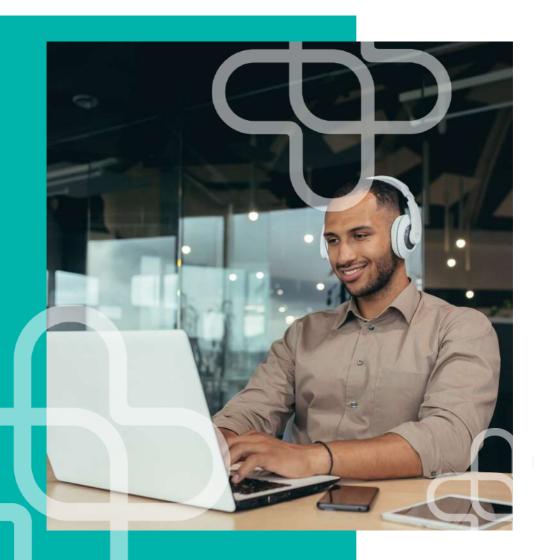


THE EMPLOYER'S GUIDE TO NEURODIVERSITY

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING NEUROINCLUSION IN YOUR WORKPLACE



Foreword



The facts don't lie – inclusive businesses are healthy businesses. Yet, inclusion at work goes beyond the bottom line and extends far beyond creating a fairer work environment. Making employees feel heard, valued, and supported on their own terms should be a core principle of every organisation, where personal wellbeing is ranked as highly as individual output.

Diversity isn't just about representation; it's about making sure everyone, regardless of how they think, work, or process information, feels valued and empowered to contribute. Neuroinclusion is a critical part of this, acknowledging the unique ways that people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other neurological differences experience the world – and making sure our workplaces are structured to embrace those differences.

This booklet has been put together to provide you and your team with a new insight into how employers can better understand neurodiversity and take actionable steps to build truly inclusive environments. We hope that you find it both useful and practical when creating your organisation's EDI policies and wellbeing frameworks.

Marj Murphy Director of Operations



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Editor's Note

This book has been written and edited by a team of neurodiverse individuals. You can find a list of all cited sources in the back of this book.

Neurodiversity is a complex and varied experience, and so this book should not be considered applicable to all neurodiverse employees. For example, the book uses a combination of identity-first and person-first language, and sometimes refers to neurodivergent conditions as disabilities. These issues are often considered a matter of personal preference and do not reflect the views of all those beneath the neurodivergent umbrella.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF NEURODIVERSITY IN YOUR WORKPLACE

Neurodiversity: the many different ways that our brains receive and process information.

A fundamental part of great workplace wellbeing is recognising that everyone thinks, feels, and works differently. No two people respond the same way to a problem, task, or concern – whether at home or at work. This diversity of thought is known as neurodiversity.

Building a workplace that's inclusive to neurodiversity – often referred to as neuroinclusion – is a growing priority for modern workplaces. As well as encouraging employers to play to their employees' individual strengths, it's estimated that **at least**1 in 7 people in the UK are neurodivergent – that is, having a neurological difference or disability.

By building workplaces that not only acknowledge neurodiversity, but actively cultivate a culture of understanding for neurodivergent individuals, employers today have the opportunity to drastically expand both their wellbeing offering and their workforce's potential.





NEURODIVERSITY VS NEURODIVERGENCE – KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE

While the term 'neurodiversity' can refer to the diversity of thought within everyone, it's usually used as a catch-all term for people who are neurodivergent. 'Neurodivergence' specifically refers to a wide range of neurological conditions, disorders, and disabilities that separate them from people who don't have these conditions – often referred to as being 'neurotypical'. Many people who are neurodivergent will refer to themselves as such, or by the abbreviation 'ND'.



THE MODERN WORKPLACE: A TAILORED EXPERIENCE

Today's workplaces couldn't be more different to those of the past. With the rise of today's now widely accepted remote and hybrid working culture and varied range of essential skills, many organisations have embraced the ability to flexibly hire the best people for the job – particularly among neurodivergent individuals.

Ways of thinking about neurodiversity are steadily growing toward **strength-based approaches**, rather than seeing neurodivergent conditions as disabling or unmanageable. In fact, studies have found that neurodivergent individuals excel in key business performance areas like analysis, innovation, and strategy¹ – but have historically been excluded from employment due to a now outdated focus on 'personal fit' and communication styles.

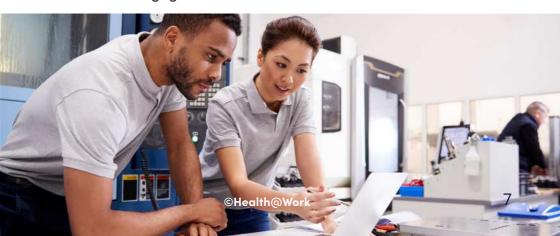
IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK

While an estimated 60% of employers say that neuroinclusion is a focus for their wellbeing or EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) strategy², only 38% of neurodivergent employees report any meaningful support being provided². This points to an urgent and growing need for improved support in the workplace.

Research by the CIPD has found that improving neuroinclusive practices has an overwhelmingly positive impact on overall employee wellbeing, with 63% of companies² who practice neuroinclusion seeing improvements in:

- Different thinking styles and creativity
- · Workplace culture
- · Quality of people management
- · Employee engagement

When organisations embrace diversity, the facts show that their business thrives. Not only does a diverse workforce – particularly a neurodiverse one – offer significantly greater opportunities for new ideas and innovation, but it can also be a key brand value that positions your company as a cut above the rest. Inclusion practices have been found to positively impact everything from retention to engagement to even market share³.



THE WORLD OF NEURODIVERSITY

Neurodiversity refers to the many different ways our brains work, but is often used as an umbrella term for people who have specific neurodivergent conditions or disabilities.

When it comes to your neurodiverse workforce, taking a strength-based approach is key to both building up your team's morale and engaging their individual strengths to benefit your business.

What are the most common types of neurodiverse conditions, and what unique abilities to they bring to the table?

Autism or ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)

Often manifests in differences in communication, socialising, and pattern and sensory processing

Dysgraphia

Causes difficulty in written expression, handwriting, spatial organisation, and written coherence

Note: This list is not exhaustive, as many other mental health conditions and disabilities can also be considered a type of neurodivergence. This includes OCD, bipolar disorder, social anxiety, sensory processing disorders, and many others.

Tourette's Syndrome

Causes sudden, repetitive, and involuntary movements or sounds called 'tics'

Acquired Neurodiversity

Some conditions like OCD and bipolar disorder also impact brain function and processing. These are often considered an 'acquired neurodiversity'

THE WORLD OF

NEURODIVERSITY

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

Typically affects social behaviour, impulse control, executive function, and attentiveness

Dyslexia

Primarily impacts reading, spelling, and writing skills, shape recognition, and even auditory processing

Dyscalculia

Primarily affects number processing and recognising or remembering number-based sequences

Dyspraxia or DCD (Developmental Coordination Disorder)

Affects physical co-ordination and both fine and gross motor functions

THE NEURODIVERSE DICTIONARY: KEY TERMS

Executive function

The cognitive processes we use to perform day to day tasks, including working memory, flexible thinking, self-control, time management, and organisation. When these processes are impaired, this is called executive dysfunction.

Overstimulation

A specific type of mental or physical stress caused by an excess of sensory input; for instance bright lights, loud noise, or crowded environments.

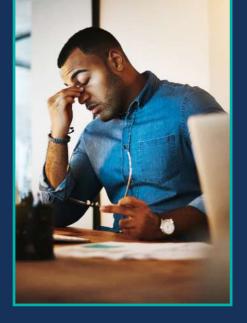
Hyposensitivity

Decreased sensitivity that can lead to sensory seeking behaviours, for example touching things more often or preferring strong tastes.

Body doubling

A technique where someone works alongside or simply shares space with another person (either physically or virtually) to help them stay on task and maintain focus.





Masking

Suppressing or hiding natural behaviours to fit into social norms or avoid judgment. It can involve mimicking neurotypical behaviours or hiding traits like stimming or eye contact avoidance, with extensive periods becoming mentally and emotionally draining.

Stimming

A common shorthand for 'self-stimulating behaviour', this refers to repetitive movements, sounds, or actions (like hand-flapping, rocking, or repeating words) to help with emotional regulation or managing sensory input.

Hypersensitivity

An increased sensitivity to sensory input, like noise, light, touch, or smell, where stimuli feel overwhelming or unbearable.

Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD)

An extreme emotional sensitivity to perceived criticism, rejection, or failure, commonly associated with ADHD.

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)

A type of behaviour often linked to autism, characterised by an extreme avoidance of everyday demands and expectations, including those that are self-imposed.



THE LEGAL SIDE: WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

"Being neurodivergent will often amount to a disability under the Equality Act 2010, even if the person does not consider themselves to be disabled." – ACAS

Neurodivergent conditions, such as those listed in the previous section, can be considered disabilities under British law. This means that as an employer, you have a legal duty to accommodate requested adjustments for neurodivergent employees where reasonable, as well as to protect these employees from harassment, bullying, and discrimination on the basis of their neurotype.

It's estimated that around half of neurodivergent people have experienced some form of workplace bullying or harassment², with low levels of workplace wellbeing being a consistent experience among neurodivergent employees across the UK³.



UNDERSTANDING REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Reasonable adjustments are the changes that you as an employer make to remove or reduce workplace disadvantages that may arise as a result of an employee's disability. For instance, an employee with dyslexia may struggle to read certain font types or page colours on a computer screen, for which you may be able to provide a screen filter or text-to-speech function. More details can be found on page 18.

It is a legal requirement under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to the best of your organisation's ability.

For more information on reasonable adjustments and workplace equality law, visit the dedicated ACAS page at www.acas.org.uk/reasonable-adjustments.

NON-DISCLOSURE - THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKPLACE CULTURE

It's estimated that around 3 in 10 neurodivergent employees choose not to disclose their condition or disability to their employer, with the most common reasons cited being concerns around privacy, stereotyping, stigma, and potential career impact².

Recent studies by the Birbeck Centre for Research have found that almost 70% of employers cite non-disclosure as a barrier to providing support⁵, as they can only offer adjustments when they are aware of an employee's concerns.

This highlights the importance of a neuroinclusive workplace culture and psychological safety. Building a workplace where support for all neurotypes can be quickly and easily accessed, free from stigma or assumption, is key to making all employees feel safe when asking for reasonable adjustments and support.





CREATING NEUROINCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

Building a neuroinclusive culture should always start with great psychological safety – including creating a workplace that supports and nurtures neurodiverse success organically. This way, if employees don't wish to disclose their disability or condition in work, they can still feel supported and empowered to thrive.

Over the next few pages, we've included some of the most common problem areas noted by both employers and employees as barriers to great wellbeing for neurodiverse workforces.

These pointers should serve as springboards for your own policy reviews rather than strict guidelines – remember, not all jobs are the same and not all neurodivergent people require the same accommodations.

STARTING FROM THE BEGINNING – INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

Research undertaken by the National Autistic Society found that only 11% of autistic and neurodivergent candidates were offered interview adjustments by employers for their disability – while just 3% were offered an alternative interview process⁴.

Writing a neuroinclusive job description:

- Avoid vague, abstract, or jargon-heavy language unless necessary
- Clearly distinguish essential versus desirable traits for the role
- Focus on the core competencies of the role that may be overlooked, such as an analytical or creative approach or problem-solving skills
- Avoid over-emphasis on social skills and 'cultural fit' unless necessary.



Conducting a neuroinclusive interview:

- Allow candidates to choose their preferred interview format (i.e. remote or in-person) where possible
- Consider sending out an agenda with sample questions, interview structure, assessments, and estimated duration beforehand
- Consider sensory accommodations such as lighting, temperature, and noise for in-person interviews
- Try to focus on structured, direct questions and avoid abstract or hypothetical language where possible

 e.g. "Do you hope to progress within this career path?" is clearer than
 "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS

Did you know that neurodivergent employees who receive tailored support are 50% less likely to leave their role and report higher levels of overall wellbeing in their workplace⁵?

Over the next few pages, you'll find some of the most common forms of workplace adjustment. As discussed on page 13, make sure to talk through all options thoroughly with the employee involved. As an employer, it's most important to create a culture where employees feel comfortable making these requests. It's currently estimated that less than half of neurodiverse employees feel comfortable asking their manager for support².

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS & MANAGER EXPECTATION – IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A STRUGGLE!

Many reasonable adjustments that can benefit neurodivergent employees can at first seem at odds with your organisation's management style or policy. For instance, many neurodiverse individuals report discomfort when asked to keep cameras on for virtual meetings or be always virtually available while home working.

In our previous guide, Mental Health at Work: The Essential Guide, we discussed how psychological safety can be impacted by management style and productivity monitoring – click here to find out more





TYPES OF WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATION CAN INCLUDE:

Flexible work schedules

Flexible working, including part-time roles, staggered hours, and flexitime, is the most common workplace adjustment for neurodivergent people, with around 45% of neurodiverse employees reporting using flexible schedules¹.

Assistive technology

Technological support tools can include speech-to-text software, screen readers, organisational tools, closed captioning, and screen filters, to name a few – these can be a fundamental support function for both neurodiverse and/or disabled employees

Adjusted management styles

Many neurodivergent people may feel more comfortable with frequent, scheduled, and structured check-ins with their line manager to provide a consistent feedback loop and accountability for their workload



- Remote & hybrid working
- Quiet or private workspaces
- Modified lighting or sensory adjustments
- Extra time for task management
- Job coaching or mentorship
- Breaks & rest periods
- Alternative formats for meetings & presentations
- Job role customisation (where possible)

It's important when assessing your organisation's neuroinclusivity to know how easily accessible adjustments are within your workplace. Does your workplace:

- 1. Have a clear process for requesting, implementing, monitoring, and reviewing adjustments?
- 2. Make it easy for employees to find this information or speak privately to their manager?

COMMUNICATION STYLES

Many neurodiverse individuals can have specific requirements for, or ways of expressing, both verbal and non-verbal communication.

NEUROTYPICAL COMMUNICATION

Typically relies on verbal cues and can include a heavy use of extrapolation and suggestion. Often utilises abstract language and non-verbal cues such as body language and facial expressions.

For instance, if when discussing a project a manager said, "Let's put a pin in that," to a neurotypical employee, the employee would likely extrapolate that the manager would bring up the issue again at a more suitable date or time of their choosing.

NEURODIVERGENT COMMUNICATION

Typically more direct and explicit than neurotypical communication styles with literal meanings being more easily construed than abstract. Non-verbal cues can feel unclear or undefined, with many neurodiverse people preferring written communication over verbal to prevent misunderstanding.

In the example of a manager saying, "Let's put a pin in that," a neurodivergent employee may feel uncertain as to when this would be raised again and may feel unsure how to proceed without a clear structure.



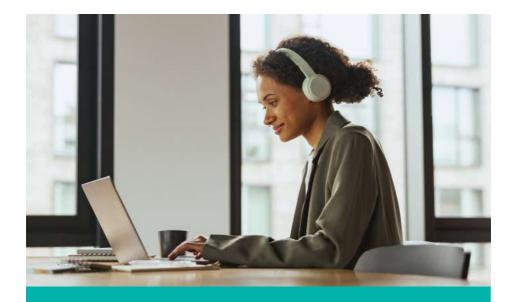
INSTEAD OF	TRY	WHY?
"Can we look at the new project after lunch tomorrow?"	"Let's schedule a 30-minute chat at 1pm tomorrow afternoon via Zoom to discuss the new project."	Provides a clear time, duration, and format for the meeting to plan and execute.
"This presentation needs tidying up."	"This presentation needs clearer data in slide 3, and the tone should be more formal."	Offers specific feedback with actionable changes.
"Let me know if you need help with anything!"	"If you have any questions, feel free to send me an email and I'll try to get back to you as soon as I can!"	Sets up a clear channel for communication and establishes an expectation for both parties.

Try to be aware of your employees' communication styles and preferences, and remember that direct communication can often benefit all employees when it comes to both psychological safety and workplace structure.

SUPPORTING STRUCTURE

Most neurodiverse individuals find working to an established structure or routine particularly helpful and rewarding. Consider how you can work with your employees to create meaningful structures to their workflow such as clearly defined tasks, deadlines, and expectations, to reduce stress and improve productivity.

HARRIET'S STORY: WORKING AS A NEURODIVERGENT PERSON



We chatted with Harriet about her experiences managing ADHD in the workplace, shaping workplace procedures, and how to use neurodivergence as a workplace superpower.

Does having ADHD impact your day-to-day work life?

Most definitely. A big part of my job involves lots of small tasks and form filling, which means lots of little jobs to remember. For example, having to scroll to find an important field on a form – I only need to access that field when it needs changing, and the system doesn't alert me when it's not done, so I can easily forget to do it. It's something that I can't see, so realistically

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DID YOU KNOW...?

ADHD can impact
the brain's ability
to process object
permanence —
meaning many people
with ADHD can easily
forget about or lose
something

I'm probably going to forget about it. There's also remembering all the different steps to each job. So, if I send something off to someone for approval, I then need to wait for them to reply. If they don't, there's a good chance I'll forget to chase them, and the job gets left behind.

Have you found any ways of tracking those little jobs that helps you at work?

I do! I have a colourcoded to-do list with green, yellow, and red dots – for 'everything is fine', 'potential problems', and 'really urgent'. I also found the switch to home working really useful as it meant that I wasn't getting distracted by people in the office...but obviously, as a person with ADHD I am completely capable of distracting myself. So it was important to set up a routine for working from home and keep myself organised.

Have you found that having ADHD has also had a positive impact on how you work?

I 100% think it gives me an edge in some ways. I process information very fast, for one. If I'm given a simple admin task with simple steps, I'll have those steps memorised quickly and be able to do it pretty much without thinking, meaning I'll get through my task list much faster. I can generally handle cases a lot faster than my colleagues they'll be working on them for a day or two, while I can get them out in maybe an hour or two. That's hyperfocus. In general, we're supposed to close between three and five cases in a week - I typically close around eleven.

HYPERFOCUS –

a state of extreme concentration or fixation on one task or activity for an extended period of time, often to the point of losing track of time or physical needs, commonly experienced by people with ADHD.

People with ADHD will often find 'hacks' or ways to make tasks easier.
One of my shortcuts has actually been adopted by the whole department. I developed a categorisation process for our projects, so that I could quickly go through all my simple cases, then more complicated ones, and then save very complicated

ones for the end and think about those while I was working on the simpler ones. I thought it was obvious, but apparently nobody else had thought of it. I was just categorising jobs by how much work they'd involve. So yes, I'd say ADHD definitely helps there!

That sounds helpful. Do you have any other strategies that help you to stay on track?

I send my manager - who I've told about my ADHD - a summary email every Friday. It's partially so she's got an update on what I'm doing, but I also send this even when she's not in - I don't necessarily need her to read it, but I do need to know there's a possibility she could. That gives me accountability for getting everything done in the week, and a chance to go through each case and see if I've missed something. I also tend to keep little checklists, such as all the different fields that need checking within client letters. That way, I know that I've thoroughly checked through all the things that could go

"People with ADHD will often find 'hacks' or ways to make tasks easier. One of my shortcuts has actually been adopted by the whole department!"

wrong. Having ADHD means there's a chance I could miss something through lack of attention to detail, and as a result I'm more cautious than I might otherwise be.

You mentioned that you're open with your manager about your ADHD, and it sounds like she's really supportive. Have you just told your line manager on a personal level, or have you disclosed having it to your employer in a more official sense? I haven't disclosed on a wider basis to the company, because while I'm reasonably confident that my company wants to try and help people with disabilities, the fact remains that I simply don't have that trust. I also feel they're not necessarily entitled to know? With managers, I've very much



treated it on a situational basis. Whenever I've had a new manager in any job, I've usually decided if I'm comfortable telling them after my first meeting with them. Generally, I have been. But, for instance, in one previous job, I explained that I had ADHD and was given my marching orders the next day.

But yes, when I have mentioned it to previous managers, I've usually said that I would prefer if they did not discuss it with HR unless they're legally obligated to do so. So far, none have needed to but have asked how they can help me. I haven't really needed any adjustments personally, but it's mostly just been making them aware and having that understanding.

You say you haven't really needed any adjustments – would you say that your workplace is already friendly toward neurodivergent people?

Yes, I think so. Home working is one of the most helpful things, particularly for me with ADHD, because I don't have the distractions of having people around me in the office. I remember a manager at an old job taking me aside after a couple of days and telling me to talk less. I explained that it was actually people coming up to me. Obviously, home working removes that distraction. In my job now, we also have a very flexible policy on working hours so long as you do all your hours.



For instance, if one day you work only four hours, it's expected that you'd just make up the time later in the week.

I also think, though, that there's still not the understanding on a cultural level throughout the whole organisation. It's very much something that HR is focused on, but no one else is really aware of.

Do you have an example of how workplaces could be doing better in terms of 'cultural' understanding?

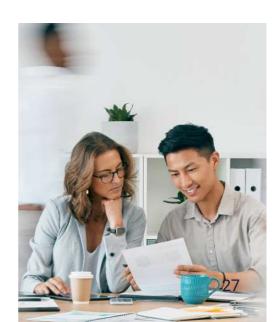
I suppose the only thing that I find a bit frustrating is the pressure to keep cameras on in meetings. I understand why people want it. But for me, with ADHD. I find having to remain with the camera on the whole time incredibly draining - it makes the day much harder for me. I find that after long meetings with cameras on the whole time, I'll go to bed hours earlier because I'm just so exhausted. Making your face stay blank and keeping eye contact for that entire call is actually quite a strain. Your legs start bouncing, you want to get up and wander around because

you're thinking better if you wander around...if you could just turn the camera off and pick the laptop up, that would be fine.

I don't think things like that stem from any malice, it's just something that most neurotypical people aren't aware of so it doesn't occur to them.

You say that it's something neurotypical people aren't always aware of – do you think that understanding of neurodiversity in general has improved in the workplace today?

I think with ADHD, there's still very much a belief that it's 'trouble sitting still disorder' and it's something that 10-year-old boys have. It's why I don't disclose to



people very often – more on a caseby-case basis. There's also still a very strong bias against medication, and a tendency to say things like, "oh, we're all a little bit ADHD sometimes, aren't we?" And it's not meant harmfully, but it's nevertheless very frustrating. And I get the impression there is still very much a way to go.

Do you do you think workplaces would benefit from specific training or awareness initiatives around neurodiversity?

That would be fantastic – honestly, the main problem is a lack of understanding and information. I've found that if you explain to people how ADHD works and what it feels like, they tend to be really responsive. It's not malice, it's just lack of understanding and education.

So, to wrap up – if you were asked by an employer what they could do to better support neurodivergent people in their workplace, what would you say to them?

I would really encourage them to consider things like flexible working, if possible. With ADHD specifically, I'd also say to do a check-in like my manager has with me.

Regular check-ins, short deadlines, and allowing people to work flexibly. I think those are the most useful things you can do, at least for ADHD.



BUILDING SUPPORT INTO YOUR STRATEGY

With all great wellbeing strategies, support for employees should feel built into your organisation's values, rather than focus on one-off initiatives and statements. This ensures that your employee wellbeing strategy is both organic and meaningful, offering genuine support for your workforce when they need it.

When looking at ways to support neurodiversity at work, consider how you can build a supportive culture into your company's long-term planning, policies, and day-to-day operations, including:

- Commitment from leadership
- Regular training & education sessions
- Company policies
- Regular policy reviews



GATHERING FEEDBACK – ERGS AND SUPPORT GROUPS

When it comes to your employee wellbeing, feedback is key. Not only does regular feedback from your employees ensure that your wellbeing practices are relevant and useful, but creates opportunities for your team to develop a sense of ownership over their workplace's culture that's great for morale, engagement, and productivity.

Employee Resource Groups (ERG) are a fantastic way for employees to connect, share their experiences, and provide evaluated feedback on your wellbeing initiatives. As your in-house focus group, a neurodiversity ERG can offer invaluable insight into what's working and what isn't, as well as offer pointers for future development.





BENCHMARKING SUCCESS – TIPS FROM THE WORKPLACE WELLBEING CHARTER

Health@Work's nationally recognised accreditation, the Workplace Wellbeing Charter, is designed around this principle – that no one knows your employees' wellbeing like they do.

The Charter is designed around a set of benchmarks, against which you can evaluate your organisational approach to wellbeing. This means that rather than receiving an externally assessed grade, you're able to consciously evaluate your approach against your team's unique needs.

When assessing your neurodiversity support practices, consider asking your ERG or support group for their benchmarks to evaluate as you go, helping you to hit the ground running.



You can find out more about the Workplace Wellbeing Charter, our benchmarking standards, and how to get involved <u>here</u>.



WORKING NEURODIVERSE: WHERE TO NEXT?

What's the key to unlocking better support for neurodiversity at work?

In short: better understanding. In 2016, the National Autistic Society found that 40% of employers thought it was more expensive to hire an autistic employee, with a further 60% saying they didn't know where to seek advice for supporting their neurodiverse teams⁴. Even today, it's estimated that only half of UK organisations understand the importance of neurodiversity at work².

Thankfully, more and more organisations are becoming aware of the benefits of supporting a neurodiverse approach to working – and how important an accepting and aware culture



can be. Promoting inclusion at work is no longer a tick-box exercise for an annual report, but an integral part of a healthy business strategy. By investing in training, support, and employee wellbeing, today's businesses gain the very best from their employees, while empowering their teams to realise their best selves.

Building an inclusive workplace that supports your full variety of employees is a daunting task.

That's why with the Workplace Wellbeing Charter, you'll work alongside your own highly experienced, dedicated Workplace Wellbeing Consultant to help you better understand your workplace for your employees. Head to our website at www.healthatworkcentre.org.uk to find out how we can help you build a thriving, resilient workplace through a holistic understanding of wellbeing. Together, we can build a workplace culture where every employee feels valued, supported, and empowered to thrive.



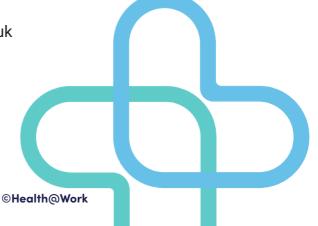
USEFUL RESOURCES

The ADHD Foundation www.adhdfoundation.org.uk

National Autistic Society www.autism.org.uk

British Dyslexia Association www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

The Brain Charity www.thebraincharity.org.uk





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