

Change your application, interview, and onboarding processes to attract neurodiverse talent

*The definition of talent across many organisations is often narrow, and an over-dependence on traditional interviews leads to neurodiverse individuals being disadvantaged. **Jasmine Virhia** lists small changes to recruitment processes could make it easier for neurodiverse individuals to access employment opportunities.*

Recruitment and hiring processes are crucial to the talent firms attract, hire, and subsequently retain, yet a clear advantage exists for [hiring neurotypical individuals](#). In 2018 90% of HR professionals in the UK reported that neurodiversity was not considered within their people management practices ([CIPD, 2018](#)). Whilst employers can make substantial organisational changes to [ensure equal opportunities for disabled employees](#), there exists an increasing demand for traditional application and interview processes to be reconceptualised.

The definition of talent across many organisations and industries is often too narrow ([Krzeminska et al., 2019](#)), and an over-dependence on traditional interviews leads to neurodiverse individuals being disadvantaged. For example, due to differing communication capabilities and preferences ([Patton, 2019](#)). Indeed, unique skills that neurodiverse individuals possess are often ignored, leading to their exclusion from the labour market ([Austin and Pisano, 2017](#); [Scott et al., 2019](#)). Instead, firms should be encouraged to assess individual capabilities of neurodiverse people, as there are many ways in which they can excel. Research indicates that some autistic people are successful in analytical thinking and attention to detail, particularly in the IT industry, ([Annabi and Locke, 2019](#)), dyslexic and dyspraxic people have been shown to demonstrate innovative thinking ([Doyle, 2020](#)), and those with ADHD have been shown to demonstrate efficient multitasking behaviours leading them to be successful entrepreneurs ([Antshel, 2018](#)). However, it is important to note that neurodiverse conditions are heterogenous, with considerable variation between individuals.

How and why to change your recruitment processes to be more inclusive

Below are several examples of how to implement small changes to recruitment processes that could make it easier for neurodiverse individuals to access employment opportunities. Also note that you can ask individuals for their own preferences during the recruitment process.

Job descriptions

Be short and prescriptive. An extensive list of desirable qualities is not useful. Candidates may lose focus, interest, and confidence in their capabilities. Instead, include fundamental requirements and responsibilities of someone in that role and how often candidates will be required to complete key tasks. For example, autistic individuals are often motivated by repetitive tasks and can find variety overwhelming ([Doyle, 2020](#)) whereas those with ADHD may lose interest if they are not intrinsically interested in particular tasks ([Brown, 2017](#)).

Colleagues and communication. Include information on who candidates will be required to work with and how communication typically occurs (for example, emails, chat functions in video conferencing software, virtual, hybrid or in-person meetings). Consider prioritising indirect digital forms of communication to circumvent social interactions that neurodiverse individuals may find difficult ([Tomczak, 2021](#); [Tomczak et al., 2020](#)). This will benefit both parties regarding coherence and efficient workplace communication.

Post-COVID working. If you are operating with flexible working practices, include details of this and the options available to your staff. For example, are you operating fully in the office or is hybrid working the most popular option amongst your staff? Has this led you to set particular in-office days? Many neurodiverse individuals prefer structure and consistency when it comes to their working practices and environment ([Scott et al., 2015](#)). Consider how you can support them with this.

Alternative formats. Use short videos or audio recordings to outline the job description, the process for application and what the interview will entail. For Deaf people, you could provide a video recording that includes a sign language specialist, include content with closed captions, or make transcripts available.

Workplace accommodations. Provide practical steps on the process for an individual to discuss [workplace accommodations](#).

Submitting applications

Motivations to apply. Provide options for candidates to supplement their CV with short videos and/or audio files rather than a supporting statement or cover letter. Avoid requiring extensive questions to be answered on an application portal.

Interview opportunity. Give candidates the opportunity to select or outline what type of interview format would work best for them. This should include the option for online interviews as many firms are returning to work in the office.

Government initiatives for guaranteed interviews. If your organisation is not already enrolled on [The Disability Confident](#) scheme [this is something you should consider](#). Guaranteed interviews will begin to combat disadvantages and inequalities across the labour market and make it more likely that you will diversify your workforce by hiring neurodiverse and disabled individuals.

Interviews

Pre-interview preparation. Provide some information prior to the interview regarding what types of questions you will be asking and how they relate to key skills listed in the job description. Asking candidates to prepare specific examples from their previous employment will reduce unfairness that often comes from being put on the spot.

Reduce the number of interview stages. Is more than one really necessary?

Interviewers. Keep the number of interviewers to a minimum and specific to those a candidate is likely to work with. Consider not using a panel at all, but short, casual conversations with different interviewers. Ensure breaks are included to avoid sensory overload and cognitive fatigue.

Education. Ensure that interviewers have been educated in the multi-faceted nature of neurodiversity and [appropriate language to use](#) so as to avoid stigmatisation. Indeed, neurodiversity awareness training has been shown to improve communication outcomes within workforces ([Philips et al., 2016](#)).

Question types. Interviewers should ask direct closed questions rather than nuanced open-ended ones. Lack of shared intentionality ([Tomasello et al., 2005](#))—which refers to collaborative interactions where individuals are expected to share psychological states— can often lead to heightened “mutual misunderstanding” within an interview situation ([Heasman and Gillespie \(2019, p. 911\)](#)).

Be patient. Some candidates will require additional time to think of answers to questions and respond accordingly. Being patient also applies to answering questions the candidate has. They may not be the traditional types of questions you expect, but understand that if they are being asked, they are important to the candidate’s well-being and productivity.

Competency. Make a substantial part of the interview process task based and specific to the role. Inform candidates of this prior to the interview thus allowing them sufficient time to prepare. Tasks such as this will allow you to assess key competencies rather than biasing your decision to social norms such as communicativeness and advocating for oneself.

Onboarding

In the office. Physical aspects of a working environment may need to be altered to accommodate sensory needs of neurodiverse individuals ([Hayward et al., 2019](#)). Controlling temperature, humidity, noise, smell, and sunlight exposure within a given space will increase comfort and efficiency ([Tomczak, 2021](#)). Ensure you discuss changes with your new employees and ask them for their preferred working conditions. It may also be useful to review these at a later date once the employee has spent some time in the role and is familiar with their environment.

Additional space. Do you have space that is not typically used for work where neurodiverse individuals can go if they feel overstimulated?

Plan for feedback sessions. If provided clearly and consistently, positive reinforcement and constructive feedback positively impacts motivation of neurodiverse individuals to complete a task ([Dreaver et al., 2020](#); [Müller et al., 2003](#)). Consider providing feedback each time your staff has completed a new and substantial task.



Notes:

- *This blog post represents the views of its author(s), not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.*
- *Featured [image](#) by [Matthew Henry](#), under [Burst Terms of Service](#).*
- *When you leave a comment, you're agreeing to our [Comment Policy](#)*