

UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSITY

By building a workplace that values neurodiversity, you are not only meeting your legal responsibilities as an inclusive employer but also unlocking the full potential of your workforce. This guide will help you to:

- Understand neurodiversity in the context of apprenticeships.
- Recognise common challenges apprentices may face.
- Use practical strategies to make recruitment, onboarding, and day-to-day work more inclusive.
- Build strong partnerships with colleges and support services.
- Confidently nurture apprentices who think and learn differently.

THE FOUR BROAD SEND CATEGORIES USED IN EDUCATION

1. Communication & Interaction

2. Cognition & Learning

3. Social, Emotional & Mental Health

4. Sensory & Physical Needs

COMMON CHALLENGES APPRENTICES MAY FACE

- Manage sensory overload (noise, bright lights, strong smells).
- Keep to time or prioritise tasks.
- Understand unwritten social rules.
- Process long or complex instructions.
- Adapt to sudden changes in routine.

INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT & ONBOARDING

Advertising Roles:

- Use clear, simple language. Avoid unnecessary requirements like 'excellent communicator' unless genuinely essential.
- Emphasise skills and potential rather than narrow qualifications.
- Show commitment to inclusion.

Applications:

- Offer more than one way to apply (written, online, or practical task).
- Provide templates or examples of what a good application looks like.
- Be flexible with deadlines where possible.

Interviews:

- Consider practical tasks, structured interviews, or questions shared in advance.
- Allow notes, prompts, or demonstrations of skill.

Onboarding:

- Provide a structured induction plan for the first weeks.
- Assign a workplace buddy or mentor.
- Share a 'How We Work' guide.
- Use a 'How I Work Best' profile.

DAY-TO-DAY SUPPORT STRATEGIES

- Offer quiet workspaces or noise-reducing tools.
- Give advance notice of changes.
- Encourage apprentices' strengths.
- During stressful moments: stay calm, offer space, avoid too many questions.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH COLLEGES

EMPLOYERS ARE NOT ALONE. COLLEGES PROVIDE:

- Specialist support teams (1:1 and in-class support, assistive technology, study support).
- Progress reviews to monitor well-being and achievement.
- Advice on adjustments and coping strategies.

EMPLOYERS SHOULD:

- Keep in touch with college staff.
- Share concerns early.
- Treat support as a partnership.

WHY INCLUSION MATTERS

INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES ARE:

- More innovative and creative
- More loyal and productive
- Better at problem-solving
- Legally compliant under the Equality Act 2010

FOR APPRENTICES IN PARTICULAR, INCLUSION MATTERS BECAUSE:

- It builds confidence at a critical stage of life and career.
- It helps apprentices stay on programme, reducing drop-out.
- It develops loyalty to the employer who supported them.

BUILDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Psychological safety means apprentices feel safe to ask questions, make mistakes, and share how they work best.

EMPLOYERS CAN:

- Model openness.
- Normalise flexibility.
- Encourage regular check-ins.

COMMUNICATION, FEEDBACK & TRANSPARENCY

- GIVE DUAL-FORMAT INSTRUCTIONS (VERBAL + WRITTEN).
- BREAK TASKS INTO STEPS WITH CHECKLISTS.
- USE POSITIVE, SPECIFIC FEEDBACK.
- AGREE ON HOW THE APPRENTICE PREFERS FEEDBACK.
- REGULARLY CHECK UNDERSTANDING GENTLY.

SIGNPOSTING TO SUPPORT SERVICES

Need support for neurodiversity, disability or workplace adjustments? Here are key services you can contact:



Access to Work

Practical & financial support for people with disabilities in employment.

gov.uk/access-to-work

0800 121 7479



ACAS

Advice on workplace rights, resolving disputes and employment guidance.

acas.org.uk

0300 123 1100



National Autistic Society

Support, guidance and advocacy for autistic individuals.

autism.org.uk

0808 800 4104



Disability Rights UK

Support, training, and advocacy for people with ADHD.

adhd-foundation.org.uk

0330 995 0400



Disability Rights UK

Information, advice, and advocacy for all disabilities.

disabilityrights.uk.org

0330 995 0400