



**Supporting neurodiverse talent
in the recruitment process**

Supporting neurodiverse talent in the recruitment process

It is now widely accepted that workforce diversity is conducive to improved levels of innovation and profitability - and advancements in HR processes reflect the near universal desire to better engage with underrepresented groups.

However, there is one demographic which is still slipping under the radar of the vast majority of talent acquisition heads – neurodiverse individuals.

Neurodiversity covers a whole spectrum of conditions. According to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), the term ‘neurologically diverse’ or ‘neurodiverse’ refers to people who have dyslexia, an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), ADHD, dyspraxia and other neurological conditions.

While these are ‘spectrum’ conditions, with a wide range of characteristics, they nevertheless share some common features in terms of how people learn and process information. While every person is different, there are specific strengths which are commonly associated with individual conditions. Some autistic candidates, for example, can demonstrate above-average levels of concentration, reliability, conscientiousness and persistence, as well as paying incredibly close attention to detail.

However, according to The National Autistic Society’s report, ‘The Autism Employment Gap’, 60% of employers say they fear getting support for an autistic employee ‘wrong’, with the same percentage indicating that they didn’t know where to go for support or advice about employing an autistic person.

The same report highlights that just 32% of all autistic adults are in some form of paid work, compared to 47% of all disabled people and 80% of non-disabled people. That is despite 77% of those surveyed who are currently unemployed signalling that they want to work.

Given that more than one in 100 people in the UK are on the autism spectrum, it is absolutely fundamental that employers are confident about how they can support autistic candidates throughout the recruitment process.

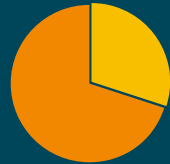


Key Stats



700k

There are around 700,000 people on the autism spectrum in the UK – that's more than 1 in 100



33%

At least one in three autistic adults are experiencing severe mental health difficulties due to a lack of support



**16%
employed**

Research by the UK's National Autistic Society (NAS) shows that the figures around employment of people with autism in the UK are still very low. In its survey of 2,000 autistic adults, NAS found just 16% were in in full-time paid employment



**only
32%
in paid work**

Only 32% were in some kind of paid work



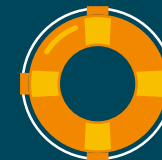
**25%
have never
worked**

Four in ten said they had never worked



**77%
of autistic
people want
to work**

This is despite 77% of people who were unemployed saying they wanted to work



**only
10%
receive
support**

Only 10% of autistic adults receive employment support - but 53% say they want it



How businesses can support neurodiverse talent in recruitment

It is important that employers are confident about how they can support neurodiverse candidates through the recruitment process: organisations should strive to ensure that procedures are barrier-free and accessible for all.

This can be done by stripping recruitment processes back to basics, assessing candidates on relevant criteria alone and opening lines of communication to ensure that jobseekers feel comfortable to request adjustments.

It is also crucial to review marketing and attraction strategies so that they are both accessible and attractive to neurodiverse applicants. Job descriptions, for example, should be reviewed to ensure that they focus on output rather than process and only ask for skills and experience if they are fundamental to the role in question. Similarly, the language in job adverts should be reconsidered to ensure that it is not ambiguous.

Businesses can benefit from offering disability-specific training to all hiring managers on their legal obligations and best practice during recruitment.

Adjustments needed to make the recruitment process accommodating for a candidate with neurodiverse conditions are often small, and cost almost nothing. Adjustments in recruitment may include, but are not exclusive to;



More time during assessment



Providing interview questions in advance



Adapting interview questions so that they cover specific examples rather than complex concepts



Swapping the traditional interview for extended interviews or a work trial



Making sure the interview environment takes account of sensory needs



Acknowledging the use of assistive technology for an interview



How Intelligent Resource is championing barrier-free recruitment

As a recruitment business which manages thousands of candidates each year, we are acutely aware of our responsibility to ensure that our processes are barrier-free – and the impact that our activities have on the UK employment market.

We believe that every individual should be offered the opportunity to shine professionally – and we are determined to make that happen.

Through partnering with organisations such as RIDI and BDF, we have been able to ensure that Disability Confidence is embedded in our culture and recognised as ‘business as usual’ practice.

Our recruiters have received Business Disability Forum (BDF) training so that they are fully equipped to assess all candidates fairly on their ability to do the job and possess the skills to recognise – and remove – any barriers which they feel some candidates could face due to their disability.



Supporting talent in work

Once in work, accommodating adjustments for people with autism, for example, can be as simple as ensuring they have a quiet space to work in, giving them clear and succinct written or verbal instructions and avoiding hypothetical or abstract questions.

Staff with dyslexia, meanwhile, may benefit from using coloured paper to make reading easier, using a dictaphone to capture notes rather than pen and paper or even a ‘do not disturb’ sign on their desk to discourage unnecessary distractions. However, no one knows better than the individual themselves what support they may require.

Don’t be afraid to ask the question – and don’t be afraid of getting it ‘wrong’.

Employers may also need to be more explicit about their expectations for an autistic member of staff. In addition to the job description, you may need to explain the etiquette and unwritten rules of the workplace. However, be sure to make it clear that any adaptations for them in the workplace are there to help them keep doing their job well, not because they are not good enough.

Make sure instructions are concise and specific. The National Autistic Society advises that managers try to give the employee clear instructions right from the start about exactly how to carry out each task, from start to finish, as this will lay the foundations for good working practices. Don’t assume the person will infer your meaning from informal instructions – for example, rather than saying ‘Give everybody a copy of this’, say ‘Make three photocopies of this, and give one each to Sam, Mary and Ahmed’. You may also choose to provide written instructions. It can be helpful to ask the person to repeat back instructions so you are sure they have understood.

Some autistic people need a fairly structured work environment. You can help by working with them to prioritise activities, organising tasks into a timetable for daily, weekly and monthly activities, and breaking larger tasks into small steps. Some people will appreciate precise information about start and finish times, and help getting into a routine with breaks and lunches.

In terms of reasonable adjustments, autistic employees may require assistive technology or benefit from things like screens around their desk, noise-cancelling headphones, or their desk being in the corner. Employers who need advice and support with adjustments can engage with external organisations and schemes (such as Access to Work) to help further support candidates with disabilities or long-term conditions.

Finally, help other staff to be more aware. If your autistic employee consents to their condition being disclosed, then providing colleagues with information and guidance on autism can benefit everyone.





Final Thoughts

Offering tailored support to candidates and employees not only creates opportunities for often misunderstood talent pools, it also makes perfect business sense.

Not all autistic people are able to work, but, with understanding from their employer and colleagues, and reasonable adjustments to the interview process and workplace, many autistic people can be a real asset to businesses.

There's no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to engaging with neurodiverse candidates, and while employment isn't right for every individual with these types of conditions, many people do want to work and have plenty of valuable skills to offer.

If you need support with attracting, engaging and recruiting neurodiverse talent, the [team at Intelligent Resource can help.](#)

