

NORTHERN **POWER** WOMEN

Neurodiversity Insight Paper

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In collaboration with



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Preface

It is fantastic to be working with EY's Neuro-Diverse Centre of Excellence (NCoE) to drive the diversity agenda forward as we learn and develop new ways of creating inclusive workplaces; a responsibility which falls to all of us. EY's purpose of Building a better working world reflects our shared motivation to lead and role model how organisations can support their colleagues, creating environments where all talent can flourish.

EY's first UK NCoE opened in Manchester in January 2022 with the aim of fuelling innovation in technology, bringing a new dimension of creativity, and driving greater diversity, equity and inclusion in the UK workplace(1). The Manchester NCoE team consists of people from diverse backgrounds.

This Insight paper is the culmination of two roundtable discussions about neurodiversity, facilitated by Simone Roche MBE, along with representatives from 25 organisations from different sectors, regions, and neurocognitions / experiences.

The roundtables discussed the different approaches individuals and organisations can and are taking to create inclusive cultures and workplaces for all to thrive in. The discussions focused on the interventions that have worked and what has not, with the intention to share practical and actionable takeaways to accelerate change.

Introduction

More than 15% of the UK population are thought to be neurodivergent (2). Despite this, many organisations still have little to no understanding of the cognitive differences between people and subsequently how to support the diverse needs of their colleagues.

This paper sets out actionable changes and adjustments that can be made by organisations, regardless of their size, to help create more purposeful and inclusive workplaces that empower individuals to bring their whole selves to work.

During the roundtable discussions, there was an acknowledgement that actions must be person-led and that one size does not fit all. This insight paper is therefore by no means an exhaustive list of the positive actions that organisations can take – it seeks to be a helpful guide and provide a starting point to help make tangible progress in accelerating best practice. Overall, it was felt that adjustments that are initially implemented for neurodiverse colleagues can be beneficial to all.

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Actionable Takeaways

A number of themes were identified as being important to fostering more inclusive workplaces.

ROLE MODELS

Visibility is vital and identifying as neurodivergent is a deeply personal decision

- It is important to have a range of relatable role models at all levels – from senior leaders to entry level employees, it cannot be one person speaking for all
- Organisations must acknowledge that individuals who choose to publicly self-identify as neurodiverse in order to be visible role models are likely to have more demands on their time and energy outside of their day-to-day role
- In the absence of visible role models, raising awareness by educating employees and opening up the conversation can help encourage colleagues to share their lived experiences, and open up access to the adjustments they may need
- Individuals may feel more able to share their lived experiences when they see the positive experience of others doing so – a culture where there is a willingness to learn and listen is key

LANGUAGE

If in doubt, ask

- Language is specific to the individual when it comes to discussing neurodiversity – if in doubt, ask
- When discussing neurodiversity, having the right attitude towards the conversation is equally as important as the language being used. Being open to the discussion and open to learning is key
- Use a strength-based approach to neurodiversity, focusing on ability and strengths in order to celebrate uniqueness as part of a workplace culture
- Language can be disempowering - the term 'disorder' when referring to neurodivergent and mental health conditions can be harmful so it's important to be aware of this

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COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Active allyship enables supportive workplaces

- Employee Networks can play an important role in supporting the colleagues of neurodivergent individuals, as well as providing a network and community for family and friends by providing a safe space for people to share their lived experience with others facing similar situations
- Employee Networks can be useful to those who are on a pathway – individuals don't need a diagnosis to get assistance
- Whilst Employee Networks represent communities, neurodiversity can be a conversation that spans all networks recognising the importance of promoting intersectionality
- Neurodivergent traits are often discussed separately, but many individuals have a co-occurrence of different traits which can lead to misunderstanding – no single approach works for all
- Education is vital where there is a desire to learn – colleagues need access to training & information to encourage curiosity. This could form part of the wider organisational DE&I strategy
- Training delivered by professionals can help raise awareness e.g lunch & learn sessions
- Inclusivity training around tools, techniques and language can help colleagues without lived experience understand how they can help others which can influence leaders to become advocates
- We must take the 'talk' into 'walk' e.g training for all, not just for senior leaders

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LEADERSHIP

Leaders must learn to lead for everyone

- Train leaders to help them find a management style that is effective for leading neurodiverse individuals
- Broadening teaching and leadership styles can lead to better lived experiences for the majority of people
- Be open to leading in different ways, and being open to adapting your style
- Hold open feedback sessions relating to communication and troubleshoot to learn from each other

RECRUITMENT

Be open to adjusting your traditional methods to attract talent

- Having readily available videos of how a person might navigate a space and where they will be interviewed can reduce stress and anxiety
- Advertising and Marketing collateral needs to be challenged from a number of different perspectives. Whether it's an additional screen that would be appropriate for someone who's visually impaired or whether it needs to have a certain text type across the bottom to ensure that it is inclusive
- Sending questions prior to an interview to all candidates can be useful
- Personal contact rather than recruiting purely through emails or online forms can make a huge difference. One organisation identified that they had hired 14 people who would otherwise not have applied due to this
- Be flexible in adjusting your recruitment process, such as having offline assessments
- Provide early access to view assessment centres, interview tasks, materials and questions prior to interview
- Consider how interview presentations are assessed, and ask candidates what would help them feel more comfortable. Behaviours experienced under the pressure of an interview may not translate into the workplace

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RETENTION

Flexibility and understanding people will get the best out of your team

- Celebrate the benefits of all types of diversity – research shows that diverse thinking can bring organisational benefits in terms of productivity and creativity
- Promote a culture of psychological safety that everyone can shape and contribute to
- Celebrate the talents of those who are neurodivergent across your organisation
- Using strengths-based assessments can help to identify the ways different team members naturally think, feel and behave to enable everyone to thrive
- Avoid grouping people into homogenous groups as everyone has different specialisms – for example we should not restrict conversations around neurodiversity just for the Neurodiversity Employee Network
- Create opportunities for individuals to contribute to, give feedback and create a culture of openness when broaching difficult discussions – it can often be better to have the conversation than not
- Some people don't want to self-label and we should not require this in order to offer support.
- Blurring virtual backgrounds or using plain backgrounds can sometimes help individuals with ADHD or Autism to focus
- Avoid thinking if something worked for one person then it will work for another. Needs to be person-led
- Physical adjustments in the office e.g., quiet booths, acoustic panels, noise cancelling headphones, considering fabric and finish choices e.g., darker and matt finishes on desks, and plain rather than patterned fabrics
- Explore Work Adjustment Passports piloted by the DWP which provide students with a disability or health condition with an up-to-date record of the adjustments they are currently using, and any future in-work support needs they may have
- Providing employee training in a variety of different formats – written, video, audio, etc

Factors to note

Factors to consider when talking about neurodiversity: Consider how different lived experiences compound to create opportunities or disadvantage

Gender:

A study by Loomes, 2017 (3) found that in individuals who met the criteria for Autism, males were three times more likely to receive a diagnosis than females and therefore there is a clear diagnostic gender bias we must be aware of. Cultural factors need to be considered such as females being traditionally socialised to 'mask' indicators that would otherwise lead to a diagnosis.

Gender:

Women can encounter difficulties when trying to identify their own traits as they can present themselves differently to expected norms.

Ethnicity / culture:

It is important to consider the impact of neurodiversity related misconceptions that may be present in some cultures.

Generational:

Younger generations may often want to know and find out about their diagnosis but it would appear that some institutions in academia aren't up to date to support effectively. Equally, it is possible that some older generations may not be familiar with the vocabulary of neurodiversity and could associate stigma with certain conditions which can be challenging to all.

Age:

Organisations are seeing a trend in graduates being more open to talking about their lived experiences because they've had access to support and so they're asking for more specific support and advocating for themselves more than their older colleagues.

Intersections:

Diagnosis can come later in life for many reasons – prevalence of this happening to women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

IN SUMMARY

There is no set finish line. People and organisations are at different stages of their learning journey on how to best support colleagues and that is okay. Organisations need to be intentional and clear in what they want to achieve by engaging neurodiversity in all conversations and start adapting now. There is a real opportunity to do better.

Having diversity of role models is absolutely critical for visibility and representation so that everyone can recognise themselves in people they look up to. Creating communities that can have open conversations within safe spaces in order to understand each other more and subsequently support each other better is really important. It can help encourage individuals to bring their whole selves to work.

Advocating for yourself while you're trying to work out what support you need can be doubly exhausting, so the more organisations can proactively offer support, the easier it will become for individuals. We appreciate there isn't a universal solution, however we also know that we need to put in place reasonable adjustments for all. Through this we can support and nurture colleagues to be their best. Operating in a more neurodivergent friendly way, will drive better outcomes for organisations as a whole. This is a concept known as universal design. These changes can't be achieved overnight but committing to action will help build a better working world for everyone.

What's necessary for some, is helpful for all.

Resources

- [Coloured balls in a bucket analogy when talking about neurodiverse diagnosis](#)
- [Temple Grandin, diagnosed with autism as a child, talks about how her mind works and female multi-state spectrum experiences](#)
- [Clare Talbot-Jones LinkedIn Post talking about her Neurodiverse traits that contributed to many of her achievements](#)
- [Cherylee Houston MBE's NPW Podcast episode](#)
- [ADHD Foundation's Umbrella Project](#)
- [Missing the Mark Podcast, exploring Neurodiversity, education and extra fight different cultures have to be recognised](#)
- [The Senator Group's Insight Piece on Neurodiversity with EY](#)
- [Rebel Ideas: The Power of Diverse Thinking by Mathew Syed](#)
- [Harnessing the Power of Neurodiversity webinar by the PoWEr Collective CIC in partnership with BNY Mellon](#)
- [Post Neurodiversity webinar questions with Olivia Catlow](#)
- [Spiky Profile: a visual representation of personal and work-related strengths and areas for development. Unlike psychometric testing, the aim of the spiky profile is to promote inclusivity rather than exclusivity. Used by NCoE](#)
- [Using the Clifton Strength Finder can help identify different traits and skills within your team to work better together](#)
- [Accessible guides help people understand how they might navigate a space, for neurodivergent visitors it can help reduce anxiety and supports visit planning. Sending videos of the building & surroundings before an interview can help visitors feel more comfortable in unfamiliar environments.](#)
- [Speech to text software such as Dragon Speech Recognition Software](#)
- [Text to speech and screen tinting software such as texthelp](#)
- [Text Magnifier tool is available on Windows](#)
- [Close Caption software can be used on Microsoft Teams & Zoom meetings](#)
- [Read EY's Made by Dyslexia report looking at the value of dyslexia in changing the world of work](#)

References

1. EY launches first Neuro-Diverse Centre of Excellence in the UK to boost client innovation - https://www.ey.com/en_uk/news/2022/01/ey-selects-manchester-to-launch-its-first-neuro-diverse-centre-of-excellence-in-the-uk
2. Rate of Neurodiversity - <https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/disabled-staff-support/neurodiversity-support#:~:text=Most%20people%20are%20neurotypical%2C%20meaning,learns%20and%20processes%20information%20differently>
3. Loomes R, Hull L, Mandy WPL. [What Is the Male-to-Female Ratio in Autism Spectrum Disorder? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.](#) *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry.* 2017

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