up an employee network for neurodiversity.*

MANDATORY TRAINING

Where possible, you should include neurodiversity in your Council's mandatory training.

This can help you:

- *Set out your commitment to being inclusive as soon as employees start.*
- *Provide a supportive environment for neurodivergent employees without them having to share their conditions.*

Mandatory training on neurodiversity does not have to be long or complicated. For example, you could include it as part of other equality and inclusion training.

AWARENESS DAYS AND CAMPAIGNS

Neurodiversity campaigns or awareness days can help educate employees.

There might be neurodivergent employees in your Council happy to share their experiences. For example, talking about challenges they face at work and how they overcome them.

They could share this in the way they feel most comfortable. For example, writing a blog post or presenting in a meeting.

EMPLOYEE NETWORKS

A neurodiversity network is a group for neurodivergent employees to:

- *Share experiences.*
- *Support each other.*
- *Raise issues that need addressing.*

A neurodiversity network might be part of a staff disability network.



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES

ACCESS TO WORK SCHEME

The Council will take reasonable steps to assist employees with applications for Access to Work Scheme and to facilitate Workplace Needs Assessments which may be conducted by Access to Work or independent consultants. It may also be recommended that the employee has a consultation with the Council's Occupational Health Provider to identify reasonable adjustments and support.

For the purposes of this guidance, further information on the Access to Work Scheme can be accessed by clicking on the below link.

[Access to Work - practical help at work / nidirect](#)

WORKABLE (NI) SCHEME

Offers a flexible range of long-term support to help employees with disabilities, to keep working, support is tailored for individuals to meet their specific needs in the workplace and will include a 1-2-1 support from a job coach for the employees, their colleagues and Council.

For the purposes of this guidance, further information on the Workable (NI) Scheme can be accessed by clicking on the below link.

[Workable NI / Disability Support / Northern Ireland](#)





FURTHER READING

The CIPD report on Neuroinclusion at work 2024 provides valuable insights into the state of neurodiversity in UK workplaces, highlighting the significant gaps and opportunities in promoting neuroinclusion within workplaces.

Neuroinclusion at work report 2024 ([cipd.org](https://www.cipd.org))

Mental health in the workplace / CIPD

FURTHER SUPPORT

Disability Action Northern Ireland - Disability Action is the largest Northern Ireland wide pan-disability organisation working with disabled people with various disabilities: physical disabilities, learning disabilities, sensory disabilities, hidden disabilities and mental health disabilities.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 - Legal Definition of Disability.

ECNI - Disability equality - The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is a non-departmental public body established by the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

How can we help? / NI Dyslexia Centre - As a centre of excellence for Dyslexia in NI, the team can offer unrivalled advice and guidance to individuals, parents, teachers or employers.

Neurodiversity in the Workplace / Labour Relations Agency - Official

National Autistic Society (autism.org.uk) - The National Autistic Society is a UK charity that provides information, guidance and support to autistic people.

Neurodiversity and Co-occurring difficulties - British Dyslexia Association (bdadyslexia.org.uk) - offers a wide range of information to help families, professionals and neurodivergent individuals.



GLOSSARY

The following list is not exhaustive but provides a helpful introduction to key neurodiversity-related terms. Language and terminology preferences can vary between individuals, so it's important to follow their lead in how they self-identify and the terms they prefer. Always respect their choices, and if you're unsure about what language to use, simply ask.

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder includes persistent patterns of inattention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity. It affects people's behaviour and causes difficulty with concentration levels and may make the person seem restless and /or make them act on impulse.

Asperger syndrome: was an assessment previously given to some autistic people. It is no longer given, people who might previously have received this assessment now receive an autism assessment.

Autism: is a lifelong developmental condition which affects the social and communication centres of the brain. It can affect the way an individual relates to people, situations and their environment. It is often a non-visible condition and may not be evident to others. The phrases "autistic person" or "person who is autistic" can be used however, it is always best to check preferred terminology with the person.

Disability: "A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities." Further information can be found on the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's publication "Definition of a Disability" available on (www.equalityni.org). Neurodivergent conditions may meet this definition depending on the impact on the person.

Diversity: Diversity is recognising that each and every one of us is different. Diversity recognises and understands differences between people including those of different races; ethnicities; genders; ages; religions; disabilities; sexual orientations; education; socio-economic backgrounds; personalities; skill sets; experiences; and knowledge bases.

Dyscalculia: is characterised by an individual's difficulty in understanding numbers and arithmetic. Dyscalculia is not determined by age, level of education or experience, it occurs across all ages and abilities.

Dyslexia: mainly affects reading and writing skills. As it relates to information processing, it can cause difficulties with memory, speed of processing and organisational skills.



Dyspraxia: is a neurodevelopmental condition that makes it difficult to perform motor skills. It also causes issues with coordination.

Neuroaffirmative: is a term used to describe neurodiversity-affirmative approaches, language and practices.

Neurodiversity: refers to the concept that brains function in different ways which determine how we think, act, feel, process information and experience the world. Neurodiversity can be broken down into two categories of people: those who are neurodivergent and those who are neurotypical.

Neurominority: a group who share a similar form of neurodivergence, for example autistic people, dyslexic people.

Reasonable adjustments: in an employment context are changes to working conditions including equipment, duties, hours of work or communication methods which are tailored to the individual disabled person to ensure no barriers exist to them fulfilling their duties and progressing their career. Failure to make reasonable adjustments may amount to discrimination under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995).

Sensory avoidant / defensive: someone who is sensory avoidant/defensive will experience sensory input (taste, smell, hearing, sight, touch, body movement and awareness) more intensely than the average person and avoid it because it is overwhelming to them. Other terms which may be used are hyper-responsive, over-responsive or hypersensitive.

Sensory seeking: someone who is sensory seeking will be under-sensitive to sensory input (taste, smell, hearing, sight, touch, body movement and awareness) and will seek more sensory stimulation. For example, with body movement, they may continually tap their feet, sway, or fidget.





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