



### **Autistic Voices from the Workplace**

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## Autistic Voices from the Workplace

### Abstract

This research paper drills down into the experience of neurodivergent and autistic employees in particular. The paper draws on a questionnaire with over 600 responses including 96 autistic people. Most neurodivergent employees were found to identify with two or more neurodivergent categories, and there is little difference, of statistical significance, between the experiences of all neurodivergent employees. This paper reports some of those differences, but the similarities of experience is striking. The workplace is experienced as a hostile environment, which is challenging at all stages of selection, being in the workplace, and dealing with colleagues. The Catch 22 of disclosure is also explored; employees remain unprotected by the law if they do not disclose, but frequently subject to discrimination when they do. Only 1% of autistic employees usually found that their manager understood their neurodivergence, but when they did, like all neurodivergent employees, usually excelled. The sample of autistic employees is relatively small (n=96) and more engaged with employment than is typical. Recommendations from the WAC Report with particular relevance for autistic employees are identified. These include neurodiversity awareness training, the need for a major cultural shift inside the DWP and JobCentre Plus so that they operate within a social model of disability, the end of counter-productive and punitive sanctions, better monitoring and evaluation of Access to Work and Disability Confident schemes, better 'reasonable adjustments', and the end of the misuse of psychometric tests during selection. The paper offers new insights into the experiences of autistic employees.

### Introduction

AchieveAbility sent a questionnaire to hundreds of neurodivergent people through all our communication channels during 2018 as part of our Westminster Commission. The purpose of the questionnaire was to explore neurodivergent experiences of employment, including those who are autistic. We were aided in this endeavour, in particular by Craig Kennady, who is an active member of both the Westminster Autism Commission and AchieveAbility's. Over 600 people responded to the questionnaire, including 96 respondents who declared they were autistic. Perhaps the most striking feature of the responses was the overlap between all forms of neurodivergence. In this paper, the intention is to drill down into the published report, "Neurodiverse Voices; Opening Doors to Employment" (Cooper, R. et al, 2019), with particular reference to autistic employees. However, it should be recognised that there was almost no statistically significant variation in responses to the questions asked, no matter the nature of the neurodivergence. This could be partially explained by the overlaps.

This paper will therefore consider

1. the nature of the overlaps in neurodivergence for our sample of autistic respondents
2. common experiences in the workplace

3. the catch 22 of disclosure
4. some key recommendations for enabling access to autistic employees

## 1. Overlapping Neurodivergence

Of our autistic sample, over 60% identified one or more additional neurodivergence:

- 29 % dyslexic
- 29% dyspraxic
- 20% AD(H)D
- 10% dysgraphic
- 8% dyscalculic
- 6% OCD

Consequently, their experience of the workplace can be expected to be coloured by a range of neurodivergence. Since acquiring a formal assessment is often expensive and will tend to focus on one form of neurodivergence rather than all of them, we would suggest that these overlaps are an underestimate for the general autistic population.

“It is likely that many of these able people have not been formally assessed as dyslexic, or on the autistic spectrum.” Prospect Union

## 2. Common Experiences in the Workplace

When analysing the results of our questionnaire, it was surprising how common the difficulties experienced are. It would appear that the workplace is an extremely hostile environment for all neurodivergent employees. We also know that the autistic sample is atypical in that 50% were in full time employment at the time of the questionnaire (compared with 16% cited by the National Autistic Society [NAS, 2016]), and a further 23% were in part time work (compared to 16% cited by NAS) or on zero-hour contracts, including 8% self employed. Consequently, this sample is much more successfully engaged with the workplace than is usual among autistic people. Nevertheless, 39% of this sample have been sacked or ‘forced to leave’ employment due to issues related to their neurodivergence.

“I have been fired due to motor difficulties, difficulties using a printer, emotional difficulties.”

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5 "I was sacked several times for not getting on with other people, I was once sacked for not going  
6 out for a drink with a team, and not having the same sense of humour as them."  
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10 "The workplace has changed drastically in the last 10 years, employment rights are unenforcible  
11 - you just lose your job if you raise a problem - not directly but you are put under more and more  
12 pressure till you leave."  
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16 Bullying is frequently cited as a reason for leaving employment:  
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21 "...bullying, not given enough time to figure out new role."  
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24 "People patronising me and excluding me."  
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28 "I felt I was being bullied."  
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32 "Being bullied for not sharing the same views as others, being bullied for wanting to change  
33 something to make it a bit easier for me, being bullied for doing something differently to  
34 others."  
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39 "I've been bullied by co-workers and employers, I have been ostracised and my life made hell  
40 because I wasn't able to fit in."  
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44 "Colleagues being too scary to approach."  
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48 "Colleagues get very upset if I do something differently to them, it is seen as swimming against  
49 the tide, even though it still gets the job done and is effective, this has led to bullying and  
50 gossip."  
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54 In many cases the prevailing work culture is cited as creating real difficulties of 'fitting in' despite  
55 significant work related talents:  
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59 "Inflexible office culture, forced me out."  
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5 "...ended by employers - misunderstanding my behaviour as lack of interest, laziness, not  
6 socialising outside of work."  
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10 "...exhaustion from lack of structure, anxiety, interacting with people."  
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14 "Commentary and ridicule about "unusual behaviour", unwillingness to assist with tasks I need  
15 assistance with, makes me feel incompetent at a job I am good at."  
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19 "Had to work in a cold, noisy office with fluorescent lights, and when I disclosed my condition  
20 and tried to make adjustments, such as dimming the light above my desk only, the director  
21 complained and made sure all the other lights were brighter. Explaining my limitations and  
22 strengths was ignored because I 'don't come across as disabled'. "  
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27 "Systems are built to suit one way of working - no real changes are made for those who don't  
28 suit the system."  
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32 " They don't want people who can't work the way they do. You have to be a particular sort of  
33 person and do things in a standard way, or it is seen as "wrong" rather than different."  
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37 There is often a focus by work colleagues and managers on what the autistic employee finds difficult,  
38 rather than their strengths and the value of their contribution in the workplace:  
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42 "It's funny how the ability to do the workloads of 2 people, produce material 3 times faster than  
43 my peers and greater ability to bring technological skills (in exchange for admitted weakness on  
44 interpersonal communication) doesn't matter... and I just get blamed and marked down (or  
45 threatened with being fired) for the interpersonal stuff, even when I've had to bail out my entire  
46 department at least 15 times from serious shortages, content or legal errors."  
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51 "Very few managers have ever shown any appreciation of the gifts I bring as a result of my  
52 oddness."  
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56 "... people often see the weaknesses but not the strengths, they don't understand that a person  
57 can be strong in one area and weak in another, they expect everyone to be an all rounder."  
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3 "Some colleagues only see the negative and not the positive, such as how we can think round  
4 problems and introduce new and efficient ways of working."  
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8 Failure of the employer to make reasonable adjustments is often cited:  
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12 "Many employers struggle to understand autism and the need for reasonable adjustments."  
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16 "Employer's failure to make reasonable adjustments."  
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20 "Failure to make reasonable adjustments led to long term illness."  
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24 "My line manager did not know what 'neurodiversity' was, even though he is a professor in  
25 public health! I have not been offered reasonable adjustments or occupational health support  
26 after my diagnosis."  
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30 "Struggle a lot at work and hard to get right accommodations despite workplace assessments  
31 and recommendations."  
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35 "My past employment had a very negative atmosphere and didn't understand how to treat, or  
36 make adjustments for, an autistic person. Certain members of staff were very hostile towards  
37 me."  
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41 "On applying for another role, I was not given the job although I was the best candidate, because  
42 I was not willing to try again at a task I had already failed badly before. I felt that this would be  
43 setting me up to fail. I requested changing 5% of the role so that this aspect was swapped  
44 with another member of staff. The feedback said I was not given the role because I was not  
45 willing to try, not because that 5% change could not be accommodated within the team."  
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50 "My employer refused to make a reasonable adjustment after being diagnosed with my autism  
51 and being dyslexic."  
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55 "I have asked for reasonable adjustments but they are ignored or scorned by some."  
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3 “Failure of Employer to understand that I have to work in a certain way has led to attempted  
4 disciplinary procedures by Manager who had no understanding of conditions. Procedures were  
5 halted by a senior manager when they realised they had gone against DDA.”  
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10 In short, it appears that employers are frequently breaking the law and in many cases choose to  
11 hound autistic (and other neurodivergent) employees out of the workplace, rather than make  
12 reasonable adjustments. The hostile environment starts during selection. We found that:

- 13 ● 21% of our neurodivergent responders avoid interviews, but this rises to 37% of our autistic  
14 sample ( $p < 0.00001$ )
- 15 ● While 19% of our neurodivergent responders always feel disabled from applying for work, this  
16 rises to 33% for our autistic sample ( $p < 0.0002$ )
- 17 ● Psychometric tests are generally experienced as discriminatory by neurodivergent applicants,  
18 and our autistic sample was no exception; just 21% did not feel disadvantaged by them (see also,  
19 BPS, 2017, p75).
- 20 ● 58% of our autistic sample said that they are always, or usually, disadvantaged by the need for  
21 presentations during interviews
- 22 ● Only 7% said that there were always, or usually, reasonable adjustments provided during the  
23 selection process
- 24 ● Less than 10% say they are able to demonstrate their skills during the selection process  
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34 “I have been turned down for jobs because of my differences. One prospective employer told me  
35 that I would be 'too difficult to manage.'”  
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40 “... interviews are the BIGGEST thing I struggle with as an autistic person. I would love to be able  
41 just to demonstrate my skills. I teach (at HE level) and have been commended for the quality of  
42 my teaching delivery. I have huge amounts of written evidence for the development work I've  
43 done. Lots of evidence of skills and expertise that I can't convey in an interview.”  
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48 The government has put a number of support mechanisms in place to counteract such experiences  
49 including Access to Work and the Disability Confident Scheme, but our research reveals that these are  
50 wholly inadequate and compounded by JobCentre Plus taking no account of neurodivergence:  
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54 “Government schemes such as Access to Work and Disability Confident are under-resourced,  
55 inadequately organised, inconsistent, poorly advertised and under-used by the neurodivergent  
56 community.” WAC Report (2019), p22.  
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3 “Only 2-3000 people have been helped by Access to Work, why so low? When we have over  
4 30,000 dyslexic graduates leaving HE every year. What happens to them?” Siabi, N., expert  
5 session, WAC Report (2019), p22.  
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9 “Disability Confident lacks incentives for employers to engage with it. The lawyers’ disability  
10 network have found this is not a robust system and not properly monitored.” Jameson, M,  
11 expert session, WAC Report (2019), p22.  
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16 “Access to Work needs to be improved due to issues of tracking- the consistency of process is  
17 difficult- finding the advisers and asking about criteria, as this keeps changing. Then having to fill  
18 in forms again- trying to get facts about support received in the first 6 weeks. All this has an  
19 impact on success.” Boyd, M., employers session, WAC Report (2019), p22.  
20  
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23 “JobCentre Plus staff will sanction people on benefits due to JCP staff’s lack of awareness.  
24 There is no diagnosis so people are sanctioned.” Janet, T., neurodivergent session, WAC Report  
25 (2019),p 23.  
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### 28 29 30 **3. Catch 22 of Disclosure** 31

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33 Employees are only fully protected by the law if they disclose their neurodivergence to employers.  
34 However, disclosing neurodivergence is often more likely to lead to discrimination than the hoped for  
35 reasonable adjustment:  
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40 “I had a very negative experience disclosing my autism to my employer of ten years. My ability  
41 to do my job and work as part of a team was suddenly questioned despite the fact that I had  
42 performed very well in the role over the years, and it was intimated that I was seeking special  
43 treatment in asking for reasonable adjustments. I was told that my colleagues might not feel  
44 comfortable working with someone who was autistic.”  
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49 “I disclosed... to a manager, who then had a disciplinary hearing with me where I received a  
50 written warning for not disclosing this information before.”  
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54 “I am severely dyslexic with high functioning autism and was repeatedly refused interviews for  
55 disclosing my neurodivergence, despite the guaranteed interview scheme. On one occasion I  
56 finally received an interview after my MP contacted the Department of Health to remind them of  
57 the guaranteed interviews policy. This added a very stressful impact and my self-esteem  
58 became low. I am now working as required for "Inclusions North CIC" as an Expert by Experience  
59 panel member using my skills to identify concerns about peoples’ care and treatment (C(E)TR) in  
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3 hospital or in the community. To date I get a small amount of support, but the support is right  
4 for me. I now worry about a change in policy from NHS England that will remove this support,  
5 because this is funded by the NHS as I am not eligible for Access to Work. This would mean  
6 that I will have to face leaving this employment that I love doing"  
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11 In fact, 40% of our autistic sample do not disclose their neurodivergence at all during the selection  
12 process due to a concern that it will lead to discrimination. In work, 67% worry that disclosure will  
13 lead to disciplinary procedures. And in fact, only 32% always, or usually, disclose. Of those that have  
14 disclosed, 42% have regretted it.  
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19 "Although I had done my job competently for years, which was well established and recorded in  
20 supervision records, shortly after disclosing that I was autistic I was essentially constructively  
21 dismissed. I was bullied into leaving by my manager. It was constructed as a competence issue;  
22 nobody understood that it was discrimination because of course a manager is allowed to  
23 question whether an autistic employee is as competent as a non-autistic employee. Nobody  
24 questioned that I was being discriminated against."  
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29 57% of autistic applicants have experienced discrimination during the selection process, and 68%  
30 have experienced discrimination in the workplace.  
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#### 33 **4. Key Recommendations**

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38 Our report identifies 10 key barriers to employment, details over 100 solutions suggested by  
39 neurodivergent people and neurodiversity experts, and identifies 8 key recommendations. This  
40 paper focuses on those recommendations with particular relevance to autistic people in the  
41 workplace, but would urge readers to read the full report. A key piece of evidence that emerged  
42 during the research was the central importance of understanding and valuing diversity.  
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47 " My manager has been very understanding and enthusiastic to help. With the added support  
48 I've thrived and my manager definitely knows my strengths and weaknesses and provides  
49 support accordingly. I couldn't ask for a better employer (Ofsted) or team to work with."  
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52  
53 "If you find a member of management that understands autism/neuro divergence then it's OK  
54 and you can move forward, but if they move on to other work, or life, then the new  
55 management tends to not understand and then makes life very difficult."  
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59 " In my employment my principle was sympathetic to my needs and provided me with rest  
60 breaks and a timetable that supported my position as assistant principal with some teaching.

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3 When the sponsor of the academy decided to remove this principal they put in place a principal  
4 who had no empathy for staff diversity or health,... and taking voluntary redundancy was at the  
5 stage of me attending neurology and my local hospital for investigations. A year later I took early  
6 retirement from teaching because I was beginning to struggle with the problems.”  
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10 The experience of neurodivergent employees is that finding an understanding, knowledgeable and  
11 empathetic manager is extremely rare, and only 3% of neurodivergent staff have always, or usually,  
12 experienced this, and just 1% of this autistic employee sample. The following quote is provided at  
13 length because it articulates in detail the important impact of being valued and appreciated so clearly:  
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18 “I have been lucky in my career. Every time I have moved forward it is because one person has  
19 seen how good I am and how that light can be hidden by asking the wrong question rather than  
20 by me not knowing the answer. It takes a lot for a person to acknowledge this in their workforce  
21 and I am very grateful for those who have been strong enough to look outside of themselves to  
22 embrace the experiences of others. For example I once thought that I would have to give up on  
23 the idea of using assessment to improve my practice because the numbers did not make sense  
24 to me. I was lucky to come across a deputy head who asked me to interpret the data and then  
25 said - ah I think I can do something. He then went away and asked me back to his office to look  
26 at the data a second time. In the interim he had used colours on the data to highlight the  
27 numbers. He then asked me to interpret the data and I did so confidently and successfully. I was  
28 lucky to come across this person and I know that any member of staff who works with him will  
29 be well supported. It is not the same with all staff and if I had been unlucky enough I may not  
30 have been given this easy and simple solution to my problem. The deputy head did this for me  
31 because he recognised my strengths and instead of being disappointed that I could not interpret  
32 data he supported me to see what other excellent practitioners could see. If I had been working  
33 with somebody who did not recognise my strengths they would not have attempted to help me  
34 with this weakness and I would not have moved forward in my career. Due to the actions of this  
35 one person I was able to feel confident about assessment, I am now a fellow of the Chartered  
36 Institute of Educational Assessors and I can confidently interpret data. If employers and  
37 managers do not understand neurodivergence - which I have seen first hand in many schools -  
38 then the education field will always remain bereft of those who could make a difference. I  
39 presume therefore, that this would also be the case in any establishment with any job.”  
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47 “My condition gives me unusual perspectives. When employers and managers support these  
48 there have been great successes. When they do not the opportunities are lost and my health  
49 suffers.”  
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53 “Adjusted work environment and Access to Work claim have been made due to an amazing  
54 manager willing to do battle on my behalf.”  
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58 This evidence points at the importance of quality neurodiversity awareness training for all employers,  
59 which is the WAC Report’s first recommendation:  
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5 “WAC is calling for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) to devise and  
6 deliver, in collaboration with the Westminster AchieveAbility Commission (WAC), a set of  
7 training programmes that can be delivered to managers, policy makers, HR professionals,  
8 JobCentre Plus and Access to Work staff and neurodivergent people themselves.” WAC Report  
9 (2019),p.54  
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14 Sadly, there seems little enthusiasm among managers for such training:  
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18 “From experience I don’t think that they are genuinely interested: HEO and EOs were offered a  
19 half day seminar (on neurodiversity awareness) and none attended.”  
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23 “There is a very poor understanding of invisible disabilities, and even less desire to learn.”  
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27 Until this changes, it is difficult to see how the workplace can be anything other than a hostile  
28 environment. To raise awareness about good practice in the workplace, the WAC Report  
29 recommendations included:  
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33 “Training programmes should be devised and delivered to ensure greater awareness of  
34 neurodivergence within organisations and government offices.” p53  
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38 “Mentoring and training schemes to build in awareness of neurodivergence.” p54  
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42 “Neurodivergent champions as role models to inspire and celebrate our abilities and successes.”  
43 p54  
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47 “ A good practice guide should be compiled on employment practices for neurodivergent people,  
48 in consultation with WAC. This should be provided and disseminated by the Department for  
49 Work and Pensions (DWP)...The guide should focus on the strengths and abilities of  
50 neurodivergent people, in addition to their support needs. In this way, employers and  
51 employees would be inspired by positive messages” pp.55-56  
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56 “A properly funded programme of training on neurodivergence for JobCentre Plus staff and work  
57 coaches.”  
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3 We also recommended systemic changes, including:  
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7 "A major culture change is needed inside the DWP and JobCentre Plus so that they operate  
8 within a social model of disability" p57  
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12 "An end to the quota system of work search activity for neurodivergent people leading to  
13 sanctions when not completed." p57  
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17 "A robust process to be implemented to check that Access to Work recommendations are put in  
18 place and are maintained by the employer." p58  
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22 "Disability Confident employers to sign up to a continuous programme of improvement."  
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26 "Better reasonable adjustments are needed. Very few of the neurodivergent people interviewed  
27 had positive experience of effective reasonable adjustments." p61  
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32 Recommendations about the selection process include:  
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36 "Written employment information needs to be re-evaluated and redesigned for accessibility."  
37 p60  
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41 "The end of a tick list of 'disabilities' for applicants to disclose, replaced by a menu of  
42 'reasonable adjustments' to select." p61  
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46 "Redesigning interview procedures so that they find the best person for the job, rather than the  
47 most neurotypical." p61  
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51 "Psychometric, and other tests that are inappropriate for a neurodivergent population should  
52 not be used in selection processes." p.62  
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56 **Conclusions**  
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3 While investigating the experiences of neurodivergent employees, the consistency of the negative  
4 experiences was striking. Personal evidence deplored the lack of understanding, the bullying, the  
5 barriers, the lack of opportunities, and the way individuals feel forced to hide who they are and pass  
6 as 'normal', which can be extremely stressful. This means that the workplace often fails to benefit  
7 from the strengths and creativity of neurodivergent employees, frequently linked to the mistaken  
8 belief that neurodivergent people will create more difficulties than opportunities, or solutions. We  
9 have also heard how effective neurodivergent people can be in the workplace if they have an  
10 understanding manager. So while it is imperative to reduce the barriers to employment preventing  
11 access to work, we believe that the most fundamental building block to a better diverse group of  
12 employees with an effective range of skills is widespread neurodiversity awareness for managers,  
13 staff, the DWP and JobCentre Plus. Once this enables a more supportive atmosphere, everything  
14 else becomes possible. Without it, little is.  
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Advances in Autism

## Autistic Voices from the Workplace

### Abstract

This research drills down into the experience of autistic employees in the workplace drawing on the Westminster AchieveAbility Commission (WAC) survey. Our online questionnaire received over 600 responses including 95 autistic people. Most neurodivergent employees were found to identify with two or more neurodivergent categories, and there is little difference, of statistical significance, between the experiences of all neurodivergent employees in comparison to autistic employees. This paper reports on those differences, but the similarities of experience is striking. The workplace is experienced as a hostile environment, which is challenging at all stages of selection, being in the workplace, and dealing with colleagues. The Catch 22 of disclosure is also explored; employees remain unprotected by the law if they do not disclose, but frequently subject to discrimination when they do. Only 1% of autistic employees find that their manager understands their neurodivergence, but when they did, like all neurodivergent employees, usually excelled. The sample of autistic employees is relatively small (n=95) and more engaged with employment than is typical. Recommendations from the WAC Report (2018) with particular relevance for autistic employees are identified. These include neurodiversity awareness training, the need for a major cultural shift inside the DWP and JobCentre Plus so that they operate within a social model of disability, the end of counter-productive and punitive sanctions, better monitoring and evaluation of Access to Work and Disability Confident schemes, better ‘reasonable adjustments’, and the end of the misuse of psychometric tests during selection. The paper offers new insights into the experiences of autistic employees, and makes recommendation for further research.

### Introduction

AchieveAbility, a registered Charity focused on supporting neurodivergent adults into education and employment, sent an online questionnaire to hundreds of neurodivergent people through all our communication channels during 2018 as part of our Westminster Commission. The purpose of the questionnaire was to explore neurodivergent experiences of employment, including those who are autistic. We were aided in this endeavour, in particular by Craig Kennady, who is an active member of both the Westminster Autism Commission and AchieveAbility’s. Over 600 people responded to the questionnaire, including 95 respondents who declared they were autistic. Perhaps the most striking feature of the responses was the overlap between all forms of neurodivergence. In this paper, the intention is to drill down into the published report, “Neurodiverse Voices; Opening Doors to Employment” (Cooper, R. et al, 2018), with particular reference to autistic employees.

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3 However, it should be recognised that there are few statistically significant variations in  
4 responses to the questions asked, no matter the nature of the neurodivergence. This could  
5 be partially explained by the overlaps (see section 4). [Where there are statistically significant](#)  
6 [differences relating to the autistic sub-group, they are reported in this paper.](#)  
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11 This paper will therefore consider  
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- 13 1. [Background and literature review](#)
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  - 20 8. Recommendations for further research
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### 37 [1. Background and Literature Review](#)

41 Autism in employment has been a feature of a number of research papers and other  
42 publications, particularly since the turn of the century (i.e. Garcia-Villamizar et al, 2000,  
43 Hagner et al, 2005, Hurlburt et al, 2004, Kregel, 1999, Mawhood et al, 1999, Muller et al,  
44 2003, Roux et al, 2013, Schuler et al, 2003, Unger, 2002, Van Wieren et al, 2008).  
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49 Available publications fall into three main categories:  
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- 53 i. [Peer reviewed academic papers, mainly concerned with the comparative](#)  
54 [outcomes of employment data, and effective support strategies in the](#)  
55 [workplace](#)  
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- ii. Surveys by organisations such as the National Autistic Society (NAS, 2016) and Autistic Not Weird (ANW, 2018), both of which include neurodivergent voices and large samples.
  - iii. Online advice about inclusive employment (including ACAS, 2020, and Progress Union, 2020)

Many of the peer reviewed academic papers are steeped in the medical, or pathological model of autism (Walker, 2020). They seem primarily concerned with the comparative outcomes of employment data, which highlights the difficulties, mainly defined by employers, and explore strategies for support, rather than provide insights into personal experiences of autistic employees. For example, in 2008 a detailed examination of litigation about discrimination against autistic employees in America (Van Wieren et al, 2008) was published, where the main conclusion was that it is surprising how few examples of litigation emerge, without asking those discriminated against why it was not leading in most cases to litigation. It is likely that in the increasing move towards the social model, we might begin to see more sociological research, which could better reflect the voices of autistic employees and the nature of social barriers to employment. Current academic surveys also tend to focus on hard data (wages, type of employment, nature of support), rather than the experience of autistic employees themselves (e.g. Roux et al, 2013).

There have been a number of relatively large-scale surveys concerning autism that include one or more questions about employment experiences, but employment is not the main focus. For example, ANW (2018) includes just one question about work:

‘I struggle/have struggled with employment’ (with graded closed answers).

In addition, although the ANW survey successfully gathered a large sample (n=13000+), just 30% had a ‘diagnosis’ of autism, with a further 20% self-identifying as autistic, so 50% of the respondents were not autistic. (These are still relatively large sub-samples and the responses are helpfully separated out into these specific groups). In contrast, the survey developed for AchieveAbility (2018) was solely concerned with neurodivergent perceptions and experiences in the workplace in the UK.

## 2. Methodology

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3 The survey was designed by a team from AchieveAbility with both academic experience of  
4 questionnaire design and practical experience of distributing and analysing questionnaires.  
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9 The AchieveAbility Westminster Commission had interviewed a number of ‘experts’ in  
10 the field, including Amanda Kirby, and Margaret Malpas, and explored anecdotal evidence  
11 of a wide range of barriers to successful employment, which informed the development of  
12 the questionnaire. This was organised into several parts:  
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- 14 i. Background information about the individual (including age, gender,  
15 neurodivergent overlaps, ethnicity, work experience, etc)
  - 16 ii. The experience of applying for jobs
  - 17 iii. More specifically, their experience of the interview process
  - 18 iv. Employers’ apparent understanding of neurodiversity
  - 19 v. Disclosure
  - 20 vi. Discrimination during the application process and in the workplace
  - 21 vii. Their experience of reasonable adjustments and equal opportunities
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33 The main difficulty with the practicalities of administering this questionnaire was considered  
34 to be that the sample would likely be unrepresentative of neurodivergent/autistic people as  
35 a whole. This is due to three factors:  
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- 37 i. The questionnaire was intended to be done online. It therefore requires not  
38 just online access, but significant literacy skills, or skilled support to complete  
39 accurately.
- 40 ii. The questionnaire was sent out through AchieveAbility’s contact channels.  
41 This in itself is predicted to skew the sample towards those more involved in  
42 social action and online support groups
- 43 iii. Since AchieveAbility began life as a Charity concerned primarily with dyslexia,  
44 our sample ended up being dominated by those who identify as dyslexic  
45 (n=303) rather than autistic (n=95). Consequently, the sample is likely to have  
46 more autistics that also identify as dyslexic than would otherwise be the case.  
47 This in turn, is likely to impact the recording of overlapping neurodivergence,  
48 which was much higher than expected. And given the overlapping nature of  
49 dyslexia and dyspraxia, higher numbers of dyspraxic autistics too. We can  
50 compare our results of overlapping neurodivergence with that found by ANW  
51 (See Section 4). The ANW survey asked similar questions about overlapping  
52 neurodivergence with a much larger sample (n=5000), although most of the  
53 respondents were not from the UK (57.8%) which raises questions about  
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3 prevalence of assessments and different interpretations of language and  
4 labels, as recognised by the author.  
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9 The main tension in designing the questionnaire was our attempt to keep the number of  
10 questions to a reasonable level to encourage completion, and having enough questions to  
11 gain real insights into individual experiences. Seeking this balance inevitably results in  
12 compromises. In the event, we found it very difficult to limit the questions to avoid  
13 questionnaire fatigue, which in turn generated some methodological difficulties with  
14 analysing the results (see below). The online questionnaire includes:  
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- 17 ● 20 closed questions (establishing background and possible confounding variables such  
18 as age, overlaps in neurodivergence, gender, and ethnicity).
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20 ● 45 closed questions with scaled answers (such as: ‘never, sometimes, usually,  
21 always’ ) focused on key issues related to job applications, interviews, disclosure,  
22 discrimination, reasonable adjustment and relationships with managers and staff  
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- 24 ● 11 open questions inviting further detail elaborating these experiences (substantial use  
25 was made of the open questions by most respondents).  
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- 27 ● Although we had some responses by carers and parents, unless they were also  
28 neurodivergent, they were cleaned from the sample.  
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34 Perhaps because of the length of the questionnaire, we found that around a third of  
35 respondents did not answer all the questions, but appeared to cherry pick those that were  
36 most relevant, or important, to them. This made quantitative factor analysis extremely  
37 difficult, because we would have lost the richness of the data by eliminating from the sample  
38 the 30% that did not fully complete. Consequently, all analysis calculations were done on  
39 paper (Cooper, R Ed., 2018, p11) to capture the full range of responses.  
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45 We gained written permission to quote respondents, keeping their contributions  
46 anonymous.  
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50 The National Autism Society survey (2016) had already established that only 16% of autistic  
51 adults in the UK were in full time employment, with a further 32% in part time employment.  
52 This further demonstrates that our relatively small sample of 95 autistic adults, are not  
53 representative of autistic adults in general, since more than 50% of our sample are in full  
54 time employment, 14% are in part time employment, while the rest are not currently  
55 employed, but have experienced the world of work. This does mean that our sample is well  
56 placed, despite the size limitations, for a deeper understanding of the experience of autistic  
57 employees and are part of the group of neurodivergent people we were targeting. So  
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unlike other survey based publications, the entire focus of this paper is on the personal experience of autistic employees in the workplace mainly expressed through their open responses.

Our survey achieved a good spread across working ages:

Age band	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	55-65
Autistic sample	24	14	28	22	7

We also achieved a relatively good geographical spread:

Area	East	E Mid	London	NE	Scotland	SE	SW	Wales	W Mid	Yorks
Autistic sample	7	8	18	9	4	15	11	3	9	11

### 3. Findings

In broad terms, 60% of our autistic sample cited bullying or other workplace problems that led to being sacked, or resigning (very often more than once) There were almost no positive views about the workplace experience except in the few cases (3%) where the individual had, at some point in their employment history, found a manager who had a good understanding of autism. As we can see, this is rare. 73% of our sample claimed that managers never understood or valued their neurodivergence, a further 24% agreeing that managers only sometimes understood, with just 1% claiming that they felt understood.

“ If you find a member of management that understands autism/ Neuro divergent then it's OK and you can move forward but if they move on to other work or live(sic) then the New management tends to not understand and then makes life very difficult .”

Consequently the quotes used in this paper are randomly chosen based on clarity of expression, are representative of the sample, and could easily be replaced with similar quotes by others in our sample. In many ways, this unexpected consistency of response was the most powerful finding of our survey. Those of us who are neurodivergent within

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3 AchieveAbility had assumed that our own challenging personal experiences from the world  
4 of employment were unusual events, but this has proved not to be the case. It appears that  
5 only a minority of us are without such experiences.  
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10 Our sample of autistic respondents included 51.5% women, 44.2% men, and 4.2% non-  
11 binary. However, there were no statistically significant variations in responses linked to  
12 gender in this subsample (nor across the wider sample). What was noticeable was that  
13 women are more likely to be in employment. 55% of the autistic women in our sample were  
14 in FT employment, compared to 47% of men. This becomes more pronounced when we  
15 include part time employment, where 78% of the women in our sample have full or part  
16 time employment compared to 50% of the men ( $p < 0.01$ ).  
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22 There were two more statistically significant findings relating to confounding variables:  
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- 24 i. The more labels of neurodivergence the person identifies with, the more negative are  
25 the experiences in the workplace ( $p < 0.0001$ )  
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- 27 ii. The negative experiences of the workplace increase significantly (around 50%) when  
28 the individuals come from a minority ethnic background ( $p < 0.002$ ), indicating that the  
29 world of work remains institutionally racist.  
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34 All these findings and more than 40 recommendations grouped into 8 areas can be found in  
35 the online (and printed) Westminster AchieveAbility Commission Report, Cooper, R (Ed) et  
36 al, 'Neurodiverse Voices: Opening Doors to Employment', 2018.  
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#### 43 **4. Overlapping Neurodivergence**

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48 Of our autistic sample, over 60% identified one or more additional neurodivergence. This is  
49 not reported separately by the ANW report on their survey, but does not look very different,  
50 despite there being significant differences in specific percentages. As we can see, both the  
51 dyslexia and dyspraxia numbers are lower, as expected. However, both AD(H)D and OCD are  
52 significantly higher, which may simply reflect the higher numbers assessed for both of these  
53 in the USA (constituting 36% of this sample)  
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Neurodivergent labels	The AchieveAbility Survey	ANW Survey
Dyslexic	29%	12.5%
Dyspraxic	29%	13.6%
AD(H)D	20%	35%
Dysgraphic	10%	Not reported
Dyscalculic	8%	7%
OCD	6%	18%
PDA	Not reported	10.3%

Consequently, experience of the workplace can be expected to be coloured by a range of neurodivergence. Acquiring a formal assessment is often expensive and will tend to be shaped by the specific expertise of the assessor (each label often being controlled by a specific professional field of expertise), assessment is usually focused on one form of neurodivergence rather than all of them. Therefore we would suggest that these overlaps are an underestimate for the general autistic population.

“It is likely that many of these able people have not been formally assessed as dyslexic, or on the autistic spectrum.” Prospect Union

## 5. Common Experiences in the Workplace

When analysing the results of our questionnaire, it was surprising how common the difficulties experienced are. It would appear that the workplace is an extremely hostile environment for all neurodivergent employees. Despite this sample being more successfully engaged with the workplace than is usual among autistic people, 60% of this sample have been sacked or ‘forced to leave’ employment due to issues related to their neurodivergence.

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3 “I have been fired due to motor difficulties, difficulties using a printer, emotional  
4 difficulties.”  
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9 “I was sacked several times for not getting on with other people, I was once sacked for  
10 not going out for a drink with a team, and not having the same sense of humour as  
11 them.”  
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16 “The workplace has changed drastically in the last 10 years, employment rights are  
17 unenforcible - you just lose your job if you raise a problem - not directly but you are  
18 put under more and more pressure till you leave.”  
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23 Bullying is frequently cited as a reason for leaving employment:  
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27 “...bullying, not given enough time to figure out new role.”  
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31 “People patronising me and excluding me.”  
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35 “I felt I was being bullied.”  
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40 “Being bullied for not sharing the same views as others, being bullied for wanting to  
41 change something to make it a bit easier for me, being bullied for doing something  
42 differently to others.”  
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47 “I've been bullied by co-workers and employers, I have been ostracised and my life  
48 made hell because I wasn't able to fit in.”  
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53 “Colleagues being too scary to approach.”  
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57 “Colleagues get very upset if I do something differently to them, it is seen as  
58 swimming against the tide, even though it still gets the job done and is  
59 effective, this has led to bullying and gossip.”  
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5 In many cases the prevailing work culture is cited as creating real difficulties of 'fitting in'  
6 despite significant work related talents:  
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11 "Inflexible office culture, forced me out."  
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15 "...ended by employers - misunderstanding my behaviour as lack of interest, laziness,  
16 not socialising outside of work."  
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21 "...exhaustion from lack of structure, anxiety, interacting with people."  
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25 "Commentary and ridicule about "unusual behaviour", unwillingness to assist with  
26 tasks I need assistance with, makes me feel incompetent at a job I am good at."  
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31 "Had to work in a cold, noisy office with fluorescent lights, and when I disclosed my  
32 condition and tried to make adjustments, such as dimming the light above my desk  
33 only, the director complained and made sure all the other lights were brighter.  
34 Explaining my limitations and strengths was ignored because I 'don't come across  
35 as disabled' ."  
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41 "Systems are built to suit one way of working - no real changes are made for those  
42 who don't suit the system."  
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46 " They don't want people who can't work the way they do. You have to be a particular  
47 sort of person and do things in a standard way, or it is seen as "wrong" rather than  
48 different."  
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53 There is often a focus by work colleagues and managers on what the autistic employee finds  
54 difficult, rather than their strengths and the value of their contribution in the workplace:  
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58 "It's funny how the ability to do the workloads of 2 people, produce material 3 times  
59 faster than my peers and greater ability to bring technological skills (in exchange for  
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3 admitted weakness on interpersonal communication) doesn't matter... and I just get  
4 blamed and marked down (or threatened with being fired) for the interpersonal  
5 stuff, even when I've had to bail out my entire department at least 15 times from  
6 serious shortages, content or legal errors.”  
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11 “Very few managers have ever shown any appreciation of the gifts I bring as a result of  
12 my oddness.”  
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17 “... people often see the weaknesses but not the strengths, they don't understand that  
18 a person can be strong in one area and weak in another, they expect everyone to be  
19 an all rounder.”  
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24 “Some colleagues only see the negative and not the positive, such as how we can think  
25 round problems and introduce new and efficient ways of working.”  
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29 Failure of the employer to make reasonable adjustments is often cited:  
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34 “Many employers struggle to understand autism and the need for reasonable  
35 adjustments.”  
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39 “Employer's failure to make reasonable adjustments.”  
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44 “Failure to make reasonable adjustments led to long term illness.”  
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48 “My line manager did not know what 'neurodiversity' was, even though he is a  
49 professor in public health! I have not been offered reasonable adjustments or  
50 occupational health support after my diagnosis.”  
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55 “Struggle a lot at work and hard to get right accommodations despite workplace  
56 assessments and recommendations.”  
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3 “My past employment had a very negative atmosphere and didn't understand how to  
4 treat, or make adjustments for, an autistic person. Certain members of staff were  
5 very hostile towards me.”  
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10 “On applying for another role, I was not given the job although I was the best  
11 candidate, because I was not willing to try again at a task I had already failed badly  
12 before. I felt that this would be setting me up to fail. I requested changing 5% of the  
13 role so that this aspect was swapped with another member of staff. The feedback  
14 said I was not given the role because I was not willing to try, not because that 5%  
15 change could not be accommodated within the team.”  
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21 “My employer refused to make a reasonable adjustment after being diagnosed with  
22 my autism and being dyslexic.”  
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27 “I have asked for reasonable adjustments but they are ignored or scorned by some.”  
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31 “Failure of Employer to understand that I have to work in a certain way has led to  
32 attempted disciplinary procedures by Manager who had no understanding of  
33 conditions. Procedures were halted by a senior manager when they realised they had  
34 gone against DDA.”  
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40 In short, it appears that employers are frequently breaking the law and in many cases  
41 choose to hound autistic (and other neurodivergent) employees out of the workplace, rather  
42 than make reasonable adjustments. The hostile environment starts during selection. We  
43 found that:  
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- 45 ● 21% of our neurodivergent responders avoid interviews, but this rises to 37% of our  
46 autistic sample ( $p < 0.00001$ )
- 47  
48 ● While 19% of our neurodivergent responders always feel disabled from applying for  
49 work, this rises to 33% for our autistic sample ( $p < 0.0002$ )
- 50  
51 ● Psychometric tests are generally experienced as discriminatory by neurodivergent  
52 applicants, and our autistic sample was no exception; 79% felt disadvantaged by them  
53 (see also, BPS, 2017, p75).
- 54  
55 ● 58% of our autistic sample said that they are always, or usually, disadvantaged by the  
56 need for presentations during interviews  
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- Only 7% said that there were always, or usually, reasonable adjustments provided during the selection process
- Less than 10% say they are able to demonstrate their skills during the selection process

“I have been turned down for jobs because of my differences. One prospective employer told me that I would be 'too difficult to manage.’”

“... interviews are the BIGGEST thing I struggle with as an autistic person. I would love to be able just to demonstrate my skills. I teach (at HE level) and have been commended for the quality of my teaching delivery. I have huge amounts of written evidence for the development work I've done. Lots of evidence of skills and expertise that I can't convey in an interview.”

The government has put a number of support mechanisms in place to counteract such experiences including Access to Work and the Disability Confident Scheme, but our research reveals that these are wholly inadequate and compounded by JobCentre Plus taking no account of neurodivergence:

“Government schemes such as Access to Work and Disability Confident are under-resourced, inadequately organised, inconsistent, poorly advertised and under-used by the neurodivergent community.” WAC Report (2019), p22.

“Only 2-3000 people have been helped by Access to Work, why so low? When we have over 30,000 dyslexic graduates leaving HE every year. What happens to them?” Siabi, N., expert session, WAC Report (2019), p22.

“Disability Confident lacks incentives for employers to engage with it. The lawyers' disability network have found this is not a robust system and not properly monitored.” Jameson, M, expert session, WAC Report (2019), p22.

“Access to Work needs to be improved due to issues of tracking- the consistency of process is difficult- finding the advisers and asking about criteria, as this keeps changing. Then having to fill in forms again- trying to get facts about support received in the first

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3 6 weeks. All this has an impact on success.” Boyd, M., employers session, WAC Report  
4 (2019), p22.  
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9 “JobCentre Plus staff will sanction people on benefits due to JCP staff’ s lack of  
10 awareness. There is no diagnosis so people are sanctioned.” Janet, T., neurodivergent  
11 session, WAC Report, (2018),p 23.  
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## 18 **6. Catch 22 of Disclosure**

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22 Employees are only fully protected by the law if they disclose their neurodivergence to  
23 employers. However, disclosing neurodivergence is often more likely to lead to  
24 discrimination than the hoped for reasonable adjustment:  
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29 “I had a very negative experience disclosing my autism to my employer of ten years.  
30 My ability to do my job and work as part of a team was suddenly questioned despite the  
31 fact that I had performed very well in the role over the years, and it was intimated that I  
32 was seeking special treatment in asking for reasonable adjustments. I was told that my  
33 colleagues might not feel comfortable working with someone who was autistic.”  
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38 “I disclosed... to a manager, who then had a disciplinary hearing with me where I  
39 received a written warning for not disclosing this information before.”  
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44 “I am severely dyslexic with high functioning autism and was repeatedly refused  
45 interviews for disclosing my neurodivergence, despite the guaranteed interview scheme.  
46 On one occasion I finally received an interview after my MP contacted the Department  
47 of Health to remind them of the guaranteed interviews policy. This added a very  
48 stressful impact and my self-esteem became low. I am now working as required for  
49 "Inclusions North CIC" as an Expert by Experience panel member using my skills to  
50 identify concerns about peoples’ care and treatment (C(E)TR) in hospital or in the  
51 community. To date I get a small amount of support, but the support is right for me. I  
52 now worry about a change in policy from NHS England that will remove this support,  
53 because this is funded by the NHS as I am not eligible for Access to Work. This would  
54 mean that I will have to face leaving this employment that I love doing”  
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3 In fact, 40% of our autistic sample do not disclose their neurodivergence at all during the  
4 selection process due to a concern that it will lead to discrimination. In work, 67% worry  
5 that disclosure will lead to disciplinary procedures. And in fact, only 32% always, or usually,  
6 disclose. Of those that have disclosed, 42% have regretted it.  
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11 “Although I had done my job competently for years, which was well established and  
12 recorded in supervision records, shortly after disclosing that I was autistic I was  
13 essentially constructively dismissed. I was bullied into leaving by my manager. It was  
14 constructed as a competence issue; nobody understood that it was discrimination  
15 because of course a manager is allowed to question whether an autistic employee is as  
16 competent as a non-autistic employee. Nobody questioned that I was being  
17 discriminated against.”  
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23 57% of autistic applicants have experienced discrimination during the selection process, and  
24 68% have experienced discrimination in the workplace.  
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## 31 **7. Key Recommendations**

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35 Our report identifies 10 key barriers to employment, details over 100 solutions suggested by  
36 neurodivergent people and neurodiversity experts, and identifies 8 key recommendations.  
37 This paper focuses on those recommendations with particular relevance to autistic people in  
38 the workplace, but would urge readers to read the full report. A key piece of evidence that  
39 emerged during the research was the central importance of understanding and valuing  
40 diversity.  
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46 “ My manager has been very understanding and enthusiastic to help. With the added  
47 support I've thrived and my manager definitely knows my strengths and weaknesses  
48 and provides support accordingly. I couldn't ask for a better employer (Ofsted) or team  
49 to work with.”  
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54 “ In my employment my principle was sympathetic to my needs and provided me with  
55 rest breaks and a timetable that supported my position as assistant principal with some  
56 teaching. When the sponsor of the academy decided to remove this principal they put  
57 in place a principal who had no empathy for staff diversity or health, and taking  
58 voluntary redundancy was at the stage of me attending neurology and my local hospital  
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3 for investigations. A year later I took early retirement from teaching because I was  
4 beginning to struggle with the problems.”  
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9 The experience of neurodivergent employees is that finding an understanding,  
10 knowledgeable and empathetic manager is extremely rare, and only 3% of neurodivergent  
11 staff have usually experienced this, and just 1% of this autistic employee sample. The  
12 following quote is provided at length because it articulates in detail the important impact of  
13 being valued and appreciated so clearly:  
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18 “I have been lucky in my career. Every time I have moved forward it is because one  
19 person has seen how good I am and how that light can be hidden by asking the wrong  
20 question rather than by me not knowing the answer. It takes a lot for a person to  
21 acknowledge this in their workforce and I am very grateful for those who have been  
22 strong enough to look outside of themselves to embrace the experiences of others. For  
23 example I once thought that I would have to give up on the idea of using assessment to  
24 improve my practice because the numbers did not make sense to me. I was lucky to  
25 come across a deputy head who asked me to interpret the data and then said - ah I  
26 think I can do something. He then went away and asked me back to his office to look  
27 at the data a second time. In the interim he had used colours on the data to highlight  
28 the numbers. He then asked me to interpret the data and I did so confidently and  
29 successfully. I was lucky to come across this person and I know that any member of  
30 staff who works with him will be well supported. It is not the same with all staff and if I  
31 had been unlucky enough I may not have been given this easy and simple solution to  
32 my problem. The deputy head did this for me because he recognised my strengths and  
33 instead of being disappointed that I could not interpret data he supported me to see  
34 what other excellent practitioners could see. If I had been working with somebody who  
35 did not recognise my strengths they would not have attempted to help me with this  
36 weakness and I would not have moved forward in my career. Due to the actions of this  
37 one person I was able to feel confident about assessment, I am now a fellow of the  
38 Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors and I can confidently interpret data. If  
39 employers and managers do not understand neurodivergence - which I have seen first  
40 hand in many schools - then the education field will always remain bereft of those who  
41 could make a difference. I presume therefore, that this would also be the case in any  
42 establishment with any job.”  
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53 “My condition gives me unusual perspectives. When employers and managers  
54 support these there have been great successes. When they do not the opportunities are  
55 lost and my health suffers.”  
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3 “Adjusted work environment and Access to Work claim have been made due to an  
4 amazing manager willing to do battle on my behalf.”  
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9 This evidence points at the importance of quality neurodiversity awareness training for all  
10 employers, which is the WAC Report’s first recommendation:  
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14 “WAC is calling for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) to  
15 devise and deliver, in collaboration with the Westminster AchieveAbility Commission  
16 (WAC), a set of training programmes that can be delivered to managers, policy makers,  
17 HR professionals, JobCentre Plus and Access to Work staff and neurodivergent people t  
18 themselves.” WAC Report, (2019),p.54  
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24 Sadly, there seems little enthusiasm among managers for such training:  
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28 “From experience I don’t think that they are genuinely interested: HEO and EOs  
29 were offered a half day seminar (on neurodiversity awareness) and none attended.”  
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34 “There is a very poor understanding of invisible disabilities, and even less desire to  
35 learn.”  
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40 Until this changes, it is difficult to see how the workplace can be anything other than a  
41 hostile environment. To raise awareness about good practice in the workplace, the WAC  
42 Report recommendations included:  
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46 “Training programmes should be devised and delivered to ensure greater awareness  
47 of neurodivergence within organisations and government offices.” p53  
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52 “Mentoring and training schemes to build in awareness of neurodivergence.” p54  
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56 “Neurodivergent champions as role models to inspire and celebrate our abilities and  
57 successes.” p54  
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3 “ A good practice guide should be compiled on employment practices for n  
4 eurodivergent people, in consultation with WAC. This should be provided and  
5 disseminated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)···The guide should  
6 focus on the strengths and abilities of neurodivergent people, in addition to their  
7 support needs. In this way, employers and employees would be inspired by positive  
8 messages” pp.55-56  
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14 “A properly funded programme of training on neurodivergence for JobCentre Plus  
15 staff and work coaches.” p57  
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20 We also recommended systemic changes, including:  
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24 “A major culture change is needed inside the DWP and JobCentre Plus so that they  
25 operate within a social model of disability” p57  
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29 “An end to the quota system of work search activity for neurodivergent people leading  
30 to sanctions when not completed.” p57  
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35 “A robust process to be implemented to check that Access to Work recommendations  
36 are put in place and are maintained by the employer.” p58  
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41 “Disability Confident employers to sign up to a continuous programme of  
42 improvement.”  
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47 “Better reasonable adjustments are needed. Very few of the neurodivergent people  
48 interviewed had positive experience of effective reasonable adjustments.” p61  
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52 Recommendations about the selection process include:  
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57 “Written employment information needs to be re-evaluated and redesigned for  
58 accessibility.” p60  
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5 “The end of a tick list of ‘disabilities’ for applicants to disclose, replaced by a menu  
6 of ‘reasonable adjustments’ to select.” p61  
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11 “Redesigning interview procedures so that they find the best person for the job, rather  
12 than the most neurotypical.” p61  
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16 “Psychometric, and other tests that are inappropriate for a neurodivergent population  
17 should not be used in selection processes.” p.62  
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## 24 **8. Recommendations for Further Research**

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28 The AchieveAbility Westminster Commission has successfully shown that the workplace is  
29 extremely hostile to all neurodivergent employees and those with multiple forms of  
30 neurodivergence, particularly from a minority ethnic background, are particularly badly  
31 served by our society and systems. Seeing the issue in terms of neurodiversity, rather than  
32 subgroups of neurodivergence, has thrown the big picture into relief, and we would  
33 recommend this holistic approach, both for research development and for making changes  
34 in the workplace. While many of the individual narratives were expected, we had not  
35 expected such a consistent negative experience of the workplace. We therefore conclude  
36 that neurodivergent voices should not be an optional extra in any research about the  
37 workplace. We would also argue that including sociological approaches is an important  
38 aspect of understanding the underlying structures of social barriers to positive employment.  
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46 The Commission has made a great many urgent recommendations for a cultural shift in the  
47 workplace. In order to achieve this, further research is urgently needed into how and why  
48 workplaces and managers maintain such difficulties and barriers, and how we can change  
49 hearts, minds, and systems.  
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## 56 **9. Conclusions**

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3 While investigating the experiences of neurodivergent employees, the consistency of the  
4 negative experiences was striking. Personal evidence deplored the lack of understanding,  
5 the bullying, the barriers, the lack of opportunities, and the way individuals feel forced to  
6 hide who they are and pass as ‘normal’ , which can be extremely stressful. This means  
7 that the workplace often fails to benefit from the strengths and creativity of neurodivergent  
8 employees, frequently linked to the mistaken belief that neurodivergent people will create  
9 more difficulties than opportunities, or solutions. We have also heard how effective  
10 neurodivergent people can be in the workplace if they have an understanding manager. So  
11 while it is imperative to reduce the barriers to employment preventing access to work, we  
12 believe that the most fundamental building block to a better diverse group of employees  
13 with an effective range of skills is widespread neurodiversity awareness for managers, staff,  
14 the DWP and JobCentre Plus. Once this enables a more supportive atmosphere, everything  
15 else becomes possible. Without it, little is.  
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