Neuroinclusive recruitment.

Recruitment processes often unwittingly discriminate neurodivergent individuals. This can be due to:

- rigid and inflexible processes
- poorly designed AI recruitment systems which automatically exclude many neurodiverse applicants
- lack of due diligence and clear communication when using recruitment agencies
- a lack of understanding of how the process produces barriers for neurodivergent people.

The result is that the neurodiverse candidates may be unable to demonstrate their strengths and your organisation could be missing out on the talent and experience it is actually looking for.

This resource sets out some steps you can take at every stage of the process.

Planning recruitment processes.

- Deciding your criteria – Look at how you plan the roles you recruit for, and the skills and experience you want for the role. Question if you are asking for criteria which is not strictly necessary and may in fact potentially exclude some applicants. For example, are the characteristics ‘enthusiastic’ or ‘friendly’ in the conventional sense actually necessary, or could someone who demonstrates them in a different way or who has different interpersonal skills, do the same job just as well.
- Clearly distinguish between ‘essential’ and ‘desirable’ criteria – and make this an accurate reflection of the role. You could put off some applicants by saying you require something that is actually non-essential.
- Carefully consider how you are going to assess applicants. Question if the use of assessments such as psychometric tests is really necessary, or whether a more neuroinclusive alternative would be a better way of assessing the skills you’re looking for. Many applicants will be put off by psychometric tests, as these are widely perceived to disadvantage neurodivergent applicants.
- Consider your application process – paper and online forms, and IT systems – especially those with timed features. Do they allow dictation? Some people may be proven to be highly competent for the role but find it harder to read and write.
- Ask applicants what accessibility requirements they have – If you have individuals with more complex communication methods such as using non-verbal

communication, ask them how if they can suggest what will help them excel at the interview.
- When you're planning the recruitment process, try to leave plenty of time for the application stage. Tight deadlines can put off some people who must overcome additional barriers such as document format, structure, reading and writing or time management.

Advertising the role.

- Advertise the role in a number of different places, including on social media. Some potential applicants may avoid text-heavy sites and are more likely to use visual sites such as Instagram. That said, many will also look in more conventional places, so advertise there as well. Offer the job adverts in alternative formats.
- Make the adverts concise and easy to read. The job description should avoid jargon and figurative language. Use simple designs, fonts and colour schemes.
- Include an accurate description of the application process. Tell applicants how many interviews there will be, whether there will be tests and what those will be, and the timeframes involved. This will allow people to ask for adjustments and make it easier for people for whom uncertainty is a barrier.
- Use this as an opportunity to invite applicants to request adjustments to the process. For example, you might be asked to assess a candidate by way of a day placement instead of an interview. Consider in advance if this is something that you can do within a reasonable timeframe to accommodate such requests.
- Including disability-friendly logos or statements on the advert will encourage more neurodiverse people to apply.

Communicating with applicants.

- When communicating with applicants and candidates, be clear about what they should expect. Use accessible formats to communicate stipulate if your website or documents are fully accessible. Offer to provide alternatives promptly if requested. Making something accessible means:
- Using web pages, Word or PDF documents with styles that can be read by a screen reader or adapted by the candidate to meet their needs best. For example, allow them to change the font, page colour, font colour.
- Using at least 12pt font size.
- Having a clear contrast in colour between the text and the background.
- Avoiding using italics or bold.
- Using a sans serif font such as Arial, Helvetica, Verdana or Calibri.
- Adding alt text to any images you put in, especially if they contain vital information.

- Have plenty of white space between bullet points and paragraphs as this can make it easier and quicker for people to read.
- Ask applicants and candidates how they prefer to be contacted, and make sure only to use that channel wherever possible. Some people can find unexpected phone calls stressful, or they may find long emails harder to understand than a phone conversation. People who have challenges with their short-term working memory often prefer clear emails to phone calls. Always offer to follow up any phone calls with an email covering the main points.

Interviewing neurodivergent candidates.

- When inviting a candidate to interview, give plenty of notice – at least two weeks if possible.
- If it's an in-person interview, give them detailed step-by-step instructions of what will happen. It may also be helpful to describe the building and offer to show them around or provide them with pictures in advance.
- Advise on transport links and parking facilities. Some organisations have maps, directions and videos on their websites and sending a link can reduce anxiety for all candidates, but especially neurodiverse ones.
- Tell them how long the interview will be, how many people will be in the interview and whether there will be any tests or exercises. This is good practice for all candidates regardless of disability.
- Invite candidates to request adjustments by providing examples of the adjustments you can make; for example, being flexible on the time of the interview to reduce travel barriers, or allowing tests to be completed on computers with assistive technology such as screen readers.
- Be prepared to make adjustments on the day, as some candidates may only realise then.
- Try to have the interviews in a quiet room away from bustle and noise. If possible, use a room with calmer lighting and colour schemes as a default with the option to change as an adjustment if necessary.

Interview and assessment processes.

Interviews and assessments are daunting for all candidates, but they can be particularly stressful, which can disproportionately diminish the strengths of neurodivergent applicants.

Think about what you're trying to assess. Is there only one way to assess this, or are there multiple ways? If you can, offer a range of assessments and allow candidates to choose their preferred method. Invite candidates to request adjustments and accommodate them where you can.

They can exacerbate activities that neurodiverse people find more challenging and often ones that are not commonly asked for in adjustments for interviews and assessments. Below are a few examples:

- Clothing – A significant number of neurodivergent people are sensitive to materials in clothing. Others will find some materials and certain weights of clothing more soothing than others. This may mean that the 'interview clothes' chosen are not necessarily what is expected.
- Eye contact – This can be very difficult for some people, and they tend to avoid looking directly at someone when speaking or listening. They are not being rude, instead it is often a way of managing the high levels of stimuli around them so that they can focus on the question.
- Bringing a notebook – This can be helpful for processing information, helping with short-term working memory challenges and maintaining focus. Doodling whilst listening is a common focus strategy for people with difficulty focusing or are prone to interrupting.
- Group exercises – These can be challenging for some neurodiverse individuals whereas others will thrive in these types of assessment.
- Presentations – Only ask candidates for a presentation if this is required in the job.
- Extra time and questions in advance – Extra time to complete a test and test or interview questions in advance are among the adjustments neurodivergent candidates most commonly request.

Testing a candidate on the knowledge and skills required for the job is reasonable. Think about what you're testing for, which will help you decide if it's reasonable to allow extra time, or to provide the questions in advance.

If you are testing a candidate's knowledge of a particular subject and the role will not require them to use that knowledge under time pressure, then it's reasonable to allow extra time to complete the test.

However, suppose you're testing whether the candidate can perform a particular task or demonstrate their knowledge within a certain time frame. In that case, it will not be reasonable to allow extra time, as the test is designed to replicate the actual working conditions.

The same applies when deciding whether to provide the interview or test questions in advance. What is it that you are assessing? If it's knowledge, then there is a chance that the person could look up the answers or ask someone else for answers, so it may not be reasonable to provide the questions in advance.

Feedback after interviews and assessments.

Make sure that candidates can request detailed feedback on their applications and is aware that they can ask for this. This is good practice in general, but it can particularly help neurodiverse candidates who may not be aware of precisely how employers perceive them as applicants.

Onboarding.

- When a candidate accepts a role, offer them the option to request workplace adjustments. The recruitment process should have included giving them an accurate reflection of what the job will be like, so they may already have some thoughts about what they need.
- Send an itinerary of what will happen on their first day, so they can plan what, if anything, to bring with them.
- You could also offer them the option of visiting the workplace before they start so they can see whether they would need any adjustments.
- If they don't ask for adjustments at the outset, remember that it's still the manager's job to keep the new recruit's performance under review during the probation period, and identify and implement any adjustments needed as the person learns what the job entails.
- Try to implement adjustments as quickly as possible, and if necessary extend the probation period so they can show their abilities with the adjustments in place.
- Introduce them to your organisation's neurodiversity champion if you have one, or a senior diversity and inclusion figure. Give them a list of different employee network groups and offer to introduce them.

FAQs – Positive and proactive recruitment.

Some of the most commonly asked questions from employers regarding recruitment centre on positive action and positive discrimination. What is the difference and is either lawful?

Employers mindful of the need to increase the diversity of their workforce and who want to hire 'different thinkers' also ask if they can hold some posts open only to people with certain disabilities, such as neurodiverse conditions.

Here are answers to these and other frequently asked questions.

What is positive discrimination and can it ever be lawful?

Positive discrimination is when you treat someone more favourably because they have what's known as a "protected characteristic" under the Equality Act 2010. In most cases this is unlawful.

An example would be saying you only want to appoint a woman for a particular job when there is no good job-related reason to have a woman in the role – for example, it isn't to work in female changing rooms or with vulnerable women.

It is unlawful to positively discriminate in favour of people with one characteristic over another apart from in the cases of pregnancy and disability.

What is the legal position regarding disability and positive discrimination?

The Equality Act 2010 says it is unlawful to treat someone unfavourably because they have a protective characteristic – such as their race, gender, religion, or age. However, not being disabled is not a protected characteristic.

As far as disability is concerned, the Equality Act is asymmetric. Only disabled people can bring a claim for disability discrimination, whereas race covers people of every race, and the same is true for gender, for example.

The only other category of people this applies to is pregnant women. This means that people who are not disabled or not pregnant cannot claim that they have been discriminated against because someone who is disabled or pregnant has been treated more favourably.

This means employers can treat disabled people more favourably than other people by, for example, saying that they will only accept applications from disabled people for particular roles.

Is it lawful for an employer to say that they only want applications from people with a particular disability or type of disability for vacancies?

For example, some employers have advertised that they are seeking only people with autism or other neurodiverse conditions for vacancies.

This is likely to be unlawful. The direct discrimination provisions in the Equality Act prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. If an employer only wants to hire people with a particular disability and rejects an application from someone with a different disability for that reason, then that person could have a claim for disability discrimination.

What can an employer do lawfully to recruit more people with a particular disability?

For example, because they are under-represented in their workforce or want to better represent their customers or the community they serve?

First, ring-fence a particular post for disabled people more generally. That way you will be more likely to reach people with that specific disability. Then work with disabled peoples' Organisations and in particular organisations that work with people with those disabilities to see if they can help advertise your vacancies.

Remember, however, that many disabled people – including people with neurodiverse conditions – look for jobs in the same way as non-disabled people, so advertise through your usual channels as well.

If you are trying to ensure that more neurodivergent people apply for your vacancies make adjustments in advance to remove or reduce barriers they might face when applying for the roles and within the role itself. This is a barrier analysis exercise:

Go through all the job tasks and think about whether someone with a neurodiverse condition would find them difficult to perform. If the answer is yes, think about adjustments you could make to remove or reduce that difficulty or barrier. This could range from removing the task altogether, making an adjustment in anticipation and / or having a range of adjustments that you could make quickly if required by the person appointed.

Think about the working environment, including travel to and for work, and common workplace procedures and practices. Again, think about any barriers or difficulties someone with a particular disability such as dyslexia or autism might experience and make adjustments in anticipation to remove or reduce the effects of these barriers. In addition, think about further adjustments you could make quickly if required by the person appointed – for example, having assistive technology installed on work laptops to enable someone to work from home easily when necessary.

Seek advice from disabled peoples' organisations and your employee networks in this exercise.

What does "positive action" mean?

Positive action under the Equality Act refers to a very specific situation where, as an employer, you can favour a person with a particular disability in recruitment provided a number of conditions are met. These are that:

You have two candidates who have applied for a position who are equally qualified for the role;

One of those candidates has a disability and the other does not; and

You do not have a policy of favouring disabled people or people with a particular disability over others.

Appointing the disabled person is a proportionate means of increasing the participation of disabled people or people with that disability in your workforce.