

exceptional minds

The Ultimate Guide for Fostering a More
Neuro-Inclusive Creative Industry



For Paul Higgins

the most exceptional mind there ever was.



Contents Page

About this Guide	03
-------------------------	-----------

Key Takeaways	07
----------------------	-----------

01. What's it all About?	09
---------------------------------	-----------

Defining Neurodiversity and understanding how it appears in the workplace

- Defining Neurodiversity	10
- Neurodiversity and Employment	20
- Neurodiversity and the Creative Industries	23
- The Business Case for Neuro-Inclusion	26

02. Joining the Team	29
-----------------------------	-----------

How to create more neuro-inclusive recruitment, interview, and onboarding processes

- Recruitment	33
- Interviews	37
- Onboarding	41
- Reasonable Adjustments	44

03. Working Practices	49
------------------------------	-----------

Considering neurodivergence in your management, environments, and practices

- Disclosure	51
- Managing	54
- Neurodivergent-Friendly Meetings	61
- Communicating	64
- Physical Environments	71
- Psychological Safety	73
- Socialising	79

04. Lights, Camera, Let's Take Action!	83
---	-----------

Creating more neuro-inclusive productions

- Pre-Production	85
- Production	92
- Post-Production	100
- Authentic Representations	102

05. Accessible Comms	107
-----------------------------	------------

Showing you care about inclusivity

- Social Media	108
- Access Statements	113
- Branding and Design	115
- Events	121
- Neurodiversity Celebration Initiatives	124

06. Accessing Support	129
------------------------------	------------

Because funding for access should never be a barrier

- Myth Busting: The Cost of Workplace Adjustments	131
- Access to Work	133
- Production Access Funding	137

Final Thoughts	141
-----------------------	------------

Appendix	142
-----------------	------------

Contact	153
----------------	------------

⋮ About this Guide

This Guide was created by Unquiet Media to help businesses and employers in the media industry to better **understand, recruit, support, retain, and value neurodivergent talent**, and to **foster more inclusive spaces and practices** for your teams, employees, colleagues, crews, and freelancers.

This Guide, which taps into the **lived experience of 100s of neurodivergent Creatives, media businesses we've scoped, and the scientific and creative industry expertise of our team**, includes descriptions of Neurodiversity and associated concepts, as well as tangible guidance for creating more diverse, inclusive, and equitable work environments and processes that not only benefit neurodivergent Creatives, but also your business.

It is purposely segmented into chapters that can be dipped in and out of, and a more condensed and interactive version of this Guide is available as a website that **can be accessed here**.

For more about our research and the wider Exceptional Minds project and funders, please click here.

Who is it for?

This guide is not just for employers - it is for **anyone in the Creative Industries** interested in increasing their awareness and understanding of neurodivergence and fostering a culture of equity and inclusion in the work place.

This includes Company Directors and Leaders, Managers, Directors, Producers, Heads of Departments, Supervisors, Employees, Freelancers, Team Members - **everyone who plays an active part in our sector!**

Disclaimer

Our Guide subscribes to the concept of 'Neurodiversity', which takes a more **holistic and person-centred approach** to neurodevelopmental differences - one **that understands our individual strengths and challenges within the context of the working world**.

The purpose is to both highlight the value of neurodivergence to the industry, whilst also appreciating that many of us face challenges navigating a world not built for our brains.

By highlighting the competitive advantages of a neurodivergent mind, we do not intend to negate these struggles, but to encourage decision makers in our industry to be considerate of them, and built more inclusive spaces in which we can thrive.

It is also important to note that when it comes to neuro-inclusion, **there is no one, uniform, definitive set of guidelines we can make**. What neuro-inclusion looks like can change over time and is entirely unique to the particular set up of a business, and the individuals working for it.

Tips, guidance, and lists of reasonable adjustments or best practice approaches are set out here as recommendations of things to consider for your own work places and processes - food for thought for you to create your own policies and standards bespoke to your business.

The information in this Guide is for advisory purposes only, and does not constitute legal advice.

Feedback

The language of and understanding around neurodivergence and associated concepts is constantly evolving - and we are continuing to learn.

The guidance presented was built around the lived experience of many neurodivergent Creatives, but we appreciate that it would be impossible to communicate the individual opinions and requirements of the entire community.

We will regularly review the content of this Guide to ensure it aligns with the most up-to-date narratives around neurodivergence, and are happy to make amends or additions based on feedback.

If you have any suggestions on how we may improve this Guide or any associated assets, we would love to hear from you.

Introduction

'Neurodiversity', a concept that describes the **natural, unique ways in which all of our brains develop and function**, is growing in popularity.

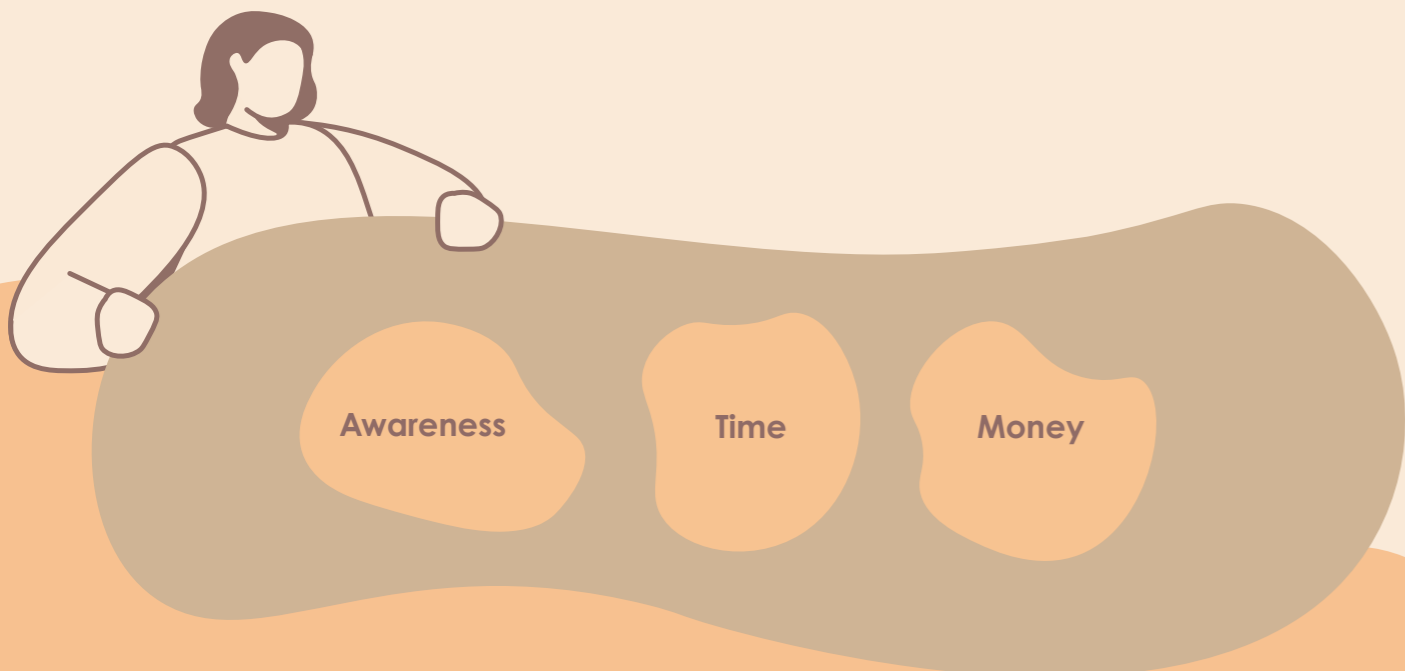
It rejects antiquated views of differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others, which view them only through their deficits, and instead focuses on the unique strengths associated with an ability to **think, learn, and see the world in different ways**. It calls for greater **awareness**, and **acceptance**, of each of our individual minds and their capabilities, and calls for systems such as in education and the workplace to reassess their processes and environments to better address the varying requirements of cognitive differences.

Across the world, we're beginning to tap into the **unearthed potential of the neurodivergent brain**. Some of our most important inventions, pieces of art and music, and discoveries in the scientific field have come from neurodivergent minds.

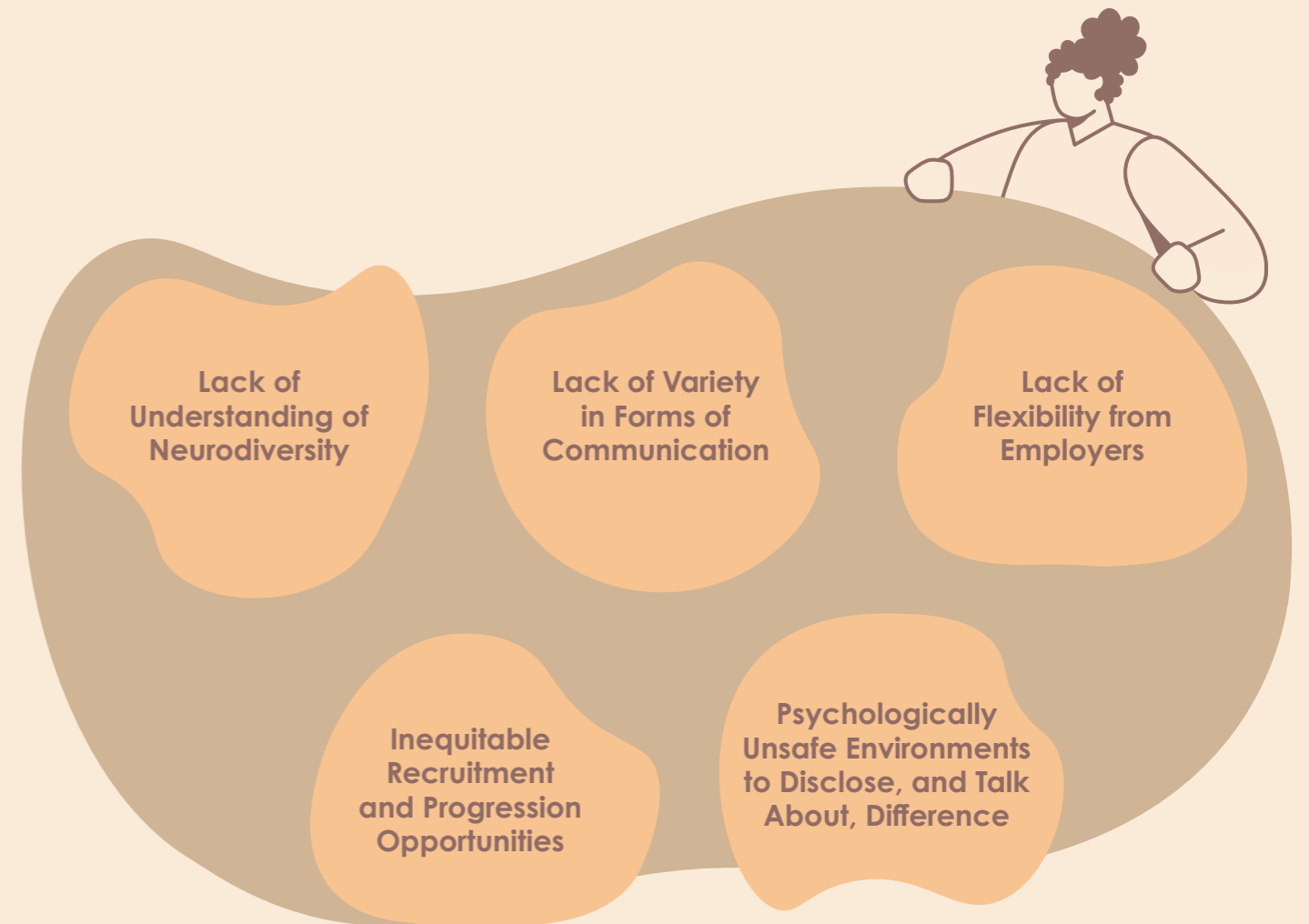
Global giants in the worlds of business, science, technology, and the arts are actively seeking and recruiting neurodivergent talent **not just because they must, but because they recognise the unique skills that diverse ways of thinking, of processing information, and of seeing the world bring to the table**.

But, while this awareness and acceptance grows, the existing resources and support available to employers to support neurodivergence in the workplace often fails to take into account the nuances specific to our creative industries, which consists often of **non-traditional hours and work spaces, high-pressured environments**, and is largely made up of **small businesses and freelancers who rarely have access to HR departments, big training budgets, or large staff numbers**.

Throughout our research, the main barriers we've identified faced by creative businesses when it comes to neuro-inclusion are:



And we have found the main barriers faced by neurodivergent Creatives in, or wanting to be in, our sector to be:



The Creative Industries, which can be the perfect place for those of us who think and see the world in different ways, **does neurodivergent people, and themselves, a great disservice by not accommodating difference**.

This Guide aims to tear down each of these barriers by **demystifying neurodivergence** (what it is and how it appears), helping you better **understand** your neurodivergent employees and colleagues and how to communicate with them, **debunking misconceptions** about the cost of access adjustments and **outlining practical guidance** on how and when to implement them, and by essentially doing the work for you - so you don't need to find the time to do so.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ **Neuro-inclusion is a journey, not a box to be ticked**
Build it into your company ethos, planning, and structures, and continuously monitor the effectiveness of your strategies.
- ✓ **Neurodiversity is essential to a successful and thriving Creative Industries**
Utilise our unique skills and leverage diversity of thought.
- ✓ **Reframe the way in which you think about difference**
Think of neuro-inclusion as an opportunity, not a challenge.
- ✓ **There is no one way to be inclusive**
... just like there are no two same experiences of neurodivergence. Be person-focused, not label-led, and treat everyone as an individual.
- ✓ **Don't be afraid**
It's better to 'get it wrong' and learn than it is to not try at all. Change doesn't come if we're scared to approach something - it comes as long as we are making an effort to learn, to check our biases, to correct our mistakes, and to listen to what individuals are asking for.
- ✓ **Do not be performative**
Put meaning and action behind your words.
- ✓ **Utilise existing support**
Understand the resources, support, and funding already available to help you pay for and implement reasonable adjustments - and signpost those available to your employees and freelancers, who may not be aware.
- ✓ **Be proactive rather than reactive in your support**
Ask someone what they need, rather than making assumptions or waiting for them to do so. Have regular check ins to ensure support measures are still fit for purpose.
- ✓ **Focus on our strengths, but don't ignore our struggles**
We can only shine when we are supported in areas we find challenging.
- ✓ **Access comes in many different forms**
Including: physical; communication; technologies; design; and working practices.

- ✓ **Be flexible: focus on outcomes, not processes**
Just because something is the "way it's always been done", it doesn't mean it's the only way. Focus on what your people do, rather than how they do it.
- ✓ **Workplace adjustments benefit everyone**
... regardless of neurotype.
- ✓ **Neuro-inclusion is just good business sense**
More accessible recruitment and retention practices award you greater access to wider talent pools and audiences, as well as increased well-being and productivity.
- ✓ **Create neurodiversity policies**
... and shout about them! Let the world know you are neuro-inclusive, and let your employees know how to access this support.
- ✓ **Lead by example**
Leadership buy-in is essential to make it clear that your organisation values neurodiversity.
- ✓ **Engage in, and emphasise, the importance of neurodiversity training**
... for the whole business, regardless of employment status or level of seniority. Psychological safety is tied to adequate awareness and understanding of difference.
- ✓ **Embed a systemic approach to inclusivity**
Fragmented, add-on diversity interventions are neither sustainable nor effective - they simply do not work.
- ✓ **Patience and empathy is key**

Remember - the business and well-being benefits to neuro-inclusion greatly outweigh the time and effort taken to adjust your work spaces and processes.

Be intentional, and be proactive.

Just by reading this Guide, you're already well on your way.

01.

What's it all About?

Defining Neurodiversity and understanding how it appears in the workplace



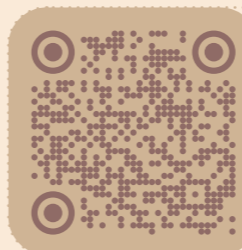
01. What's it all About?

Defining Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity. You've probably heard the word before.

But what is it? What does it mean? What does it look like?

In short, neurodiversity describes the natural, unique ways in which all of our brains develop. Any developmental path that deviates from what is understood as 'typical*', is described as neurodivergent. Neurodivergent identities include autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, OCD, Tourette's Syndrome, and many others.



Do you know what neurodiversity means?
Click/Scan here to see if the general public do!

*note on: Neurotypical

There is no 'normal' path of neurological development, as the medical model appears to suggest. Believing so is harmful as it implies that neurodivergence is 'pathological' – something that needs to be **cured, or fixed.**

In reality, every brain is different. **There is no 'normal' way** for human brains to be organised and developed – simply different developmental paths.

*note on: Identity First Language

Throughout this Guide, we use identity-first language (e.g. autistic person) rather than person-first language (e.g. person with autism) because identity first-language is preferred by a majority of participants in existing studies (Gillespie-Lynch et al, 2013)– our neurodivergence is a part of who we are, and we would not be the same person without it. Identity-first language may also be **less likely** to contribute to stigma. However, it is important to always ask an individual what their own language preferences are.

Throughout history, the predominant way in which neurodevelopmental differences like autism, ADHD, and dyslexia have been viewed is through the lens of the **medical model**, which characterises them by their **deficits**.

Viewing them as such can be harmful for those who experience it, increasing feelings of shame, of being 'wrong', of being 'less-than'. It can affect how we are seen and are treated by those around us, something many of us compensate for by masking who we are to try and fit into what is considered 'normal' ways of existing in the world.

Despite being the governing framework in shaping perceptions and understanding of neurobiological difference, the medical model has been **unenthusiastically received** by advocates in favour of a more nuanced, empathetic, and **holistic approach**.

'Neurodiversity', born in the 1990s, was a new, **alternative paradigm** for understanding these differences.

Neurodiversity

Noun [noor-oh-di-vur-si-tee, -dahy-, nyoor-]

a portmanteau for 'neurological' 'diversity' coined by autistic* sociologist Judy Singer (1997) and later popularised by journalist Harvey Blume (1998). It is both a political movement and a concept.

Challenging the negative terminology and limiting generalisations of the medical framework, neurodiversity is a term that argues that everyone's brains are varied by nature; that there is **no one 'normal' way** of thinking, learning, communicating, processing information, or behaving; and that small, biological differences, deeply **shaped by the unique context** of each individual's life, are simply parts of a whole that form to create our diverse and interesting world.

Medical Model:

- The historical view of neurodiversity.
- Focuses on deficits in individual communication, organisation, socialisation, and attention.
- Argues pathologies are situated within the individual.
- Shapes negative perceptions of and behaviours towards neurodivergence.
- Results in negative attitude towards 'disability' as a concept as well as inclusive ways of thinking.
- Does not explain personal experience.

Social Model:

- A new way of viewing neurodiversity, developed and favoured by disabled people.
- Focuses on challenges posed by social structures: systemic environmental and attitudinal barriers.
- Argues that people suffer not necessarily as a result of their deficits, but the impacts of ignorance, and the limiting ways in which we measure intelligence, ability, and success.
- A core part of both the UK Government and the United Nations' stance on equality and protections for Disabled People.
- Suggests that when barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society.

Though the neurodiversity paradigm still **sees values in labels** and sometimes the necessity of clinical intervention, it favours a more nuanced approach

to developmental difference better aligned to the **social model** of disability, one that advocates for an understanding of the entire person: our social world, our strengths as much as our weaknesses, and our well-being, as a priority.

This has given neurodivergent people a new framework through which to identify ourselves – one **that results in better confidence and self-esteem, increased ambition, and optimism**.

Fundamentally, it seeks to prove that 'different' does not mean 'worse'.

note on: Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the way in which two or more aspects of someone's identity interplay or overlap with one another.

That is, the way in which someone experiences neurodivergence is also dependent on their gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and socio-economic background.

Ideas about what neurodivergence 'looks like' that do not consider intersectionality mean that, for example, **women** and **ethnic minorities** are disadvantaged in accessing diagnoses and clinical support, as well as face **misconceptions** and **negative attitudes**.

note on: Disability

There are conflicting opinions amongst the neurodivergent population about whether they consider themselves 'disabled' or not. Some do not identify and feel stigmatised by the label, others find it useful, and some call for those uncomfortable with identifying as such to consider why they feel so.

It is a complex and polarising discussion - of those we surveyed, for example, 60.3% considered their neurodivergence a disability, 14.7% did not, and 25% were not sure.

Regardless of whether an individual considers themselves disabled or not, neurodivergences are likely to be protected under The Equality Act (2010), which describes disability as 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'**

This provides them with legal protection against discrimination, harassment, and victimisation that relates to their condition.



People meet me with pre-loaded conceptions of who I am as a Black woman, before they even get to my autism. I am constantly battling to make sure that I'm soft enough, not too intimidating, not too loud, not too weird. I don't fit in in so many different ways.

– survey response



01. What's it all About?

Defining the Conditions

Though there is no one 'right' way for human brains to be organised and developed, some people with similar ways of thinking, communicating, learning, and processing information can have a sense of shared identity or experience, identified and/or diagnosed as one or more of the following:



ADHD

- A behavioural condition, with characteristics including a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with day-to-day functioning and/or development.



Autism/Autism Spectrum Disorder

- A lifelong developmental difference which affects how people communicate and interact with the world around them.
- It is a spectrum condition, and affects individuals in many different ways.



Dyscalculia

- A specific and persistent difficulty in understanding numbers which can lead to a diverse range of difficulties with mathematics. It occurs across all ages and abilities.



Dyslexia

- A specific learning difficulty which primarily affects reading and writing skills, marked by differences in information processing.
- Though it effects certain abilities used for learning, dyslexia has no impact intelligence.



Dyspraxia/ Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD)

- A common disorder that affects movement and physical co-ordination, but one that does not affect intelligence.



OCD

- A common, chronic, and long-lasting mental health condition in which a person has uncontrollable, reoccurring thoughts (obsessions) and/or behaviours (compulsions) that they feel the urge to repeat over and over.



Tourette's Syndrome (TS)

- A complex condition, the key features of which are tics, involuntary and uncontrollable sounds and movements.
- Often misunderstood as a condition which makes people swear or say inappropriate things – 'coprolalia', the clinical term for this symptom affects only 10% of those with TS.



Remember:

Definitions relating to neurodiversity are constantly evolving – labels that existed ten years ago are already outdated because of changing cultural perspectives and diagnostic criteria. At the time of writing, we have used the definitions used by the governing UK charity/organisation related to each condition, as they, above and beyond clinical categorisation, best reflect the experience of individuals.

Click on each title to find out more.

'Neurodivergence' as an umbrella term is broad, and the conditions that fall under it vary depending on interpretation.

Additional neurodevelopmental conditions such as Intellectual Disabilities, mental health disorders such as depression and psychoses, and acquired differences from brain trauma are all considered by many advocates of neurodivergence to fall under its definition; each representing human variations in development, behaviour, thinking, and communicating; each difference contributing to our beautiful world.

01. What's it all About?
Prevalence Rates

The most recent research predicts that between 15-20% (Doyle, 2020) of the UK are neurodivergent – that's over **13 million people** in the UK, and **1.6 billion people** worldwide.

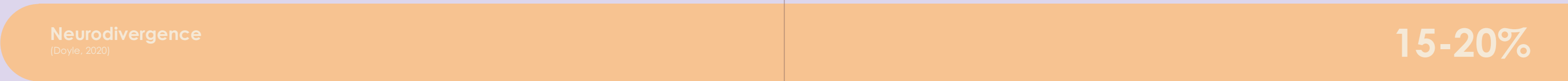
For you and your team, that means that **1 in 6** job applicants, existing staff, clients and audience are likely neurodivergent in some way.

Comorbidity
 Noun [koh-mawr-bid-i-tee]

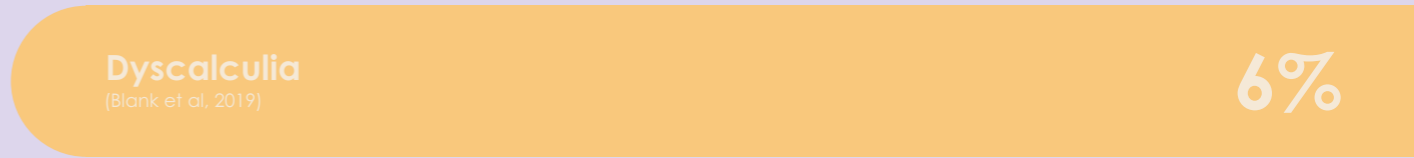
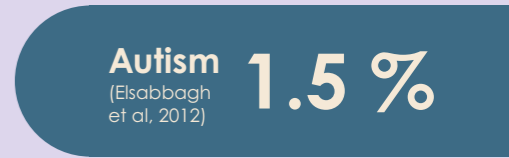
The overlap of two or more conditions in one individual – many people experience multiple neurodivergences.

Though we do not yet know whether common comorbidities mean that conditions are related to each other, we do know that it occurs at a very high rate – not just with other neurodevelopmental conditions, but also physical health and mental health differences.

Some people prefer the terminology 'co-occurring' or 'co-existing' rather than 'comorbid'.



**Current
 Prevalence
 Rates**



note on: The Neurodivergent Epidemic?!

While some question the validity of the 'increasing' prevalence of neurodivergence, the rise in diagnoses in recent years can at least in part be explained by better public understanding of these differences, how they appear, and their diagnostic characteristic, as well as an increased acceptance of them in the 21st Century (due in part, at least, to the rise of the neurodiversity movement). There's not 'more neurodivergent people' – we just have the tools and knowledge to identify it.

01. What's it all About?

Neurodiversity... Neurodivergent... Neurodiverse... it's a minefield!

Scared of saying the wrong thing?

Don't worry – you're not alone.

Our understanding around the use of the word 'neurodiversity' has seen so many developments since it entered the dictionary almost 30 year ago.

Terminology relating to neurodiversity is often contentious and fluid – at best, what we have are 'working definitions' – subject to change over time as culture shifts, and patterns of popular usage evolve.

It is important that we **respect the way in which individuals want to identify**, as well as use a **consistent and inclusive set of words and phrases** that are **informed by the neurodivergent community**.

Each individual is neurodivergent:



ADHD Autism Dyscalculia Dyslexia Dyspraxia OCD

This group is neurodiverse:



ADHD Autism Dyscalculia Dyslexia Dyspraxia OCD Neurotypical

Neurodiversity

- a noun -

Describes the variation of cognitive function in the human mind. Highlights that we all have unique brains, differences, abilities, skills, and needs.

Neurodiverse

- an adjective -

Describes the variation of cognitive function in the human mind.

Neurodivergence

- a noun -

The divergence in cognitive function from what is considered a 'typically' developing brain; includes differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and others.

Neurodivergent

- an adjective -

Describes people who have a neurodivergent identity, such as those who are autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, dyspraxic, and others.



Remember:

we're all learning. We learn and grow, together. What is important in practical terms is a good-faith effort to be inclusive in our language and our actions – and to be receptive to feedback from individuals on their preferences.



01. What's it all About?

Common Strengths and Challenges

Though no two brains are the same, there are similarities between neuro-identities in terms of how they present.

These are just some of common strengths and challenges often associated with neurodivergence:

note on: Spiky Profiles
 "Many neurodivergent people have a more 'spikey' skills profile than neurotypical people. They may have outstanding, unique abilities in specific areas, but in turn find other aspects more difficult. Employers need to get better at making the most out of what people are good at and make role adjustments for things they're not good at. That's how you get the best out of talented people."
 - Ray Cole, CEO Auticon UK



ADHD

Strengths

- Hyperfocus
- Calm under pressure
- Pattern recognition

Challenges

- Executive functioning
- Concentration
- Restlessness



Autism

Strengths

- Logical reasoning
- Analytical thinking
- Detail orientation

Challenges

- Socialising and communicating
- Overly-literal thinking
- Coping with change



Dyslexia

Strengths

- Out-of-the-box thinking
- Entrepreneurialism
- Innovation

Challenges

- Executive functioning
- Reading and writing
- Anxieties



Dyscalculia

Strengths

- Problem solving
- Visual-spatial reasoning
- Strategic thinking

Challenges

- Maths and numeracy
- Memory associated with numbers (dates, etc)
- Time management



OCD

Strengths

- Attention to detail
- Organisational skills
- Creative thinking

Challenges

- Obsessions
- Compulsions
- Related anxieties



Dyspraxia

Strengths

- Multi tasking
- Inferential reasoning
- Innovation

Challenges

- Motor co-ordination
- Clumsiness
- Processing speed and working memory



Tourette's

Strengths

- Enhanced cognitive control
- Information Processing
- Creativity

Challenges

- Social skills
- Organisation
- Self esteem

01. What's it all About?

Neurodiversity and Employment

Across the world, we're beginning to tap into the **unearthed potential of the neurodivergent brain**. Some of our most important inventions, pieces of art and music, and discoveries in the scientific field have come from neurodivergent minds.

Global giants of the worlds of business, science, and technology, and the arts are actively seeking and recruiting neurodivergent talent not just because they must, but because they're desperate to utilise our (often) heightened abilities in innovative thinking, problem solving, persistence, hyperfocus, and pattern recognition.

Leaders such as NASA, Google, Microsoft, SAP, EY, GCGQ, and IBM all have active recruitment and training programmes catered specifically to neurodivergent people, **recognising the unique talents that diverse ways of thinking bring to the table**.

Yet despite an increasing awareness and understanding of hidden differences, neurodivergent individuals continue to be critically under-served in the world of work.

The Numbers ...



Over **70%** of autistic people are under- or un-employed, despite three quarters wanting to be in work (The Buckland Review, 2024). This population **face the largest pay gap** of all disability groups, receiving on average a third less than non-disabled people;



4 in 10 unemployed people using a Job Centre are dyslexic (Baroness Walmsley, 2010), and only **5%** of supported working-age adults with a learning disability are in paid employment in the UK (BASE, 2024);



ADHD diagnosis reduces employment by **10%**, earnings by **33%** (Fletcher, 2014), and makes someone **60%** more likely to lose their job (Murphy et al, 2008);



Unemployment is **5x higher** for people with Tourette's (Byler et al, 2015);



People with neurological differences remain as a population the **leading target** for violence and general antagonism (Sin et al, 2009) and **workplace bullying** (CIPD, 2024);



Persistent evidence of disproportional representation within **prisons** (Fazel et al, 2008), long term **unemployment** (Carter et al, 2011), and **failure to achieve career potential** (Holliday et al, 1999).

Of those in work, nearly three-quarters (70%) (WTW, 2022) of ND employees experience mental health issues in the workplace*, and are having **consistently more negative experience** of wellbeing, career satisfaction, and psychological safety than their neurotypical peers (NiB, 2024).



Our research highlights we need to take urgent action. The quality of support, including workplace adjustments, employee training and psychological safety, remains inadequate.

- Dan Harris, chairperson and founder of NiB



* Neurodivergence is a mental health problem

Not all neurodivergences are mental health conditions, but mental health conditions are considered by many to also fall under the 'neurodiversity umbrella'. In addition, mental ill health is more common for neurodivergent people than the general population. These additional challenges are often the result of discrimination, isolation, and the extra pressures for neurodivergent people to navigate a world not built for them, one where 'masking' who they are can lead to burnout, anxiety, and depression.



The world of business largely remains **inconsistent in recruiting and retaining neurodivergent talent**, and a **lack of understanding of neurodivergence** means it is rarely being considered in the design of workplace processes, management practices, environments, and cultures.

The problem of overlooking neurodivergence in business is already very clear: we are **neglecting entire talent pools**, we are **not creating psychologically safe environments** that enable better employee wellbeing, and we are **missing out on the myriad of unique skills and talents** a neurodivergent workforce can bring.



01. What's it all About?

Creative Industries

How has your neurodivergence benefitted your role in the creative industries?*

Because of my own experiences, I can understand other people's nuances and differences and anticipate their needs better and be more open and accommodating.

I just think about things in a different way – something that has always been a negative for me, but have found to be a positive in the creative world.

I THRIVE under pressure. Set life is perfect for my brain.

High energy and motivation.

Creative thinker.

I can think in non-linear ways: multisensory creativity informs the story world with richness.

An eye for detail comes in handy for editing.

I'm very good at spotting patterns which means I'm great at reflecting on and adapting for project management.

I get deeply invested in 'special subjects' I care about – this helps in telling stories.

I can adapt very quickly and come up with solutions in creative ways.

I am blunt about things other people skirt around.

When things don't go to plan on a shoot, I can quickly work out best way to adjust plans and still deliver.

People always ask me 'how can you do that?' I don't know, it's just the way my brain works. But it helps in this industry.

[responses from our ND in Creative Industries Survey, 2024]

***note on: being careful**

For many, their experience of neurodivergence is not always something they look at positively - and that's okay. Learning and behavioural differences can be challenging in a neurotypical world, and the day-to-day reality often exhausting.

While it does not aim to negate the genuine struggles of many who experience them and acknowledges that certain conditions require healthcare intervention, the concept of neurodiversity recognises that there are many great strengths and abilities associated with brains that think and work differently – competitive advantages that can, in the right environment and with the right support, be enabled to flourish.

I am anxious and overthink everything – it means I never miss detail, always have contingency, and everything I produce will be of high standard.

Creative complex problem solving cross sectors.

I see patterns clearly, so find it easy to restructure scripts quickly before production.

Hyperfocus.

My brain collects lots of bits of information about lots of things and matches info to needs very well. This makes me very good at networking and research.

I have lots of empathy because of past experiences – it makes me a good manager to lots of different personalities.

I obsessively delve into subjects.

It has allowed me to focus on multiple things at once or work at a fast-paced speed.

Hyper aware of the needs of other departments and team-members

Out of the box thinking.

I don't mind doing jobs that others would be unhappy doing because I don't mind working alone.

I am hyperlexic and have a very fast reading speed, and a very good memory for words on a page.

I can retain lots of detail and deal with several possible plans at once. Good for strategizing on a production.

I 'see/hear' structure as being like a piece of music, so it's obvious when there's a wrong 'note'.

Calm in stressful situations.

The Creative Industries
Scan here to watch our video!

It is no surprise given the unique skillsets in **imagination, out-of-the-box thinking,** and **hyperfocus,** that our creative industries could be the **perfect home for those of us who see the world in different ways.**

In fact, the **United Kingdom Creative Industry Council (2021)** estimated that **20-30%** of the workforce in the creative industries are neurodivergent, while the **'Creative Equals' Equality Standard** data put this much higher, closer to half of all employees.

Diverse perspectives naturally bring innovation and creativity, but many of us also have **great attention to detail, thrive in crisis-mode, are liberated by the transient nature of freelance work, work best in non-traditional work spaces and structures,** and naturally have a **different way of thinking.**

We're constantly hearing from creative stars acknowledging their neurodivergence and how it has enhanced their careers; talent like: Armando Iannucci, Paddy Considine, Steven Spielberg, Tim Burton, Stanley Kubrick, Billie Eilish, Sir Anthony Hopkins, Jules Robertson, Chris Packham, Jordanne Jones, Jane McGrath, Stuart Dunne, Tom Holland, to name but a few.

And creative businesses clearly see the potential: **96%** of whom believe there is an **active competitive advantage to a neurodivergent workforce** (Universal Music, 2020). There's **huge audience potential, too** – by centring neurodivergent stories and voices, both in front of and behind the camera, you're reaching the (at least) **1 in 7 (15%)** of neurodivergent people living across the globe.



Celebrating neurodiversity is paramount to Bomper Studio's ethos. We thrive on curiosity and pushing boundaries to create our best work, and neurodivergent individuals play a huge part in that. They bring unique talents like problem-solving prowess, boundless creativity, and an eye for detail that keeps us sharp. But it's not just about what they bring to the table; it's about making sure everyone feels seen and valued.

Celebrating and embracing neurodiversity isn't just good for business - it's good for all of us, creating a richer, more inclusive environment where everyone can shine.

- Ceri Davies, Bomper Studio, Leading Animation Company

01. What's it all About?

The Business Case for Neuro-Inclusion

Clearly, more needs to be done to ensure that these **exceptional minds** are being sufficiently served by our creative sector, and it is everyone's job to ensure true equity in the workplace.

If everybody thinks the same way, we're likely to miss opportunities to bring creative solutions to the market.

- José Velasco leads the Autism at Work program at SAP for North America

But this shouldn't just be considered a box-ticking exercise – one that serves both our moral, and legal, obligation to ensure equal opportunity to neurodivergent individuals.

There is an active, competitive advantage to fostering a truly neurodiverse workforce.

Productivity:



Companies that lead in Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent (DDN) inclusion are **25%** more likely to outperform on productivity (Accenture, 2023). Research from EY suggests that neurodiverse teams can be **30%** more productive when their strengths are recognised and supported (EY, 2024), JP Morgan Chase have seen rises in productivity of **50-90%** (Financial Times, 2020). Studies elsewhere have found productivity rates as high as **145%** in autistic talent (The Buckland Report, 2024).

Profitability:



Inclusion leaders realise **1.6%** more revenue, **2.6x** more net income, and **3x** more economic profit than their direct competitors (Accenture, 2023). **31%** of HR leaders think neurodivergent employees have made their businesses more profitable (CIPD, 2024).



Talent:

Focusing on neuro-inclusion gives businesses access to new talent pools and new opportunities for existing talent pools, and reduced turnover of top performers. One study found, when their neurodivergent staff were properly supported, they had a **92%** retention rate (Forbes, 2024).



Diversity of Thought:

A neurodiverse team improves the quality of decision making, bolsters innovation, enhances problem-solving, and is more likely to generate a wider range of ideas and avoid cognitive bias.



Reaching Audiences:

Companies with better understanding of differences and the different ways in which we all communicate and process information are more likely to meet the needs of different customers and audiences, as well as solidify relationships and boost the company brand.



Wellbeing:

Having neuro-inclusivity as a gold standard within your business rather than an afterthought ensures psychological safety for everyone, including those without a diagnosis, those unaware that they are neurodivergent, and also your neurotypical workforce – everyone, regardless of neurotype, has access needs.



Happier Workplaces:

Companies committed to diversity are **75%** more likely to report a pro-teamwork culture and benefit from professional attributes such as job appreciation, high work attendance rates, and company loyalty (McKinsey & Company, 2022).



The Law:

Neuro-inclusivity: the right thing to do, an evidenced competitive advantage - but also your legal obligation under **The Equality Act (2010)**. Fostering truly and systemic neuro-inclusive practices protect you and your team.

However, to realise these benefits, your organisation needs to be neuro-inclusive, with a dedication to equality of outcomes for all types of thinkers.

01. What's it all About?

Next Steps

Though we are beginning to recognise that atypical brains are key to the future, there are still few companies in our sector that actively implementing neurodivergent policies and practices (<25% (Universal Music, 2020)). Small businesses, of which our creative sectors in Wales makes up 98% (Clwstwr, 2020), are the least likely to say neuro-inclusion is an area of focus for their business (CIPD, 2024).

There is still a **lack of tangible support for employers for addressing and accommodating neurodivergence**, for **neurodivergent individuals hoping to enter and remain in our industry**, and there are still **ongoing misconceptions and stigmas** prevalent around these common but hidden differences.

Employing and retaining a neurodivergent workforce is **still viewed as a challenge rather than an opportunity**, and **the industry is missing out on the myriad of benefits of hiring some of these exceptional minds**.



When a flower doesn't bloom,
you fix the environment in which
it grows, not the flower.

- Alexander Den Heijer



02.

Joining the Team

How to create more neuro-inclusive recruitment, interview, and onboarding processes



02. Joining the Team

Overview

Constantly, we're hearing how indies are struggling to find diverse talent.

But is talent shortages the issue, or a far deeper problem?



the Head of Production said in conversation it 'was difficult to recruit diverse people' and yet never tailored their recruitment or employment practices, and only ever hired the same type of people. It made me want to scream!

- focus group participant

Traditional hiring practices in the creative industries, including **ambiguous job descriptions, poorly defined 'culture fit' criteria, rigidly formal interview questions, and challenging sensory environments** have all been designed with neurotypical brains in mind, and have the effect of, consciously or unconsciously, discriminating against neurodivergent applicants.

Many of us don't even know that we're doing it. Many companies are not only neurodiversity friendly, but also neurodivergent led – they just fall victim to following standardised recruitment processes or templates simply because they do not know any other way. This is especially true of small businesses, (of which our industry is largely made up of) but it isn't necessarily a reflection of how they feel towards neurodiversity more generally.

Despite our field being one that interests significantly more neurodivergent **graduates** and **jobseekers** than neurotypical (Cheriyana et al, 2021), too many identify anxiety about the application and interview process as the **biggest barrier** to finding work.

Evaluating your hiring and onboarding procedures will likely raise areas for improvement. **Are your recruitment processes discouraging neurodivergent applicants? Are your interview practices allowing neurodivergent talent to best demonstrate their strengths? Are your onboarding procedures truly setting up your neurodivergent employee to navigate the workplace?**

There is a wealth of untapped creative people across Wales and beyond. Use these guidelines to help you hire from the full range of human talent and make sure you're selecting the best candidate for the job.

we just don't have any neurodivergent people coming within our pipeline'



either you do and you don't know because applicants don't feel comfortable enough to share, or your recruitment policies are inadequate in enabling neurodivergent talent to progress through them. At least 1 in 7 people are neurodivergent, far more than you think. If they're not in your pipeline, you are responsible for ensuring that they are.



02. Joining the Team

Recruitment

Job Specs/Descriptions

Too often, those responsible for hiring look to hire generalists - someone who will tick 'all' possible boxes related to a job role - which ignores the context of what the business actually needs and excludes candidates with narrower, deeper skills, - perhaps actually better suited for the specific role being specified.

It's important to consider **what it is you are actually looking for** when writing your job spec, rather than generic and cliched requirements. Don't just 'copy and paste' past descriptions - think consciously about what the role will entail - what skills, rather than experience, you are looking for.

How to create neuro-inclusive job specs:

- **Be intentional** in your job descriptions - focus on the key and essential requirements
- **Avoid generic and cliched requirements** such as 'confident communicator' if these skills aren't essential for the role.
- **Be clear** about what the job, and working environment, will entail
- **Avoid ambiguous terms** like 'fast-paced environment' without defining what this means and if, and how, it can be adapted to suit the individual
- Be clear and concise in your language, **avoiding jargon**
- Where possible, **indicate the number of steps involved** in the hiring process
- **Clearly demark 'must-have' and 'nice-to-have' skills and experience**
- Remove reference to poorly defined 'culture fit', such as a need to be 'outgoing'
- Try, where possible, **not to be too prescriptive in essential experience**. There are many reasons neurodivergent individuals have not had previous access to opportunity
- Keep the **format clear** and simple
- Keep the **description short**

note on: Job Roles

You don't need to describe, in detail, the requirements of a job role you're advertising. Link the job description to, for example, [ScreenSkills](#) job role profile, which can provide the candidate with more information if they need it, rather than confusing the advert with too much detail.

Adverts

- **Make sure your materials are not:**
 - X overly complex
 - X text-heavy
 - X jargon-heavy
 - X causing visual overwhelm
- **Make sure that they are:**
 - o Written in a **sans serif font**, in at least **12 point font**
 - o **Sufficient contrast** between the font colour and background
 - o **Compatible with screen readers** and other assistive technologies
 - o **Bullet-pointed**, where possible.
 - o Include **alt-text on images**, if used.

Neurodivergent candidates will rarely feel motivated to apply to employers that they don't think will understand or value their difference. **Post an access statement on your advert** that clearly states that you encourage neurodivergent talent to apply. This signals to candidates that you consciously welcome applications from a range of thinking styles.

This can be as simple as:

Job Ad

we encourage people from all walks of life to apply for this role. If you have any access requirements during the application process, or require any of this information in a different format, please contact me@example.com

note on: Reaching Talent

Evaluate your long-term talent pipeline strategy, and consider reaching out to talent in new places. Look beyond text-heavy ad spaces like Facebook and LinkedIn to visual boards that naturally attract neurodivergent candidates. Form relationships through work placements and internships, and partner with educational organisations and recruitment agencies to target specific talent pools.



Remember:

only include an access statement if it truly reflects your workplace policies. It is not inclusion if it ends at the recruitment stage.

Application Forms

- **Avoid long application forms**
- Allow applicants to **download the form** and work on a Word Document (or equivalent) template before uploading, so that they may see all of the questions in advance and take their time to get it right
- **Include contact details** so applicants can ask additional questions
- **Be open to alternative application formats**, such as **video**, **portfolios**, or **showreels**
- **Offer the opportunity to disclose** their neurodivergence, if they wish. Sometimes it can benefit facilitating a useful discussion about what reasonable adjustments are needed (though there is no obligation for them to do so)
- Ensure that they are **compatible with screen readers and other assistive technologies**
- Application forms must feature a spell checker
- Allow users to **see how far through** the process they are (e.g. page 1 of 5) and allow them to **save and come back** - this avoids reliance on active memory

Job Application Form

These application guidelines are available in:

- Large print
- Easy read
- Audio
- British Sign Language

You can apply to this position by audio, video or text. If you need to apply in a different format or require additional support (such as scribing assistance) then please get in touch.

This application portal is compatible with screen readers.

note on: recruitment filtering

Many organisations are using artificial intelligence (AI) software to screen candidates, or are outsourcing their recruitment filtering to companies who automate these processes. This can unintentionally screen out neurodivergent talent who have challenges with spelling, with patchy educational or experience, and, in all, are not evaluating candidates for their strengths.

'accommodating for neurodiversity in recruitment creates an unfair advantage' – a genuine, real comment we had



neurodivergent people are already starting from a point of disadvantage. Traditional hiring processes, created with neurotypical thinking styles in mind, can be challenging for many neurodivergent people to navigate. What you're really doing is recognising the barriers employment that are currently faced, creating a level playing field, and a fairer, more inclusive starting point for neurodivergent candidates.



Spotlight On: Microsoft

Managers at Microsoft realised that more than 40% of the successful employees that were hired through their Neurodiversity Hiring Program had actually tried – and failed – to make it through their traditional application processes. This forced the business to reevaluate how inclusive their processes actually were, and to put new approaches in place to ensure that accessibility was embedded, not just an afterthought. This has allowed the company to successfully recruit and retain neurodivergent talent.

02. Joining the Team

Interviews



Interviews. **Famously formal, rigid, and awful – for everyone involved.** They're rarely a pleasant experience, but interviews can prove particularly challenging for neurodivergent candidates, many of whom experience executive functioning difficulties making immediately responding to questions difficult, and, because interviews are generally measuring social competency over ability, those of us who do not present in 'typical' ways are disadvantaged.

Here are some tips and tricks for those responsible for interviewing neurodivergent candidates, cast, and crew:

Pre-Interview

- Ask **every candidate** in advance if they have any **access requirements** for the session, regardless of it takes place online or in person
- Send **detailed information about the location** of the interview (preferably with **visual cues** like Google Maps), including how to get there, who will meet them at reception, and what the room will look like
- If in person, provide an **access statement** for your work building
- **Include an itinerary** detailing how long they will be there and the structure of the interview
- Let them know **how many people** they are likely to meet during the interview, **and who they are** (preferably with headshots)
- Give **clear expectations** – on dress code, on what they can bring (e.g. notes), and what to
- Allow the candidate to **ask any questions in advance**

- Where possible, **provide interview questions in advance** (for those with executive functioning challenges, associated with, for example, ADHD and dyslexia, it offers the opportunity to recall important information without the immediate pressure of the day. Autistic candidates, too, benefit from the additional time to process and formulate responses, particularly to questions they may not quite understand in the moment)
- **Notify with sufficient time any changes**



You're not allowed to ask a candidate if they have a disability, nor if they will need adjustments in the workplace if successful. You are allowed to ask if they have any access requirements for the application and interview processes – but putting these things in place as a standard practice creates a level playing field for those unable to advocate for their own needs.

During the Interview

- **Avoid an interview time that requires travel during peak hours**
- Be clear: make **sure questions are direct and experience based**, rather than abstract hypotheticals like 'where do you see yourself in five years' time?'. An autistic person can find this impossible to answer, and can put them into a stressful and anxious state
- **Don't have multiple parts to a question**
- Offer a **range of interview options**, including in-person, remote, or phone
- Offer a **choice of seating arrangements**, e.g. side by side, facing across a table
- Offer **additional time** to answer questions
- Keep it **short and simple**
- **Avoid arbitrary or abstract psychometric tests**, only using ones that are valid, reliable, and administered by suitably qualified assessors capable of interpreting data without discriminating against neurodivergent candidates
- Allow them to **bring an advocate/supporter**, if necessary
- Make sure **your interviewer is well-informed** about neurodivergence, preferably through training, so that they can be aware of their own bias* against behaviours such as:
 - Poor eye-contact
 - Unconventional body language
 - Challenges with small talk
 - Fidgeting
 - Lengthy conversational tangents
 - Stimming
 - Slow responses
 - Subdued enthusiasm
 - Over honesty about weaknesses
 - Low confidence and self-esteem

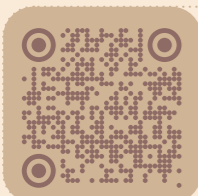
... and adapt accordingly.

- Choose a location with reduced sensory overwhelm, one that:
 - Is quiet
 - Is free from distractions
 - Does not have harsh artificial lights

In general, processes that overload the working memory, in what is an already stressful situation, disable neurodivergent applicants by exaggerating their weaknesses and reducing, if not eliminating, their strengths.

Where possible, consider alternatives to the interview process, that better consider competency and showcase relevant skills, such as:

- **Practical assessments and applied tasks**
- **Short-term trial placements**
- **Job shadowing**
- **Work samples/show reels**



Scan/click here to watch our animation about neuro-inclusive interviews!

*note on: Affinity Bias

"People tend to hire people who are like themselves, and [neurodivergent] people are not like you, they are like themselves." – Steve Silberman, Neurotribes.

Affinity bias is the unconscious tendency to gravitate towards people who think and behave in the same ways as we do. This is problematic in the hiring process, especially given that the list of things you're 'supposed' to do, like 'make eye contact', 'be confident', 'read the room', 'sit still' and 'be persuasive' run counter to typical neurodivergent behaviours, creating criteria that systemically screens us out. Understanding this can help interviewers look beyond arbitrary social measures and get to know the real candidate, their strengths, and what they can do.



The calls for a more diverse industry and those willing to put the work in to accommodate differences is a wide chasm. Despite what they say, higher-ups always have a certain 'type' of person that they're looking for. And I don't fit into this box in a lot of ways, so my skills and talents aren't even considered.

- Neurodivergent Line Producer, focus group participant



After the Interview

Applications and interviews are incredibly taxing for neurodivergent candidates, who have to give a lot of themselves – mentally, physically, and emotionally – to get through the processes. And rejection is felt hard.

If possible, provide clear and honest feedback to unsuccessful candidates, to help ease preparation for the next one and take some of that pressure of the unknown off their shoulders.

Spotlight On: RONDO

"One thing 'The Open Door Initiative' was very keen to promote was best practice in offering advice and support to those who were not successful in getting a place on the scheme.

After we had shortlisted candidates, to those who were not successful, we had sent a carefully worded rejection email, bearing in mind how hard it is to receive such news at any stage of the selection process. We were very mindful to be considerate and offer other available opportunities, including a comprehensive list of, for example, other current TV training schemes that were opening up or open. For those who were rejected after the interview stage, we included that if they wanted any personal feedback, we would offer this.

For those who took us up on this, we gave pointers on where they can improve as well as offer them a further chat with a seasoned professional in the area in they were interested in getting into."

- Yeeta Imam-Rashid, Rondo Media, on the importance of giving unsuccessful candidates feedback

Check your processes!



Just because you think that your recruitment processes are inclusive, it doesn't mean that they actually are – in fact, there is a huge discrepancy between decision makers' perception of inclusive practices and that of neurodivergent applicants. One study found 64% of HR leaders felt their recruitment processes were inclusive and that they were capable of identifying neurodivergent differences – only 4% of dyslexic employees felt the same (Made by Dyslexia, 2023). Strategically assess your practices against the above recommendations, and involve neurodivergent voices to contribute to the process – whether those already existing in your community, or consult with lived experience professionals.

Remember! Simple changes to these processes can hugely reduce anxieties around expectation and performance, meaning that everyone can perform at their best self - regardless of neurotype.

02. Joining the Team

Onboarding

You've managed to secure a talented neurodivergent employee, crew member, freelancer, or cast member. Lucky you!

But a commitment to being neuro-inclusive does not end at the recruitment stage.

To **reduce anxiety** about the new role for your staff member, and to **better get to know** who they are and **what they need** to thrive, ensure your onboarding processes, where possible, align with these guidelines:

Preparing the New Starter

- Provide in advance **detailed information packs**, that include:
 - **Access information** about the place they will be working
 - **Instructions** about workplaces processes, including who they should report to, chain of command, procedures for communicating issues, and how to call in sick
- Be sure to also include information about **the 'unspoken' rules and expectations** of the workplace, including:
 - **Dress code** (with clear examples, not vague 'smart casual' guidance)
 - Typical **work hours and patterns** (and any flexibility around this)
 - **Conventional times for breaks**, and **length**
 - **Typical communication channels**, and **expectations of use**
 - **Social events**, and **expectation** around attendance
 - Etiquette around **social 'norms'** like making tea, birthdays, etc
- Establish that they have a **travel plan** to get to and from work
- Make sure they have all the **tools, contacts**, and **training** necessary to be able to successfully do their job
- Offer **alternative methods** for any necessary training (e.g. self-paced tutorials, where they can process information at their own speed)
- Give a **tour of the office**, including key facilities like toilets, fire exits, and quiet spaces
- **Avoid**, where possible, **group 'icebreaker' activities** – which can be anxiety-inducing for individuals with social communication challenges. In certain cases, you may want to provide a more **tailored, one-to-one experience for employees**, giving them the opportunity to meet colleagues individually or in small groups
- Provide opportunities for employees to **acclimate themselves** to the workforce and workplace before starting their job

- If remote working: make sure that **lines of communication** are clearly established
- Offer a peer-to-peer **'buddy' scheme** who they can clarify information with, help navigate the social norms of the workplace, and gain insight on processes
- Be clear that you are **open to questions**, or point to who they can follow up with (e.g. their Line Manager or Head of Department)

Getting to Know Your New Starter

I just want the onus being taken off of neurodivergent people to highlight their access needs - for access not to be an afterthought.

- survey response

The best way to shift the responsibility of addressing and asking for access requirements from the individual and to the employer, is to get to know all of your new hires by providing a workplace questionnaire.

Often referred to as **Access 'Statements'**, **'Riders'**, or **'Passports'**, **'Welcome Aboard'**, **'Comfort at Work'**, or **'About Me'** questionnaires, these are a live record of access requirements shared between a worker and their manager to support their ability to be successful at their job.

Often, the obligation is on the individual to provide this information. People may provide in advance of being asked their own, bespoke Access Riders they have created themselves or from previous roles, but not everyone will have the confidence to do so.

By providing these in template form and in advance to new hires, you take the responsibility off the individual to advocate for themselves and helps them to feel included and comfortable in asking for what they need.

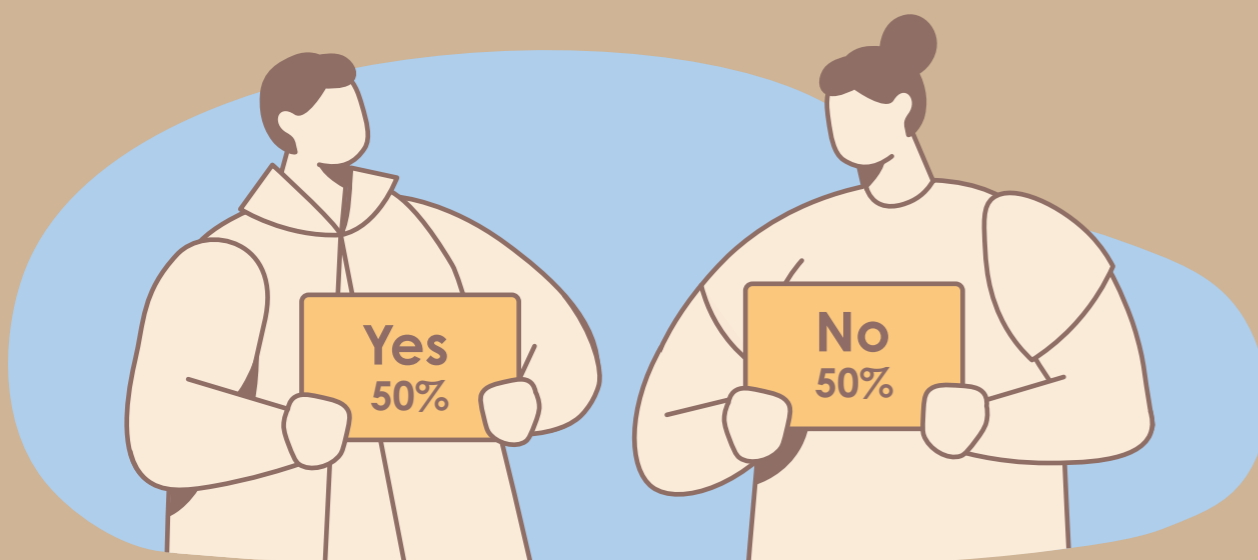
This resource should be provided to **all new starters**, regardless of neurotype, as many employees may have access preferences or requirements for any number of reasons.



These questionnaires could include questions about:

- **Identity preferences** (e.g. 'autistic' or 'person with autism')
- **Communication preferences** (e.g. email, verbal, combination)
- **Work environment preferences** (e.g. not next to a distracting window, use of headphones)
- If they require a **quiet space**, **scheduled movement breaks**, or **flexible hours**.
- **Emergency contact** information
- **Travel support requirements**
- How they like their tea or coffee (keep it light!)

“Have you ever asked for adjustments from your employer?”



asking your hires about their individual requirements helps support the 50% who have not felt able to advocate for their needs.

[results from our ND in Creative Industries Survey, 2024]

- Advise each individual that it **might not be possible to meet every preference**.
- Offer the option to **provide their answers verbally**, or to **not answer** at all.
- **Regular reviews** of how well these access requirements are being met, and if they have changed or evolved as the individual has become more integrated in the role, will help monitor the success of these measures.
- **Always gain consent** from the individual about what of this information can be shared with others in the organisation, and follow GDPR rules when managing these documents.

These are particularly useful for short term contracts, of which many exist in the creative industries, as normally the nature of these prevents employers fully being able to understand and create relationships with their hires. Documents like these – which can be carried with neurodivergent individuals between roles – help remove these barriers and ensure that they're being heard, regardless of the length of the role.

02. Joining the Team

Reasonable Adjustments

Most are low/no cost, many are useful to everyone.

Reasonable Adjustments, sometimes known as 'accommodations', are **things you put in place to support the access needs of your employees**, identified in the application and onboarding processes.

So many are concerned about how implementing workplace adjustments will affect their business – in fact, employers' main perceived barrier (69% (The Buckland Report, 2024)) to hiring disabled talent is the cost of making workplace accommodations.

But many adjustments required by neurodivergent (and neurotypical!) staff are actually **low cost** or even **free**, and there is help available to support businesses cover additional costs. In general, employment-based adjustments create **safer, happier, and more productive workplaces**, and are significantly **cheaper than the cost of re-recruiting**.

Simple changes to the work process and environment can enhance productivity and wellbeing, **by creating safe spaces** in which everyone can be their best self.

It's important that adjustments are made on a **person-by-person basis** – not based on preconceived ideas of what someone might need. Sure – some autistic people need to wear headphones to aid filtering out of external sensory inputs – but not all will. Yes, some people with ADHD will find open plan offices distracting – but some might not. Even people with the same neuro-identity will be very different in the way in which they experience it. **Don't assume - understand each person** and **customise the work place and role** in a way that **plays to individual strengths**, and **mitigates individual weaknesses**.

After all – who is best qualified to know what is needed to tear down the barriers a person faces? The **person who faces them**.

And remember – **adjustments become less of a 'burden' when they are not an afterthought**. Implementing **universal design** within every policy, process, product, and procedure you create means that work spaces and practices become inclusive by nature, rather than each time you hire someone new.

'it's too expensive to implement reasonable adjustments'



Many adjustments are simple, cost-effective, or free – up to 56% (Job Accommodation Network, 2024) of requested accommodations actually cost nothing to the employer.

These can just be small changes to the way in which you communicate with them, allowing flexible hours or remote working, creating quiet spaces, or providing written agendas and follow up meeting notes. Where there is a cost involved, for example in purchasing assistive technology, it is usually fairly cheap, and there are tax incentives to support businesses.

The 'cost of reasonable adjustments' should never be a deterrent to hiring neurodivergent staff – the cost of not being inclusive has a far, far more substantial price.



Examples of Reasonable Adjustments

These are examples, not a set of rigid guidelines to be followed. Remember – accommodations are bespoke to individual needs!



Work Environment

- Quiet spaces for working
- Varied lighting
- Noise-reducing office partitions
- Temperature adjustment
- Clear signage within buildings
- Moving of noisy equipment (printers, copiers) away from designated quiet areas
- A personal assigned workstation rather than 'hot desking'
- Relaxing dress code for sensory sensitivities or motor challenges



Schedule Flexibility

- Adjusted hours to avoid peak commute travel times
- Comfort breaks
- Remote working (the most requested adjustment of our survey participants, and advocated for by Screen Skills own research (2022))
- Fixed hours rather than varied shifts might suit some
- Additional time off for appointments or treatment



Additional Support

- IT and communications support for remote workers
- Providing a workplace mentor or 'buddy'
- Support Staff
- Adjusted performance analysis that is outcome based rather than process based
- Modifying procedures for testing or assessment
- Additional feedback from supervisor
- Modifying disciplinary or grievance procedures



Training

- Neurodiversity awareness training for managers and staff
- Specialist training for the individual in time management, visual memory, or communication
- Adjusted training methodology to include pre-recorded videos that don't rely on social ability or recall/memory skills
- Sending materials in advance



Assistive Technology

- Screen readers and dictation tools
- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Captioning services
- Project or time management tools
- Mind-mapping software



Communication

- Option of mode, e.g. written or oral
- Agendas and minutes for meetings
- Recorded instructions, or 'easy read' manuals
- Direct, clear instructions and deadlines
- Colour and font preferences in written communications
- Scheduling breaks into long meetings
- Setting cut off times for digital communication

note on: defining 'reasonable'

There is no single definition of what is reasonable – it entirely depends on the context. Factors to consider when determining what is reasonable include:

- Is it effective at removing an individual barrier?
- Is it practical?
- Is it (after accounting for incentives to support costs) affordable?
- Does it disrupt business activities?



Remember:

Creating an accommodating workplace doesn't just benefit neurodivergent workers – an inclusive and psychologically safe workplace is just good people management.

Providing reasonable adjustments:

- Enables all employees to be their best self
- Reduces absenteeism
- Increases productivity
- Leads to happier, more satisfied employees
- Enhances the reputation of your company

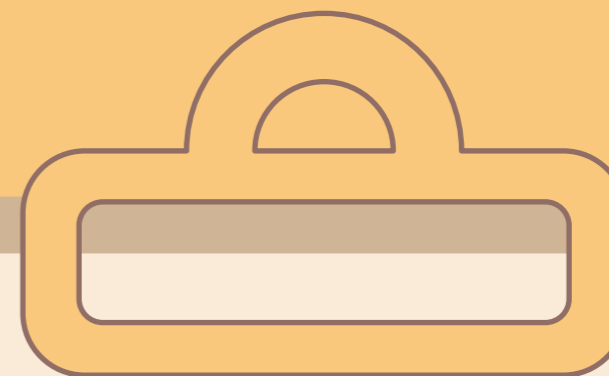
note on: Reasonable Adjustments and The Law

Accommodations are not charitable gifts to neurodivergent employees – **you are legally obligated under The Equality Act (2010) to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace** to remove, reduce, or prevent any disadvantages that disabled workers face. Making adjustments can help avert discriminatory conduct against your business.



Sitting in traffic is a major trigger of anxiety for me, so I requested that I get into, and leave, work 30 minutes later. it was the difference between staying in and quitting my job. and I am more productive.

- focus group participant



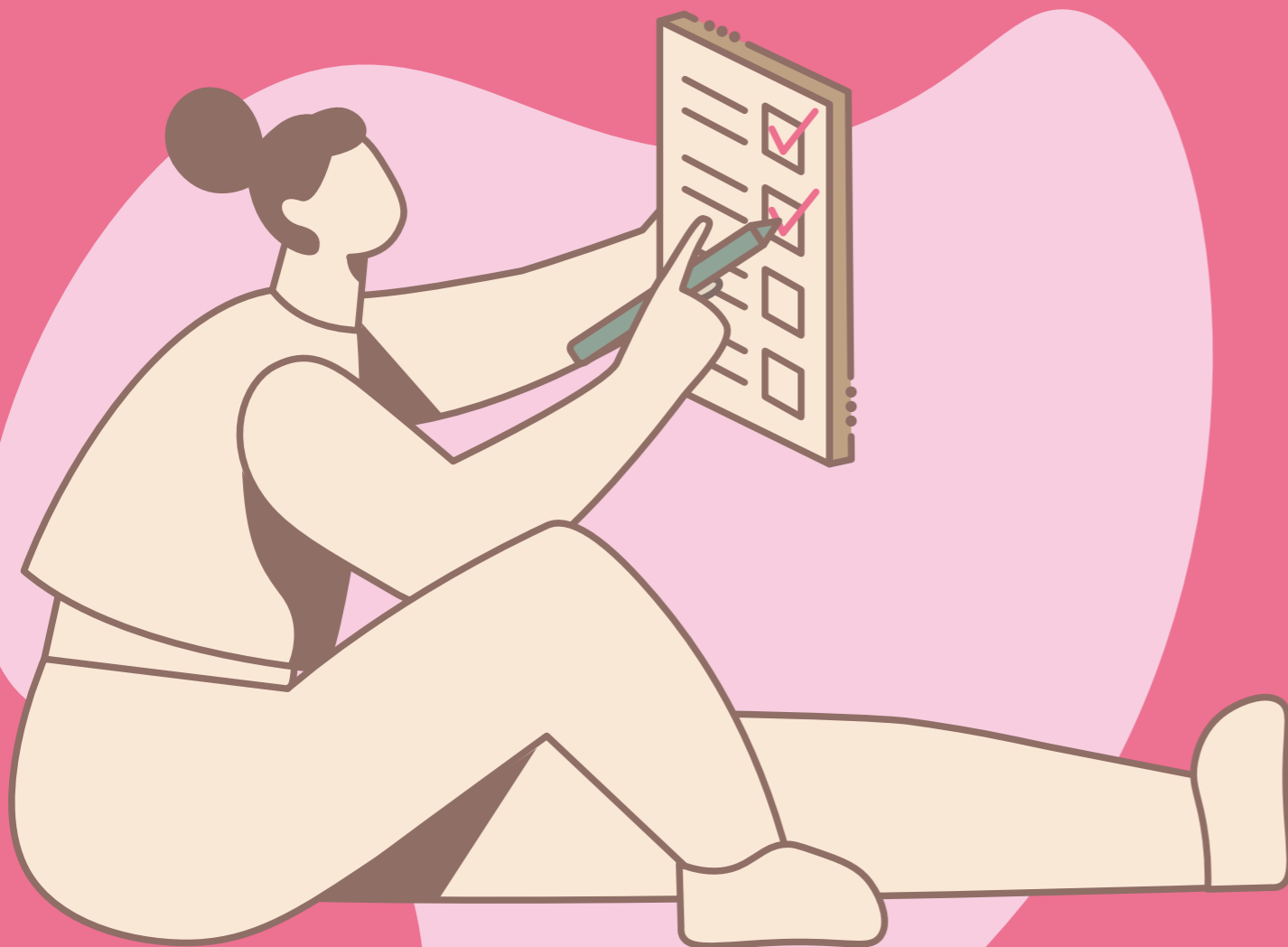
CHECKLIST

- Are your job ads direct, clear, and accessible?
- Are your application forms compatible with access software, and do they offer additional support or formats of applying?
- Have you given enough detail your interviewees in advance, and is your interviewer trained in recognising and understanding common neurodivergent behaviours?
- Could you consider competency-based hiring processes that focus on job tasks or past work, rather than on social aptitude or recall abilities?
- Is your new employee or freelancer sufficiently prepared for their role and working environment in advance of starting?
- Do you understand what reasonable adjustments are, what they look like, your legal responsibilities around them, and how to implement them?

03.

Working Practices

Considering neurodivergence in your management, environments, and practices



03. Working Practices

Overview

Look, we get it.

So much guidance around neurodiversity in the workplace assumes **substantial DEI budgets, big HR departments, and established policies and governance** typical of large corporations.

But for the 98% (Clwstwr, 2020) of small or micro businesses within the Welsh creative industries, many of us do not have access to these resources. We are managing smaller teams, freelancers, and non-traditional working activities that span locations, environments, and modes of work.

But what will it cost you to not get the most out of your employees? Or to miss out on key talent? What will it mean to your ability to be creative, to be innovative, if you do not have diversity of thought? What markets, or audiences, are you missing out on by not considering neurodivergence in your content and product creation?

What is key is a systemic approach to inclusivity: fragmented, add-on diversity interventions simply do not work. As is the case for recruiting and onboarding your new hires, considering **universal design** to proactively shape your working practices and environments **takes responsibility away from individuals** to have to advocate for change, **creates a safe space** for those who need additional adjustments to ask for them, and overall fosters a **happier, healthier, and more productive** team and place of work.



Remember:

it is thought that at least 50% of those working in the creative industries are neurodivergent. You do yourself, and your employees, a great disservice by not thinking with everyone in mind when you design your working practices.

Ultimately, there is no 'best practice' guideline. You have to work out what is best for you, your business, and your individual members of staff. These tips and tricks are simply things to consider as you assess your practices and policies:

note on: Beyond the Surface

"the production companies I have worked for all love to say that they are inclusive in hiring people like me. But what they mean is the version of me masking all the 'difficult' parts of myself, the version of me that is tolerable. As soon as I asked for genuine support for a challenge I am facing, their version of 'diversity-friendly' really changed its tune." - focus group participant

While progress is certainly being made, there still remains a significant gap between 'good intention' and 'meaningful action'. Don't just skim the surface with lip service to diversity – a deeper understanding and commitment to supporting neurodivergence means new talent, happier employees, and greater innovation and value for your business.

03. Working Practices

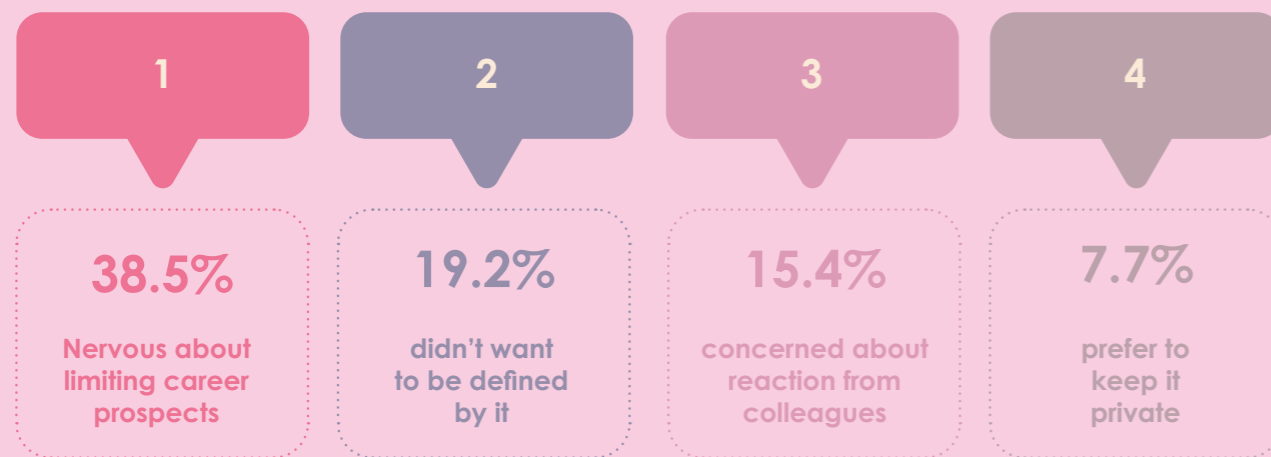
Disclosure

Disclosing that you are neurodivergent in a workplace is a completely personal choice – with a myriad of pros and cons, all dependent on context.

Of those in the creative industries we surveyed during our **exceptional minds research**, **69%** said that they had disclosed their neurodivergence at work, **31%** never had.

What stops people from disclosing their difference to their employers and colleagues?

top reasons for not disclosing neurodivergence



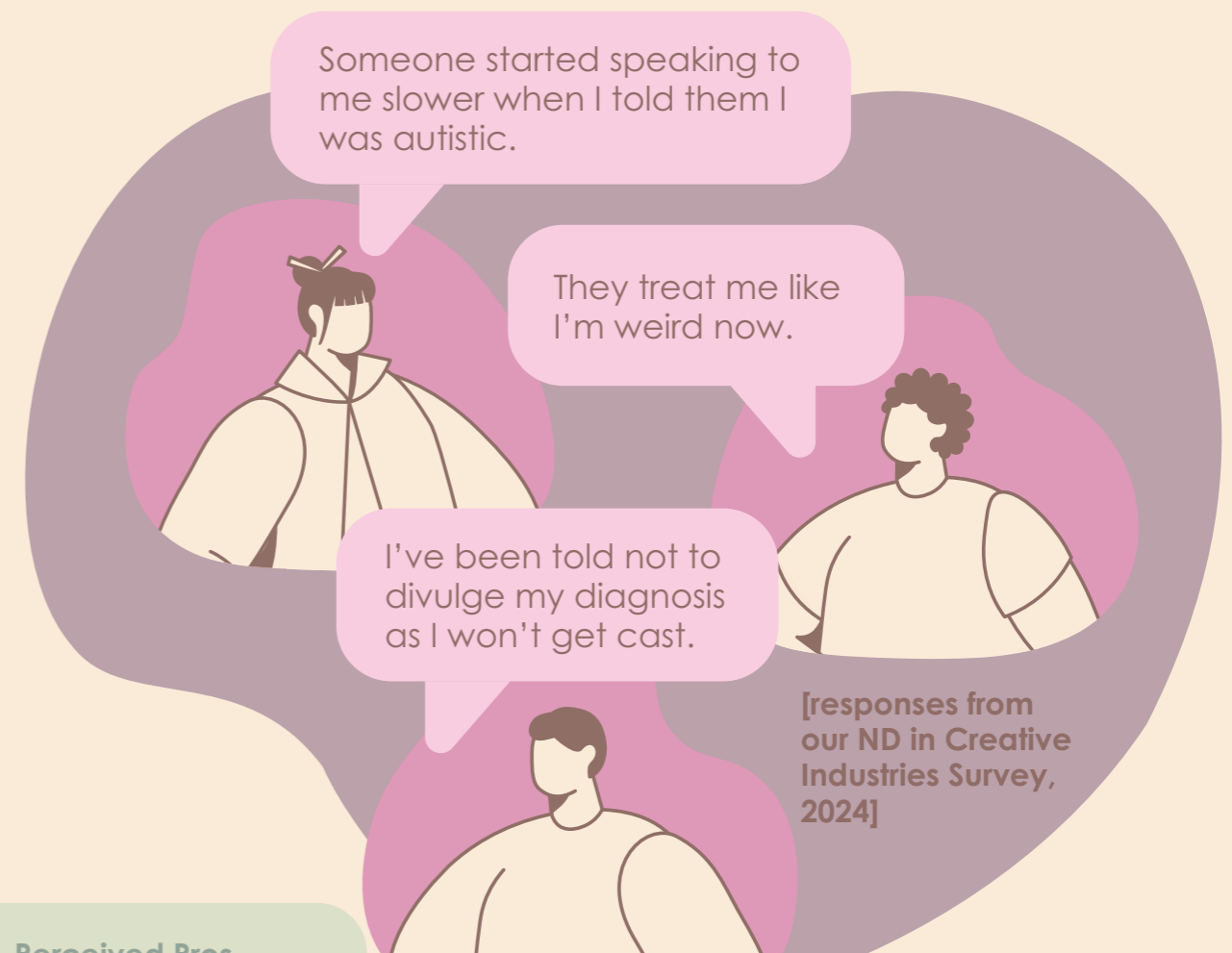
[top results from our ND in Creative Industries Survey, 2024]

There are many reasons people don't disclose their difference at work.

Some worry about the **impact it will have on their employability** – and with good reason. A recent study revealed that **50%** of employers interviewed admitted that they would not hire someone who was neurodivergent (Institute of Leadership and Management, 2020).

Others **fear the response from their colleagues** – again, not unfounded. Studies have repeatedly shown an increase in incidents of discrimination (The Buckland Report, 2024) and bullying and harassment (The Westminster AchieveAbility Commission, 2017) of workers who are open about their diagnoses.

And many are **scared of being defined by disclosure**, are **not aware of their rights or what they can ask for**, or they **might be self-diagnosed and/or awaiting assessment**, so do not feel comfortable talking about it.



[responses from our ND in Creative Industries Survey, 2024]

Perceived Pros

- Greater legal protection if disability is disclosed
- Opens doors to accommodations and support
- Increased job performance and self-esteem
- More likely to stay in employment
- Opens up a mutual understanding between individual and the people around them
- More favourable first impressions on others
- Ability to bring 'whole, real self' to work

Perceived Cons

- Can lead to discrimination
- Fear of being pitied or viewed as less capable
- Worried about being pigeon-holed, based on stereotypes
- Scared of being 'othered'
- Feel like they need to constantly justify their ability because of their differences

What is clear is that it is up to employers need to create psychologically safe spaces where employers feel comfortable disclosing – one where they won't face discrimination for their difference, but support for their access requirements.



Remember:

you are at your most inclusive when you ask the people you're working with, how they would like to be worked with.

How to react when someone tells you they are neurodivergent:

1 Be Appreciative of their Openness

- It is a big decision for someone to decide to disclose. Try: **“Thank you for trusting me with this information”**

2 Listen

- Create a non-judgemental space for the individual to express themselves, and let the conversation be led by them. Try: **“do you feel comfortable telling me more about how this impacts you at work?”**
- **Validate their experience** – let them know that they are heard and that you understand.
- **Do not** make it about you. Sure, you have a friend or relative who is also neurodivergent – this is not the time to talk about it. Give them space to talk about their own, individual experiences.

3 Learn

- Let them know that you will learn more about the specific condition and how you can best support them. Take the initiative to seek accurate education, but include the individual within this. Try: **“I would love to learn more – do you have any recommendations of places to start?”**

4 Maintain Confidentiality

- Ensure that their privacy will be maintained by clearly deciding who should be informed and why and, with the person and preferably in writing, consent before revealing this information to anyone. This is essential for maintaining trust.

5 Discuss Access Requirements

- Talk to the individual about what can be put in place to ensure that they can be their best self at work, addressing their individual strengths and challenges.
- Try: **“what can we adapt to make your role better suit your way of thinking?”**
- Establish a set of reasonable adjustments, and continue to review them.
- Remember – the person, especially if they have been recently diagnosed, might not know what they need yet. This is an ongoing, dynamic, journey – go on it together.

6 Encourage Open Dialogue

- Reassure the person that they can discuss any concerns or questions they may have, or that you are there if they would like to talk further.

03. Working Practices Managing

How business leaders conduct their communications, set up their workplaces, and manage the success of their employees is fundamental in how individuals navigate, and feel about themselves within, the world of work.

Good people management requires proactive engagement with **building culture, devising inclusive strategies, understanding each employee, relative strengths and challenges, and developing individualised paths for career progression** – an approach that doesn't just benefit neurodivergent individuals, but the entire team.



Did you know?

Managers report that learning to create and use inclusive strategies helps them to be more effective leaders (Optimize, 2024)

Person-Centric Management

Person-centric management is about getting to know each employee or freelancer for who they are – **palliating their struggles in order to access their strengths, and forging job roles and careers that maximise the potential of the individual.**

No two brains are the same, and within a truly neurodiverse workplace, each person will have their own, unique skills and challenges, their own environment preferences, their own social differences, and their own favoured styles (and channels) of communication.



I've found managing someone who is ND an enlightening experience as it makes you think about how you support everyone you line manage. EG if you think about how you communicate with colleagues, you will do so often from your own perspective; offering or imparting information in a way that we would like to receive that information or how we assume someone would want that information. Since managing and working with ND, I have become more acutely aware of different communication methods (verbal, written, pictures and images, face-to-face, structured, etc) and make sure I understand preferences in communication styles. I've been able to employ this new thinking to everyone I support.

- Sean Gilroy, Head of Cognitive Design,
BBC Design and Engineering

Taking a person-centric approach is **a strategic game-changer**: it embraces and leverages the diverse spectrum in ways of thinking, communicating, and processing information within a neurodiverse team – instead of being inconvenienced by it.

Consider these tips to embrace a more person-centric approach to management:

Better Understand Neurodivergence

This can be achieved in two ways:

Engage in training

- This can help you understand what neurodiversity is, intersectionality, and the different ways it can manifest, indicators of mental ill-health to be cognisant of, and give you confidence to approach language and terminology surrounding cognitive difference.

Open a dialogue with your neurodivergent employees

- Learn about and from their individual experiences of neurodivergence, how they best learn and absorb information, and how they understand and navigate the world.

A better, more rounded understanding of neurodivergence and the individual experiences of it can mean that you might:

- ✗ No longer mistake the bluntness of your autistic employee's communication for rudeness;
- ✗ No longer mistake your ADHD freelancer's chronic lateness for laziness;
- ✗ No longer mistake your dyslexic worker's spelling mistakes for incompetence;
- ✗ No longer mistake a crew member with OCD's quietness for inattention;
- ✗ No longer mistake your dyspraxic colleague's clumsiness for negligence.

But that instead, you better understand these occurrences, can work with employees to help mitigate the barriers contributing to them, and beginning noticing, and valuing, their individual strengths and skills.

The greatest challenge facing businesses and the disability community today is that decisionmakers, creatives, producers, and creators simply lack in their understanding of the disabled experience

- Valuable 500

Job Crafting

'Job crafting' is about building roles in a way that maximises the productivity of an individual, rather than sticking rigidly to uniform preconceptions of what this role 'should' look like.

Susan* is a researcher employed by a TV production company. Her role usually requires her to deep dive into a specific project, exploring the themes within it, finding and connecting with contributors related to them, and writing up and delivering her findings to her manager. She loves it.

Challenges to executive functioning caused by her ADHD, though, mean that often, Susan gets overwhelmed by admin responsibilities, particularly when they are more 'mundane'.

Her manager blocked out 1 x morning per week in Susan's calendar, so that all non-urgent admin could be dealt with, and a note on Susan's email signature let everyone she was communicating with be aware of the set up.

This meant that Susan was not worrying about finding time to do admin throughout the whole week, that there were clear deadlines and expectations set suited to her particular needs, that Susan could establish a routine, that the change was communicated sensitively, and that Susan could be at her best.

*pseudonym to retain anonymity, but case study based on real interviewee from our research.

It matches a job to a person's skills, rather than forces a person to adapt to fit an entirely predefined role.

If your colleague with ADHD works in an unconventional way, it may be because they've found a method that works for them. They may work in short, more focused bursts and take a few more fidget breaks, but you're guaranteed to still get high quality results. If you can give them the flexibility to approach tasks in their own way, you will get the very best out of them.

- Enna Global

Job crafting:

- Focuses on what individuals **can do**, rather than what we **can not**
- Builds roles around environments and practices **best aligned with our individual productivity styles**, rather than 'one-size-fits-all'
- Experiments with **flexible working**
- Helps individuals **establish routines** that work for them
- Adjusts the ways that performance is measured, **focusing on outcomes** over presenteeism or 'typical' processes
- Allows individuals to be **masters of their own career path**
- Provides allowances for working in **non-linear ways**
- Enhances **productivity and outcomes**

Work with your employees to create a strategy that aligns workplace activities, mindsets, hours, and relationships with their strengths, in a way that respects the needs of the organisation and other team members.

note on: Pigeon-Holing

Stereotypes about neurodivergence, even when 'positive', mean that often, we get occupationally pigeonholed. For example, the typecast that autistic people are 'best in tech jobs' is both limiting and inaccurate, as research repeatedly shows links between autism and high levels of creativity (Kasirer et al, 2020). **As always - don't assume!**



Regular Check Ins

Checking-in with your employees and freelancers is important for everyone – but particularly those who are neurodivergent. Consider more frequent, scheduled, and structured check-ins with your staff. These can allow you to:

- **Review reasonable adjustments** – are they still working? Do they need updating?
- Create a space for workers to **discuss challenges and ask for support**
- Give considered **feedback**
- **Monitor wellbeing** and work/life balance

- Offer **appraisals** to equip individuals with what they need to improve their performance
- **Help avoid burnout**
 - Hyperfocus is an immense neurodivergent skill – but it can lead to overwork and exhaustion. Regular check-ins can be used to ensure your staff are taking enough, sufficient, breaks
- **Aid individual time management** and task prioritisation
- Ensure enough **regular communication** with your remote and freelance workers

Being proactive in these check ins can mean that small issues don't escalate into bigger ones.

Smart!

Team Work

Productive, cohesive, neurodiverse teams are only achieved when individuals **understand each other**, their **communication preferences**, their **social styles**, and their **specific ways of working**.

Being proactive to embed inclusive attitudes, behaviours, and working practices across all of your staff creates psychologically safe places of work free of judgement, stigma, and misunderstanding – **one that leverages the strengths of each member of the team to drive greater collaboration, innovation, creativity, and productivity**.

Fostering inclusive teams can be achieved by:

- **Providing and encouraging neurodiversity training** for all staff to help:
 - Individuals identify and address their **unconscious bias**
 - **Reduce stigma and stereotypes** and, as a result, incidents of exclusion and bullying.
 - **Squash the misconception** that neurodivergent people 'don't do' teamwork and collaboration.
- Engage in **neurodiversity celebration to raise awareness** of what it brings to the team
- Ensure staff take time to **learn each others' communication styles**
 - One autistic individual might struggle to give spontaneous answers in team meetings, preferring to think deeply and reflect. A colleague who recognises this may follow up after, to ensure their thoughts and ideas are still included, and their voices heard.
 - An ADHDer might excitedly speak over another during a brainstorming session to get their answer heard. A teammate who recognises this might more respectfully manage the exchange, de-escalate a potential conflict, and value the passion of the individual instead of misconceiving it as rudeness.

- **Realigning the way in which you view a 'successful team'**
 - To be successful, teams don't always have to look like, behave like, and think like, one another. In fact, **they benefit from not**
 - Creativity and bold ideas thrive through different points of view, honesty and objectivity, and out-of-the-box thinking – all recognised neurodivergent skillsets
 - Being outgoing or talkative isn't essential to being a good team member – everyone contributes in their own, unique ways. **It's the contribution that matters – not the personality**
- Opening channels of communication for individuals to **report negative experiences within the team structure**, and working collaboratively with the team to correct them.

Fostering open communication, understanding of different perspectives, setting clear expectations, and embracing neurodiversity helps avoid or navigate potential conflict, and creates a team that not only understands, but values embraces difference.

Tearing Down Success Barriers

It's not just access barriers that neurodivergent talent face in our industry – it's success barriers, too. Biases about what exactly a leader should 'look' like, that does not align with the typical characteristics of neurodivergence, disadvantages us from in-work progression.

When leadership is equated with 'charisma' or extraversion, the career opportunities of those with challenges in self-confidence and self-advocacy, commonly associated with the neurodivergent experience, are severely limited.

So many neurodivergent people we spoke to throughout our research identified that progression opportunities always went to the person best at networking, or most sociable at after-work drinks – environments sometimes trickier to navigate than the more structured part of work. But they know that this doesn't make them better placed to perform the role.



I have been overlooked multiple times. The most recent example: Even though I qualified in a pool for a management position, two colleagues who failed to qualify were promoted later on because they socialize. When I mentioned it to my supervisor (the director), she 'didn't realize' that I might have been interested in those positions, even though I had told her previously that I wanted to advance, and she knew that I was in the pool of qualified candidates.

survey response



People with gregarious personalities have always got ahead more easily, I get overlooked at times because I'm quiet and get on with my work. It doesn't mean that I don't have ambition, or that I am not capable.

- survey response

Across the board, managers currently report low levels of confidence in supporting neurodivergent career progression.

Help address these success barriers by **confronting your biases** of what makes an effective leader and work with your individual employees to **help forge personalised career paths**.

This might include **understanding their ambitions for leadership** and **helping to prepare them for these types of role**, or **creating progression opportunities that do not include people management** for those who do not want it, but still want to advance, such as with additional practical or technical responsibilities.

Don't make assumptions about someone's career aspirations and potential: work with the individual to create structured, personalised plans that supports their development towards their goals, and sets clear expectations.

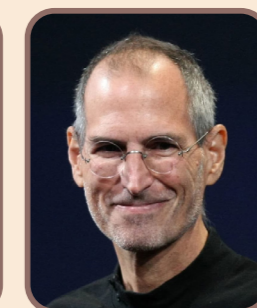
Creating more equal opportunities for career progression:

- **Enables better employee retention**
 - career satisfaction was recently identified as the most important factor for neurodivergent workers seeking to stay with their current employer (NiB, 2024)
- **Increases revenue**
 - It's just good business: companies with more diverse management teams have 19% higher revenues (Uptimize, 2024)
- **Tears down organisational cycles of discrimination**

Think neurodivergent people can't be good leaders? Think again!



Bill Gates



Steve Jobs



Richard Branson

03. Working Practices

Neurodivergent-Friendly Meetings



Remember:
neuro-inclusive meetings benefit every member of the team!

How can I make my meetings more inclusive to those who think, learn, and process information in different ways, reducing auditory and social stressors?

Here's how:

1 Agenda

- Allow participants to properly prepare and reduce anxiety by providing in advance a **clear, written agenda** that includes the **purpose** and **goals of the meeting**, the **duration**, and the **location**.
- Try not to keep any big, surprise announcements for during the meeting. Communicate these beforehand, so that everyone can be prepared to react.

2 Structure

- Have, and stick to, a **structured meeting format with clear segments**, that **includes breaks** for long meetings to prevent cognitive overload.
- Keep the meeting **on track and on time**.

3 Location

- Choose spaces mindful of sensory differences, **considering lighting, seating arrangements**, and **potential background noise**.

4 Movement

- Allow people to move to accommodate their own sensory needs, whether that is **fidgiting, doodling, stimming, or standing up and moving around**. Remember that these things do not necessary indicate disinterest – they can **aid focus** for neurodivergent individuals, and help us **self-regulate**.

5 Materials

- Ask attendees in advance **how they best interpret information**, e.g. through graphics, verbally, or in written form. This can help you accommodate different processing styles in your meeting prep.
- Ensure all materials that are used comply with accessible design recommendations and are sent out after the meeting for people to process the information in their own time.
- Try to **avoid large sections of text** in Presentations. This can be difficult for those with dyslexia who struggle to read under pressure, or for those for which lumpy paragraphs require stopping and 'translating' what they are reading into meaning.

6 Purpose

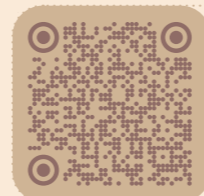
- Clearly **outline the purpose** of the meeting at the start of the meeting, and **refer to it throughout** to help people stay on track.

7 Input

- **Respect response times** from individuals, who might need extra pauses to process information and formulate contributions.
- **Moderate discussions** to ensure they stay focused, and **facilitate turn-taking** to prevent dominant voices taking over conversations.
- For individuals who struggle with contributing spontaneously **offering the opportunity to input to the meeting before or afterwards** can ensure their voice is still heard.

8 Actions

- **Clearly wrap up the meeting** and **detail next steps** – both verbally and in a written follow up. These ensure no critical information is missed, including for those unable to attend.



Scan/click here to watch our animation about neurodivergent-friendly meetings!



Additional Considerations for Video Meetings

Virtual meetings are a cornerstone of our increasingly remote post-Covid era, but **45%** of neurodivergent employees struggle to maintain focus during them (O2, 2021). Help mitigate these challenges:

- **Attach the agenda** within the meeting invite
- State at the top of the meeting **expectations around participation** and **use of platform functions**, e.g. 'hand raise', chat boxes, mute, and breakout rooms
- Where possible, **do not make 'cameras on' mandatory** (though you should state a preference). Try asking for everyone to have cameras on for initial face-to-face introductions, and then allow participants to turn them off if they are more comfortable
- **Provide closed-captioning** and **meeting record** where possible
- **Offer assistive technologies**, such as transcriber apps like **Otter.ai** or **Zapier**, which can help with individuals struggling to listen to long blocks of info, or **AI solutions for auto-generated meeting summaries** (such as available on **Zoom** or **Fireflies.ai**)
- **Avoid impromptu meetings where possible** – they can disrupt flow or routine, and cause anxiety or catastrophising. If unavoidable, clearly identify with written communication the purpose of the last minute arrangement.*
- **Allow use of chat functions** for written input from participants intimidated or struggling with verbal communication
- When demonstrating new software, tasks, or technology, **recordings can help** individuals process information at their own pace
- **Consider meeting fatigue**. In person-meetings usually consider commute/travel time in-between, and structured breaks. In our increasingly remote workspaces, virtual meetings are often scheduled back to back. Avoid this where possible to **allow people time to decompress**, have a **screen/movement break**, **process information from the previous meeting**, and to **sufficiently prepare for the next**

*

Less of this! It is too vague and unclear. Immediate stress!

More of this! It gives detail about the purpose of the call, time to prepare, and space to ask questions.

To: John Smith

From: Jane Doe

Subject: quick call?

Can I give you a quick call?

To: John Smith

From: Jane Doe

Subject: Call re Client Feedback

Are you free at 11am for a quick chat about the latest client feedback to an edit?

If you have any questions in advance, just send me an email.

03. Working Practices

Communicating

We all have preferred ways of communicating. Here are some tips and tricks on how to accommodate and be sensitive to diverse styles of receiving and presenting information:

Preferences

The very first step in understanding your individual employee's communication preferences is **simply to ask how they best process information**. This can be achieved during the onboarding process with access questionnaires, and reviewed during one-to-one meetings.

The idea that there is one best way to learn and absorb information is outdated, considering the diverse spectrum of human talent and thinking styles.

Don't make assumptions about how people would like to communicate – ask how they prefer to receive information (verbally, written, bullet point, audio), and via what channel (email, phone, in-person, direct messaging), and make accommodations where you can.

"is there any particular way you prefer to receive information?"

Presenting Information

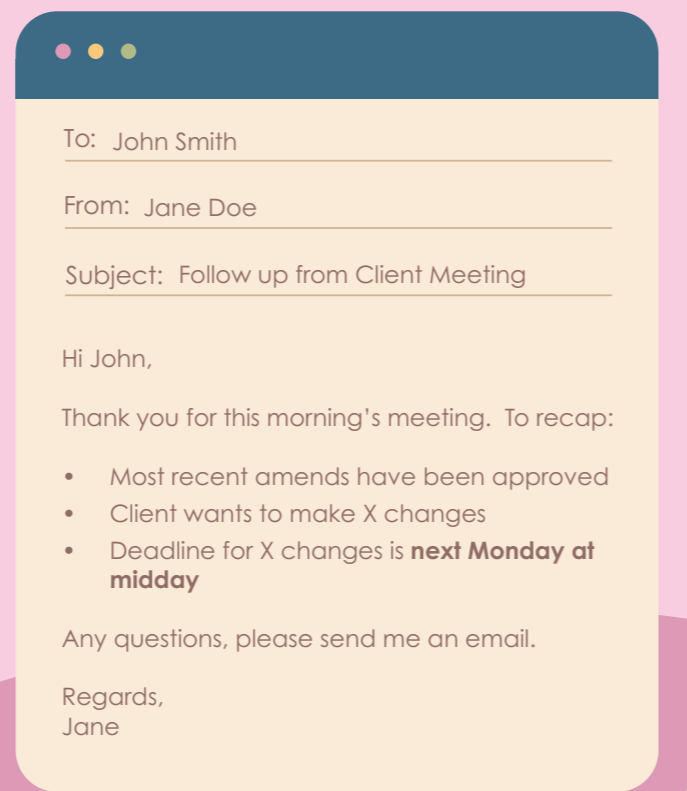
Writing Style

Many neurodivergent people are **literal thinkers**, and many experience **'information overload'** when explanations are too lengthy or wordy. Be clear in your communications by:

- Avoid jargon, slang, subtext, acronyms, inferences, or idioms
- Use bullet points rather than long paragraphs
- Prioritise brevity over complexity
- Outline main objectives


Email

- Make your email header reflect the content
- Write in digestible bullet point format for long bits of info
- Highlight any important timelines or details
- Keep it brief



Visual Materials

- Use a **sans-serif font** (like Calibri, Verdana, and Tahoma) minimum 12pt, with sufficient contrast between background and text – like this!
- **Use sentence case**
- **Use double spacing** where possible
- Make **headings** a font size that is **at least 20% larger** than the main body text
- **Avoid using images directly behind text** – use a solid-coloured text box if needed
- **Bolden** key words rather than underline or italic
- **AVOID USING ALL CAPS** – it's much harder to read without familiar word 'shapes'
- Give PowerPoint slides **a unique title**, and ensure **contents can be read in the order that you intend them to be** – this helps screen readers properly communicate your work
- Add **Alt Text** to images and charts



Accessible Format Guidelines
download here!

Dual Coding

- Dual-coding is the process of combining visual (image-based) and verbal (language-based) elements to convey information.
- Offering multiple forms of information is beneficial to individuals who have delayed auditory processing or challenges with working memory, both traits of neurodivergence.
- Show and tell at the same time.

Instructions

- **Be organised and direct in your language:** avoid hidden messages, corporate doublespeak, or 'insider' expressions that can be misinterpreted by literal thinkers
 - **Say 'Do X' rather than 'Would you like to do X'**
- Provide **specific examples** of what you are asking for
- **Limit the amount of necessary steps** to a given task
- **Outline expectations** at the very start of a project
- **Follow up** to ensure that someone has fully understood the task communication – even if they have said that they do in the moment
- Encourage **follow up questions** for when they have had time to process the instructions and expectations
- **Do not communicate instructions in a rush** – even when it's busy. It can lead to confusion, anxiety, and stress
- **Avoid attaching social meaning to delayed processing time** – a lack of immediate verbal response, blank stares, or a furrowed brow do not necessarily indicate rudeness or disinterest. Try to avoid misinterpreting these cues by asking if they understand and encouraging clarifying questions
- **Try to stick to one request at a time**, especially verbally. If impossible, allow thinking space between key points. **Follow up with a written list** for reference
- Struggle with brevity? **Use language aids to help you simplify your complex sentence** constructions for those receiving the information, such a **Grammarly or Writer**



I quite often misunderstand people and instructions. I often get anxious if I don't know where I'm going or what I am doing. But often, I'm too scared to ask for clarity.

– survey response

Remember your Freelancers!

Home working has been a godsend for many neurodivergent workers, opening up access to careers in the creative industry by allowing people to work on their own terms in a familiar, comfortable, and self-controlled environment.

But for freelancers and/or remote workers (both of who make up a large proportion of our creative industries), communication may be more difficult as we might not have as direct or regular of an access route to them. To ensure that they are also being sufficiently communicated with:

- **Agree a format** for briefing and updating that works for them
- **Establish routines**
- **Explore reasonable adjustments** to their own working environments or processes
- **Provide clear timescales and deadlines**, preferably with shared calendars
- **Regularly check in**
- **Structure socialisation** by offering optional activities like virtual coffee breaks or group chats – but don't make it compulsory
- **Suggest movement and regulation breaks**
- **Signpost** resources, support networks, and training

Essentially – make sure you treat them as any other employee, considering both their access needs, wellbeing, and preferences for communication.



I require deadlines. I hate them, but I require them. So even when I don't have them officially, I give them to myself. And then I have a friend who does accountability for me.

– NK'IRU. NJOKU, *Writer*

Deadlines

Many neurodivergent workers **may need structure to plan, prioritise, and schedule their tasks***. Firm deadlines provide **detail, clarity, and expectation** – meaning a reduction in frustration and embarrassment, and an increase in productivity.

- **Be specific with dates and timings** when outlining when a project is due
- **Avoid ambiguous and loose-ended terms** like 'ASAP' or 'when you get the chance' – any deadline that is open to interpretation is essentially useless for a neurodivergent worker. **Tasks are prioritised when they are explicitly asked to be**
- **Provide or point to accessibility tools or training** for help with time management
- **Consider providing mnemonics and mind maps** to help people prioritise work and meet deadlines
- **Deadline reminders and check ins** from managers or HoDs can be useful, especially for ADHDers

what the heck does 'ASAP' mean?!
Be clear in your deadlines!



*note on: Executive Dysfunction

One of the biggest challenges neurodivergent people face in the workplace is struggles with executive functioning: a set of cognitive processes that helps people stay focused, achieve goals, access the working memory, manage time, organise and prioritise. This can pose a specific challenge in the creative industries, where schedules are often tight and deadlines are immovable.

Clear and direct communication, deadlines, and providing support and accessibility tools to manage time and prioritisation can all help workers with managing their executive functions, and avoid unnecessary stress and burnout.

Change

Change, particularly last minute change, can often be difficult to navigate – **the uncertainty and disruption to tasks and routine** can **create high stress and tension** which, in turn, can lead to **anxiety, burnout, or meltdowns**.

But, ultimately, last minute changes to schedules, locations, deadlines, tasks, and content are so characteristic to the nature of our fast-paced and dynamic industry, that **they can't always be avoided**.

What is important is the manner in which you communicate this change. Consider these steps to empathetically, sensitively, and successfully do so:

- **Be direct** with the person the change impacts – don't let them hear it through word of mouth
- **Talk through the reason for a change**, so that they can understand and participate in the process
- You might not have all the answers regarding the change – and that's okay. **Be honest and transparent** with your team that you are uncertain, and **reassure them** that you will let them know as soon as you do
- Have **regular check ins** to ensure the change is being managed
- **Give descriptive details of what the outcome of the change will be** to the task, environment, or deadline will be, so everyone knows what to expect
- **Encourage follow up questions** after they have processed the change



Sometimes being so scared of failing or getting something wrong prevents me from achieving a task.

- survey response

Feedback

- **Consider how someone prefers to receive feedback** – some feel confronted by verbal assessment, some prefer to read through and process at their own pace, some prefer to talk it through
- **Be balanced in positives as well as areas of improvement**
- **Be sensitive to RSD*** and a perceived overreaction to feedback in the form of denial, defensiveness, challenges, or shutdown. **The way a message is received might be different from how you intended it.** Help them through their feelings – or seek external support to do so
- **Make feedback regular**, and **don't let criticisms build up**, so that a performance review is overwhelmingly negative
- **Be sensitive, but direct** – many people don't perceive a subtle critique or do well with 'reading between the lines'

- Sometimes, feedback sessions don't go to plan. Allow **a follow up meeting** or debrief after the feedback, and communication of it, has been processed
- **Focus on 'what would work better' rather than 'what went wrong'.**
- **Provide reassurance**, especially around what areas they are successful in



*note on: Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD)

RSD is a heightened reaction to rejection, criticism or negative feedback that is common for neurodivergent people, who tend to have grown up facing significantly more criticism throughout their life. While everyone finds rejection difficult, RSD can mean overwhelming stress and physical symptoms, which are challenging to process and can seep through at work. It can mean interpreting normal communication as intense rejection, making even day-to-day management difficult.

A recent survey found that 68% of neurodivergent workers struggled with dealing with criticism (NIB, 2024).

"I feel rejection hard – and feedback in this industry is not always the most constructive. It's really hard to process – and handle"

- interview response



03. Working Practices

Physical Environments

Look – we know **it's not always possible in our industry to have total control over the environment you're working in**. The next chapter details considerations on choosing and adapting new locations, particularly for shoots or events – here are some considerations for your fixed environments (such as offices/buildings):



Light

- **Adjustable lighting**
- **Natural light** and **non-central light options** available
- **Avoid harsh, cool fluorescents**



Focus

- **Create quiet spaces** for focused work or **calming spaces** for **regulation breaks** – accessible without having to walk through crowded areas.
- **Avoid stark, bright colours for the walls** (particularly red) – pale, calming colours are better associated with focus and wellbeing.
- **Allow fidget tools and items**
- **Allow individuals to sit at desks further away from distractions** (e.g. away from a window, away from machinery, away from others)
- **Create working 'zones'** such as ones for group activity, ones for quiet work
- **Offer desk partitions** for open-plan offices



Tactile

- **Relax dress codes or uniform requirements** to allow different fabrics, textures, fits of clothing, or styles that are more comfortable



Smell

- **Move individual work spaces away from kitchens or bins**
- **Set boundaries on food and fragrance** for employees



Noise

- **Minimise background noise** where possible like office music or TVs
- **Have soundproof booths** available
- **Provide or allow noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs**
- **Give warning about potential loud noises where possible** (e.g. fire drill, building maintenance)



Generic

- **Offer ergonomic options for seating and furniture**, e.g. softer chairs, standing desks
- **Clear visual signs for directions and instructions for equipment/machinery**
- **Make sure all equipment and furniture is accessible to those with motor-co-ordination challenges**

quick note

sensory overwhelm severely impacts how much information can be processed and, ultimately, how productive neurodivergent workers can be [NiB., 2024].



'what seems like a 'minor inconvenience' to someone neurotypical, feels like being hit by a baseball bat to me'

- focus group participant



Remember:

Adjustments to the workplace should be bespoke to individual access requirements, as everyone thrives in different environments. But by offering to all employees these sensory and focus environmental adjustments as best practice removes the need for people to have to advocate for their needs.

03. Working Practices

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety describes an environment where people feel comfortable expressing themselves, their ideas, and their questions and concerns without fear of negative consequences.

Feeling safe in our environments, particularly professional, can be particularly difficult for neurodivergent people **who may have faced a lifetime of masking who we are, or not feeling quite good enough.**

In an industry dependent on risk taking, bold ideas, and innovative collaboration, psychologically safe environments where individuals feel comfortable using their voice are **not just 'nice to have' – but essential to the future of our creative world.**



I just want to work with companies and be on a team where it doesn't feel like I have to constantly fight people to think in a better, more holistic and flexible way.

– focus group participant

I think that should be the overall main point is that it shouldn't be down to neurodiverse (or any minority group for that matter) individuals telling others what is acceptable and what they need in order for them to be included, it should be built into how companies are recruiting and being run more holistically. You also cannot expect employees to be open with a team if you do not create the structure and safety where people can actually do so.

– survey response

Training

When participants in our ND in the Creative Industries Survey (2024) were asked to identify what one change they would make to improve their working experience as a neurodivergent person, the top response (**48%**) was **'for employers and colleagues to better understand what neurodiversity is, and how it manifests.'**

Providing (and mandating) neurodiversity awareness training for all staff, regardless of seniority, helps to dispel prevalent stereotypes, break down harmful biases, and foster mutual awareness and understanding for the different ways in which we think and behave.

It can help people **understand the challenges** that another individual may be facing, help **increase empathy and reduce conflicts that arise from misinterpreting social behaviours, humanise teams** and create environments in which **individual strengths are not only able to shine through – but to thrive.**

Seek out training specific to your particular line of work, one that considers the particular (and often non-traditional) practices and environments found in the creative industries. It should:

- Help everyone **become more comfortable** talking about neurodiversity
- **Raise awareness** about the different conditions and common misconceptions surrounding them
- **Inform co-workers** about why others might work in non-traditional ways, to **prevent misunderstanding** difference for laziness or ineptitude
- **Define legal obligations and rights** surrounding disability
- Help teams **work in a more inclusive manner**
- Prepare everyone to be **more sensitive and mindful** in their communications
- **Discuss mental health** as it relates to neurodivergence, and **how to monitor and support wellbeing**
- **Highlights success stories** and **empowers individuals** to share their experiences
- **Signpost resources** to enable leaders and colleagues to better support the neurodivergent people around them

Policies

Create Neurodiversity Policies that support neurodivergent employees and accommodate a wide range of access needs - and make sure they are easy to find and understand.

These can include protocol around reasonable adjustments, a commitment to flexible working arrangements, web and material accessibility guidelines.

Have a dated access statement on your website that includes reference to your policies, to demonstrate your commitment to neuro-inclusivity to current and future employees, freelancers, or clients.



Bullying and Harassment

Promote openness and a clear chain of command to tackle issues of bias, micro-aggression, and discrimination.

1/5th of neurodivergent workers report facing harassment or discrimination at work as a direct result of their difference (CIPD, 2024), and are less likely to be believed while seeking a recourse or to receive empathy for their experience. This is particularly difficult for a population who may already face issues **with rejection and feelings of shame and ridicule** based on prior experience.

Take a stance against bullying and harassment by monitoring welfare, promoting openness in sharing incidents, and making examples of their occurrence.



Support

“
In my current role we have a disability advisor and it has been amazing! I have felt so supported and I'm loving my new role, I wish this was something that could have happened in the art department.

– Set Designer, survey response

Additional support can come in many different forms: **a mental health worker, a workplace mentor, a career coach, or a support network/circle** where neurodivergent workers can connect with others who may have similar experiences.

Alternatively, a **peer-to-peer buddy** can act as an independent sound board, helping to demystify some of the 'hidden rules', social expectations, or communication barriers that arise in the workplace. This can reassure individuals and help them better constructively navigate the often ambiguous and unclear processes of a work environment.

Being able to offer this support, or to direct individuals to the right services, demonstrates a commitment to and a more holistic approach towards their overall wellbeing.

Spotlight On: Safe Spaces on Social Media

Many communities have been established online for neurodivergent creatives to meet, share experiences, and advise one another as they navigate our weird and wonderful industries. Where networks can't be formed in the workplace, consider pointing your colleagues or staff to these safe spaces:



Spotlight On: DIVERGE

'DIVERGE' is a monthly co-working space for neurodivergent* creatives, producers, and artists working in the cultural sector in South Wales to come together to work and connect.

*you might have a formal diagnosis or you may be self-identifying.

In partnership with Creative Cardiff, DIVERGE was founded by Tom Bevan - a freelance theatre and live events Producer from Cardiff, who has ADHD and Dyslexia and wanted to create spaces where neurodivergent creatives can get together and build solidarity, support, and collaborations.

[Click here to find out more about DIVERGE.](#)

Assessment

Set key inclusion goals and track key indicators.

It isn't enough to simply ask your workforce directly if they feel psychologically safe. So many people fear the consequences of being a 'trouble maker', the way in which honesty could limit their job prospects, and how they might be excluded for speaking out.

Consider partnering with experts to audit your processes, and consistently, and anonymously, monitor the wellbeing of your staff. This will identify what critical talent issues exist within your business, and allow you to set goals to improve upon them.

This demonstrates commitment to improving inclusion and ensures it remains a fundamental part of your overall practices, by holding you accountable.



Celebrate Difference

Recognise and celebrate the unique skills and strengths your neurodivergent staff bring to your team.

Amplify success stories – internally and externally!

Leadership

"I would like to have felt like I wasn't a problem to be tolerated but as a valued team member. That asking to write things down wasn't an inconvenience to be met with an eye role, making me feel even more inadequate and broken than I already did. I wish there had been someone who made me feel comfortable talking about these issues while they were happening and not just after the fact."

- interview response

Lead by example.

Proactively engage with the needs of and challenges faced by your neurodivergent employees, candidates, and freelancers.

Champion difference and make it clear that your business takes neuro-inclusion seriously. This might be by mandating training, organising events, writing about neurodiversity on social media, or sponsoring neurodiversity programmes within work or external organisations or charities.



03. Working Practices

Socialising

People assume I'm not chatty because I don't enjoy small talk, I often get ignored for the other AP on the team

[responses from our ND in Creative Industries Survey, 2024]

I can struggle with being in loud spaces, due to getting overstimulated in sound. Which might lead me to avoid socials and parties, or when I go to socials I will be very in my shell.

I never fit in with the team as they would make fun of my different music taste, hobbies, food habits, clothing, size etc... They would leave me out of lunches, gatherings and special occasions, it felt like being back in school!

It is a common misconception that neurodivergent people, particularly autistic people, do not like interacting with others, but it is true that many struggle with the parameters of workplace socialising specifically. The **ill-defined expectations of after-work drinks**, the **spontaneity of kitchen chats**, and **balancing preconceptions and judgements about their social skills made by those around them** can make participating, or even wanting to, more challenging.

Autistic people don't like socialising



This is a stereotype that pigeon-holes an entire neurotype into one, binary characterisation. Sure, many autistic people find 'typical' norms of socialising more challenging, but that does not mean that they do not enjoy it, nor that it applies to everyone. Remember – 'different' does not mean 'less'



Here are some tips and tricks for more neuro-inclusive social interactions:

- **Small talk is hard – neurodivergent or not.** Try to find **common grounds** with your colleagues, particularly those who are struggling to come out of their shell. **Learn about their interests, hobbies, and passions**
- **People have different social communication norms**, such as being more direct, introverted, gaze avoidance, or having a more niche sense of humour. **Get to know how people tick**, rather than making assumptions about 'what they meant' by an interaction
- **Don't mistake an avoidance of socialising for disinterest in work, or career progression.** Too often, talented people are overlooked for the 'loudest' in the room
- Planned event? **Send information about the location, food and drink options, and start and finish times to participants in advance**, to allow everyone to be prepared and avoid unexpected occurrences or anxiety
- **Do not make social events compulsory.** It should be available – not required
- Consider the accessibility of a location before booking it for a social gathering
- Occasionally, consider social hang-outs **that don't take place in a loud and overstimulating environment.** How about drinks in the office/on set? A games night?
- **Be conscious of sensory sensitivities** – gatherings can take a few days to decompress from - allow for this
- As always: **ask people their preferences when planning a social meet up**
- **Don't cancel your parties or pub visits – just allow people to engage with them on their own terms, consider quiet breakout spaces at large gatherings, don't judge people for their level of participation and, occasionally, plan smaller group gatherings or remotely-accessed events, like quizzes**

note on: Sensory Assault

Many neurodivergent people experience lights more brightly, noises more loudly, and smells and temperatures more intensely than neurotypical people. This can mean that large, social gatherings feel like a sensory assault – one that can take several days to recover from, and can lead to withdrawal from these kinds of interactions.

I'm thinking of planning an after-work social. How does a pub quiz at X sound? :)
Does this venue and menu suit you?

Studies have demonstrated that neurodivergent people are often excluded socially not necessarily because of a desire to avoid interactions, but often because others make assumptions about their desire for social connection.

Get to know your colleagues and employees better and understand how best and how much socialisation works for them so that they are not disadvantaged by what may be differences in social communication.



CHECKLIST

- Do you know how to respond if someone discloses their neurodivergence to you?
- Are you person-centric in your approach to management?
- Have you participated in neurodiversity training, and encouraged it of your workforce?
- Have you thought about inclusion in your delivery, materials, and hosting of meetings?
- Do you consider the different ways in which your teams and colleagues may prefer to communicate?
- Have you conducted an access assessment of your physical work spaces, and thought about what changes you can make to reduce sensory overwhelm?
- Have you thought out-of-the-box in terms of team bonding and socialising, for those who might find traditional forms challenging?

04.

Lights, Camera, Let's Take Action!

Creating more neuro-inclusive productions



04. Lights, Camera, Let's Take Action!

Overview

Amongst the pressures on schedules, the limited resources, and the tight budgets, considering neuro-inclusion can feel like a stress too far for those in charge of sets and production spaces.



Bosses are verbally extremely supportive and understanding, but in a fast paced environment with tight budgets, my needs are not always a priority.

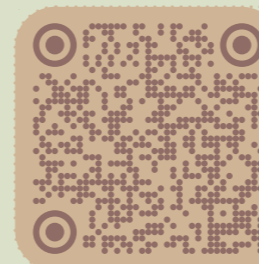
– interview response

But where implementing adjustments can be seen as disruptive in fast-paced environments, embedding inclusion in your processes actually creates happier, healthier, and more efficient production sets, maximising quality and consistency of output.

And, as funders, commissioners, and broadcasters increasingly demand diversity and inclusion in the production teams and companies they are working with, considering neuro-inclusion **is not only the right thing to do, but also rapidly becoming a necessity.**

Our brains all work in unique ways. Considering this not only in the stories you are telling, but also in the process of telling them, can make your production more inclusive as well as productive.

This chapter will help you start this journey.



Scan/click to watch our Short Film: **Navigating Neurodiversity and the Media Sector**



04. Lights, Camera, Let's Take Action!

Pre-Production

Pre-production is often a chaotic time for everyone involved - impacted by **budget, schedule, and organisational pressures and constraints**. But considering and investing in inclusion **early** in your planning can have a huge impact on the wellbeing of not only your neurodivergent crew, but **everyone involved in the production**.

The main takeaway across this section is about **alleviating anxiety** by **minimising the amount of surprises and unexpected challenges** a neurodivergent person will be faced with in the production process (**conscious, of course, that there is only so much you can be prepared for!**)

Budgeting

Ensure a line for flexible accessibility support that is ring-fenced within your finance plan, agreed in advance with funders.

Associated costs might include:

- additional roles such as an **Access Coordinator, Creative Enabler, or Wellbeing Facilitator**
- **Assistive technology**
- **Lived-experience specialists** to ensure authentic scripts, characters, and representation
- Any **essential training** for your senior team members
- **Transport and accommodation**
- **Alterations to the physical environment** (such as additional trailers for 'quiet zones')

Securing funding for access should not be a barrier for working with disabled talent. For more information about how production companies can access this additional funding, [see our section on Accessing Support](#).

note on: Mental Health Planning

It's important to invest early in planning your mental health and well-being provision, which can help support your neurodivergent talent facing additional challenges. More information on how to conduct a mental health risk assessment and properly plan for mental health support can be found at the [Whole Picture Toolkit](#), an essential resource created by **The Film and TV Charity**.

Casting/Hiring

Increasing the proportion of companies who are actively encouraging Disabled applicants to apply for a role and who are automatically asking for and/or offering access adjustments was identified as **an Area for Improvement by the 'Access Into Action' Industry Access Survey 2022**.

Ensure your casting and hiring practices are fair, transparent, and openly promote diversity by:

- Considering **fonts, language, and formats** in your ads
- Making sure **the role is clearly described**, with key **responsibilities and skills outlined** for talent both in front of and behind the camera, so that individuals can apply for the role with full context
- **Never asking unnecessarily for details about a person's disability**
- **Understanding your legal obligations** to provide reasonable adjustments in the recruitment and selection processes
- **Being transparent** about the interview process and **offering access support** throughout

Check out our section on [Recruitment](#) for more information about neuro-inclusive casting/hiring.



TV and film recruitment is often informal and impacted by time pressures and skills shortages, which leads to unadvertised positions and a reliance on existing contacts to find crew. Fair and transparent processes are key to enable diversity and inclusion in the workplace, and tackle under-representation in the industry.

– The Film and TV Charity

Onboarding

Successfully preparing new hires for their roles was also identified as an **Area for Improvement by the 'Access Into Action' Industry Access Survey 2022**. Better onboarding practices look like:

- **asking new recruits about their access needs or adjustment requirements** (consider **access passports/riders** for all new hires) and, recognising that accessibility comes in a variety of forms (physical environments, communication, and assistive technology), implementing what is reasonable before they begin
- Discussing with each person **how they want their challenges and adjustments to be shared with the crew**, and make sure everyone on set **knows their boundaries**
- Treating each individual as such, **avoiding assumptions** about anyone based on their particular difference or disability
- Being clear on the induction process by **clearly detailing role expectations**, and **providing contact information** for asking additional questions.
- Agreeing a **point of contact** for emergency support

[Check out to our section on Onboarding for more guidance on these processes.](#)



Spotlight On: The 5 As

The **TV Access Project (TAP)** created the 5As as guidelines for Disability Inclusion in UK Television production. These guidelines are to ensure the full inclusion of DDN talent in the industry.

The 5As are:

- **Anticipate**
Fully expect to work and continue to work with Disabled people on a regular basis.
- **Ask**
Avoid assuming anything, of anybody.
- **Assess**
Value self-reflection.
- **Adjust**
Deliver what is needed.
- **Advocate**
Set high standards for everyone.

[When you are producing content for TAP's members](#) (which includes most major global broadcasters and streamers), you will be asked during commissioning and green light conversations to consider how the 5As throughout the production process.

[Learn more about TAP's 5As guidelines here.](#)

Schedule

Production schedules are often tight and rigid - but there is **always flexibility within these** to make the working day easier for your cast and crew. Consider the wellbeing of both your neurodivergent and neurotypical talent by:

- Factoring in **breaks** throughout a shooting day
- Planning enough time to be able to **slow the pace down** if required by essential cast and crew, where possible
- **Outlining and sticking to communication boundaries**, including offline periods such as late at night or on weekends, where direct (text, WhatsApp, calls) communication is paused and only urgent messages are made.

Neurodivergent-Friendly Call Sheet Guidelines
download here!

Locations

The Industry Access Survey 2022 found that physical access in the industry remains problematic, with **1 in 4 spaces used by companies in the TV industry deemed physically inaccessible** - a finding replicated across other areas of the screen sector.

When undertaking a recce for locations, both for shooting and for production offices and other working spaces, be sure to consider:

- **an access audit**
- **Taking photos/videos of the space** to send to crew in advance of first day, so that they can be prepared for the environment
- **The availability of accessible toilets, catering, and quiet spaces**

Work with experts in physical access to help with your preparation and audits, including:

[Triple C](#)

[DDPTV](#)

[TAP](#)

Information Packets

Bespoke project information packets in advance of a shoot not only help **alleviate anxieties** experienced by many crew members on a production (increasing both wellbeing and productivity), but **save set co-ordinators and line producers a load of time - and stress**. Information Packets should include:

- **Location maps** and **clear, comprehensive directions** for navigating and accessing them
- **Set expectations** and **codes of conduct**
- **Your disability policy**
- **Crew lists** and **hierarchy diagrams**
- **Key contact information**

Training

Consider neurodiversity training for your senior team members. Training can:

- **Help identify underlying causes of challenges**
- **Impart better understanding of difference** and how it manifests, and can be supported, on productions

- equip HoDs and managers with the **confidence and knowledge to intervene early in potential areas of conflicts** and to **de-escalate risk**.

This can save you time, money, and even reputation in the long run.

[Find out more about the benefits of neurodiversity training here.](#)

Access Coordinators

We highly recommend **engaging expertise** where needed to support you in planning and creating the most neuro-inclusive productions, from development right through to marketing.

'Access Coordinator' is a new role **for people from the DDN community** committed to **improving disability representation** and **removing barriers to inclusion in Film, TV, and the Creative Industries**.

They are **lived-experience specialists** that ensure that access and adjustments are provided throughout the process so that both actors and crew members can give their best work.

Working from greenlight to post production, the Access Coordinator acts as **the bridge between production, cast, and crew**, working with HoDs and senior decision makers to **remove potential and actual barriers to access** - whether **physical, social, communication, or cultural**.

They work in different ways according to the requirements of the production and/or the DDN people involved, and may be part- or full-time, work remotely, or be based within the production office, studio, location, or edit.

For more information about the role of an Access Coordinator and how and when to find one, [check out this resource from PACT and the TV Access Project \(TAP\)](#).





Training for this role has been a real education, seeing the challenges Deaf, Disabled, and Neurodivergent talent face. And how important it is to level the playing field on and off screen and through the stories we tell. I'd like to empower disabled creatives to focus on the roles they're paid for, rather than spend their precious time putting the right support and adjustments in place, and help to create welcoming, thriving, and inclusive workplaces that are better for everyone.

- Sally Lisk-Lewis, Wales' first Access Coordinator

Policy

Clearly outline your production's disability policy in the very earliest stages of planning - this is an opportunity to **set the tone** around these topics, as well as to **help normalise the conversation**. This policy should:

- Include **guidance on response to disclosure and access requests**, as well as a **reasonable adjustments plan**
- Include **inclusive recruitment and onboarding** as well as **disability training commitments** for your teams
- Be referenced in an **accurate access statement, displayed on internal** (e.g. onboarding packets) **and external** (e.g. websites, job ads) **communications** related to the production
- Be **reviewed against specific industry standards/templates**, such as those of BECTU
- Be **signposted** so that everyone who works on your production, at any stage, is made aware of these policies and values

note on: the Film and TV Support Line

Signpost your cast and crew to this support line, which is a free and independent 24/7 service providing counselling, legal, and financial advice for anyone in industry who might need it.

0800 054 0000

04. Lights, Camera, Let's Take Action!

Production

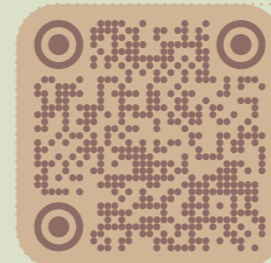
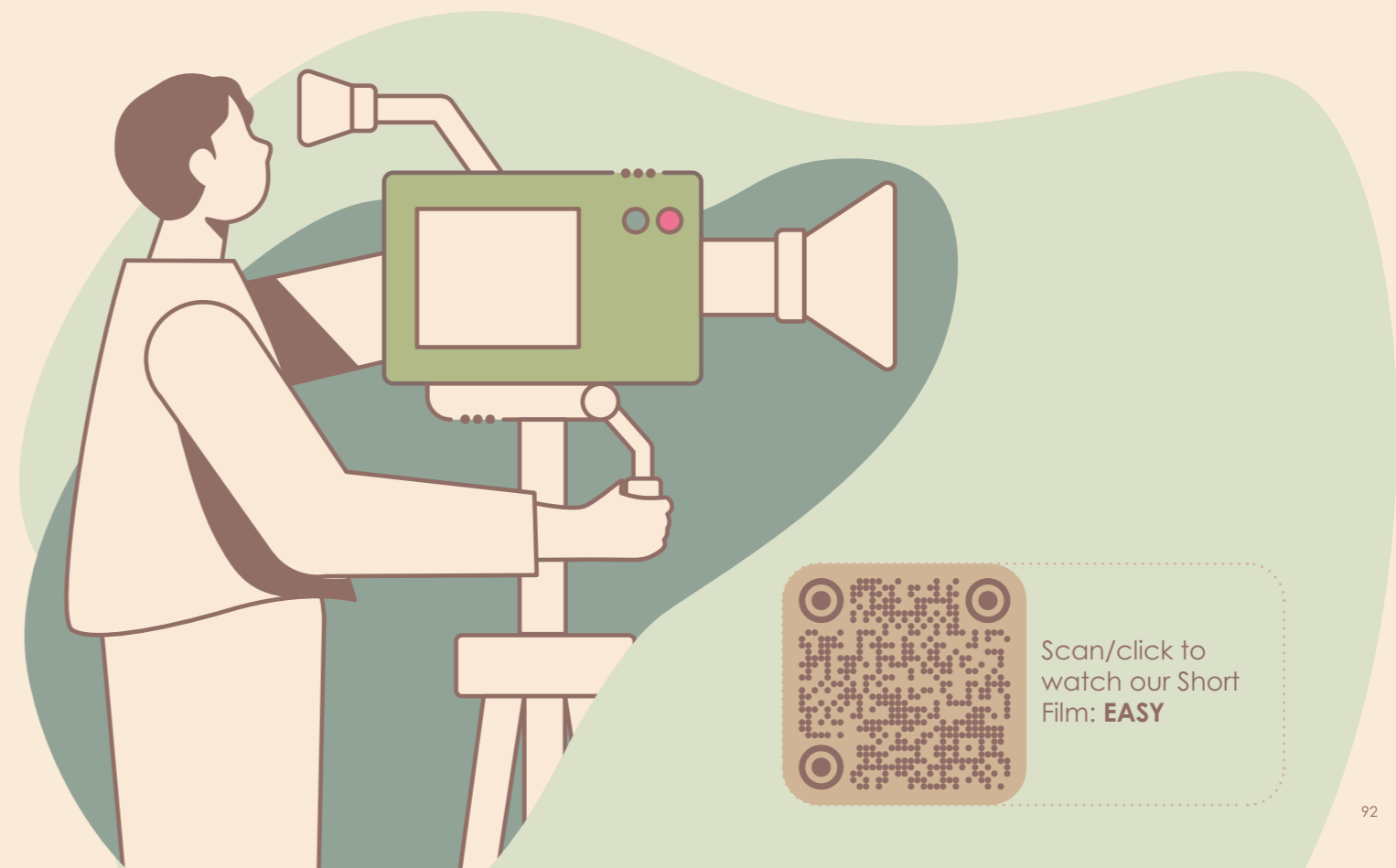
Production environments and practices tend to follow a fairly standard formula - it's **"just the way things have always been done"**.

But we just need to look back to the Covid Pandemic to demonstrate that these processes are not immovable and, actually, **we are as an industry capable of adjusting our way of working when we need to**.

Be proactive in access provision, rather than reactive, by considering these measures:

Preparation

- Minimise surprises on the day and maximise comfort by ensuring you have enough time before shooting to:
 - **Rehearse**
 - Get neurodivergent actors and crew **acquainted with equipment, costume, locations, and people on set**
- **Properly brief** cast and crew to **set the tone** and the **'rules' for shooting**
- **Do location tours** of set for all crew on their first day
- Provide **name labels** for all



Scan/click to watch our Short Film: **EASY**

Communication

I struggle to read and comprehend things sometimes on white paper and have been unable to get copies of things in formats that work for me. I'm made to feel like a nuisance.

- focus group participant

As a supporting artist, I've found on set sometimes the pace of instructions and my processing speed are at odds with one another. So if I'm given 1, 2, 3 instructions, I'm still stuck on the first one while being asked my thoughts on the last. I want to ask again or for bite-sized pieces, but I'm scared of how they'll react.

- focus group participant

There were all these 'hidden rules' on set - and you're just expected to know them?! To interpret instructions in a certain way, ways that aren't always clear or literal. I felt like I was just constantly getting it wrong, and it destroyed my self-esteem

- survey respondent

I recall a prominent director telling me to "place your hand kind of like this" ... kind of like this? What does 'kind of' mean? Do they want me to do it exactly like that or do they want me to change it up but not too much? I was completely lost and no one understood why. This kind of direction might be easy to follow for a neurotypical actor, but indirect communication for an autistic actor causes us to freeze. We know we can't ask as we look silly doing so, so opt to wing it instead - stressing the entire time that we might have misunderstood and made the wrong decision on the action. I could hardly walk down the stairs and into my scene as my palms were sweating, all because the director used the phrase "kind of"

- focus group participant

A lack of provision of alternative formats and access adjustments to internal communications content for employees such as documents or videos, or during meetings, was identified as **an Area for Improvement by the 'Access Into Action' Industry Access Survey 2022.**

Simple adjustments like:

- being **direct** and **literal** in your instructions
- **Providing multiple formats** for documents and communications
- **Asking people for their preferred method of communication**

... can help to reduce the stress experienced by neurodivergent people caused by **misunderstandings** and **miscommunications**.

For more guidance on creating more neuro-inclusive communications with your teams, check out our Communications section.

Quiet Spaces

Plan **quiet spaces** for cast and crew to use as their calm areas - be that separate on-site rooms, or private trailers.

Working Hours and Breaks

The Film and TV Charity's Looking Glass Survey (2024) has highlighted the impact **long hours** and **lack of rest** has had on crew's mental health and wellbeing, something many of us have both witnessed and experienced.

Facilitate sufficient rest and recharge time for your crew to help them **manage their health** but also to **ensure that they are at their best during working hours** by:

- **Never underestimating the importance of regular breaks**, and ensuring they are **scheduled into a shooting day** - and **stuck to**. Lots of neurodivergent people are literal thinkers and hyperfocus-ers, and will not take breaks unless we are explicitly directed to
- Encouraging your team to **take proper time off**, and **modelling healthy behaviour** by ensuring senior members are taking their own planned leave
- Having **clear start and finish times** and sticking to them where possible
- **Not rewarding overworking or presenteeism**
- **Setting boundaries on communication times and methods** (e.g. no direct messaging after a certain hour, unless an emergency)



Spotlight On: THE ASSEMBLY

Series Producer Holly Ritchie called **The Assembly (2024)**, a brilliant programme which saw Michael Sheen grilled by a group of Autistic, neurodivergent, and learning disabled people (produced and edited by partially neurodivergent crew), one of the 'easiest productions' she's ever worked on. How did they pull this off? By ensuring:

- **Access budget was signed off in advance** with commissioners
- **Thorough research** on each person on set and their **individual access requirements**
- **Bespoke call sheets** for each individual - detailing only the information they needed and customised to their information processing needs (e.g. text or visual preferences)
- **A set ethos** was established and followed from the beginning: **Be Kind**
- **Reducing the number of unnecessary people on set** to not overwhelm talent and avoid disruptions
- **Seating chart for talent was set in advance**, to ensure access requirements (e.g. a different kind of chair, a specific location to accommodate hearing and vision challenges and preferences, and space for wheelchairs that wasn't an afterthought) could be met
- **Quiet spaces were available**
- Access Coordinator and individual support workers on set
- **Thought-through and detailed travel and accommodation plans** for non-local talent
- **Flexibility and openness in filming:** e.g. participants were allowed to adapt their interview questions on the day, if they preferred
- **A willingness to adapt:** e.g. a rehearsal was making participants too nervous, so they decided to end it early to alleviate anxieties.
- That the show was neurodivergent-led, both in-front and behind-camera

Check out **The Assembly** if you haven't already - chaos, laughter, and tears promised!



Implement Reasonable Adjustments

Make sure that all requested adjustments are **properly considered, and implemented where reasonable.**

Individual requirements can change throughout a production process - **check in regularly** with your talent to ensure that the access support provided is still fit for purpose, and **adjust where necessary.**

Respect confidentiality in these processes, only sharing personal information on a need-to-know basis, with an individual's prior knowledge and expressed consent.



Despite people on set saying that they can't discriminate because of disability or neurodivergence, the lack of accommodations is astounding. From people being frustrated or visibly annoyed that you have to write things down or ask for repeated instructions due to your neurodivergence to people not understanding how a mobility issue would demand some rest or support with moving heavy equipment quickly...

– survey response



Accommodations needs to be put in place up front, not as an after thought. Call times and information need to be delivered earlier- I remember getting home from a night shoot at 4am and not having a call sheet yet so anxiously waiting for it so I knew when to set an alarm- lots of this is simple but for some reason our industry seems to think it doesn't apply to them

– interview response



Spotlight On: HIJINX

Hijinx is one of Europe's leading inclusive theatre companies, creating outstanding performances with learning disabled and/or autistic artists on stage and on screen, for Wales and for the world. Their brilliant services for industry include:

Creative Enablers: trained experts with understanding of the individual needs of their actors, accompanying them on productions to help them with scripts and documents, assist with travel, and act as a liaison between the actor and any crew for communication support, and make the actor feel more comfortable. It helps the actor maintain their autonomy and ensure their needs are met, and supports the production team in communicating with the actor.

Refocus: a communications training for the screen industries, design to help anyone working in the screen sector, in any department, make their working practice more inclusive of learning disabled and/or autistic people. The one-day course is certified by the CPD Certification Service.

Why is it important to our business to celebrate neurodiversity? Because it is at the centre of everything we do. Our incredibly talented, creative artists with learning disabilities and/or autism are what make our work unique, exciting, surprising, and hugely engaging. They bring positivity and professionalism to everything we do.

– Dan McGowan,
Head of Film, HIJINX

Set Clear Chain of Command for Reporting Incidents

Psychological safety means an environment where everyone feels safe to ask for what they need, and to report grievances when they occur, without fear of a negative consequence.

Set a clear chain of command for reporting bullying, harassment, and issues - some people may prefer to do so anonymously.



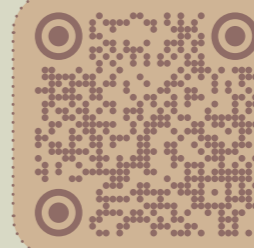
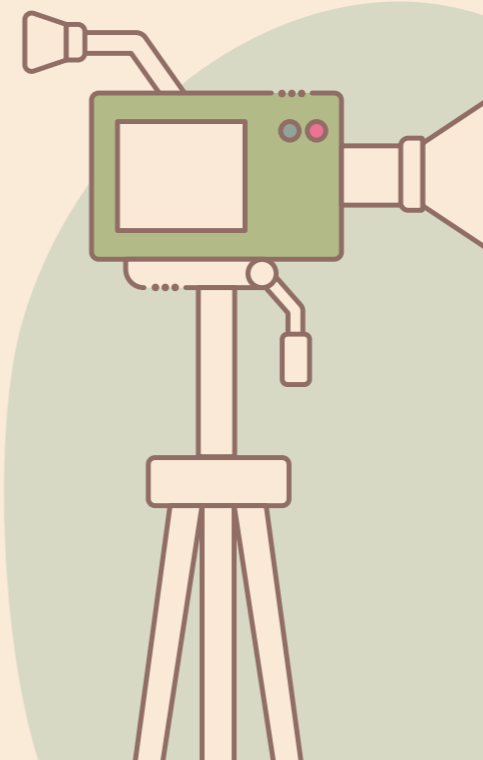
The Art Director had shouted down the phone that I wasn't good enough, that I'd never be good enough, that they didn't want someone 'like me' with my difficulties, and that I was letting everyone down. But she was my HoD - I didn't know how, or if I should, report it.

- survey response

Spotlight On: Call it! App

Call It! monitors and measures workplace culture, including concerns regarding health and safety, working conditions, unacceptable behaviours and safeguarding, and instances of bullying, harassment, and discrimination. The process is anonymous, which helps senior management get a more honest overview of well-being on productions, and for crew to report incidents they wouldn't feel comfortable doing in person.

[Check out the app here!](#)



Scan/click here to watch our Case Study video on the impact of a negative experience.



Remember: **Words Matter**

Do Things Differently

Being open to 'doing things differently' opens up access to a far wider pool of **talent**, who may not be able to navigate the long hours and journeys required of traditional production roles.



During my first full time role in a kit hire room my anxiety was incredibly bad and I was struggling with the commute, long hours, and isolation. My job was very manual and performed at a computer, so I asked if there was any opportunity of hybrid working to be made, and they turned it down without even exploring the options. I had a phone call with their office and they told me to go home and 'have a real thing about whether this industry is the right place for someone with your needs'. I ended up quitting.

– survey response

Be creative and open-minded in your working practices, considering job sharing and flexible working - where reasonable.

Exit Interviews

Exit interviews provide an opportunity to:

- To **debrief crew** and **offer support**
- For your crew to **share their experiences** of the working culture, atmosphere, and set up worked and what they'd like to see change
- To **reflect** on your neuro-inclusion practices and policies, and **learn** and **take forward** areas for improvement for your next production

note on: Sensitive Subjects

Does the content being filmed contain sensitive themes that might potentially trigger your neurodivergent crew? [Check out this guide](#) to better understand your duty of care and safeguarding responsibilities, and how to ensure that your workforce are properly prepared and supported during filming.

04. Lights, Camera, Let's Take Action!

Post-Production

For many, post-production feels like the end of the project - but for **some, it's just the beginning**. It's often a very challenging stage, with additional stressors of schedules, budgets, and resources, long hours, and frequent periods of isolation - particularly in the editing and grade processes.

Neuro-inclusion doesn't just end when filming is wrapped - ensure that these practices are continued for your editing and delivery phases.

Schedule

Ensure that your schedule is **realistic**, and **deadlines clearly communicated**. Changes and amends are to be expected at this stage - but ensure that they are **briefed in properly** and that **ample time** is assigned to deliver them.

Edit

This can be a long and isolating process. **Schedule in movement breaks away from the screen** for your editors, and ensure that they are taking them. For staff who spend long bouts working in the dark on an edit or grade - **encourage sunlight periods**, where possible.

Support

Extend any wellbeing support you have put in place for your production teams to your post production staff, too.

[Access Riders/Passports](#) should also be encouraged for post staff, too, and adjustments considered with equal weight to other areas of production.

Share additional support where necessary for the challenges unique to this phase, too, particularly around managing screen time, isolation, and long hours.

Communication

In addition to the [communication](#) adjustments and allowances you've continued to make throughout your production process, make sure your communications with post team are neuro-inclusive by also considering:

- **clearly detailing expectations around deadlines**
- Scheduling frequent **catch-ups** and **check-ins**

- **Including the post team** at the earlier stages of production, including in broader project discussions or calls, so that they feel part of the team and properly integrated within the project
- **Setting up a shared calendar** highlighting meetings, deadlines, and key delivery dates - and notifying people clearly of changes
- Include the post team within all of your planned social events or group chats - **don't leave them out!**

Spotlight On: Recognising and Managing Loneliness and Isolation

Post production teams often work long hours and in isolation - which can impact **wellbeing, work-life balance** and **opportunity for social interaction**. **Get to know your team**, and **be alert for signs of loneliness**, including significant changes in behaviour, performance or communication, any patterns of conflict, and increased time off work due to illness.

Neurodivergent people are significantly more susceptible to experiences of loneliness, as well as more vulnerable to the negative physical and psychological effects of it (Quadt et al, 2024).

To help prevent or support crew impacted by feelings of isolation, try to:

- Stick to company policies around working hours and breaks, ensuring **clear start and finish times**
- Encourage **prioritising downtime, social interaction, and personal events**
- **Signpost support** such as [Mind's tips on managing loneliness](#)
- **Encourage daily movement, daylight, and screen time breaks**
- **Regularly check in** with crew - **particularly remote workers**, for whom the experience of isolation can be particularly exacerbated.



04. Lights, Camera, Let's Take Action!

Authentic Representations



If there was more of a neurodivergent presence within the screen industries, then this might change the depictions and the stories constructed for the screen

- Eleanor McSherry, leading academic voice in neuro-inclusion for the screen industries

For people with little exposure to neurodivergence in their day-to-day lives, the **media plays an important role in filling in gaps of knowledge** of what exactly it 'means' to experience it.

You ask someone what 'autism' looks like, for example, and for those without autistic people around them, characters like 'Raymond' from **Rain Man** (1988), 'Sheldon' from **The Big Bang Theory** (2008-2021), and 'Dr Shaun' from **The Good Doctor** (2017-) **provide frames of reference** for what autism means, and may **affect how someone interacts** with an autistic individual.

But do, for example, these depictions of extraordinary autists lead audiences to expect these savant abilities from all autistic individuals they meet in the real world? Multiple studies seem to think so. (Huws & Jones, 2010; Nordahl-Hansen, T. ndevold, & Fletcher-Watson,, 2018)

Media is a powerful tool in this sense: it can, and does, **perpetuate harmful misconceptions** about what it means to be neurodivergent, but it also gives us the opportunity to **dispel stereotypes** and **humanise neurodivergence** in compelling ways. All of this is dependent on **how it is represented on screen**.

Too often, **one-dimensional storytelling** misrepresents the real experience of neurodivergent people - either infantilising us as a group that should be pitied or, worse, feared - or as 'superheroes', inspirations, triumphs, that should be revered.

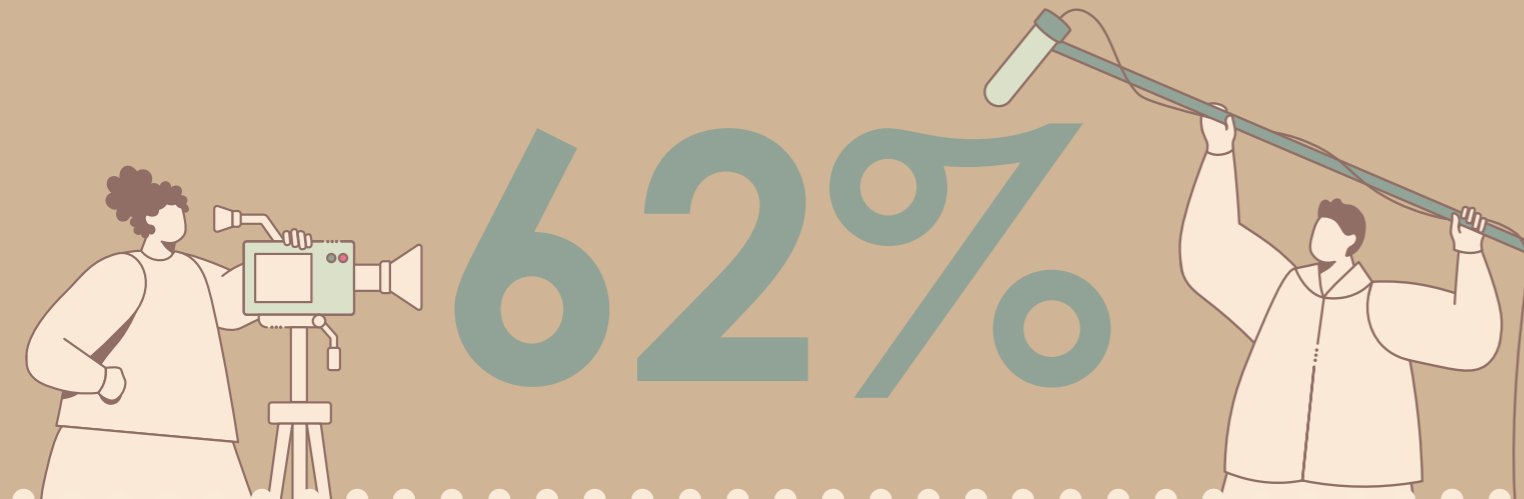


Disability doesn't look like one thing. Not the superhero or tragedy narrative. Nothing sensational. Just me as I live my life.

– Tiffany Yu, Valuable 500 focus group participant (2023)

Neither sufficiently takes into account who we are - **individuals, with unique strengths and challenges, navigating a world not built for us** in the best way we can. Reducing us to stereotypes **shapes how we are perceived by others, and by ourselves** - leading to **feelings of isolation**, and **experiences of discrimination**, in social and working worlds.

62% of people say that their disability is rarely or never appropriately represented in TV and film (Valuable 500).



How can I ensure authenticity in my representation of neurodivergence?

- **Consult with lived-experience experts and communities.** You're not going to be able to communicate everyone's experience, but **rooting your characters and dialogue in realism** is only achieved by **working with people who have lived it**.
- **Think about the significance of being overt in your portrayals.** If a character has ADHD - is there a place in the story for them to actually reveal their diagnosis, and what it means to and for them? More subtle and indirect portrayals of neurodivergence can be successful, too, particularly around normalising differences in behaviour or communication on screen.

- **Depict the good, the bad and the ugly:** capture the reality of neurodivergence as it exists on a day-to-day basis, not the watered-down or exaggerated version you think audiences want. It's important that people see themselves represented.
- **Consider intersectionality, always.** Someone's experience of neurodivergence is also dependent on their gender, physical health, ethnicity, socio-economic background, age, and any other characteristic.
- **Avoid stereotypes.** Many unrealistic depictions of neurodivergent people in media stem from the writer's reliance on their own assumptions.
- **Round your neurodivergent characters** - give them passions and fears, hobbies and relationships, established back stories - don't define them by their diagnosis alone.
- **Show neurodivergence**, even (and preferably) subtly: consider earplugs or headphones worn by a character to help with auditory processing, or a character stimming (repetitive behaviours that reduce anxiety, relieve discomfort, and avoid sensory overload)
- **Consider 'special interests' for your characters outside of stereotypes:** some of us like trains. We don't all like trains.



We are going to be your audience. Our families are going to be coming to watch your movies. There is money there, but it's bigger than that. You're creating awareness and making new role models.

- Emma McKinney, Valuable 500 focus group participant (2023)





CHECKLIST

- Have you budgeted for adequate access provision for your sets?
- Have you made effort to alleviate the anxiety of your cast and crew, by providing as much information about shoots in advance?
- Have you considered additional crew for your productions to support the access requirements of your teams, including Access Coordinators or Creative Enablers?
- How well is the wellbeing of your cast and crew anticipated and managed on your productions?
- Have you considered, and implemented, adjustments to your processes where reasonable?
- Have you consulted with lived-experience experts in your on-screen representations of neurodivergence?

05.

Accessible Comms

Showing the world you care about inclusivity



: 05. Accessible Comms

: Overview

One of the most effective ways you can communicate to prospective employees, to your clients, and to your audience that you are neuro-inclusive is through your brand, comms, and marketing - yet so few companies do so.

Put yourself on the map and show that you care about neurodiversity!

: Social Media

Accessibility in your comms is no longer just a nice thing to do - it's fundamental in your ability to reach, and engage, the widest possible market for your business. A recent survey found that **92% of respondents believe that brands have a duty to ensure accessible communications (Valuable 500, 2024)**.

Considering neuro-inclusion in your social media practices and content is the best way to externally demonstrate your commitment to these communities.

Language

Inclusion is important to consider in your choice of language. Your choices don't just benefit those in the DDN communities - creating content that is thoughtful, easy to scan, and simple to absorb, benefits everyone.

When writing copy for social media, consider:

- ✓ Disability-inclusive language
- ✓ Logic in your format
- ✓ Being literal - avoid abstract phrases and say what you mean, directly
- ✓ Short, everyday words
- ✓ Simple sentences in plain English
- ✓ Meaningful headings and subheadings
- ✓ Bullet points over long paragraphs

Need support in accessible copywriting? Try:

- **The Hemingway App**
- **Readable**
- **Accessibility on Microsoft Word**
- Other AI solutions such as **ChatGPT**



My friend said, "I'll be there within the hour."

It was 9:30 am. Did she mean by 10 am or 10:30 am? (Still don't have a scooby.)

That's why neurodivergent folk make brilliant copywriters.

- A lot of us need clear, direct communication
- We might struggle to read in between (ambiguous) lines
- We're aware that walls of text won't keep our attention
- We know how rubbish miscommunication can be - the disasters it can lead to

So, we try our best to quash any confusion.

Why's that handy? Asking for clarity is inconvenient; customers won't always have the time/will to do it.

- Ellie Perkins, Copywriter

Emojis :)

Emoji's can unintentionally disrupt how content is consumed, because they can obfuscate the message for screen-readers which are unable to decipher context, and can also be hard to interpret - particularly for those of us that are literal thinkers.

Be intentional, and sparing, with your use of emojis.

Hashtags

- Use **Camel Case** for hashtags - which means **capitalising the first letter of each word within the hashtag**. This makes it compatible for a screen reader and other accessibility tools, who need to distinguish where each word starts
- **Don't use full stops or commas**

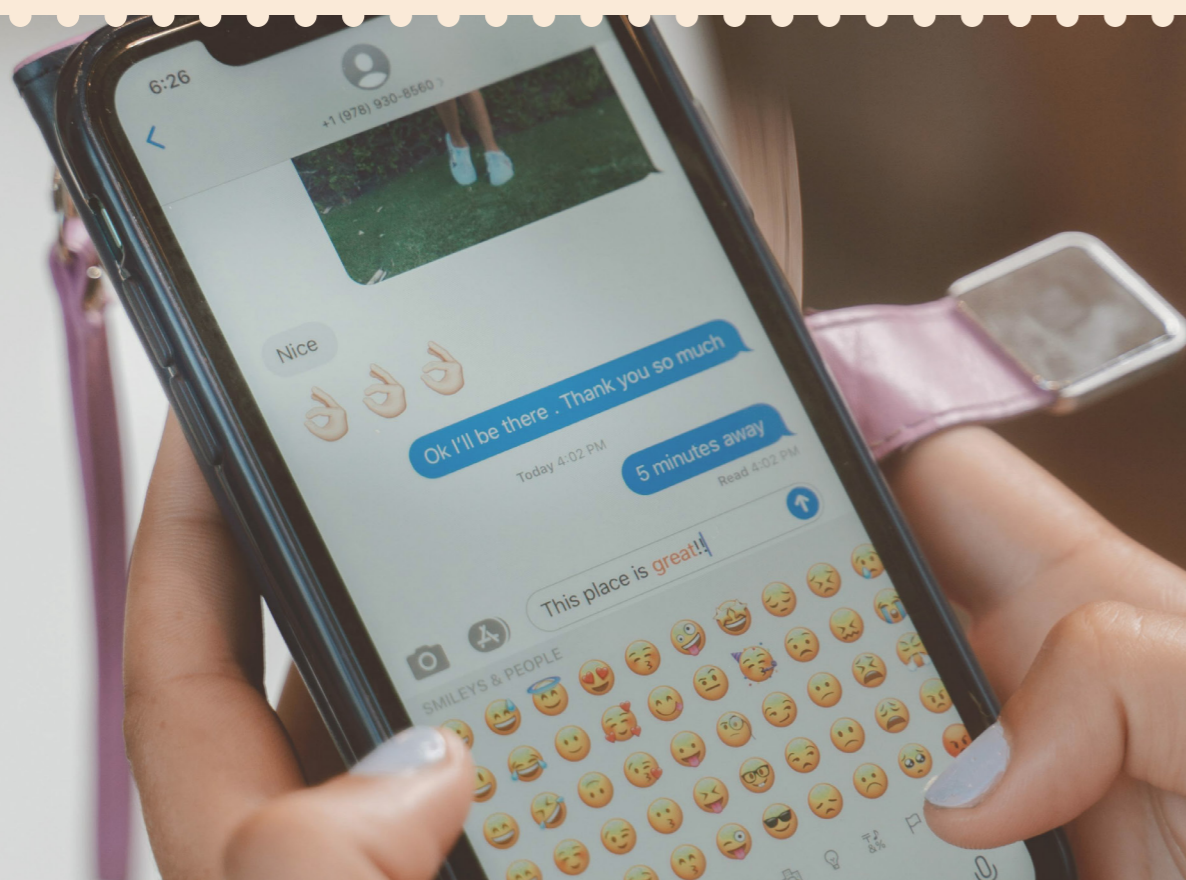


Images

- **avoid busy images** (these can be overwhelming and take longer for neurodivergent people to interpret and process)
- **Avoid text-heavy images**
- Chose **cohesive colour schemes** that are not too bright or contrasting (opt for more understated, pastel tones or single-hues)
- Use the [TPGi Colour Contrast Analyser \(CCA\)](#) to optimise your visual content

note on: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

These are international guidelines explaining how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. Check it out and see if your social media content complies!



Alt Text

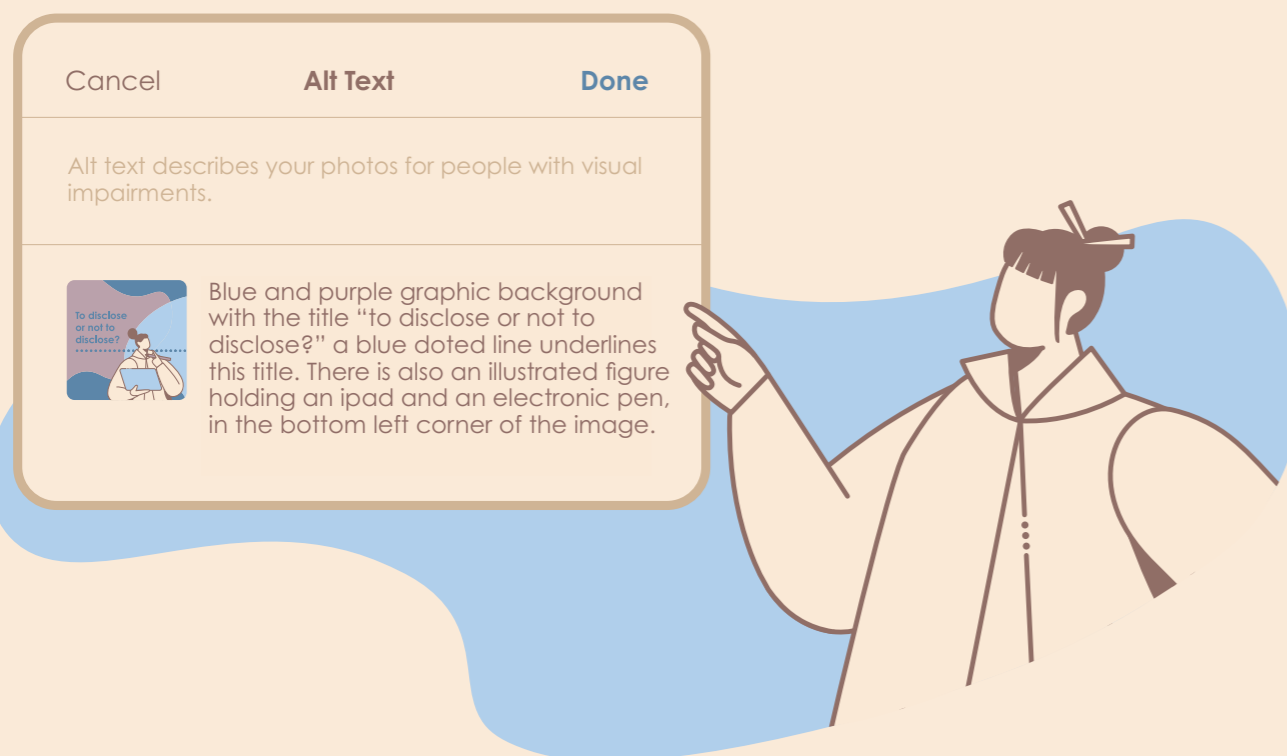
Alt Text (or alternative text) is a brief description of an image that conveys the content and context to those who may not be able to see it or understand it.

Generally, on most apps (X, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn), AI automatically generates Alt Text or allows users to input themselves.

Alt Text is important for neurodivergence as it **helps people using screen readers to understand the content of images**, which can improve their access to, and interaction with, social media content.

Always engage in using Alt Text where you can when posting images on social media.

Be descriptive, remember the importance of context (what is the image being used for?), and, if using AI generated alt text, **check to ensure it is properly communicating what is shown.**

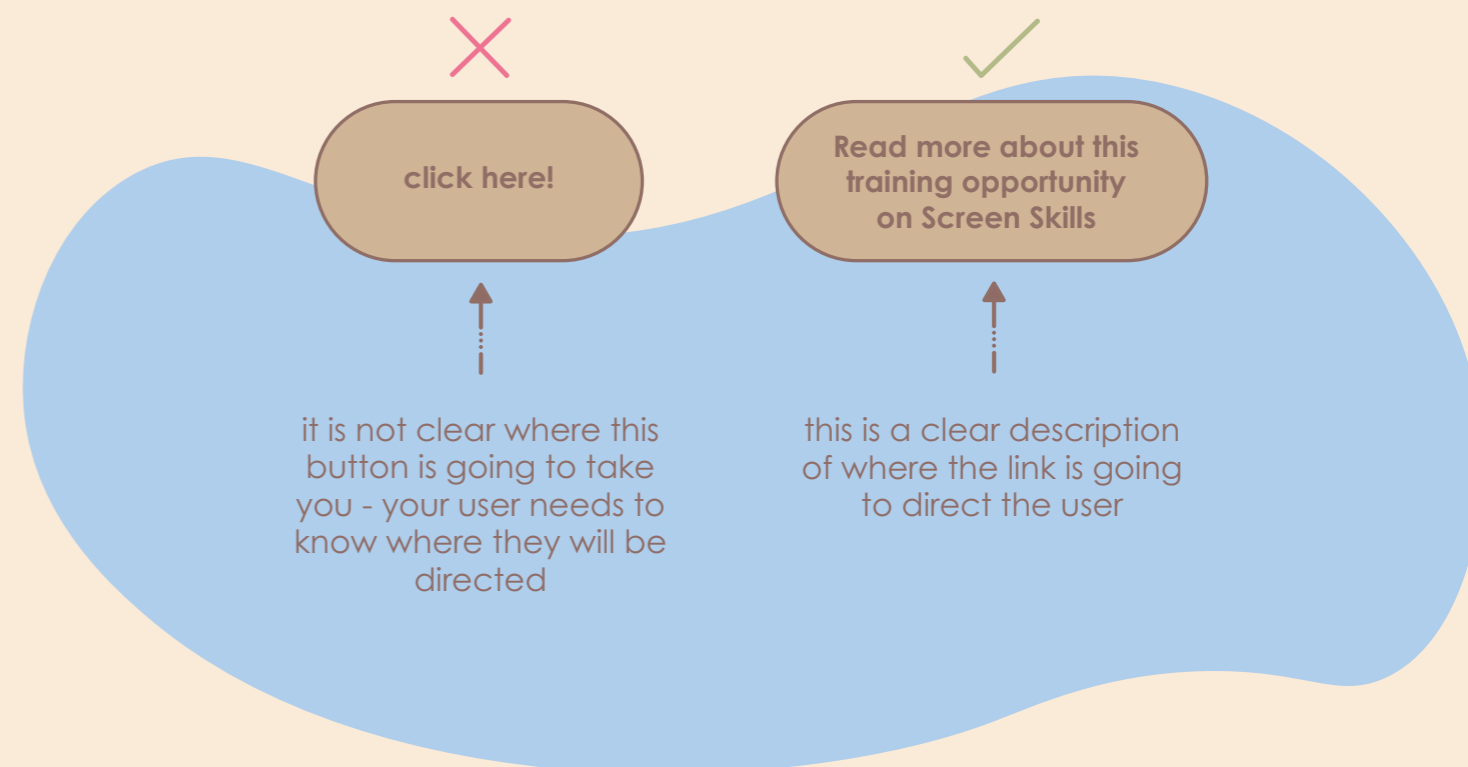


Videos

- **Provide captions as standard** (easily done in Final Cut Pro X, added on in-house, or use AI-generated ones embedded in social media platforms - but ensure that the subtitles correctly match what is being said)
- **Consider British Sign Language (BSL) options**, where possible (there are AI solutions that make this process significantly more cost-effective)
- **Use audio descriptions**
- **Introduce (with visual descriptions) each new speaker in a video**

Mailing Lists

- **ensure there is clear visual hierarchy: prioritise important information and visuals, using meaningful headings and subheadings**
- **Consider a 'contents' section** at the start of your newsletter
- Check whether the mailing list platform you are using (e.g. Hubspot, Mailing Chimp) has **accessibility built in**, and utilise it (or consider an alternative)
- Use a **sans serif font** where possible, and **keep it consistent**
- **Keep text short and simple**, and **use bullet points** to break up large paragraphs
- **Use Alt Text** for images
- Use **meaningful link descriptions**



Spotlight On: Eli Beaton

Much of this guidance on Accessible Social Media practices comes from Eli Beaton, a leading voice in inclusion in the screen industries.

[Check out her Training and Consultancy services here.](#)

05. Accessible Comms

Access Statements

Are you already, or working on becoming, a neurodivergent-friendly company? Then let the world know!

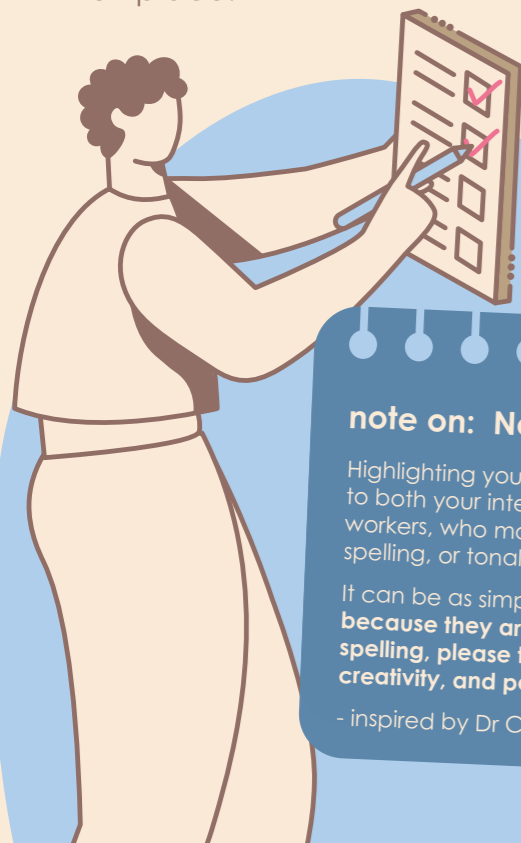
So many neurodivergent individuals hoping to enter our industry are put off applying to jobs because they are unsure that a workplace is going to truly support their needs, and value their skill sets.

They are afraid of the consequences of disclosing their neurodivergence in the application process for fear it would deter prospective employers, and aren't confident that the company would understand their differences.

A simple, dated access statement on your website (and referenced in your job ads and in other corporate materials) that is updated annually and may include:

- a declaration of your inclusion agenda and policies
- Your current communication methods
- Your working patterns and practices
- Any employee resource groups (ERGs)
- Your levels of disability knowledge and understanding (any accreditations or qualifications you and your team have undertaken)
- A statement about the accessibility of your website, including whether it complies with regulations and any tests you have taken to ensure accessibility (and when these were completed)

... lets prospective employees and clients know that you are a neuro-inclusive workplace.



note on: Neurodivergent-Friendly Email Signatures

Highlighting your neurodiversity policy in your email signature demonstrates your commitment to both your internal workforce and your external clients, but it also gives your neurodivergent workers, who may be less confident in the written form, empathy and space for grammar, spelling, or tonal mistakes.

It can be as simple as: **'Here at [company name], we actively seek out neurodivergent talent because they are key to our success. If this email seems a bit different in tone, grammar, or spelling, please trust that all our communications are well intended. We value fresh ideas, creativity, and performance, over business jargon, perfect punctuation, and spelling.'**

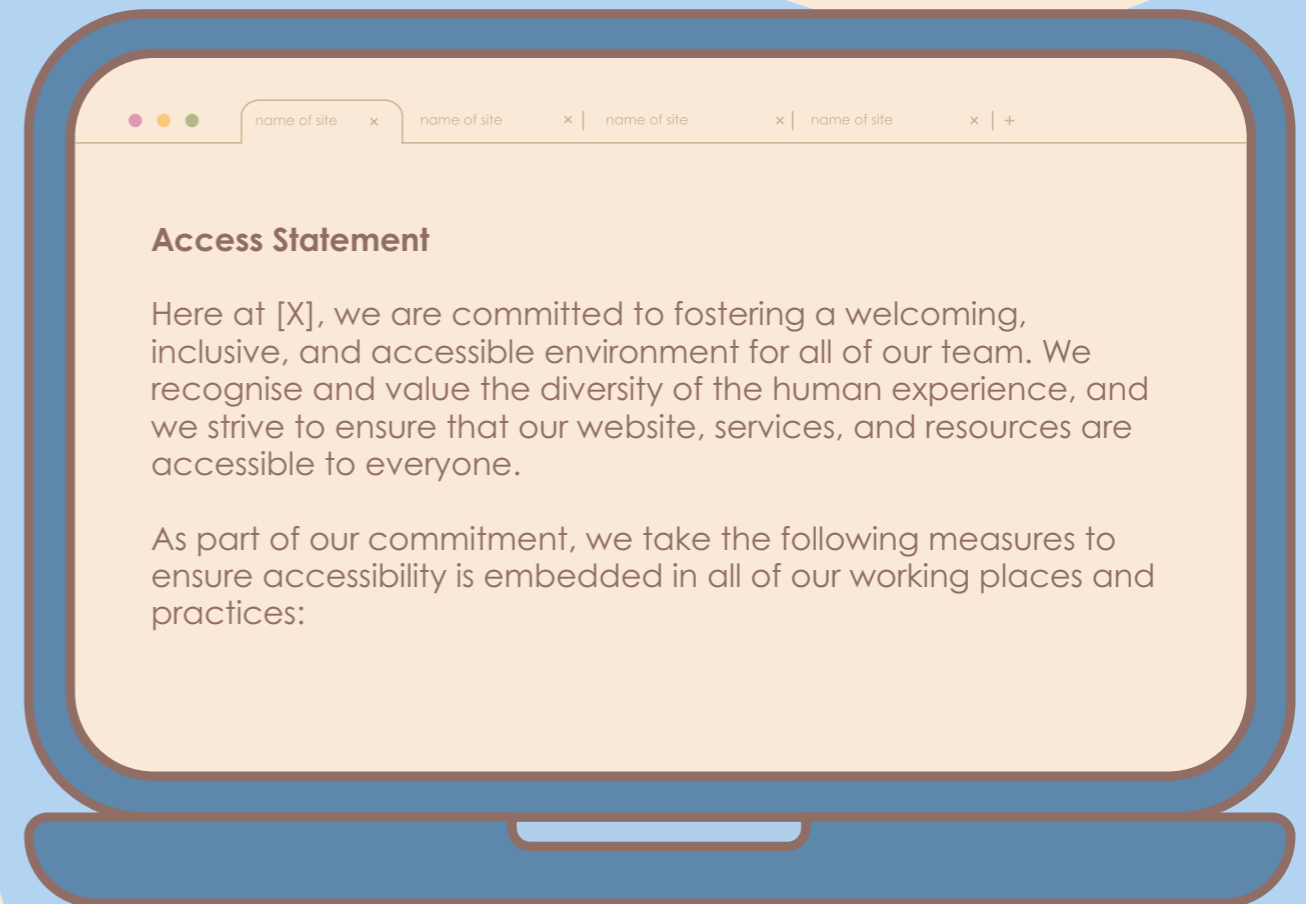
- inspired by Dr Carly Danesh Jones MBE, Enna Global

It means that neurodivergent talent within your workforce, or hoping to enter it, **can expect reasonable adjustments** and **open communication** - without the awkward conversation. **This opens up your access to new, wider talent pools - more confident in you as an employer.**

In addition to job seekers, studies have shown that customers, clients, and audiences prefer socially inclusive companies (CIPD, 2024). **It's just good business sense!**

Need help writing an access statement?

Download our template here!



Remember:

An Access Statement is purely performative if you do not use inclusive practices in your day-to-day working places, processes and communications. The actions and values of a company define its neuro-inclusivity - **ensure there is meaning behind your words.**

05. Accessible Comms

Branding and Design

Being neuro-inclusive in your company's brand and design is one of the **best ways to show authentic commitment to diversity** to the world - including prospective employees, clients, and audiences.

Truly inclusive design ensures that all services, content, products, and environments you are creating and fostering are designed with **all users in mind**, including those with visual and/or cognitive differences.

Even where brands are established, subtle amends or enhancements to your websites, visual materials, and comms can ensure that neurodivergent access needs are met, **without being asked**.

Consider these measures in your branding and rebranding conversations:

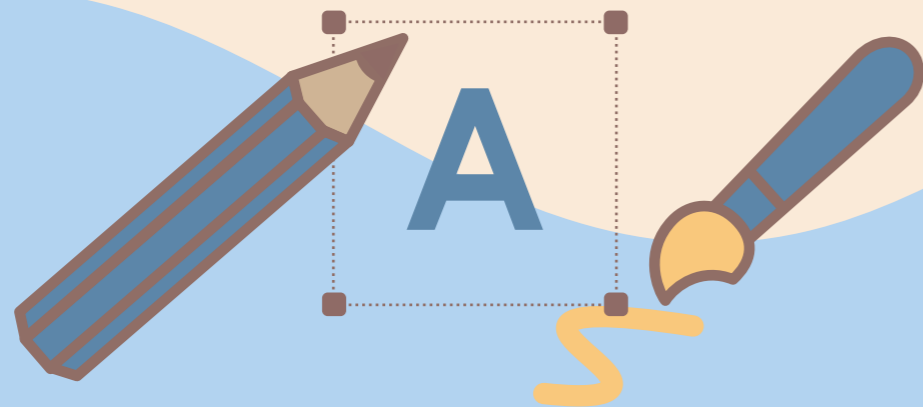
Design of Visual Materials

Navigating a world built for neurotypical brains can be exhausting, so **reducing cognitive load** is a recurring theme in designing for neurodivergence.

Consult with the neurodivergent people around you and in the wider community to maximise inclusivity in your design of visual internal and external materials (Word Docs, PowerPoints, Pdf decks, etc), but start by considering these principles:

General

- Make sure all of your visual materials are **seamlessly compatible with screen readers and other text-to-speech (TTS) software**



Fonts

(source: BDA)

- use at least **font size 12pt** or above
- Use **1.5 or double line spacing**
- **Colour code text** - put information in one colour, a question in another
- Fonts should be clear, rounded, and have space between letters - a **sans serif typeface and kerning** (printed/un-joined text) is preferable

Examples:

Century Gothic Comic Sans Arial Helvetica Calibri Tahoma

Headings and Subheadings

- headings should be a **font size that's at least 20% larger than the main body text** (Microsoft has accessibility options under the 'Layout' tab that will help to align headings correctly)
- **Avoid underlining and italics** which can make words 'run together': **use bold text** for titles, sub headings, or to draw attention to important information or key terms

Page Layouts

- **Left align, without justification**
- **Wide margins**
- **Avoid multiple columns**
- **Avoid too much text** on a page
- **Break up text** with regular section headings in long documents, and include a **table of contents**
- **Avoid the use of background graphics with text over the top**
- **Use text boxes** or borders for headings or to highlight important text

Writing Style

- Ensure sentences and written instructions are **short and simple**
- **Keep paragraphs as short as possible - dense blocks of text are difficult to read**
- Use **numbers or bullet points** rather than continuous prose - and use them consistently
- Include **flow charts, illustrations, and diagrams** to break up large sections of text or to demonstrate a particular procedure

Colour Schemes and Readability

- Where possible, particularly for non-printed materials, **avoid white backgrounds**, opting preferably for off-white/pastel colours
- Use **sufficient contrast levels between background and text**: avoid black text on a white background, and light text on a dark background
- **Avoid colours such as green with red/pink** in your content where possible as they can cause difficulty for people who are colour blind or have colour vision deficiencies
- **Avoid patterns on backgrounds where there is a lot of text** - it will be less distracting for the reader

When in doubt, use the **ACCESSIBILITY button** on all Microsoft programmes to check your documents/presentations.

MultiMedia

- **Use Alt Text** for all images
- **Provide captioning and transcripts** for videos and audio content

PowerPoint Presentations

- Ensure slide contents can be **read in the order that you intend them to be**, and give every slide a **unique title** - this helps screen readers properly communicate your work
- **Ensure that colour is not the only means of conveying information** - this is challenging for people who are blind, have low vision, or are colourblind
- Try to use a **larger font size (18pt or larger)** where possible
- **Use images** to break up blocks of text and make your slides easier to scan
- **A colourful, high-contrast graphic layout, with pictures and text** creates a structured design - far easier for people with dyslexia to understand

[Download our Accessible Formats Guidelines here!](#)



Websites

Overstimulation can cause anxiety and may incite significant stress in someone who is neurodivergent, as well as anyone experiencing even acute mental health challenges, physical disabilities, or neurological conditions such as migraines or brain injury - as well, of course, as anyone less proficient with online tools or having a particularly bad day.

note on: Inclusive Design

"Inclusive design aims to go beyond specific accessibility benchmarks and create experiences that can be fully appreciated by a wider variety of people. It requires incorporating empathy and compassion for all kinds of users as part of the design process. Instead of focusing only on required, functional objectives, inclusive design thinks holistically about a wide variety of struggles a user may experience and how your product or service can meet the user where they are."

- Cassie Barden, Proven



““

71% of disabled people say they have abandoned a website due to excessive access barriers. What will this cost you in potential client and market reach?

- The Click-Away Pound Report, 2016

Thinking inclusively in your website design or redesign not only makes your site **more accessible**, but also more **enjoyable, engaging**, and **aesthetically pleasing** to the **possible widest audience**.

In addition to the above design principles, consider:

- **Text:** Reduce the amount of text you have on your website where possible, and use images, bullet points and meaningful headings/subheadings to ensure a strong visual hierarchy
- **Navigation:** reduce the amount of steps to simplify your site navigation
- **Language:** avoid jargon, similes and metaphors, and always explain complex terms and acronyms
- **Iconography:** we **love** strong and familiar iconography to help us process information
- **Colour:** choose cohesive, intentional colour schemes that are not too bright or contrasting, regardless of your brand. Most websites benefit from 'clean and simple' designs that use colour sparingly (use the [TPGi Colour Contrast Analyser \(CCA\)](#) to optimise your visual content)
- **Ensure all your interactive elements can be operated using a keyboard** for those with motor skill challenges and those who prefer keyboard navigation
- **Consistency:** many of those of us who are neurodivergent rely on repetition and predictability to feel in control and comfortable by what we are attempting to comprehend: consistency and predictability in colour, design, navigation and format can help appease this
- **Compliance:** review your website against specific criteria in the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#)
- **Animation:** minimise looping animation, flashing imagery, or any other moving content like auto-playing video (or give an option to disable these features)
- Include an **access statement**, so that potential clients or jobseekers can know to expect an understanding and psychologically safe workplace
- add an **accessibility tool** to your website that offers options in light/dark mode, different fonts, colour contrast, and the ability to pause animations. [Check out an example on the Exceptional Minds website here!](#)
- **Links:** Use meaningful link descriptions, where it is clear what will happen if they click through
- **Wear it on your sleeve:** is your website neuro-inclusive? Include a declaration of this, and ask site visitors to get in touch if they'd like to receive information in any other format

Like this

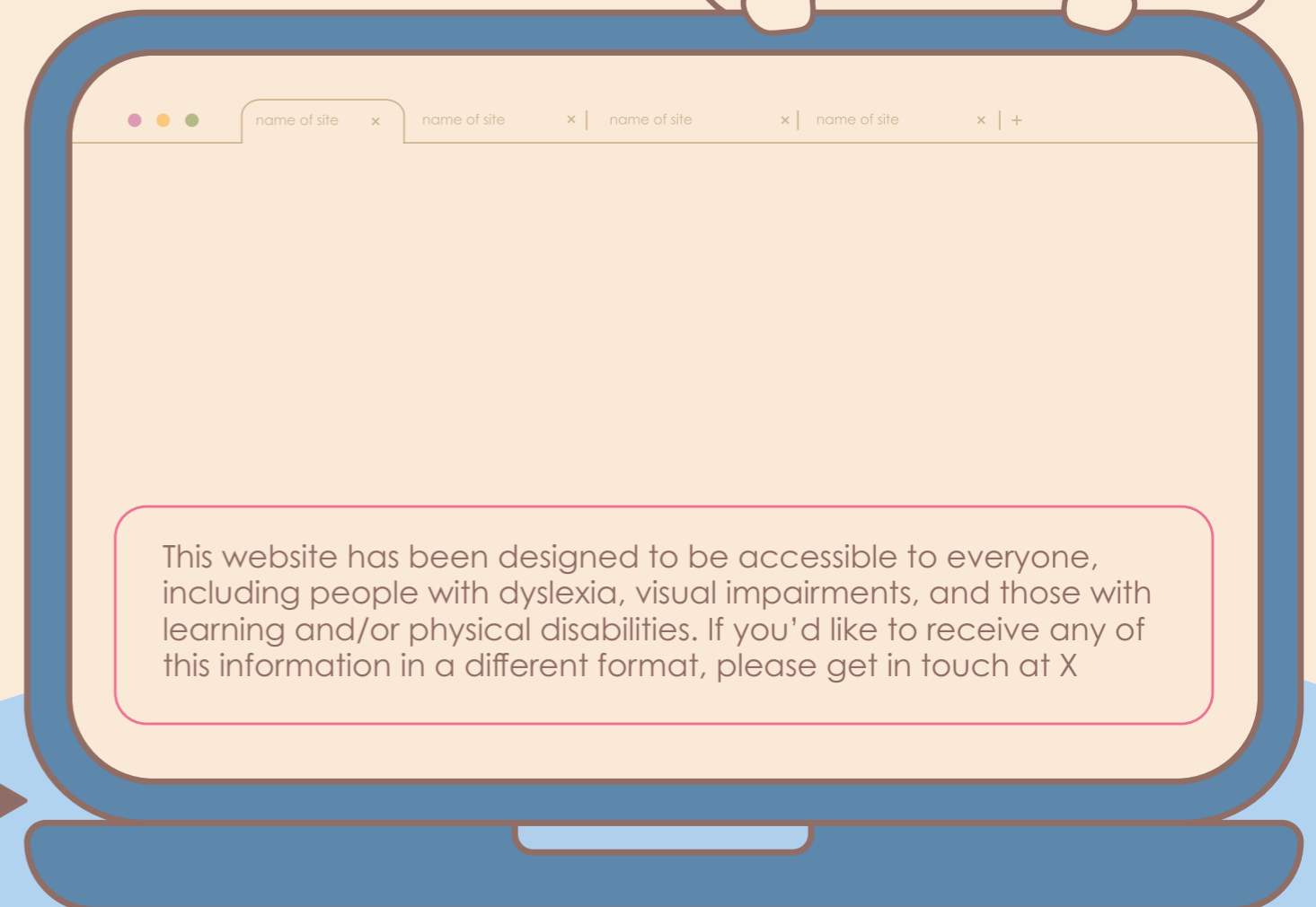
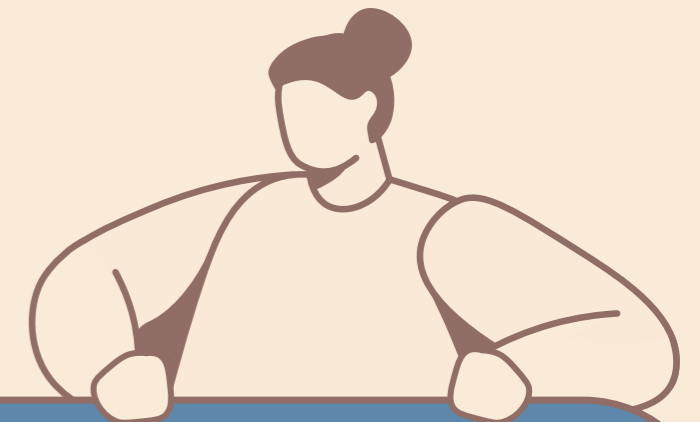


In essence - **keep it simple**, and **communicate your message or services in the clearest and most visual terms!**



Remember:

Visual processing is not only faster for people with dyslexia, but carries a significantly lower cognitive load. **Never underestimate the importance of visuals, including images, iconography, and intentional use of colour!**



05. Accessible Comms

Events

When it comes to external spaces and buildings, only **just over a third** of organisers (**36%**) always ask about the access status of the venues they hire, regardless of who is attending

- The Industry Access Survey, 2022



Hosting events, exhibitions, or socials for industry, or for your staff? Here's some things to think about to make them more neuro-inclusive:

Planning

- **Ensure access** (parking, public transport) when choosing a location, conducting an access audit in advance of booking where possible
- Support speakers and exhibitors to create **accessible presentations**
- **Think about the duration** of each session - trying to keep them short or broken up with movement breaks to aid concentration and focus
- Think about **splitting at least part of the event into smaller breakouts**, sessions, or workshops, for people who find noise and lots of people overwhelming
- Consider **hybrid events** where possible, with options for people to join online
- Choose a location that is physically accessible and also has **break out spaces for quiet zones**
- **Provide guests with as much information about the event as possible**, including images and a map of the location, how to get there, clear start and finish times, schedule for the day, dress code, and who will be speaking

- Consider a **choice of food options** where possible, conscious of dietary restrictions and food sensitivities
- Make it clear how **attendees may articulate their access requirements** to event organisers, and accommodate where possible
- **Give sufficient guidance for online participants** on how to log into the session, rules for the platform (e.g. camera off or on, how to use chat functions) and on any apps they may need to download in order to access the event

Speakers

- Ease the anxiety of your speakers **by asking for their access requirements** well in advance of the event, and accommodating these where possible
- Provide them with a **picture of the venue and the space** in which they will be speaking, as well as any information about **how to use any tech** well in advance of the day
- Provide them with **information about the event, the audience, and how many people will be in it**, so they can be best prepared
- Check with the venue if speakers are allowed to do a recce of the space in advance of the day, which can aid anxiety and allow them to anticipate any access barriers
- Encourage speakers **to describe their physical appearance** for those who are visually impaired in the audience
- Ask speakers to be as **clear and concise as possible**, avoiding metaphors, idioms, or jargon in their phrasing

At the Event

- have **access support workers** on the day to signpost and assist
- **Reduce sensory stimulation** where possible, by, for example, dimming the house lighting, avoiding blinking lights, and not having multiple sources of noise at once (e.g. don't have music playing when someone is speaking)
- Ensure exhibitors are **patient** with attendees, and **understand that behavioural differences** such as avoiding eye-contact or stimming are not necessarily indicative of a lack of attention
- Have **markings around the building** to direct people around the event and to toilets, refreshment areas, and quiet zones
- Articulate to attendees that **fidget tools and movement breaks are encouraged**, and provide **standing space** for people who prefer

- Ensure there are **sufficient, structured breaks** throughout the day
- Have **name tags** for all attendees
- **Gain consent before taking/publishing pictures** (some organisers use colour-coded name tags or lanyards to identify those not wanting to be photographed)
- Have **closed captioning** on presentations, live where possible
- Have a **BSL interpreter** where possible
- Try to maximise the **options for asking questions**, for those who feel uncomfortable raising their hand or speaking into a microphone - e.g. post-it notes, co-ordinators in the crowd, digital write-in options

After the Event

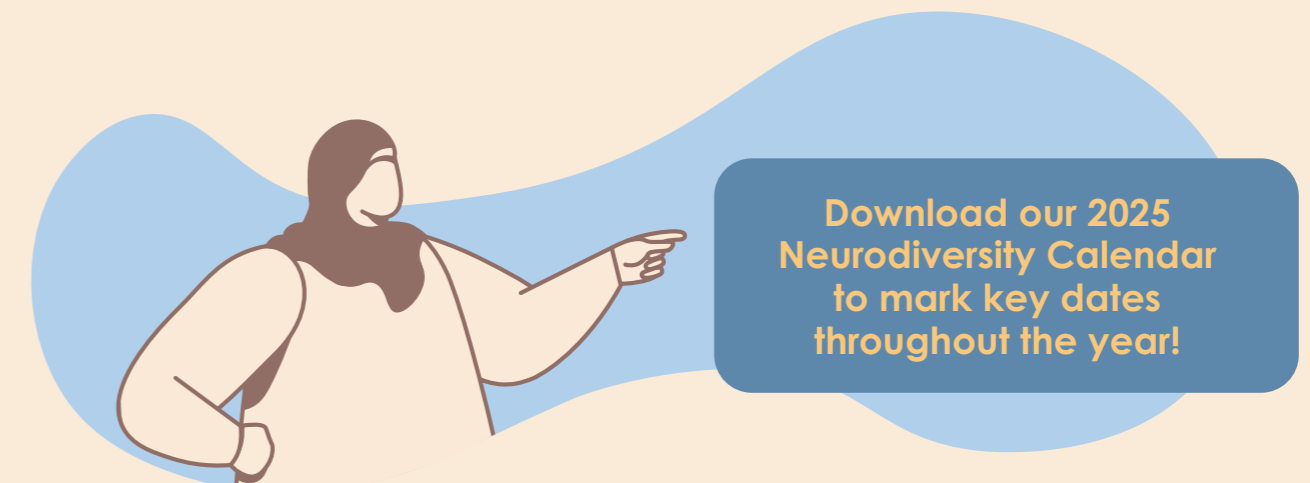
- offer a **follow up opportunity for attendees to ask questions**, for those who may be too anxious to do so in person
- Provide **exhibitor information and contact details**
- **Provide notes and materials** from presentations, sessions, and speakers where possible
- **Ask for feedback** on what worked, and what didn't - for you to improve upon your neuro-inclusive practices, for next time!

05. Accessible Comms

Neurodiversity Celebration Initiatives

One of the best ways in which you can show you are genuinely engaged in neurodiversity as a business is to wear it on your sleeve. **Take part in Awareness and Celebration Days and initiatives across the year, both internally and in your external comms.**

By raising awareness and acceptance about what neurodivergence is, how it manifests, and the relative barriers faced by people who experience it, you are playing a pivotal role in **fostering more understanding, more empathetic, and more inclusive workplace cultures** - one in which more positive attitudes are shaped and harmful stereotypes are challenged.



Here's how to participate in neurodiversity celebration and help raise-awareness in a sensitive and empowering way:

- **Track internationally recognised awareness days**, weeks, and months, and participate in celebrating in a way that makes sense for your company
- **Silence your voice and centre those with lived experience**
 - Communicate with neurodivergent employees, people around you, and communities about the organisations you champion and the messages and imagery you use, to ensure you are **amplifying actually neurodivergent voices rather than alienating them.**
 - For example - 'Autism Speaks' is a recognised organisation that many businesses reference in their autism awareness/celebration days, but is one many actually autistic people are strongly averse to.
 - Similarly, a singular 'puzzle piece' is an often used visual when it comes to initiatives and awareness campaigns about neurodiversity, but many actually in the community feel it represents neurodivergence as being a 'missing part', as if their brain was 'incomplete', and could be 'fixed'.



- **Run social media campaigns celebrating neurodivergence**, showing the world you care about these causes - sharing posts and work by neurodivergent creatives - or hire a neurodivergent designer to create your materials, if you can!
- **Offer workshops, seminars, and training sessions** that educate your employees about neurodivergence, our strengths and the challenges we face, and why it is important to be inclusive
- **Highlight success stories** within your company and encourage employees to celebrate their neurodivergent identity(ies)
- **Avoid the 'super power' narrative.** Many neurodivergent people have unique talents and skills, but perpetuating the idea that every neurodivergent person has special abilities has the unintended consequence of negating the genuine struggles many face, reinforces the untrue sentiment that neurodivergences aren't 'real disabilities', and places pressure (and often, guilt) on those of us who aren't, in fact, heroically gifted
- While we're on it - **do not endorse a 'tragedy' narrative**, either
- **Include your neurodivergent employees** in planning (and leading) events and initiatives - if they would like to, of course
- **Avoid any language associated with 'curing' or 'fixing' neurodivergence**, focusing instead on support language
- **Include everyone** within these campaigns and initiatives - not just directed at neurodivergent people themselves

note on: virtual experiences of neurodivergence

Virtual and/or augmented experiences that simulate sensory overload in every situation can really help neurotypical people to better understand and empathise with the experiences of the neurodivergent people around them. Consider sharing these with your employees - here's some examples:

Project Cape Neurodiverse
Immersive 360VR experience
(BBC)

The Party: a virtual
experience of autism (The
Guardian)

Autism TMI VR Experience
(National Autistic Society)



Though, of course, the truest form of allyship is to create fully inclusive, neurodivergent-friendly workplaces and practices, so that everyone feels welcome, supported, and valued.



Remember: **Nothing about us, without us.**

note on: being Disability Confident

Disability Confident is a UK Government initiative designed to encourage employers to recruit and retain disabled people and those with health conditions.

It is a voluntary scheme developed to help employers improve how they recruit, retain, and develop disabled talent, as well as how to:

- challenge attitudes and increase understanding of disability
- Draw from the widest possible pool of talent
- Secure high-quality staff who are skilled, loyal, and hard working
- Improve employee morale and commitment by demonstrating fair treatment

It also helps identify those employers who are committed to inclusion and diversity in the workplace.

[Find out more and about how to sign up here.](#)





CHECKLIST

- Are your social media practices considerate of the different information-processing styles of your audience?
- Are your visual materials accessible and compliant with industry standards?
- Do you have an up-to-date access statement on your website?
- Does your website contribute to overstimulation or sensory overwhelm, and, if so, have you thought about how you can reduce these factors?
- Are your events inclusive of the access requirements of your guests and speakers?
- Do your neurodiversity celebration initiatives amplify authentic voices in the community?

06.

Accessing Support

Because funding for access should never be a barrier



06. Accessing Support Overview

note on: Our Evolving World

As society increasingly recognises the importance of valuing neurodivergence, and of supporting access requirements in education and workplaces, so too does policy. What is offered by way of support by both the Government and by key financial stakeholders (broadcasters, funders, commissioners) is constantly evolving - as are their expectations of the production companies they work with. The below information is valid at the time of publication (January 2025) - **we hope this support will continue to grow.**

The top perceived barrier (69%) to hiring and working with Deaf, Disabled, and Neurodivergent talent is the cost of making workplace adjustments (The Buckland Report, 2024). They can feel intimidating, especially because they are a **legal requirement**, because **everyone has different access needs**, and, particularly for those of us running small businesses and counting the pennies every day, the thought of considering additional budget lines for access **adds further stress** to what are always already incredibly tight budgets and finance plans.

But so many reasonable adjustments and other forms of access support are **actually low cost or even free**, and there is **help available to support creative businesses to cover additional costs**.

This section aims to **debunk misconceptions about the cost of inclusive practices**, and **demythify the process of accessing support for your businesses** - because funding for access should never be a barrier for working with DDN talent.



06. Accessing Support

Myth Busting: The Cost of Workplace Adjustments

Many adjustments are simple, cost-effective, or even free - in fact, **as many as 59% of commonly requested accommodations actually cost nothing to the employer** (Job Accommodation Network, 2024).

recent research by the Business Disability Forum (2024) found that the average cost of a reasonable adjustment is just £75 per individual.



Sometimes, they are simply changes to the work process and environment that can enhance productivity and wellbeing, by creating safe spaces in which **everyone can be their best self.**

Cost-effective but meaningful adjustments include:

- Changes in the way you **communicate** to suit individual preferences
- **Flexible hours**
- **Remote working**
- Creating **quiet spaces**
- Providing **written agendas** and **follow up meeting-notes**

Workplace adjustments create **safer, happier, and more productive workplaces**, and are **significantly cheaper than the cost of re-recruiting.**

And they're not just for neurodivergent and Disabled employees, either - **adjustments for all** include people with caring responsibilities, mental health challenges, or any other form of access requirement.

The 'cost' of reasonable adjustment should never be a deterrent to working with neurodivergent people - the cost of not being inclusive has a far more substantial price.



Remember:

'reasonable' means **adjustments that are not detrimental to your business, including financially.** Access adjustments are about creating more equitable workplaces, not exploiting or bankrupting them. **Reframe your approach to adjustments.**



06. Accessing Support

Access to Work

Sometimes, access requirements may have an attached cost - and it is an employer's **legal responsibility to pay for and implement adjustments that are considered reasonable**.

But a Government scheme called **Access to Work** can support you in covering some or all of these costs **above and beyond what is 'reasonable'**, helping to alleviate the financial burden on businesses.

For those who manage to get through the often arduous process*, **the scheme can be life-changing** - and the difference between a Disabled person being able to work or not. **Yet so few people know about it** - in fact, 84% of creative businesses believe that if they were to hire someone with workplace adjustments, they would be expected to pay for them entirely themselves (The Industry Access Survey, 2022)

Access to Work is **a grant of up to £69,260 per person** which covers the costs incurred providing accessibility and adjustments to a disabled worker, to help **remove the barriers they face** in undertaking paid employment and ensuring that **everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their full potential at work**.



Remember:

Access to Work **complements** an employer's legal duty to make reasonable adjustments - **it doesn't replace it**. In considering what is 'reasonable', Access to Work will consider the size of your organisation and available budget as part of the application.

As an employer, it can help you:

- **Hire disabled talent** with the skills you are looking for
- **Retain an employee** who develops a disability or health condition
- Show that you **value and will support your employee** by having good employment policies and practices
- **Increase diversity** in your organisation



It can provide grants to help pay for things like:

- **Special equipment** (e.g. a height-adjusted desk, an adapted keyboard, or noise cancelling headphones)
- **Software** (e.g. screen-readers)
- **Additional travel costs** (e.g. taxis for when public transport is not accessible)
- **Work premises adaptations** (which can include someone's home, if that is where they work)
- **A support worker, personal assistant, or coach**

Often, neurodivergent individuals do not know what they need in terms of access support. Access to Work can also carry out workplace assessments to help them figure it out.

To be eligible, an individual must be:

- **in (or about to start) a paid job**
- **Disabled or living with a long-term health condition** which means they face barriers doing your job
- **living in the UK**
- **older than 16 years old**



Remember:

Whether or not someone 'considers' themselves Disabled, neurodivergences are covered under **The Equality Act (2010)** and people experiencing them are therefore eligible for Access to Work support.

As an employer, you may have to share the cost for new equipment, special aids, and adaptations to premises or equipment, **but this contribution is dependent on:**

- employment status of the individual (e.g. are they self employed?)
- How long they have been working for you when they apply
- The size of your business
- The number of employees you have

Aiding the Process

- **Tell your employees about Access to Work** - not all employees realise they can get it, or be aware of workplace adjustments in general, particularly if they do not consider themselves as 'disabled'.
- Before your employee makes an application, **discuss with them what reasonable adjustments you can make** to the workplace
- **Make your employee feel supported** in discussing their access requirements, and **offer them help in completing the form** if they need it - it can be incredibly stressful (note: it is helpful to have a member of staff who is familiar with the process to be able to offer guidance)
- **Support the communication between your employee and their advisor**, who may need additional context about the job role or might well be unfamiliar with your employee's specific condition or access requirements
- The advisor may need to speak to you about what support your employee needs - **help with this process**
- **Have back up plans and contingencies in your budget**, conscious of how long the application process can take
- If your employee's job role has changed, so too may their access requirements. **Encourage them to ask for their award to be reviewed**, which can take place as many times as their situation changes
- **Support your employees mental health** and signpost resources during this process, which can be emotionally exhausting
- **Ensure you cooperate** with the adjustments recommended by Access to Work to ensure your employees can work effectively

Please note: the waiting periods for Access to Work can be incredibly long, but someone's access requirements are ongoing. You may need to pay some costs upfront, and claim them back later.



Resources to Understand Access to Work:

- [Access to Work factsheet for employers](#) (UK Government, Department for Work & Pensions)
- [Access to Work: A Guide for the Arts and Culture Sector](#) (Disability Arts Online)
- [A manager's guide to Access to Work](#) (SCOPE for Business)
- [Access to Work](#) (TAP Toolkit, Pact)

*note on: (In)Access(ible) to Work

While Access to Work is an envied resource around the world, and is a widely valued by its users (Adams et al, 2018), it most certainly has its shortcomings - by the Government's own admission (The Buckland Report, 2024). It is **under-resourced, difficult to access** (ironically), and many are experiencing **unprecedented waiting times**. Be conscious of this and **support especially your freelancers**, who are often going through these processes alone - it can be incredibly isolating.



06. Accessing Support

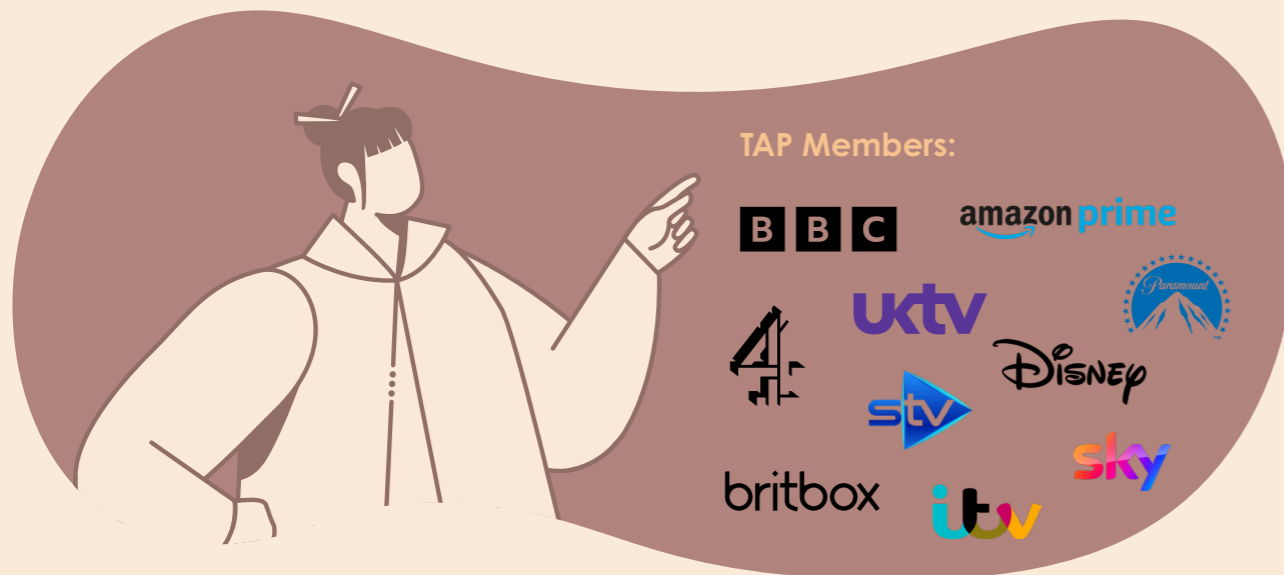
Production Access Funding

Information for this section was primarily sourced from the [TAP Toolkit](#), hosted on PACT's website.

One of the recommendations made to production companies to make their film and TV projects more neuro-inclusive is to ensure a line for flexible accessibility support that is ring-fenced within your finance plan, agreed in advance with funders. Where production budgets are always already incredibly tight, this can feel like an additional burden.

But, **thanks in large part to the incredible work of the TV Access Project (TAP)***, ensuring that there is sufficient access funding above and beyond the production budget is now a reality for many productions.

Members of TAP are committed to covering access, inclusion, and adjustment costs (whether they can be anticipated at the start or arise at a later date) not covered by Access to Work for scripted and unscripted productions via an **Access Funding Request**.

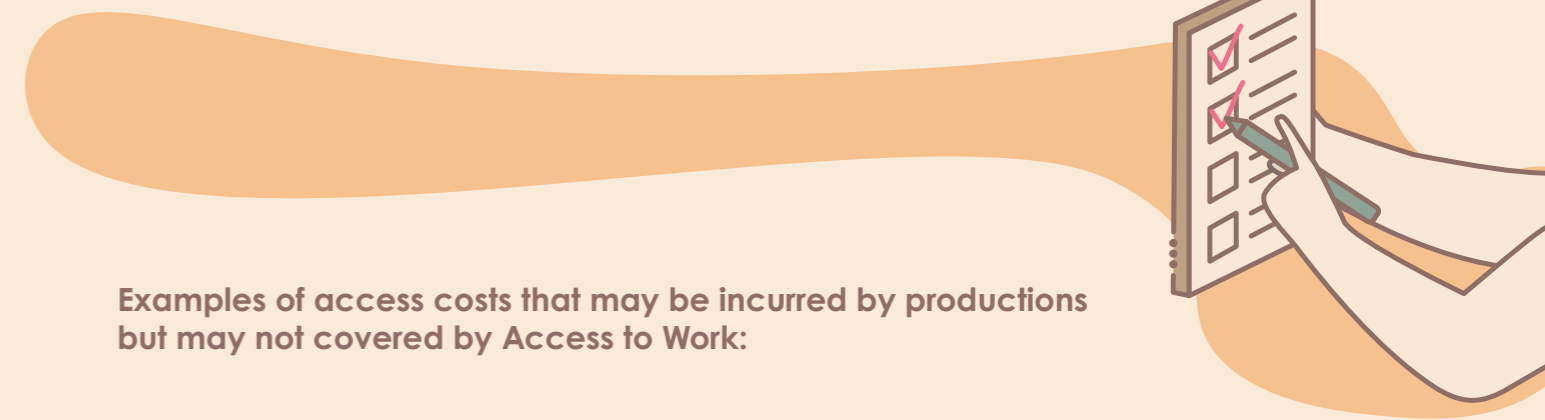


Remember:

Access to Work should cover the costs of providing access and adjustments for an individual Disabled worker, and the production company should pay for wider accessibility across the production. **Production Access Funding funds costs above and beyond these interventions.**

While each individual Broadcaster or Streamer has their own processes, they have all committed to the below approach:

- Each TAP member will have an **Access Funding Contact (AFC)** assigned to each production
- Productions should **scope projects and must agree anticipated access costs** with the Broadcaster or Streamer when planning the budget
- The production fills in an **Access Funding Request Application** form for the agreed amount (additional requests can be submitted using the same process)
- Broadcasters or Streamers will aim to respond quickly to Access Funding Applications - aiming to approve them at the same time as the initial budget or, when submitted later than that, within 2 weeks
- **There is no cap or time limit on submissions of requests**, as TAP members recognise that unexpected access costs can arise at any time on a production
- If a TAP member is funding most of the budget on a production, **it will be agreed which company pays for access** - if it is co-funded with non-TAP members or overseas partners, every effort will be made to come to an agreement over funding access (though recognising that this may not be possible)
- Productions will be expected to **pay back any unspent funding** at the end of the project



Examples of access costs that may be incurred by productions but may not be covered by Access to Work:

- Making cast and crew callouts more accessible (e.g. a redesign or a BSL version of a job flyer)
- Redesigning an established set to make it more accessible
- Neurodiversity training for production crew
- Hiring accessible facilities (e.g. additional trailer for quiet zones, or one that is wheelchair accessible)
- - Paying for access and adjustments for Disabled contributors participating in the production who are not employed by the company - and therefore not eligible for Access to Work



For more information on Access Funding Requests, check out:

- [Easy Read Summary of Funding Protocol](#)
- [TAP Toolkit](#)

Production companies would make an Access Funding Request to the Broadcaster or Streamer where these costs can not be accommodated by the existing production budget.

Spotlight On: TV Access Project (TAP)

Launched in 2022, the TV Access Project (TAP) is an **alliance of ten of the UK's biggest Broadcasters and Streamers** who have pledged to work together to create a **substantive and permanent structural shift in the TV industry to ensure access provision for Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent talent.**

Its vision is to see full inclusion by 2030 - that is to say, a TV industry where no Disabled talent is ever excluded because barriers have been removed and equity created.

At its heart, this is an ambitious co-creation between disabled people and the wider industry to **deliver sustainable solutions with buy-in for and from everyone.**

For more information on TAP and their incredible work, and how you can engage with it, check out:

[PACT: What is TAP?](#)

[Screen Skills: What is TAP and what are The 5 As?](#)

[Creative Diversity Network: TAP Funding Access and Inclusion on Productions](#)



CHECKLIST

- Do you know about the support available to you as a business and/or employer, and do you know how to access it?
- Have you signposted Access to Work and other available funding to your neurodivergent team members?

Final Thoughts

What we hope is communicated throughout this Guide and all our Exceptional Minds resources is that **we need to be considering neuro-inclusion throughout all of our processes, to enable neurodivergent creatives, and our businesses, to thrive.**

We recognise that creating more neuro-inclusive workplaces can feel intimidating. We may be fearful of saying or doing the wrong thing and, for many of us running small businesses, we may not have the resources or budget to implement expensive change.

But ultimately, the benefits of creating more diverse, inclusive, and equitable spaces to wellbeing, recruitment and retention, productivity, profitability, and market reach greatly outweighs the time and effort taken to adjust our work spaces and processes.

Many workplace adjustment requests are cheap, easy to implement, and benefit your entire workforce - regardless of neurotype. And where there is a cost attached, there is funding support available to support you with them.

Putting in effort to create more inclusive and empathetic practices around recruitment, retention, and work environments will facilitate more accessible opportunities and psychologically safe work spaces and businesses - where neurodivergent talent feel empowered to apply for jobs in our industry, to advocate for our needs within it, and to reach new heights in our careers previously felt impossible.

And diverse ways of thinking and of seeing the world are vital to our ability as companies to be creative, to be innovative, and to reach new and wider audiences with our work.

Let's do more to serve the Exceptional Minds both in, and wanting to be in, our thriving Creative Industry.

Appendix

Appendix

Exceptional Minds

Exploring and developing better ways of accommodating neurodivergence in the media sector

About this Project

Exceptional Minds, led by [Unquiet Media](#), is a Research and Development (R+D) project aimed at exploring the specific barriers neurodivergent individuals face within our sector, and developing better practices and policies to support our different access requirements and to value our unique strengths - to help ensure equity for current and future generations.

The project aims to address existing stigmas and misconceptions around hidden differences, to advise and assist in creating more accessible work environments, and to amplify neurodivergent voices within our industry.

About our Funders

Exceptional Minds was co-funded by [Unquiet Media](#) and [Media Cymru](#).

Unquiet Media are a content production and business consultancy company specialising in all matters of the human mind, but with a specific focus on neurodiversity, and mental health. All of our work is rooted in diverse perspectives, lived experience, and expertise in the worlds of media and cognitive science.

Media Cymru is a collaboration aimed at turning the Cardiff Capital Region into a global hub for media innovation, with a focus on green and fair economic growth. Media Cymru is funded through £22m from UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) flagship Strength in Places Fund, £3m from Cardiff Capital Region, £1m from Welsh Government, through Creative Wales, and £23m match funding from industry and university partners, including here Unquiet Media.

media
cymru



Our Values



people

...

improving working practices and ensuring psychological safety for the incredible people who inhabit our industry



neurodiversity

...

research led by experts in developmental psychology and neuroscience, and informed by lived experience



media

...

decades of media experience and industry-leading consultants place us well to know what businesses need, and to create content about and in this space

combined to make



exceptional minds

Our Research Approach

1 Professional Consultants

Our board of consultants is made up of award-winning scientists and academics in the fields of behavioural neuroscience and developmental psychology, global giants of the media industry, and neurodivergent creatives from diverse backgrounds.

2 Research

Primary Research:

- Quantitative Data Collection
 - Surveys
 - Research experiments
- Qualitative Data Collection
 - Interviews with Industry
 - Consultation with neurodivergent creatives and communities (digital and IRL)
 - Focus groups
 - Case studies

Secondary Research:

- Industry scoping
- Extensive literature review*
- Liaising with leading neurodiversity organisations and charities

Using the evidence collected from our research, the expertise of our psychology and neuroscience consultants, the needs of the many businesses we've scoped and, most importantly, the voices of the 100s of neurodivergent contributors we've spoken to, **Unquiet Media** have created a suite of resources to help businesses and employers better recruit and support neurodivergent talent - and help neurodivergent creatives navigate our sometimes tricky sector.

These resources include:



This Guide Book



Animations



Downloadable Templates



Interactive Website



Short Films



Research Findings



Social Media Communities



Contributor Page

[Click here to check out all of our resources!](#)

From Wales, for the World

Exceptional Minds was funded via Media Cymru: a collaboration to turn Cardiff Capital Region into a global hub for media innovation with a focus on green and fair economic growth.

For this reason, much of our research took place in and around Wales. But, while our exploration and our resources addressed some of the characteristics of, and challenges specifically faced by, our region (for example, the high representation of micro and small businesses, as well as freelancers, in addition to some Welsh-language-related points of discussion), **we believe that our learnings and our guidance is very much applicable to creative sectors across the UK, and even further afield.**

We have identified where resources or communities shared relate specifically to Wales, and are constantly updating our site to signpost these are available in other regions and nations.

It is very much a project From Wales, but For the World.

Appendix

Glossary

Accommodations	Used to describe the adjustments that can reasonably be made to meet the access requirements of a neurodivergent person in the workplace or interview process. Also referred to as reasonable adjustments.
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: a behavioural condition, with characteristics including a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with day-to-day functioning and/or development.
Affinity Bias	The unconscious tendency to gravitate towards people who think and behave the same ways as we do.
Autism	A lifelong developmental difference which affects how people communicate with the world around them. Also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
Comorbidity	The overlap of two or more conditions in one individual - many people experience multiple neurodivergence. Also (sometimes more favourably) known as co-occurring or co-existing differences.
DDN	Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent
Disability	Defined in The Equality Act 2010 as any 'physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities'.
Dyscalculia	A specific and persistent difficulty in understanding numbers which can lead to a diverse range of difficulties with mathematics. It occurs across all ages and abilities.
Dyslexia	A learning difficulty which primarily affects reading and writing skills, marked by differences in information processing.
Dyspraxia	A common disorder that affects movement and physical coordination, but one that does not affect intelligence. Also known as Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)
Executive Function	A set of mental processes and skills that help people plan, focus, and complete tasks.
Intersectionality	Refers to the way in which two or more aspects of someone's identity overlap or interplay with one another, for example their neurodivergence and their age, ethnicity, and socio-economic background.
Masking	A common coping strategy in which neurodivergent people hide or disguise certain traits in order to conform to the expectations of a neurotypical society. Can have a significant detrimental impact resulting in stress, anxiety, and depression.

Medical Model	The historical view of disabilities that characterised them by their deficits.
Neurodivergence	The divergence in cognitive function from what is considered a 'typically' developing brain; includes differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and others.
Neurodivergent	Describes people who have a neurodivergent identity, such as those who are autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, dyspraxic, and others.
Neurodiverse	Describes the variation of cognitive function in the human mind.
Neurodiversity	Describes the variation of cognitive function in the human mind. Highlights that we all have unique brains, differences, abilities, skills, and needs.
Neurominority	Any group that differs from the majority of the population in terms of behavioural traits and brain function.
Neurotype	The type of brain a person has.
Neurotypical	Refers to someone whose cognitive function falls within society's standards of what is considered 'typical'.
OCD	Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: A common, chronic, and long-lasting mental health condition in which a person has uncontrollable, reoccurring thoughts (obsessions) and/or behaviours (compulsions) that they feel the urge to repeat.
Reasonable Adjustments	Used to describe the adjustments that can reasonably be made to meet the access requirements of a neurodivergent person in the workplace or interview process. Also referred to as accommodations .
RSD	Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria: a heightened reaction to rejection, criticism, or negative feedback, common for neurodivergent people.
Sensory Overload	Many neurodivergent people have sensory issues or sensory processing disorders, which can make life overwhelming.
Social Model	A more empathetic, holistic approach to disability that focuses on strengths, and argues that challenges are largely contributed to by societal structures and barriers rather than a disability itself.
Stimming	Repetitive behaviours that reduce anxiety, relieve discomfort, and avoid sensory overload, such as feet tapping, rocking, or hand flapping. More formally known as self-stimulation.
The Equality Act 2010	A UK law that protects people from discrimination.
Tourette's Syndrome	A complex condition, the key features of which are tics, involuntary and uncontrollable sounds and movements.

Appendix

Literature

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This document was prepared by **Unquiet Media**.

Have any feedback, or need support on your journey to neuro-inclusion? Please get in touch!

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