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Neurodiversity in Business: Research Report 2026

Neurodiversity Gain, Inclusive Practice and Self-employment

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Author Biographies



Professor Almuth McDowall CPsychol

Almuth is Professor of Organisational Psychology at Birkbeck University of London. Her research is focused on neurodiversity, wellbeing at work, coaching and professional competence. She co-directs the Centre for Neurodiversity Research at Work and has co-authored the bestselling book *Neurodiversity Coaching*. Her mission is to help businesses make their people happy, and her vision is for a world of work where everyone can thrive and do their best work. Almuth has published widely in the academic and practitioner press and is a regular keynote speaker at industry and academic events. She has overseen and delivered funded projects on Neurodiversity at Work for Neurodiversity in Business, Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) and Genius Within.



Aishwarya Srinivasan

Aishwarya has been a doctoral candidate and pre-doctoral researcher in the School of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck, having received a T Ritchie Rodger Research Fund scholarship to complete their doctoral studies. Their PhD thesis is focused on the (early) career experiences and narratives of ADHDers. Aishwarya's previous work includes conducting mental health research in cultural contexts for educational, tech, and social justice organisations. Their coaching practice has focused on working with neurodivergent and LGBTQ+ individuals looking for workplace and career support.

Words of thanks from the NIB Chair, Dan Harris



For the third year, we are proud to partner with **Birkbeck, University of London**, to build on our 2023 and 2024 reports. This foundational work has deepened our understanding in practice and academic communities.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to sponsor: **Sage (www.sage.com/en-gb)** whose generous support made this undertaking possible.

This year, we have included the perspective of people who have opted out of corporate life.

The data comparison shows us that employers are at risk of losing exceptional talent. Despite gains in line manager and colleagues support, the data documents that year on year neurodivergent employees have consistently worse work experience. It need not be that way.

Our programme of research makes the business case for workplaces that truly embrace neuroinclusion by embedding wellbeing and inclusion into their core strategies, policies and process. This is more important than ever in 2026, given an increasingly volatile geopolitical context. **Let's celebrate our shared humanity and the power of different human minds.**

— Dan Harris

Sage

 **Birkbeck**
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Endorsement



Each year this collaboration between Neurodiversity in Business and Birkbeck gives us another opportunity to listen carefully to the lived reality of work. **This year's report does something particularly valuable: it turns its attention towards those who have quietly stepped beyond the boundaries of traditional employment.** Neurodivergent entrepreneurs, freelancers and sole traders have too often been absent from research, despite offering some of the clearest insights into what happens when people are free to shape work around the way they think, create and contribute. Their stories are not simply about independence; they reveal both the liberation of autonomy and the hidden costs of carrying every responsibility alone. They remind us that when talented people leave organisations to find environments where they can thrive, employers should not simply admire their success — they should ask what can be learned from it.

The findings throughout this report point to a future that is both more productive and more human. The organisations that will flourish in an era of artificial intelligence, demographic change and economic uncertainty will not be those asking neurodivergent people to work harder to fit existing systems. They will be those willing to redesign work itself. Psychological safety, meaningful flexibility, thoughtful job design and empowered managers are not accommodations for a few; they are the foundations of sustainable performance for everyone. This year, I particularly love the concept of neurodiversity gain. It is so compelling. It shifts the conversation beyond compliance and kindness towards innovation, resilience and shared prosperity. **My hope is that every leader reading this report sees not a challenge to manage, but an opportunity to build workplaces where different minds do not merely belong — they shape the future of work itself.**

— Dr Nancy Doyle, CEO, Genius Within

Acknowledgements

We give thanks to **Sage** for hosting our iterative co-production round tables and **Sara Goffe** for being host on each day.

The Birkbeck research team would like to thank **all volunteer community and NIB members** who gave their time to shape this research for their input into co-creation.

We thank **Rob Edwards from the Neurodiversity & Entrepreneurship (NEA) association** for assisting with co-production and distributing our call for participation.

We thank members of our advisory board for the **Centre for Neurodiversity Research at Work**, namely **Marcia-Brissett-Bailey, Beverley Burke and Nancy Doyle** for their thorough peer review.

Finally, we thank all our participants.
Your voices will be heard.

Executive Summary

Neurodivergent talent is central to the UK's capacity to tackle its growing economic inactivity crisis. The evidence in this year's co-produced NIB and Birkbeck report shows a workforce rich in capability but held back by inconsistent work design, uneven support, and organisational cultures that still rely too heavily on individual coping rather than systemic inclusion.

All adults are better off in work than out of work. But work has to be good, meaningful and sustainable to enable everyone to thrive.



The data is clear: neurodivergent people bring sharp, critical and disruptive thinking that organisations value. Yet their day-to-day experience remains markedly poorer than that of the wider workforce. Psychological safety was identified in the peer-reviewed analysis of the 2023 NIB report as the single strongest driver of wellbeing, career satisfaction and retention. This has not improved in 2026. For the first time, we captured burnout and engagement. The likelihood of burnout is high, particularly for those with multiple neurotypes, driven by cognitive load, inconsistent support, and inflexible structures.

Work design continues to be a decisive factor. Neurodivergent employees overwhelmingly rely on flexible structures, supportive line managers, and informal relational adjustments to perform at their best.

Hybrid work remains essential:
75%
of our respondents work this way

On the flip side, nearly **40% had received a return to office mandate**; and half of these people said this makes them reconsider their employment with their current organisation. Job crafting (being able to shape tasks, relationships and how people think about work) is a powerful enabler of sustainable performance. Blanket structure mandates diminish opportunity. Alongside, psychological safety remains the baseline for neurodivergent employees being able to realise their contribution and talent. It's the organisational climate that matters.

This year's research focus on entrepreneurs (including contractors and the self-employed) reveals a parallel narrative. Nearly half discovered their neurodivergence before opting out of corporate life, and 61% would not return.

Many thrive through autonomy, purpose-driven work and the ability to self-design neuroaffirming environments. Yet the data also shows the **hidden cost of seeking better work-neurotype fit: unpredictable workloads, administrative and financial pressures, and the strain of managing capacity without organisational infrastructure.**

Push factors were as strong as pull factors, with many leaving corporate roles not out of preference but necessity. There is much learning that can be cross pollinated back into organisational practice to understand what self-led neuroinclusive work looks like.

Employers, meanwhile, express strong commitment to neuroinclusion and we mapped four principles of neuroinclusion, which align with fundamental evidence-bases of:

a. good person-environment fit

b. job crafting and strengths-focused neuroinclusion

c. fostering identity and belonging

d. psychological safety

Employers recognise barriers to adjustments regarding lack of disclosure, lack of centralised and streamlined processes and approval pathways, limited budgets and myths that adjustments may not make a difference. The research reinforces that line managers remain the pivotal lever: when they are equipped, supported and empowered, outcomes improve dramatically.

Taken together, our findings present a strategic opportunity. **Neurodivergent employees are not a marginal group. They are a test case for whether organisations can design work that is genuinely sustainable, human-centred and future-ready by amplifying cognitive diversity.** In a labour market reshaped by artificial intelligence (AI), demographic change and rising ill health, businesses that embed neuroinclusion into their core strategy will be better positioned to unlock productivity, reduce turnover, and build resilient workforces.

We introduce the concept of **neurodiversity gain**: the idea that when organisations redesign systems, processes and cultures to work for neurodivergent people, all stakeholders benefit. This is not about benevolence or corporate kindness. It is about competitive advantage, workforce sustainability and organisational performance. **We summarise the key insights for fostering neurodiversity gain through evidence-based practice:**

a. Insight into neurodivergent strengths and challenges at work: We profile authentic and values-led cognitive diversity. Neurodivergent challenges include self-care, work-life balance and navigating the social aspects. Entrepreneurs consistently experience the challenges to a lesser extent and lean into the strengths more than employees.

b. The in-work experience: Neurodivergent employees continue to have a less positive experience regarding wellbeing, work-life balance and psychological safety compared to other groups. However, career satisfaction and support from line manager and colleagues have improved. Turnover intention has decreased. Neurodivergent identity acceptance, 'finding your tribe' and existence of support networks are crucial for thriving at work.

c. Key drivers: Career satisfaction is driven by high psychological safety, opportunity for job crafting and good wellbeing, and diminished by return to office mandates. In turn, high career satisfaction is the single most important driver for low turnover. Engagement is driven by job crafting and line manager support whilst diminished by return to office mandates. Burnout is prevented by high psychological safety and organisational knowledge of neurodiversity whereas amplified by return to office mandates.

d. Entrepreneur experience: The push and pull factors for people opting out of corporate life are strong, regarding a wish to work in a less neuronormative environment and working to one's strengths. Employers would do well to actively engage with this group and transfer learning regarding how innovation and creativity thrive outside the corporate world. Lessons learned include that networking, marketing and financial planning are more onerous than anticipated.

e. Employer perspective: Good practice maps onto a blend of (1) neuroaffirmative job design, (2) specialist pathways to success, (3) enabling capability through psychological safety, and (4) building connections and identity. Lack of disclosure, cost of adjustments and lack of centralised resource are the biggest barriers to implementing adjustments.



The call to action is simple:

Put neuroinclusion at the heart of corporate strategy as a core design principle for the future of good work. This report offers depth and breadth of insight to inform organisational strategy and practice.

01

Section 01

Introduction & Context

Why neuroinclusion matters now. The economic backdrop, the changing nature of work and how this research was co-produced.

Backdrop to the 2026 NIB research

The UK is facing an urgent economic inactivity crisis, fuelled by ill health and barriers for labour force entry and sustained participation for disabled people.

The statistics are stark and document monumental individual, social and societal cost ⁽¹⁾. In short, all adults are much better off in work than out of work. But work has to be good work and sustainable work to enable everyone to thrive ⁽²⁾.

But do employees experience the right conditions for sustainable and good work? A recent report commissioned by the UK Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) ⁽³⁾ outlines that **44% of working adults experience conflict within the workplace**, and experience is even more common for **people whose disability has a major impact on daily life and functioning (68%)**.

Not every neurodivergent condition is disabling but can be. Neurodiversity is receiving increased attention as a focus for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives evidenced by several practitioner reports ⁽⁴⁻⁷⁾, a plethora of conferences dedicated to the topic including Neurodiversity in Business [NIB] yearly flagship event. UK statistics document that labour force participation remains unequal which suggests that protective legislation is insufficient ⁽⁸⁾. Human resource management practices such as flexible working remediate underemployment to some extent but there is a persistent gap about in-work experience ⁽⁹⁾.

A commissioned research report ⁽¹⁰⁾ documents that principles of positive neuroinclusion rests on strategic pillars including:

a. a proactive not reactive perspective

b. moving away from reliance on diagnosis as a gateway to compliance-focused adjustments

c. supporting line managers

d. considering neuroinclusion through the entire lifecycle

Alongside, work is changing fast and fundamentally through the use of AI and generative AI. Many skills such as assembling and analysing information are now done by AI and automated, yet employees also think that productivity improvements are outweighed by the impact on mental health and wellbeing ⁽¹¹⁾. AI is no panacea as employees have spent time (and thus costly resources), cleaning up AI “workslop” ⁽¹²⁾.

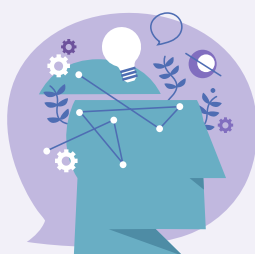
Structural changes to work have been fundamental in the aftermath of the global pandemic when remote, hybrid and home-working have become normalised, described by some as a global ‘experiment’ ⁽¹³⁾. Yet, even before the pandemic and certainly after, some employers reversed the trend asking for a return to office ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Lastly, at a more global scale the World Health Organisation has released its global report which documents that one in six people is affected by a lack of social connection ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Fostering social connection is at the heart of this research. Social connection is embedded in the research methods, through a co-creation approach. It is imperative to how we frame both the research questions and the findings. We want to create understanding and not silos. Readers might contend that many of the issues raised above are not unique to neurodivergent employees.

We argue that the inclusion and fostering of cognitive diversity is a valuable test case. If we can get work right for this diverse group of people, then everyone benefits. Thus, we posit the concept of ‘neurodiversity gain’. We align this term to the concept of ‘disability gain’ from the field of critical disability studies which also posits that society at large benefits from radically rethinking structures and systems by radically rethinking disability as generative resource not restriction ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Previous funded NIB research documented unique neurodivergent skills such as: critical, sharp and disruptive thinking that are valued by employers ^(6,7).



The research also documented low baseline levels of wellbeing and a drop in psychological safety. The current report extends previous findings and builds on the academic peer-reviewed analysis of the 2023 data which indicates psychological safety as the key driver not only of wellbeing, but also a positive career experience and intention to remain with the employer ⁽¹⁷⁾.

2026 Research objectives and questions

It was our overarching objective to investigate how neuroinclusive practice has shifted in 2026, and to widen the perspective beyond people in permanent employment. We replicated several indices we captured in the previous two reports and the academic work arising from this to profile psychological safety, career satisfaction and retention in order to investigate where the dial has moved. We captured wellbeing extensively to include measures of burnout, a recognised occupational phenomenon. New for this year we included data from participants who have opted out of corporate life – entrepreneurs, the self-employed and contractors. This is because anecdotal evidence tells us that many neurodivergent employees choose these paths, yet academic evidence is largely limited to ADHD and entrepreneur traits ⁽¹⁸⁾.

The overarching questions guiding the current research are:

a. What are current neurodivergent strengths and challenges at work?

b. How do neurodivergent employees experience psychological safety, wellbeing and talent inclusion, and does their experience compare to other groups of participants?

c. To what extent have experiences of wellbeing, support, retention and career satisfaction changed or stayed the same compared to previous years?

d. What is the current employer perspective on neuroinclusion?

e. What is important about understanding entrepreneurial experience (including contractors and self-employed people)?

f. What are the drivers for key metrics including turnover and wellbeing as measures of sustainable performance?

The structure of this report

1

A co-produced approach

We outline how the research was designed and executed with stakeholders.

2

Who took part

Three research strands: employees, entrepreneurs and employer representatives, with technical detail in the appendices.

3

Findings & comparisons

Strengths, experiences and drivers — including comparisons to the 2024 data.

4

Implications for practice & policy

The final section summarises findings and what they mean for organisations and, where relevant, policy.

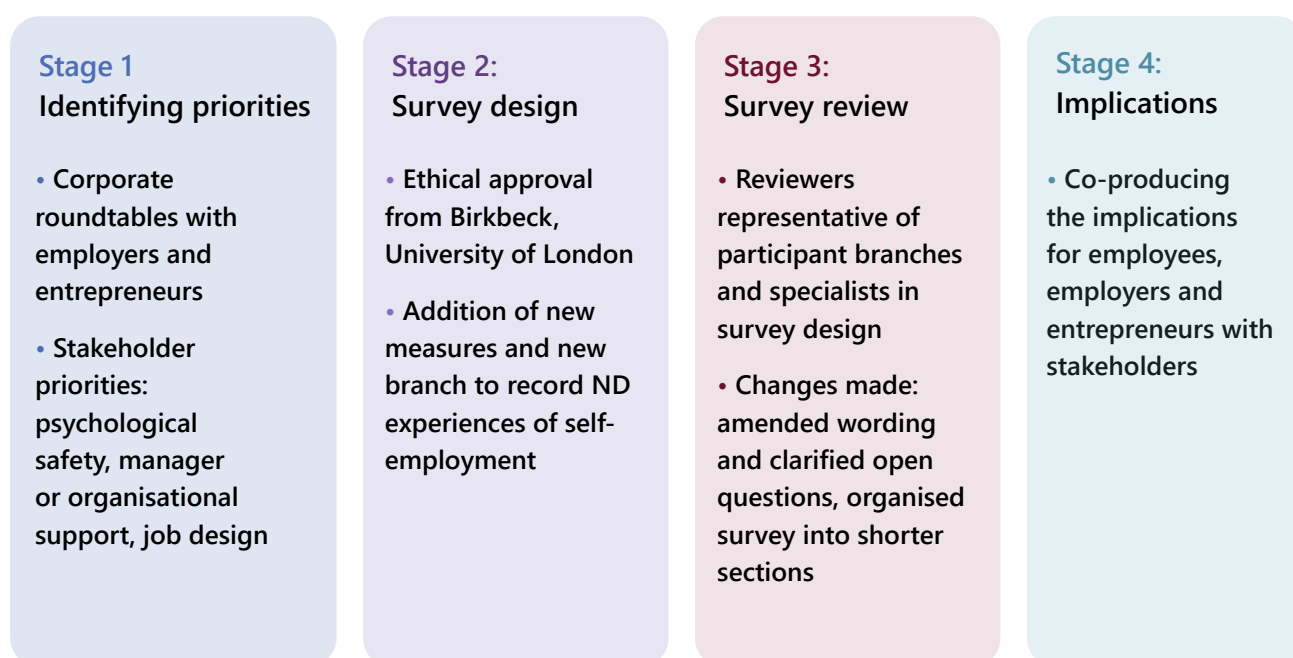
Throughout, we frame findings to create understanding not silos. Many issues raised here are not unique to neurodivergent employees, which is precisely the point of neurodiversity gain.

This report uses neuroaffirming language where possible. Relevant terms are outlined in the Glossary Appendix.

Research co-production

The Birkbeck research team (which included a wider consultation with representatives from the centre’s advisory board, doctoral candidates, and people with varied lived experience), employer representatives recruited through NIB, a group of self-employed / entrepreneurial people and employees all with lived experience of neurodiversity worked together in an iterative co-creational stakeholder consultation and survey design process in four stages, summarised in Figure 1 below; further detail is in the Technical Appendix.

Figure 1: Stages of research co-production



Survey indices and promotion

The research measures (indices) are detailed in the Technical Appendix. Measures included data about people’s age, tenure and mode of working as well as detailed indices which were tailored in three survey branches for employees, entrepreneurs and employers respective.

The survey was promoted via social media platforms including LinkedIn and X through NIB. Data collection was anonymous and individual responses were not shared outside of the research team, who are the named authors of this report. The survey was held open for 10 weeks from November 2025 to February 2026. The median response time to complete the survey was 15 minutes.

02

Section 02

Who took part

605 participants across three strands: Employees, entrepreneurs and employer representatives - and the makeup of the sample.

Findings for 2026

The following sections detail data about the entire sample and then specific information about each group of participants.

For some categories (e.g. sexual orientation, strengths and challenges) multiple responses were possible. We have rounded percentages where relevant for ease of reporting. The Technical Appendix details the indices we used.

Upfront, we caveat that participant numbers were smaller this year especially from employers compared to 2023 and 2024 data.

Who took part

The total sample were 428 Neurodivergent Employees, 122 Entrepreneurs and 55 Employer Representatives of which 21 also identified as neurodivergent* (Figure 2). From these:

Worked in or ran private companies

61%



Worked in community interest companies

16%



Worked in and charities or not-for-profit organisations

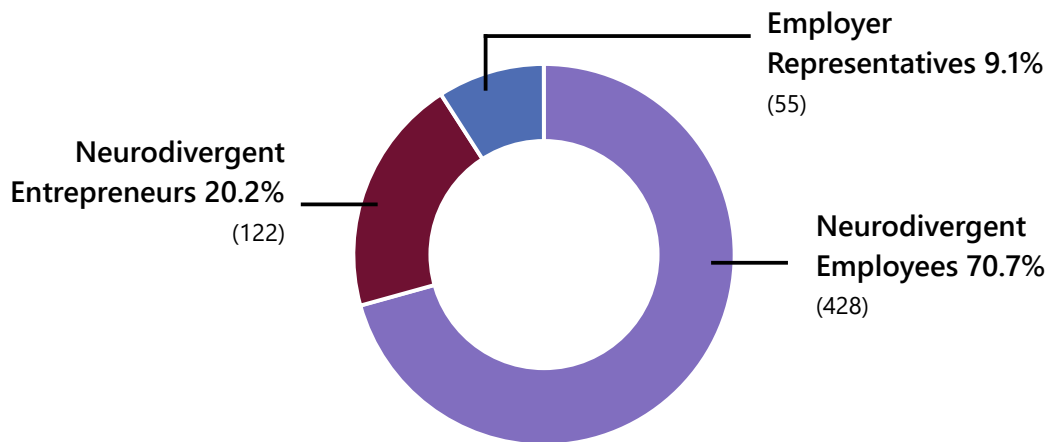
13%



We also included data from **three in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs.**

* We abbreviated neurodivergent to ND for readability in relevant tables in graphs.

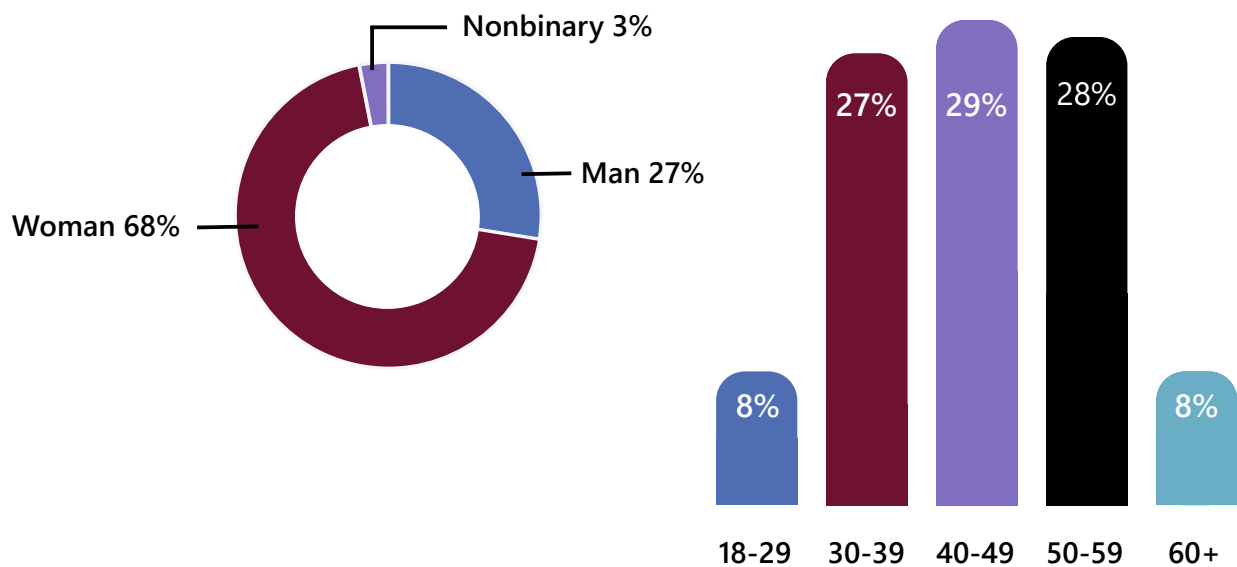
Figure 2: Participant groups N=605



In the total sample¹, 68% identified as women, 27% as men and 3% as non-binary; 94% had the same gender as registered at birth and 4% had changed their gender (compared to 0.5% in UK census data; Figure 3).

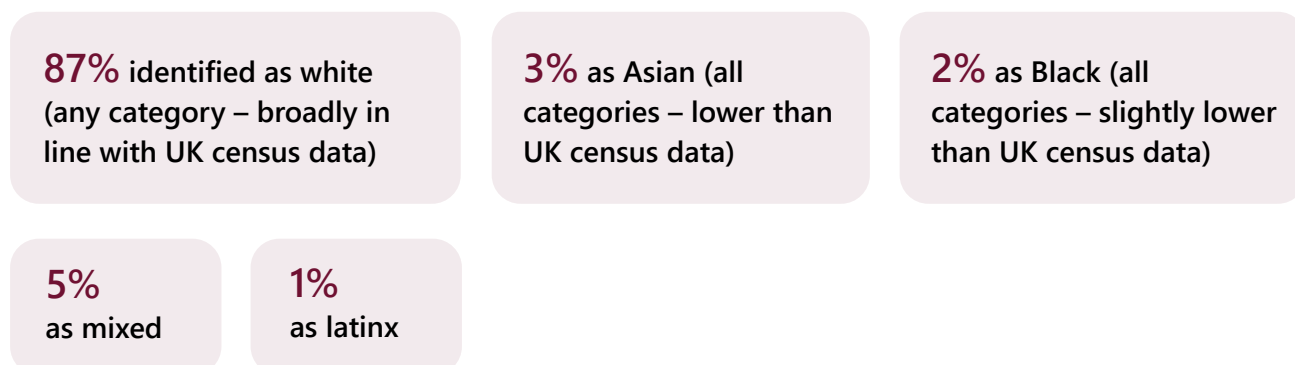
Regarding sexual orientation, 72% described as heterosexual (compared to 93.4% in UK Annual Population data ⁽²⁰⁾, 18% as bi or pansexual, 4% as gay or lesbian, and 4% as asexual. More than half, namely 56% were in the 30-49 years age group, 28% 50-59 years old, 8% aged 18-29 and 8% 60 years and older.

Figure 3: Sample distribution for gender and age (note that for gender orientation there is 2% non-disclosed data)



¹ Note that not all numbers will add up to 100% due to missing responses.

Regarding ethnicity



Regarding caring responsibilities, 31% of the total sample cared for one dependent, and 29% for two or more and 39% had no caring responsibilities. It is of note that among the carers 33% cared for neurodivergent children, 24% for children, 11% for elderly dependents, 4% for neurodivergent elderly dependents, 8% for a partner and 12% for a neurodivergent partner (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Sample distribution for caring responsibilities

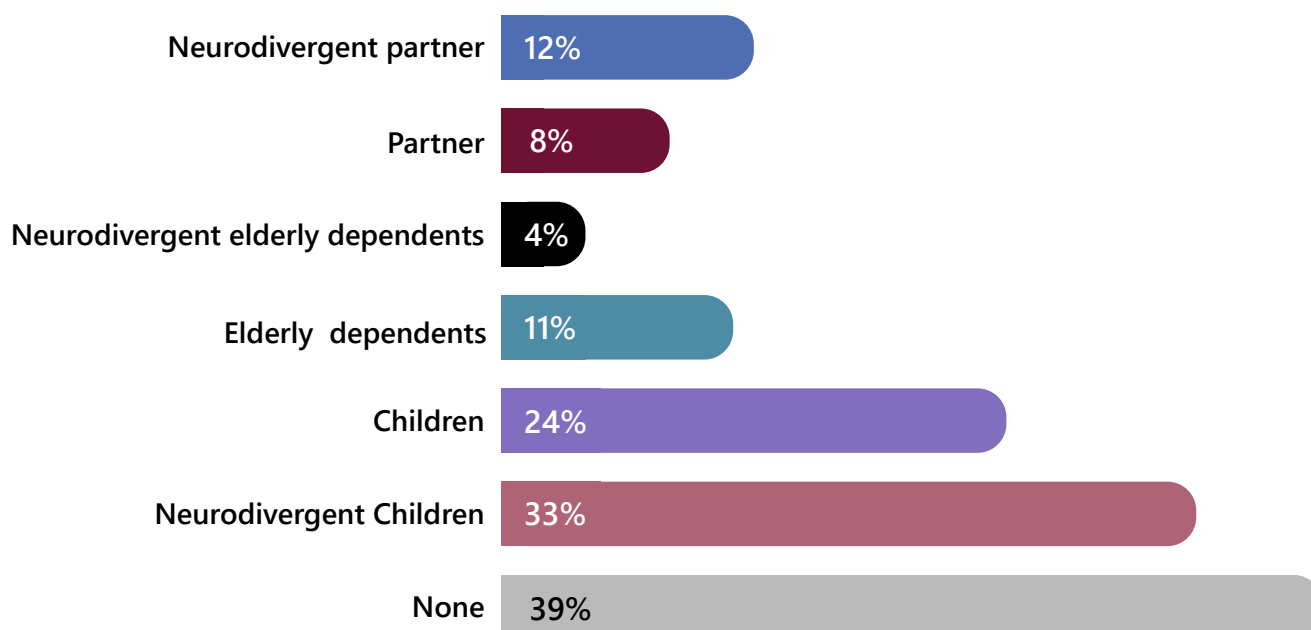


Table 1 demonstrates that co-occurrence of more than one condition was the norm for 72% and 28% reported one condition. About a quarter (23%) reported a physical disability. Regarding disclosure, 80% had shared their condition with the line manager, 79% had shared their condition with a colleague, and 52% with Human Resources (HR).

Table 1: Number of self-reported neurotypes

Number of neurotypes	Employee (n = 427)*		Entrepreneur (n = 55)		Employer Rep (n = 21)		Total (N = 503)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	124	29%	7	13%	10	48%	141	28%
2	148	35%	20	36%	6	29%	174	35%
3	109	25%	11	20%	4	19%	124	25%
4	32	7%	10	18%		0%	42	8%
5	12	3%	5	9%	1	5%	18	4%
6	1	0%	2	4%		0%	3	1%
7	1	0%		0%		0%	1	0%

*One participant preferred not to say

Self-identified neurotypes (multiple were selections possible) are outlined below (Table 2). Autism and ADHD were overrepresented as in the previous NIB research (21).

Table 2 : Self-identified neurotypes (multiple responses possible)

Neurotype	ND Employee (n = 428)		Entrepreneur (n = 55)*		Employer Rep (n = 21)**		Total (N = 504)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
ADHD	302	71%	48	87%	17	81%	367	73%
Autism	266	62%	38	69%	7	33%	311	62%
Dyscalculia	33	8%	8	15%	1	5%	42	8%
Dysgraphia	7	2%	2	4%	1	5%	10	2%
Dyslexia	78	18%	13	24%	2	10%	93	18%
Dyspraxia	40	9%	10	18%	3	14%	53	11%
Mental health condition(s)	192	45%	28	51%	6	29%	226	45%
Neurological condition(s)	7	2%	4	7%	0	0%	11	2%
Tic conditions (incl. Tourette's)	6	1%	0	0%	0	0%	6	1%
Not listed / prefer not to say	18	4%	6	11%	2	10%	26	5%

*Data for 67 Entrepreneurs unavailable (due to malfunction in survey logic outside researcher's control);

**21 employer representatives of the 55 participants identified as neurodivergent.

03

Section 03

The employee experience

How neurodivergent employees are set up to work, and what enables them to do their best work.

Neurodivergent employees work experience

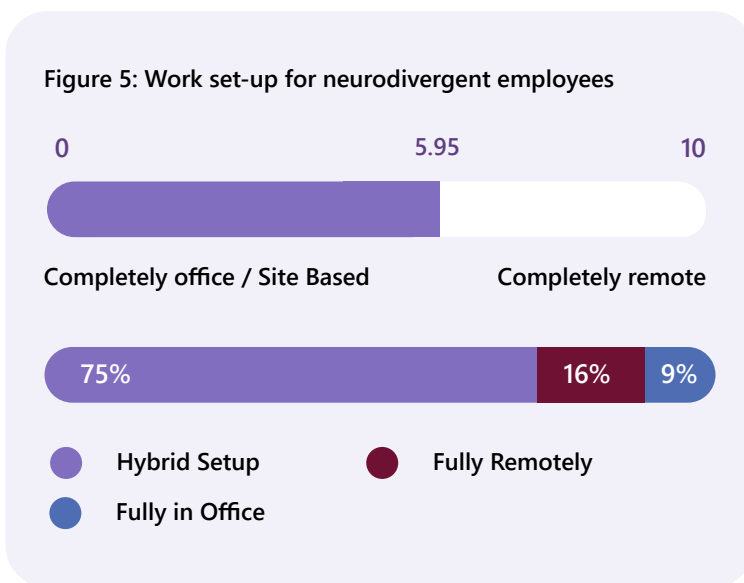
The following section describes employee experience data relating to work structures and set up, as well as neurodivergent strengths and challenges.

We profiled experiences of wellbeing, burnout and other indices (see appendix). While wellbeing declines subtly as the number of neurodivergent conditions increases, there is little if any constant difference for the additional indices and this data is provided in the appendix.

Work structures and set ups

Most participants had permanent (87%) and full-time (84%) employment. The majority worked in a hybrid set-up (75%) with 16% working entirely remotely, 9% entirely in an office, as indicated in Figure 5.

Nearly 40% (38%) had experienced a 'return to the office' mandate, and 62% had not. Over half (53%) said it made them reconsider their current employment.



People were employed mainly in a service industry style role such as in health or social care (12%), education and early years (7%) or business and management (7%). The banking and finance industries (18%) and digital, computing and IT industry (13%) had the highest percentage of participants.

The sample is not representative of the UK working population as important sectors such as retail and construction were underrepresented (similar to the previous NIB reports in 2023 and 2024).

We asked a question about what enables employees do their best work (multiple responses were possible, see Table 3). Taken together, the data makes a call for continued focus on job design, good work relationships and informal accommodations which are facilitated by a supportive climate.

Table 3: What enables employees to do their best work

Work aspect	Percentage*
Work structure support (e.g. flexible or home working)	72%
Line manager support	68%
Colleagues / Peer support	64%
Informal relationship adjustments (e.g. my colleagues understanding how I work best)	61%
Informal technological adjustments (e.g. using AI tools)	45%
Informal networks (e.g. online communities)	42%
Formal relational adjustments (e.g. having coaching)	32%
Professional networks (e.g. ERGs or employee resource groups)	30%
Formal technological adjustments (e.g. assistive software)	30%
Mentorship / Sponsorship	21%
Funding through Access to Work	13%
Something else**	11%

*multiple responses were possible;

**e.g. support from senior leadership, flexibility with processes and systems, awareness and understanding, sensory adjustments

New for 2026, we considered job crafting which is the extent to which employees can ‘mould a job’ and ‘make it their own’ through proactive behaviour. Job crafting is about the task (“doing”, most frequently rated), cognitions (“thinking about work”, least frequently rated) and relational crafting (“working with others”). On average, respondents rated themselves highest on task crafting and lowest on cognitive crafting.

04

Section 04

The entrepreneur experience

First UK data on neurodivergent entrepreneurs, the self-employed and contractors. Why they opt out and what they learn.

Entrepreneurial work experience

New for 2026, we asked in-depth questions about entrepreneurial experience (note that for brevity's sake we understand this term to also encompass the self-employed and contractors).

Entrepreneurship is highly relevant for neurodivergent people because this offers opportunities for job crafting and leaning into one's strengths which may not be a given in corporate environments. But we lack evidence about why people opt out and what they chose to do. **Our survey shows that 49% were aware of their neurodivergence before opting out of corporate life and 61% would not consider returning. The data is rich, illuminating, thought provoking and details varied experience.**

The entrepreneurial set up

Most of the participants identified as entrepreneurs (41%) or self-employed (43%), with 16% indicating they worked as contractors or freelancers. Participants predominantly worked by themselves (59%), while 41% worked collaboratively as part of a team. For those who were self-employed or entrepreneurs, 37% worked as sole traders and 52% had started more than one business.

When it came to workspaces, 29% of the participants stated that they always worked in their own space, while 9% indicated that always worked in shared workspaces; 62% indicated a combination of the two.

Entrepreneurs worked mainly in the service industry contexts, with:



34% in coaching and training



13% in business, consultancy or management



7% in health or social care



7% in media or creative industries

Strategy and plans

Regarding current and future organisational plans regarding their current work content, entrepreneurs indicated the following (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Plans to change the business for entrepreneurs*



*multiple options possible;

**e.g. find markets for specific offerings, retraining in a different industry, obtaining further qualifications, selling products

Typology of neurodivergent entrepreneurs

Participants go into entrepreneurship and self-employment for many reasons. We interpreted the following four-way typology with two axes from person to purpose and operation to innovation (Figure 7):

a. Why people define themselves as an entrepreneur: descriptions range from drivers regarding creation, innovation and problem solving ("I create innovation, address need and take risks to offer a superior service") to operational and management motivators ("If there's a problem, and I see that workflows don't work, I have to do something about it – if this means opting out, then so be it")

b. What motivates people to become entrepreneurs: Drivers range from a wish for autonomy and self-determination in a neurodivergent-affirming way on the one hand (“I find traditional employment challenging to obtain and maintain. Working for myself I can create structures and an environment which allows me to thrive”) to a strong wish to make impact through social change, addressing meaningful issues and making a difference (“My driver for my company is to serve all humankind ...but specifically borne from a desire to enable ND individuals to better ‘navigate’ the world round them”)

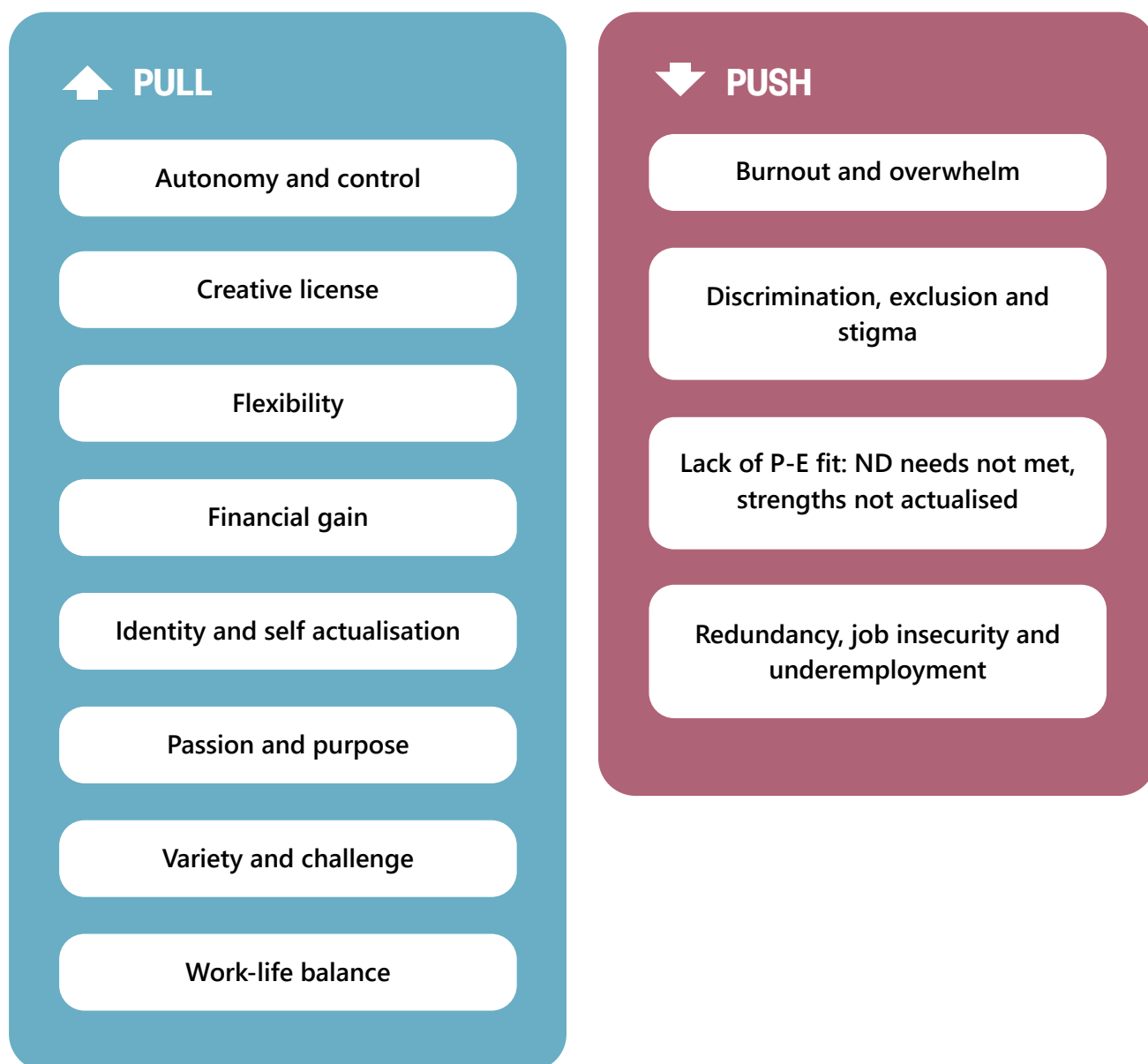
We interpreted the following four-way typology with two axes from person to purpose and operation to innovation (Figure 7).

Figure 7: ND Entrepreneurial Typology



We asked what prompts participants into entrepreneurship as an open-ended question which we coded as themes (Figure 8). Pull factors, for example regarding autonomy and self-actualisation, were as strong as push factors, which were broadly about employment challenges including lack of neuroinclusion.

Figure 8: Themes of push and pull factors for entrepreneurs*






*Indicating what **pushes** entrepreneurs away from traditional employment, and what draws or **pulls** them towards entrepreneurship.

How entrepreneurship meets expectations: challenges and enablers

To our open question of whether entrepreneurship had met their expectations, 47% responded positively ('great match'), 36% indicating it was mixed and 13% that setting up on one's own was harder than expected. We summarise the data below.

Table 4: How has self-employment matched expectations

Category	Key themes	Common experiences
 As expected and great match	Freedom, autonomy, wellbeing, identity alignment, self determination	"Exceeds expectations", never going back to the day job
 Mixed experiences	Flexibility can be hard to navigate, administrative challenges, health barriers	Burnout, loneliness, income variability, instability, administrative burden
 Expectations not met	Financial precarity, overwhelm, health barriers	Burnout, instability, difficult marketplace

Entrepreneur participants indicated experiencing the following challenges with self-employment:



Table 5: Challenges faced by Entrepreneurs

Self-employment challenges	Percentage*
Maintaining a social media profile	66%
Juggling work-life balance	63%
Unpredictability of work	60%
Working to my capacity or energy levels	59%
Marketing and public relations	57%
Finance and accounting, including invoicing and record keeping	57%
Juggling personal and care responsibilities	50%
Taking on too many new projects	49%
Managing my own expectations	48%
Business planning and forecasting	43%
Networking	42%
Communication (e.g. emails, phone calls)	38%
Business and company reporting	37%
Additional challenges not listed here	30%
Rising utility bills and overheads	29%
Dealing with customer feedback including any complaints	23%
Managing client expectations	22%
Physical fitness for work	20%
Operations	16%
Managing teams	16%

Other challenges included building a portfolio of clients, consistency and uncertainty in cashflow, self-motivation and working in isolation and the lack of opportunities for mentorship.

Entrepreneurs indicated the following enablers to work at their best. Overall, the data indicates that professional and peer communities along with work structure and administrative support were the most important enablers.

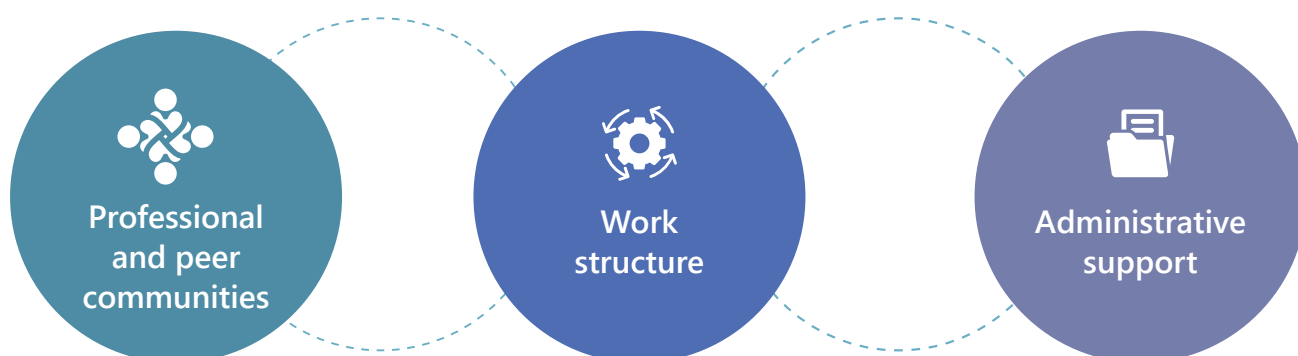


Table 6: What enables you to work at your best for entrepreneurs

Type of enabler	
Peer support	57%
Professional networks	52%
Work structure support (e.g. flexible or home working)	52%
Administrative support (virtual)	43%
Support with finances and accounting	42%
Mentorship / Sponsorship	39%
Formal relational adjustments (e.g. having coaching)	39%
Specialist advice	39%
Business advice	35%
Formal technological adjustments (e.g. assistive software)	30%
Administrative support (in-person)	28%
Human resource (HR) partner	7%

Next, we asked what participants would do differently with hindsight about going into entrepreneurship and 80% stated lessons learned with extensive open comments. We analysed these as follows in four categories about finance, support, marketing and identity and personal management.

Table 7: Lessons learned from entrepreneurship

 <p>Financial Readiness & Business Foundations</p>	<p>Participants underestimated the financial and operational infrastructure such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a financial buffer • Understanding tax, pricing, and cashflow before transition • Securing clients before leaving employment • Avoiding over-investing too early
 <p>Support, Systems & Neurodivergent-Friendly Structures</p>	<p>Participants signposted the need for a good infrastructure because self-employment needs cognitive resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical, directive support • ND-informed business guidance • Help with admin and executive-function-heavy tasks • Better systems, processes, and boundaries
 <p>Marketing, Sales & Client Acquisition Confidence</p>	<p>Participants reported avoiding sales and wished they'd have known how they would struggle with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking • Selling themselves • Building a client pipeline • Delegating or avoiding marketing tasks
 <p>Identity and Personal Management</p>	<p>Participants wanted an identity-aligned transition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting out of non-neuroaffirmative work sooner • Transitioning more gradually • Choosing work aligned with value and neurodivergence • Setting boundaries to avoid burnout • Accepting it's a journey

Entrepreneurship and wellbeing

There was a breadth of experience where approximately a quarter of participants (31) reported that they struggle to take care of themselves, whereas 50 (nearly half) had integrated and holistic approaches in place.

The following activities and tools help entrepreneurs in order of how often they were mentioned:



a. Exercise and movement



b. Sleep and rest



c. Boundaries, breaks and pacing



d. Meditation, mindfulness, and journaling



e. Technological tools, applications and wearables



f. Diet and nutrition



g. Social support and talking therapies



h. Assistive support
(e.g., Access to Work (AtW))

05

Section 05

In their own words

Three in-depth case studies documenting the entrepreneur experience, and what organisations can learn from each.



Case 1. Non-binary contractor and freelancer

I'm an Asian nonbinary creative professional who moved to the UK over a decade ago. I've always lived in the world of self-employment, shifting across creative industries. Although I'm not formally diagnosed, I recognise many neurodivergent traits in how I think, structure and process work. Freelancing wasn't a profound career decision, it was simply how the theatre world functioned where most people are on short-term contracts. But over time I realised freelancing suited me deeply, as does working from home. **I thrive on autonomy, on being able to move between projects, and on structuring my days around focus not presence.**



My strengths are big-picture thinking paired with narrative coherence and rigorous organisation.

People assume freelancers are chaotic, but I'm the opposite: extremely structured, deadline-driven and meticulous. Success, for me, is sustaining this way of working and not replicating corporate pressures for worse pay. Autonomy is not a luxury, it's a deep need and my reason to freelance.



The barriers I've experienced were predictable: finding work, building visibility, managing cash flow.

The unexpected barrier was having to learn to say no. When you're self-employed, scarcity thinking creeps in, and you take on things you shouldn't. I had to learn to trust my instincts. I also wish I'd documented more about what I've done and experienced, the feelings, the learnings, the small wins, because memory fades faster than you expect.

To my younger self, I'd say: be braver, take risks, trust your gut. You're more capable than you think and the sky is the limit.



What organisations can learn from my experience:

Freelancers need clarity, boundaries and respect for the fact that they juggle multiple commitments. Ambiguity creates unnecessary stress, and many freelancers lack mentors or models for practice. Just like everyone else, clear expectations and thoughtful communication go a long way. Oh, and don't forget that my self-employment matched my expectations, I now have autonomy which corporate mandates lack.



Case 2. Woman entrepreneur who runs ND business

I'm a London-based woman, diagnosed as autistic and ADHD in adulthood, running a growing business built around supporting neurodivergent clients. I grew up in a single-parent family, found comfort in the structure of school, and stumbled into self-employment at 18 without any plan. Only after my diagnosis did everything click: why traditional employment felt overwhelming, why I needed control over my environment, and why transitions cost me so much energy. My work now is designed around what my brain needs. I work from home, with a carefully controlled workspace, and I structure my day in focused blocks. If something doesn't fit, I redesign the system rather than push myself harder.



My strengths lie in big-picture thinking, systems design and matching lifestyle strategies to neurodivergent clients.

I know my weaknesses, so I build support around them — a virtual assistant, automation tools, and a team who share my values and communicate openly.



My biggest barriers have been the unknowns: tax, legal structures, and the fear of failing when no one in my family had succeeded in self-employment.

I burnt out badly by pushing myself far beyond what was sustainable before I understood my neurodivergence.

To my younger self, I'd say: you don't need to turn every passion into a job. You will get to do everything you dream of, just not all at once. And yes, you're neurodivergent. Embracing that will change your life.



What organisations can learn from my experience:

Neurodivergent people don't burn out because they're incapable; they burn out because systems ignore their needs. Clear processes, flexible environments and psychologically safe communication are not "nice to have", they are the difference between thriving and collapse.



Case 3. Man who combines entrepreneurship with employment

I'm a man with ADHD and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). I've had a long career in corporate finance, and two neurodivergent children whom I care for. For more than twenty years I climbed the banking ladder, from cashier to senior leader, masking the parts of me that struggled with detail, organisation and focus.



The culture was rigid, male dominated and unforgiving. But as I got older and become a parent I stopped hiding, "I was in a box of my own masking".

I realised my strengths were my energy, curiosity, leadership and in helping people grow.



The barriers in my journey have been real: stress, lack of control, and the pressure of building something from scratch.

What helped was having the right people around me and a mindset framework that keeps me grounded.

To my younger self, I'd say: stop giving yourself such a hard time. Enjoy being different. The things you tried to hide will become the things that help others thrive.



What organisations can learn from my experience:

Neurodivergent professionals don't need fixing. They need environments where strengths are recognised and challenges are supported, not seen as weakness. "We're ambitious, you know, and ready for leadership and realising ideas".

06

Section 06

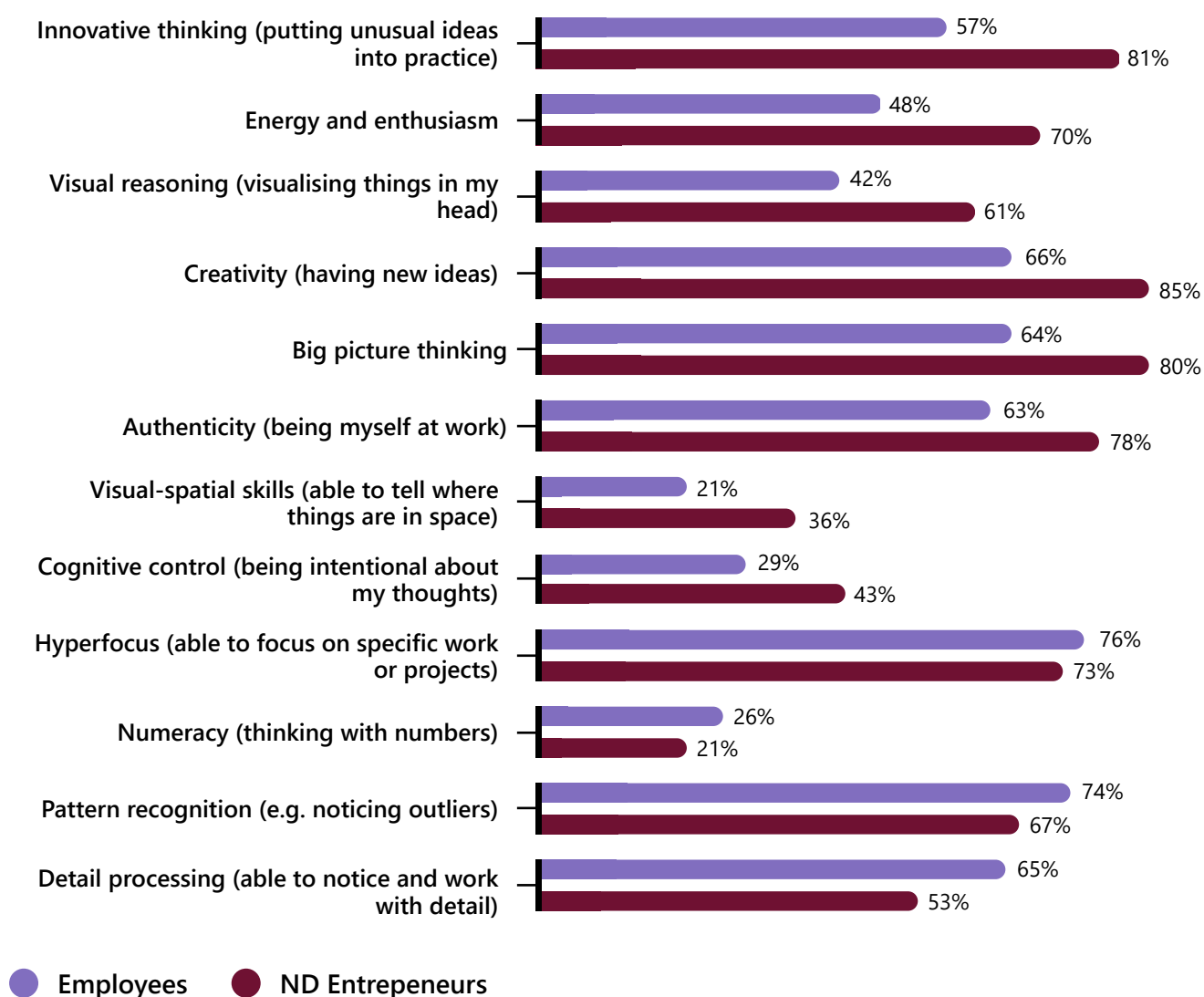
Strengths & Challenges

Self-reported strengths and challenges, compared for neurodivergent employees and entrepreneurs.

Neurodivergent strengths and challenges for employees and entrepreneurs

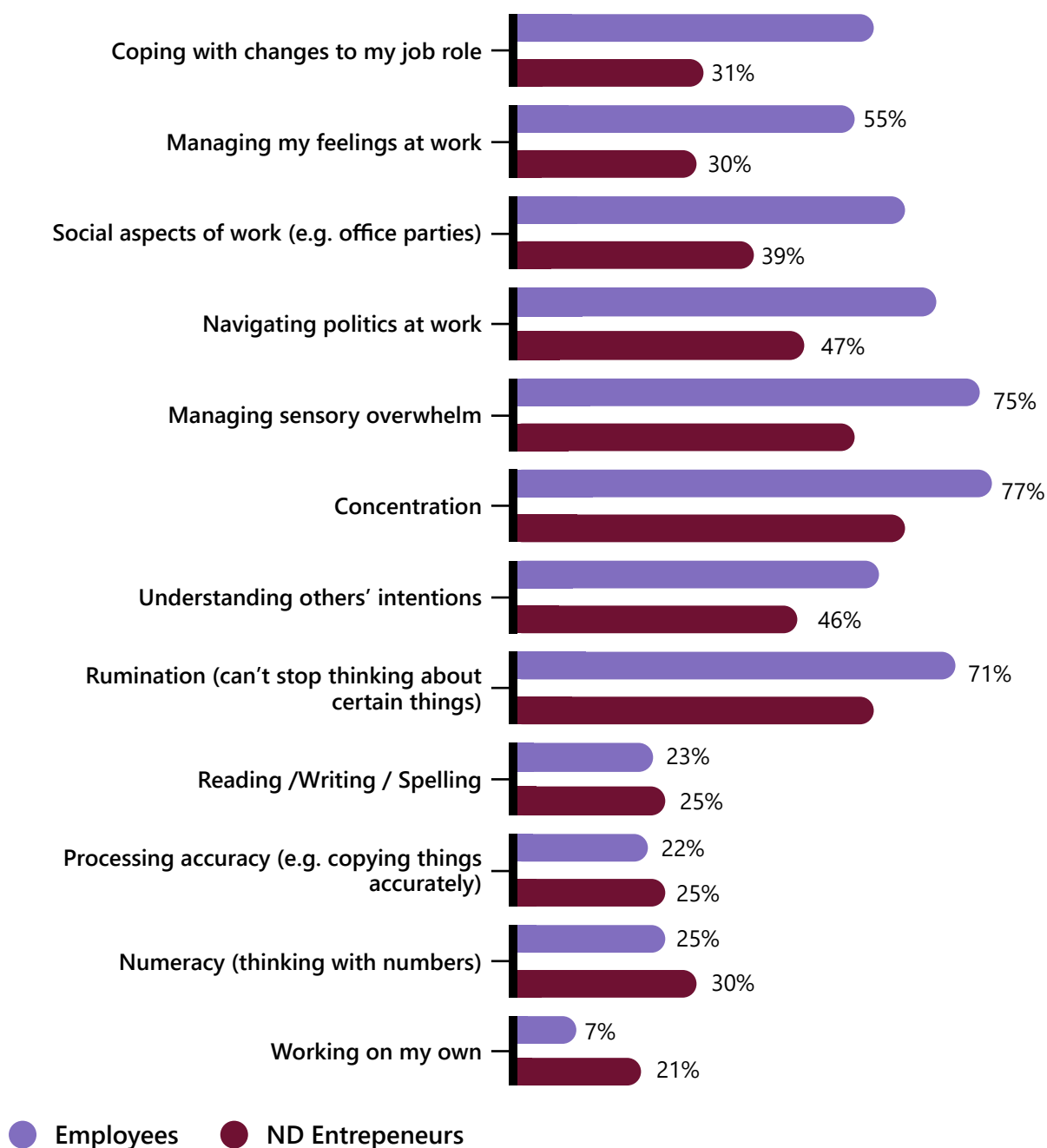
The figures below compare twelve self-reported strengths (Figure 9) and challenges (Figure 10) for neurodivergent employees and entrepreneurs with the biggest differences. Consistently, entrepreneurs report stronger strengths and fewer challenges than employees. These differences are consistent regardless of whether enabling strengths might be context dependent (e.g. innovative thinking or creativity being more salient for entrepreneurs) or are about enduring traits and abilities (such as pattern recognition and cognitive control).

Figure 9: Neurodivergent strengths



The biggest differences pertain to challenges due to the relationship aspects of work, emotional regulation and sensory overwhelm. For challenges which are enduring or could be enabled by assistive technology there is very little difference.

Figure 10: Neurodivergent challenges



07

Section 07

The employer perspective

What employers do to support their neurodivergent talent, where demand outstrips supply, and what good practice looks like.

Employer experience

Support and adjustments

Regarding whom neurodivergent employees could approach for support within the organisation, 64% referenced diversity and inclusion specialists, while 79% mentioned the human resources function. Occupational health and reasonable adjustment support were often outsourced (43% and 11% respectively). Employer representatives also indicated that employee resource groups, mental health first aiders, or line managers were approached for support.

All employer representatives indicated that support or adjustments provided to neurodivergent employees were tailored to individual needs, with 36% indicated they were tailored to a large extent, and 64% indicating adjustments were tailored to some extent. **The following sources informed the tailoring of support.**

Figure 11: Sources of information and processes that inform any tailoring*



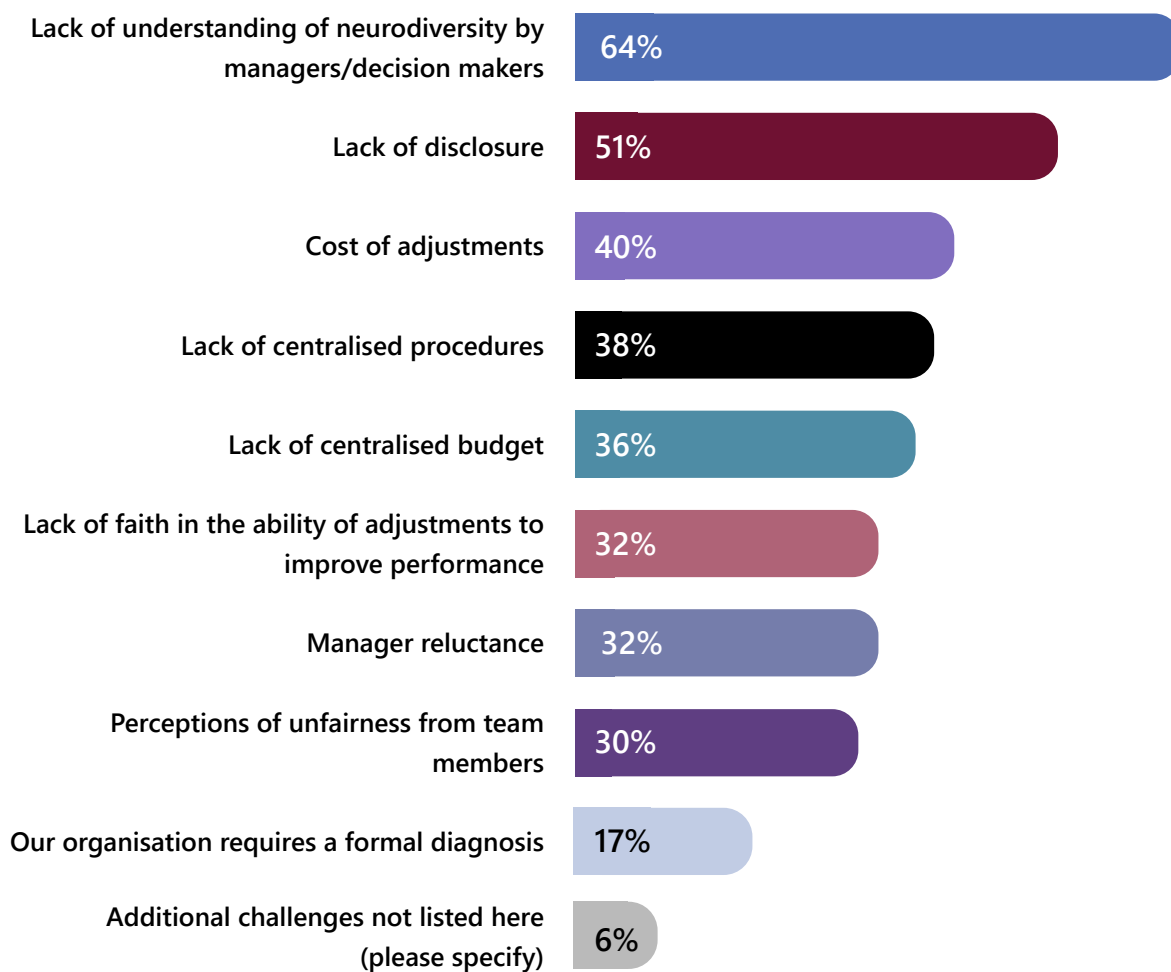
*multiple responses possible;

**Other sources of information included online resources and webinars, ND training, and reasonable adjustment passports.

Demand and supply

Most employer representatives indicated that there was an increased demand for neurodiversity support over the last 18 months (85%), with around half of them stating that they had sufficient resources (e.g. staff, budget) to meet this demand. The following were rated as the most common challenges in the implementation of adjustments.

Figure 12: Most common challenges in the implementation of adjustments*

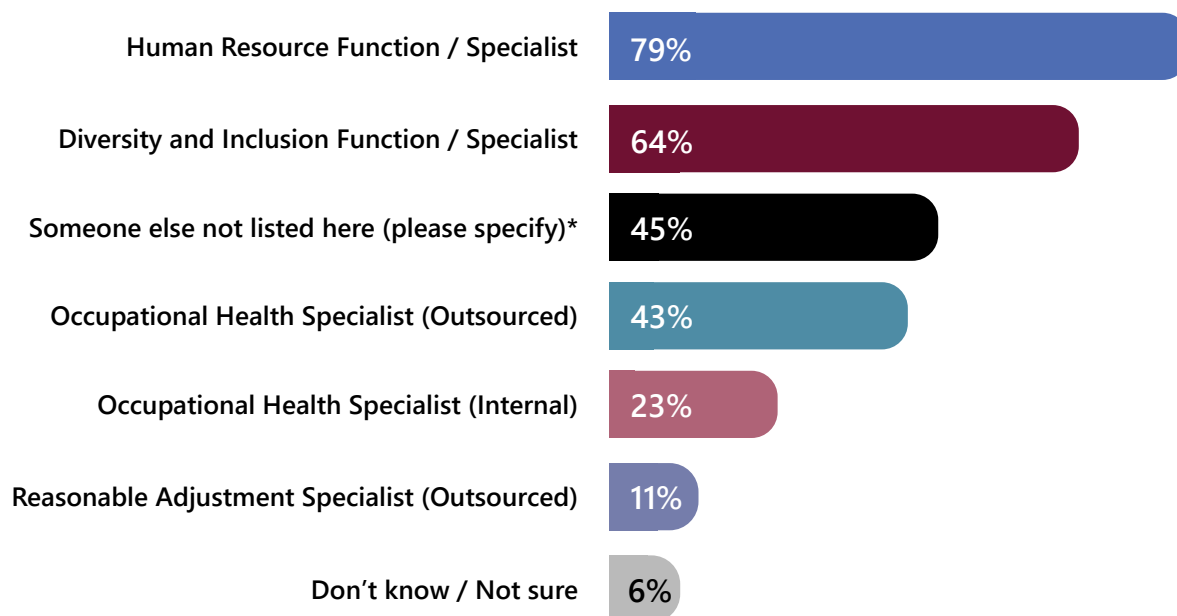


*multiple responses possible

Other challenges included different procedures in each country, health and safety considerations around suitability of adjustments, and a lack of clarity in processes and procedures.

We asked employers who employees can approach for support in their organisation, with HR and EDI specialists featuring highly as well as occupational health.

Figure 13: Sources of support for employees

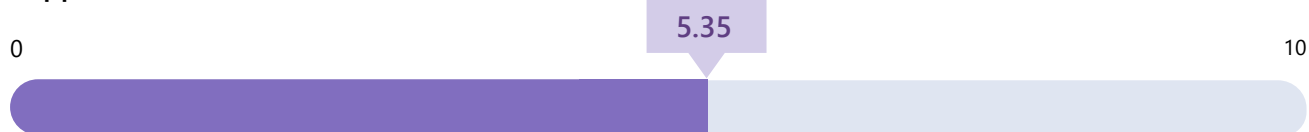


*e.g. line managers, peer support networks such as ND networks, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) providers

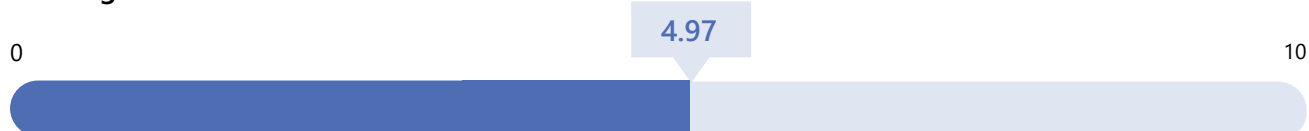
We asked employer representatives about line management responsibilities (which were the case for 57%). Of these, 77% manage neurodivergent employees in their team. However, only 19% said that neurodiversity talent management is acknowledged in their workload.

The figures below document variation across organisational practices. Managers develop confidence in neurodiversity support through self-guided efforts rather than through training and support as 55% said that they received less than average support, and 58% less than average training.

Support received*



Training received*



Confidence in managing*

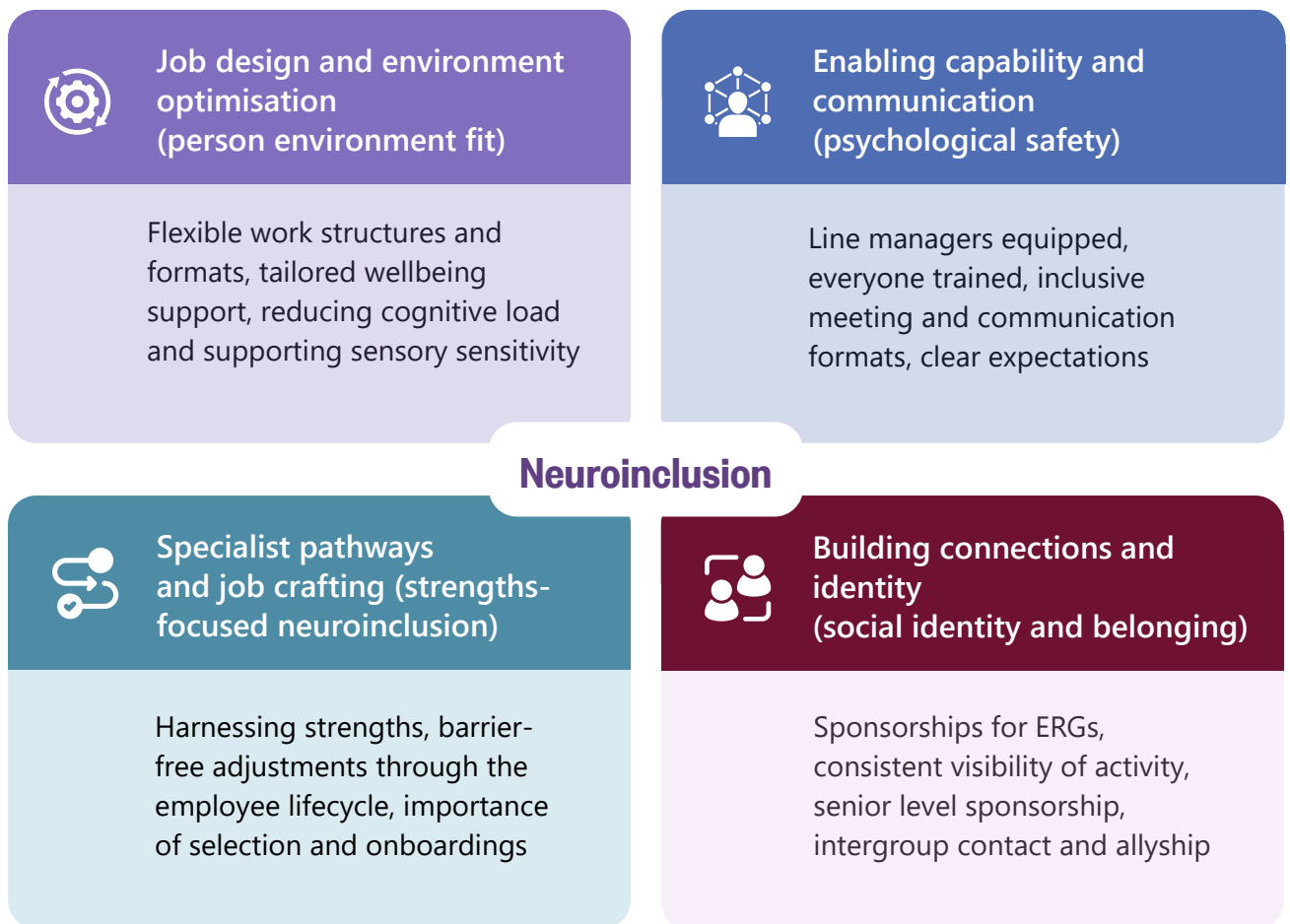


*Where None / Not at all = 0 and A lot / Extremely confident = 10

Good employer practice

Figure 14 summarises principles of good practice, which are based on the qualitative comments. The data maps onto a quadrant which indicates a blend of job design and person-environment fit, strengths-focused neuroinclusion and specialist pathways, enabling of capability through psychological safety and building connections and belonging through social identity as practical and conceptual framing.

Figure 14: Principles for good practice



08

Section 08

Change over time

How key indices have shifted, how groups differ, and what drives satisfaction, turnover, engagement and burnout.

Data comparisons

Index changes for neurodivergent employees from 2024 to 2026

Data from the 2026 and 2024 surveys were compared across eight different measures for neurodivergent employees: psychological safety, wellbeing, work engagement, work-life balance, turnover intention, perceptions of colleague support, line manager support, and organisational knowledge of neurodiversity. Significant results are reported below. **We tracked the following changes over time for employees which indicate positive change:**



Work-life balance in 2026 is better than in 2024



Perceptions of colleague support is better in 2026 than in 2024



Perceptions of line manager support is better in 2026 than in 2024



Turnover intentions are lower in 2026 than in 2024

How workplace experiences differ between participant groups

We compared the indices for employees, entrepreneurs and employer representatives (Figure 15). We found that:



Psychological safety is significantly lower for employees than for employer representatives and entrepreneurs who work in teams



Wellbeing is significantly lower for employees than for employer representatives and entrepreneurs

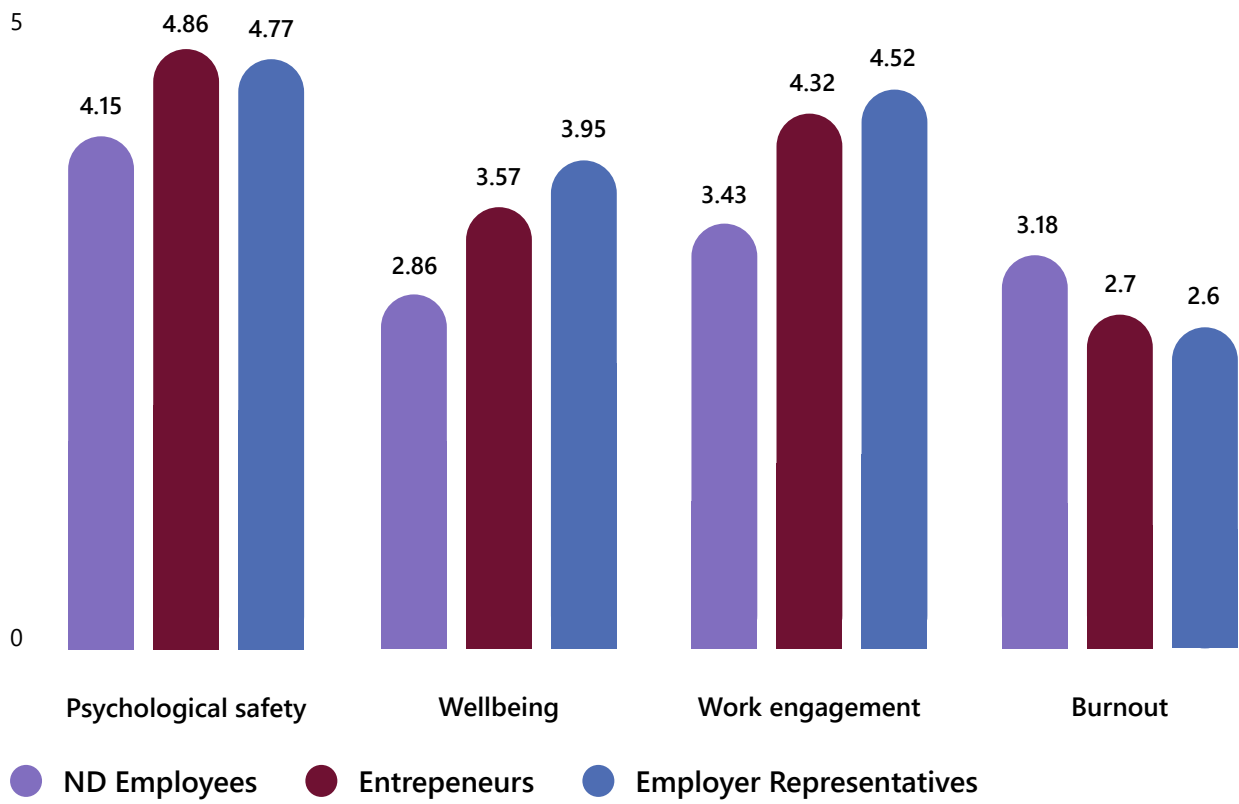


Work engagement is significantly lower for employees than for employer representatives and entrepreneurs



Burnout is significantly higher for employees than for employer representatives and entrepreneurs

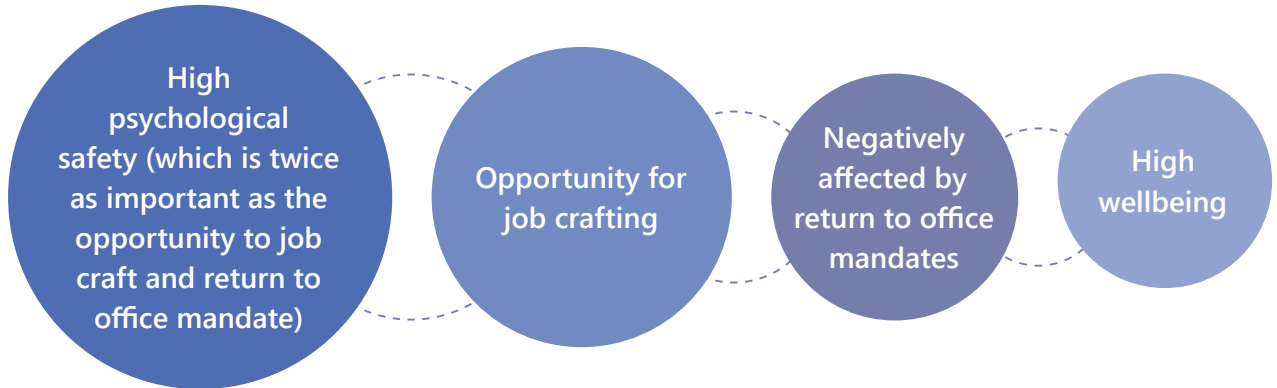
Figure 15: How workplace experiences differ between participant groups



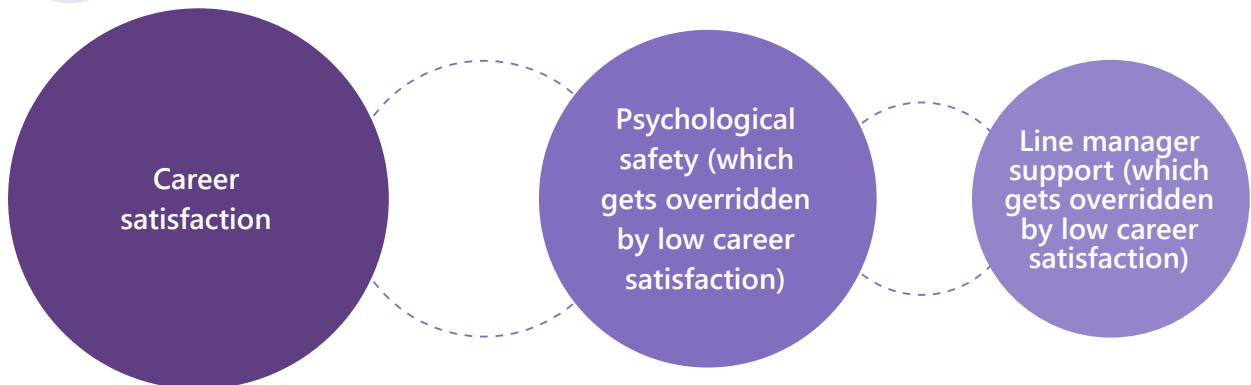
What drives career satisfaction and turnover for neurodivergent employees



Career satisfaction (how people feel valued and motivated regarding opportunity to develop and self-actualise) is driven by the following, in order of importance:



Turnover is driven by the following, in order of importance. Career satisfaction makes the biggest difference, more than twice as much as the other aspects:



Engagement and burnout for neurodivergent employees



Work engagement (also often called thriving) is like career satisfaction about motivation, namely what drives employees to do their best work. Burnout is a state where employees feel depleted, devoid of drive and depersonalised.

This is what the 2026 data tells us about engagement:

The number of neurodivergent strengths (so the more, the better) is linked to high engagement as a baseline

Career satisfaction matters

Job crafting makes the biggest difference – the more crafting, the more engagement.

Return to office mandates have a strong negative effect

Line manager support is important

This is nearly four times as important as psychological safety



This is what the 2026 data tells us about burnout:

High psychological safety is the strongest protector

A return to office mandate has a strong negative effect

Organisational knowledge of neurodiversity is a protector (surprisingly line manager and colleague support make no difference for our sample).

2026 summary of insights

We summarise the key insights for fostering neurodiversity gain through evidence-based practice:

a. Insight into neurodivergent strengths and challenges at work: We profile authentic and values led cognitive diversity. Neurodivergent challenges include self-care, work-life balance and navigating the social aspects. Entrepreneurs consistently experience the challenges to a lesser extent and lean into the strengths more than employees.

b. The in-work experience: Neurodivergent employees continue to have a less positive experience regarding wellbeing, work-life balance and psychological safety compared to other groups. However, career satisfaction and support from line manager and colleagues have improved, turnover intention has decreased. Neurodivergent identity acceptance, 'finding your tribe' and existence of support networks are crucial for thriving at work.

c. Key drivers for neurodiversity gain: Career satisfaction is driven by high psychological safety, opportunity for job crafting and good wellbeing, and diminished by return to office mandates. In turn, high career satisfaction is the single most important driver for low turnover. Engagement is driven by job crafting and line manager support whilst is diminished by return-to-office mandates. Burnout is prevented by high psychological safety and organisational knowledge of neurodiversity and amplified by return to office mandates.

d. Entrepreneur experience: The push and pull factors for people opting out of corporate life are strong, regarding a wish to work in a less neuronormative environment and working to one's strengths. Employers would do well to actively engage with this group and transfer learning regarding how innovation and creativity thrives outside the corporate world. Lessons learned include that networking, marketing and financial planning are more onerous than anticipated.

e. Employer perspective: Good practice maps onto a quadrant with a blend of neuroaffirmative job design, specialist pathways to success, enabling capability through psychological safety and building connections and identity. Lack of disclosure, cost of adjustments and lack of centralised resource are the biggest barriers to implementing adjustments.

Limitations & Caveats

We learned through our co-production process that engaging employees in research related to equality and diversity was not an option this year, hence large organisations did not push for participation. Our employee sample was gendered and weighted towards certain neurotypes and does not reflect the breadth of work which drives UK economy.

Due to reasons outside our control the Birkbeck team were delayed collecting the data, which meant we had to push into the 2025 Christmas period when the UK (our main data source) grinds to inactivity. We cannot discount the possibility that entrepreneurs experience a good level of post hoc rationalisation: "because I opted out I must be doing better."

09

Section 09

Insights, recommendations and Conclusions

The call to action: putting neuroinclusion at the heart of corporate strategy.

Recommendations for employers and organisations

We present the first UK data on neurodivergent entrepreneurs across neurotypes and draw on a large sample of entrepreneurs.

Many of our recommendations reinforce what we reported in previous years which we map against the above quadrant of good employer practice (Figure 10). Rather than seeing neuroinclusion as an add on, we recommend using neurodivergent employees as a benchmark for inclusive talent management. **We argue for neurodiversity gain:** if organisations harness cognitive diversity of neurodivergent employees in a positive way, then everyone benefits.

Neuroinclusion is at the heart of sustainable business strategy and performance, not benevolence



Job design and environment optimisation

- Continue to offer flexible work structures and formats and explicitly reconsider blanket initiatives such as return-to-office mandates, whether fully or partially, by carefully weighing up the impact on performance, motivation and wellbeing. Engage consultatively with your workforce before making any decisions and have courage to revert (to more flexible structures) if the data tells you this is wise.
- Tailor neuroinclusive wellbeing support and use local data with appropriate analysis to ensure that initiatives have the desired effect of a cohesive approach to enabling thriving but also mitigating burnout.
- Reduce cognitive load through clear expectations and seamless work flows.
- Offer and foster opportunities for job crafting and encourage psychoeducation: job crafting is about the task, about the relationships and about how people think about their jobs.



Specialist pathways and job crafting through a strengths-based approach

- Enable processes and communications aimed at identifying individual neurodivergent strengths and talents and sustain the systems and culture for people to actually work from their strengths.
- Offer barrier free adjustments throughout the employment lifecycle by centralising budgets and resources for implementation. Address bias implementations by gathering data for the business case (e.g. reduced turnover, sickness absence etc).
- Recognise the importance of neuroinclusive employee selection and onboardings for identifying talent but ensure that insights are fed forward into the entire employee lifecycle and not lost along the way.
- Monitoring joiner and leaver data and use it to inform talent strategy with a holistic whole workforce neuroinclusion approach.



Enabling capability and communication

- Foster psychological safety by sharing learnings and through regular 'wash ups' which capture not only what happened and what was done, but also what works well about collaborative working.
- Never underestimate the importance of setting clear expectations, for day-to-day tasks and also for medium-term and long-term goals.
- Put into place and regularly re-enforce neuroinclusive meeting formats.
- Train everyone in the organisation about neuroinclusion focusing on enabling function (enabling strengths and supporting challenges) not labels.
- Equip and support line managers to continue doing their good work regarding neuroinclusion and share and celebrate good practice.



Building connections and identity

- Recognise and value neurodivergent identity through sharing of good practice and showcasing and reinforcing senior level role modelling.
- Sponsorship for employee resource groups, with a dotted line to senior level leadership so that activities have link to business strategy.
- Consistent visibility for inclusion initiatives and consistent support for intergroup contact and allyship.
- Actively engage with entrepreneur and contractor networks to learn what enables self-actualised talent in this context and cross-pollinate insights back into the business (see also section below for entrepreneurs).

Recommendations for employees and entrepreneurs

At first glance, our current data shows that opting out of corporate life is an entirely rationale choice for neurodivergent people who consistently lean into their neurodivergent strengths more, and experience far fewer challenges. But it is not as simple as that. Many entrepreneurs underestimate the energy cost of transitions and the need to build a 'buffer'. Many also underestimate that crafting your own work still means responsibility for tasks which may not suit your strengths, such as scheduling, organising, networking and marketing.

Thus, four fundamental recommendations are to:

- 1** **Develop or deepen self-awareness of your neurodivergent strengths** and articulate these clearly.
- 2** **Develop or deepen self-awareness of your neurodivergent challenges** and develop strategies on how to resource yourself, particularly during times of pressure or transitions.
- 3** **Network with others and learn from good and effective practice**, through mentoring, coaching and actual business advice.
- 4** **Think before you jump (into entrepreneurship or self-employment):** craft a clear business plan, think about where and how you need to resource and or outsource and ensure a financial transition buffer. Consider carefully that opting out is no panacea against burnout, as there is for example a danger of invisible overworking and camouflaging. Consider a business mentor and build up a support and referral system (if applicable).

For entrepreneurs who have already made the transition, we add the following:

- 1** Monitor administrative load and outreach activities and consider outsourcing of tasks where possible and appropriate.
- 2** Monitoring and supporting personal wellness to ensure business sustainability.
- 3** Engaging in regular and neuroaffirmative administrative and financial planning (many entrepreneurs underestimated this aspect). Find neuroaffirmative support systems (e.g. neuroaffirmative business advice) through networking and recommendations.
- 4** Have a clear plan for social media engagement and self-protective strategies within this.

Conclusion and final reflections

Nothing in our data or co-creational approach told us that neurodiversity at work is any less important in 2026 than in previous years. Line managers and colleagues are key enablers to foster neurodivergent talent to thrive.

We profile divergent thinking which needs to be promoted through neurodiversity gain with a clear focus on fostering human capital. Future research should consider what sustainable work looks like in increasingly AI focused and digital work spaces.

We learned that organisations are not entirely rational. Why issue return to the office mandates if overheads are substantial, no one has really thought about best use of shared space and there is likely detrimental impact on not only neurodivergent employees but everyone? How can organisations meet the increased demand for neurodiversity support given no increase in budgets?

There is nothing in our data that tells us that prevalence of neurodivergent conditions will change, with co-occurrence remaining the norm not exception.



We, as communities of leaders with an interest in neuroinclusion, researchers who are keen to foster the evidence and neurodivergent employees who want to self-advocate need to work with each other to continue to raise awareness, debunk myth and foster evidence-informed organisational practice not blanket mandates which smack of long outdated top-down practices. The future is now. The future needs to be neuroinclusive to mitigate against ill health and economic inactivity, and loneliness as a threat to our society.

We need to keep doing better so that all people stay in work for longer, thrive at their best and self-actualise their talents.

Closing Remarks from Amanda Cusdin, Chief People Officer, Sage



Sage is proud to sponsor this research for the third consecutive year, as the findings continue to both inspire and challenge us. That is exactly as it should be. If we are serious about building a truly inclusive organisation, we must be willing to sit with uncomfortable truths as well as celebrate progress.

This year's report shows meaningful improvement in areas that matter. Line manager and colleague support is stronger, work-life balance has improved, and neurodivergent employees are less likely to leave than they were two years ago. These are not small gains. They reflect real investment in training, in listening, and in building the conditions for people to feel they belong.

At Sage, neuroinclusion is not a side activity. It sits within our broader diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) approach, aligned to core business priorities including talent, performance, and innovation. We have used the insights from this research to inform action across policy, process, manager capability, and colleague support.

That includes making workplace adjustments more consistent and easier to access through a global Workplace Adjustments Policy, strengthening our Neurodiversity Hub as a self-serve resource for colleagues and managers, and building peer communities through our Neuroverse network, where colleagues share lived experience, practical strategies and support.

Visibility matters too. The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower scheme, which began as a pilot with 60 colleagues, has now reached more than 4,200 colleagues across the UK, Ireland, France, and South Africa in under a year.

Colleagues can wear sunflower indicators, hold deeper discussions with line managers about the adjustments they need, and feel brave enough to voice concerns about other non-visible conditions.

Line managers remain our single most important lever, and we are committed to giving them the confidence, tools and support they need. More broadly, we are moving beyond awareness into evidence-led action, using data from colleague declarations, assessments and lifecycle insight to understand where barriers still exist and where our efforts are having an impact.

However, the 2026 report is also clear that we are far from done. Psychological safety - the foundation on which everything else rests - has not improved. Burnout risk remains high. Talented, capable people are leaving corporate environments not because they lack ambition, but because those environments have not yet created the conditions for them to fully thrive. That is a loss we should feel, and a gap we are committed to closing.

This is not about separate tracks or special treatment. It is about building an organisation where flexibility, psychological safety, and the freedom to work to your strengths. That vision sits at the heart of our ambition to be a place where every person can do the best work of their life.

There's more for us to do here, but having access to research of this rigour means we can move with intention rather than assumption. Our thanks to Professor McDowall, Aishwarya Srinivasan and the entire Birkbeck team, and to every participant who shared their experience. Your voices shape what we do next.

— Amanda Cusdin, Chief People Officer, Sage

Appendix



Reference Material

Glossary, methodology and selected data tables supporting the findings.

Glossary appendix

We have agreed the following terms for clarity, sticking to established labels for conditions as necessary with an effort to use inclusive language where we could.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity disorder or ADHD	Condition marked by (in)attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity
Autism	Referred to as 'autism spectrum disorder' in diagnostic manuals as a condition marked by differences in social communication and interaction and different patterns of behaviour (e.g. repetitive)
Burnout	Occupational phenomenon where people are in a state of exhaustion, energy depletion and mental distance
Camouflaging	Form of assimilation with neurotypical norms, behaviours might also include working extra to make up for neurodivergent challenges
Career satisfaction	Participants' subjective evaluation of to what extent they work at level which reflects their skills and opportunities for promotion and development
Cisgender women or cisgender men	To identify people whose gender aligns with the sex observed at birth
Condition	Where possible we use condition not disorder and co-occurrence rather than co-morbidity to mitigate against overly deficit-focused language
Double empathy	Phenomenon where neurodivergent people communicate well with each other, and neurotypical people communicate well with other neurotypical people, but where there is less effective communication and understanding between these groups
Dyslexia	Developmental condition with a wide range, in adults this can be observed as difficulties in planning and meeting deadlines and organising, reading spelling or writing or expression thoughts in writing
Dyspraxia or DCD	Developmental condition also known as developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD) which affects movement and coordination
Dyscalculia	Developmental condition which affects how people can manipulate numbers and understand quantities
Dysgraphia	Developmental condition which affects writing, spelling and written expression which can include motor challenges.
Employer (representatives)	Participants who have answered on behalf of their organisation, typically in senior management or human resources.
Entrepreneurs	Participants who identified as entrepreneurs, self-employed or contractors in the relevant survey branch

Identity first language	Language which puts the label first such as ADHD-er or autistic people which people told us that this is what they prefer.
Masking	Describes hiding or suppressing visible neurodivergent behaviours or traits at work
Mental health condition	Category which describes participants who self-identified with a condition such as anxiety or depression in survey responses
Neuroinclusion	Organisational approach and climate where different neurotypes are proactively considered, accommodated and talent harnessed as part of a comprehensive diversity strategy.
Neurodivergent (ND)	People with one or more of the typically included neurotypes / conditions
Neurodivergent (ND) employee	People who are employees or self-employed contractors who are neurodivergent. We use mainly neurodivergent in this report but use ND for brevity for example in some figure headings
Neurodiversity	Breadth of human neural, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural functioning
Neurotype	People with specific conditions or groups of conditions. For example, dyslexia is considered a neurotype. We refer to, for example, dyslexic neurotypes in the report rather than dyslexic people, because many of our participants reported more than one neurotype
Neuronormativity / neuronormative	Way of thinking and behaving (individually or collectively) where norms and practices are aligned to a neurotypical norm rather than considering a range of neurotypes
Neurotypical (NT)	People who do not identify with a neurodivergent condition
Participants	People who took part in this research
Psychological safety	Individual and team beliefs about an environment where mistakes can be made and learning can happen collectively without fear of reprisal
Sample	Groups of people who responded (people who matched our criteria for inclusion, and gave consent for their data to be used)
Tic conditions	Conditions marked by fast and repetitive movements that are difficult to control
Tourette's syndrome	Condition marked by vocal (sounds) or motor (movement) tics that cannot be controlled and are prolonged
Turnover intention	AKA intention to turnover, or retention. How likely people are to stay with current employer over the next 12 months

Technical appendix

Detail on Co-production

Stage 1

We held two roundtables in October and November 2025 with employers and entrepreneur representatives to identify:

- Stakeholder priorities for 2025-26 research: through dialogue and democratic ratings of topics (using online audience participation software) we identified psychological safety, manager or organizational support, and job design as priorities. We incorporated constructive suggestions to more clearly delineate between support from the line manager and shifting language from supporting neurodivergent people to enabling them. We gained agreement on which sections to omit (for example no in-depth questions about workplace adjustments this time around) to keep the survey length manageable. We also asked about preferences for the eventual report format.
- In the employed and entrepreneurial round table, we asked open questions (e.g. “what made you opt out of corporate life? How do you work now? How does working like you do get the best from your strengths? What challenges have you encountered – expected and unexpected”). We incorporated the insights gained into open and closed survey items for the third survey branch relevant to this group.

Stage 2

- Building on our approach from 2023 and 2024, we obtained ethical approval from Birkbeck University of London. To capture a range of perspectives, the survey had three branches: for a) neurodivergent employees, b) employer representatives, and c) the experiences of entrepreneurs, to include contracted workers and self-employed people. The survey had closed and open-ended questions, and where possible and relevant we included similar question in each branch to allow for comparison. We used a range of previously validated questions (see Technical Appendix) and bespoke items and shared these with researchers, practitioners, and industry members for feedback on language, framing, as well as additions or deletions.

We then put the draft survey online using Qualtrics software and did the first round of user testing to ensure that the survey logic worked (i.e. no questions inadvertently skipped etc.). We changed the order for some survey sections to ensure comprehension and thoughtful responses. reviewed instructions to add more detail where necessary. We held an information session for the community.

Stage 3

We piloted the survey with nine people online who were representative of our participant branches and specialists in survey design.

We asked our co-production reviewers to comment on:

- a. The instructions for completion
- b. Any wording that was confusing or unclear
- c. The order of questions and the order of survey sections.

Based on feedback received, we amended wording that could be seen as othering (e.g. adding options to self-describe identity where relevant), clarified open questions, and made some minor amendments to the structure (e.g. moving questions about organisational context into one section, adding a "Not applicable" option to specific items/measures). From a design and readability perspective, we also organised the survey into shorter sections, ensured consistency in font size and higher contrast in colour, and reviewed instructions to add more detail where necessary. We held an information session for the community.

Stage 4

We held a round table with representatives from different employers, different neurotypes and entrepreneurs to present the initial findings in April 2026 and asked for views on the implications for a) employees, b) employers and c) entrepreneurs.

Demographic data

Demographic data were:

- a. Age recorded in eight categories (18-21, 22-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-65, over 65 and prefer not to say)
- b. Gender recording in 5 categories (man, woman, non-binary, self-describe and not disclosed)
- c. Gender same as registered as birth (yes, no, prefer not to say)
- d. Sexuality in 6 categories, where people could select multiple options (asexual, bisexual or pansexual, gay or lesbian, straight or heterosexual, self-describe and prefer not to say)
- e. Ethnicity in categories aligned to UK census
- f. Care responsibilities in 11 categories, including not having any care responsibilities and other responsibilities not listed. The latter resulted in the addition of three categories: ND nephews or nieces, grandchild / grandchildren, and animals or pets. Participants could select multiple options, which allowed us to calculate how many caring responsibilities each participant had.

Neurotypes

We recorded 11 categories including not listed and prefer not to say. Alphabetically listed, these were: ADHD, autism, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyspraxia, mental health condition(s), neurological condition(s), and tic conditions (including Tourette's). For neurodivergent employees, we also recorded if they had declared a physical disability.

Strengths and weaknesses were recorded based on the expanded list used in the 2024 research project, with the addition of one challenge, rumination.

Organisational context

We recorded the organisation sector, type and whether the organisation operated at a national or international level across all branches. For employer representatives and neurodivergent employees, organisation type was aligned with the categories used in the Labour Force Survey, and organisation size was also recorded. For the self-employed, the categories included types of small businesses, and participants could indicate if they were sole traders.

We also recorded line management responsibilities across all branches, including managing neurodivergent talent. We asked additional questions about support and training received, and confidence in managing neurodivergent talent. For employer representatives and neurodivergent employees, we asked if there were specialist roles (e.g. occupational health specialists) who could be approached for ND support within the organisation. For employer representatives, we additionally asked what inclusion policies were already in place in the organisation, and included an open-ended question to identify examples of organisational good practice to enable ND employees.

Neurodivergent employees

We asked employees how long they had been working at an organisation, and any changes to their role they had experienced in the time. We also asked about their employment patterns (e.g. agency work, fixed-term contracts, percentage of full-time employment and their work environment (e.g. degree of remote or site-based working)). We checked if there was a return-to-work mandate issued in the last 24 months, and if it made participants reconsider their current employment.

In the neurodiversity context, we asked whether participants had shared their neurodivergence with people in the organisation, what enabled them to work at their best and about the outcomes of receiving workplace adjustments or support.

Self-employed

For our new branch this year, we asked people if they identified as self-employed, an entrepreneur, or a contractor / freelancer. We recorded if people worked by themselves or in collaboration with a team. We recorded working patterns (e.g. degree of remote or site-based working, how often people worked in shared workspaces), years of experience with traditional employment structures and self-employment, and whether they would consider returning completely to traditional employment.

We also asked whether people were planning any structural changes in their organisation or work setup, and recorded what support enabled them to work at their best.

Employer representatives

We asked employer representatives about the approaches used to identify neurodivergent employees within their organisations, the estimated prevalence of neurodivergence in the organisation, and whether any support provided was tailored (and if so, what informed the provision of tailored support). We also identified if there was an increased demand for ND support over the last 18 months, if organisations had sufficient resources to meet this demand, and challenges in implementation of adjustments.

Organisational support and climate

a. Psychological safety was measured with the seven item measure by Edmondson (1999), focused on team-level psychological safety (22). Items were rated on a six-point scale: All the time (6) to At no time (1) such that a higher score indicated higher psychological safety. Three items on the measure were reverse scored.

We asked two additional questions to identify:

- a. What enables you to work at your best?
- b. What would allow you to feel more comfortable to share your neurodivergent identity and needs?

b. Organisational knowledge of neurodiversity, staff support and line manager support were measured with one item each validated in previous research (17). Staff and line manager support were measured on a five-point scale: Extremely supportive (5) to Not supportive at all (1), such that a higher score indicated higher perceived support. Organisational knowledge of neurodiversity was measured on a four-point scale: Very high (4) to very low (1).

c. Challenges with self-employment were recorded for the entrepreneur branch. Participants could select multiple options to indicate specific challenges associated with running one's own business or working for themselves.

Wellbeing measures

a. Overall wellbeing was measured with the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index (2024) (23). Items were rated on a six-point scale: All the time (6) to At no time (1) such that a higher score indicated better wellbeing.

b. Engagement was measured with the three item ultra-short UWES scale (Schaufeli et al., 2019) where each item focuses on a different dimension of work engagement: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Items were scored on a six-point scale: All the time (6) to At no time (1) such that a higher score indicated higher levels of engagement with work.

c. Burnout was measured with the four item ultra-short burnout scale (BAT4; Hadžibajramović et al., 2024) where each item taps into one of the burnout facets: exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairment and emotional impairment. Items were measured on a five-point scale from Always (5) to Never (1) such that a higher score indicated higher levels of burnout.

d. Work-life balance was measured with one item, scored on a six-point scale: All the time (6) to At no time (1) such that a higher score indicated better work-life balance.

Career and job measures

a. Career satisfaction: this was measured with five items previously validated (17). Items were rated on a five-point scale: Strongly agree (5) to Strongly disagree (1) such that a higher score indicated higher career satisfaction. One item on the scale was reverse scored.

b. Turnover intention: measured with one item previously validated (17), scored on a five-point scale from Very likely (5) to Very unlikely (1) such that a higher score indicated higher intention to leave their current organisation in the next twelve months.

c. Job crafting was measured with the nine-item job crafting scale tapping with three items each into task, relational and cognitive crafting (Niessen et al., 2016). Items were rated on a five-point scale from All of the time (5) to Not at all (1) such that a higher score indicated more crafting.

Open ended questions

Entrepreneur branch

- How do you define an entrepreneur?
- What prompted you to transition to self-employment / setting up your own company?
- To what extent has reality matched your expectations?
- If you could make the transition to self-employment again, what would you do differently?
- How do you enable and monitor your wellbeing now?
- In your experience, success in the context of self-employment is like what...? Please describe in as much detail as you like.
-

Employer representative branch

- Can you tell us of examples of good practice to enable neurodivergent workers in your organisation to work at their best?

Data Appendix

We provide additional information for select indices.

Burnout

Burnout	ND Employee (N = 428)		Self-employed (N = 122)		Employer rep (N = 55)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
At work, I feel mentally exhausted	3.54	0.87	3.02	0.87	3.05	0.89
I struggle to find any enthusiasm for my work	2.96	0.98	2.33	0.94	2.24	0.82
When I'm working, I have trouble concentrating	3.45	0.85	2.93	0.85	2.73	0.78
At work, I may over-react unintentionally	2.78	0.89	2.53	0.85	2.36	0.95
Overall burnout	3.18	0.66	2.7	0.63	2.595	0.65
Cronbach's alpha	0.711		0.683		0.744	

Career Satisfaction

Career Satisfaction	ND Employee (N = 428)	
	Mean	SD
I believe that I can advance my career in this company.	2.94	1.37
There is a good chance of being promoted from my team.	2.53	1.33
I am employed in a job which reflects my ability.	3.4	1.34
I am employed in a job which reflects my qualifications.	3.52	1.35
I have been passed over for development opportunities.	2.96	1.35
Overall Career Satisfaction	3.07	0.99
Cronbach's alpha	0.79	

Job Crafting

Job Crafting	ND Employee (N = 428)		Entrepreneurs (N = 122)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I concentrate on specific tasks	3.7	0.74	3.71	0.88
I undertake or seek for additional tasks	3.34	1	3.29	0.86
I work more intensively on tasks I enjoy	4.43	0.7	4.3	0.85
Task crafting subscale average	3.82	0.56	3.77	0.58
I look for opportunities to work together with people whom I get along well with at work	3.59	1.12	3.51	1.14
I invest in relationships with people whom I get along with the best	3.84	0.97	3.92	1.02
I usually limit the amount of time I spend with people I do not get along well with, and only contact them for things that are absolutely necessary	3.85	1.14	3.8	1.18
Relational crafting subscale average	3.76	0.77	3.74	0.77
I find personal meaning in my tasks and responsibilities at work	3.46	1.03	4.15	0.98
I view my tasks and responsibilities as being more than just part of my job	3.43	1.26	4.22	0.91
I try to look upon the tasks and responsibilities I have at work as having a deeper meaning than is readily apparent	3.26	1.27	3.93	1.05
Cognitive crafting subscale average	3.38	0.56	4.1	0.82
Overall job crafting	3.66	0.56	3.87	0.52
Cronbach's alpha: Task crafting subscale	0.409		0.394	
Cronbach's alpha: Relational crafting subscale	0.507		0.449	
Cronbach's alpha: Cognitive crafting subscale	0.863		0.797	
Cronbach's alpha: Overall job crafting	0.688		0.68	

Strengths

Strengths	ND Employees (N = 428)		Entrepreneurs (N = 122)		Employer rep (N = 55)	
	Frequency	Cumulative %	Frequency	%*	Frequency	%
Advocacy for others	332	80%	99	81%	39	71%
Authenticity (being myself at work)	266	63%	95	78%	46	84%
Being fair and just	350	82%	105	86%	41	75%
Big picture thinking	274	64%	98	80%	35	64%
Candour and honesty	311	74%	93	76%	39	71%
Cognitive control (being intentional about my thoughts)	115	29%	53	43%	21	38%
Creativity (having new ideas)	273	66%	104	85%	45	82%
Crisis management	206	49%	71	58%	19	35%
Critical thinking	299	71%	98	80%	41	75%
Detail processing (able to notice and work with detail)	275	65%	65	53%	42	76%
Empathy and sensitivity	320	78%	103	84%	35	64%
Energy and enthusiasm	202	48%	85	70%	40	73%
Entrepreneurialism (starting a new business or new projects at work)	119	28%	84	69%	28	51%
Hyperfocus (able to focus on specific work or projects)	317	76%	89	73%	40	73%
Innovative thinking (putting unusual ideas into practice)	240	57%	99	81%	38	69%
Long-term memory (remembering things from long ago)	183	44%	60	49%	21	38%
Numeracy (thinking with numbers)	122	26%	26	21%	23	42%
Pattern recognition (e.g. noticing outliers)	304	74%	82	67%	36	65%
Resilience and tenacity	255	62%	93	76%	29	53%
Short-term memory (remembering things which just happened)	36	9%	18	15%	12	22%
Systems thinking	175	43%	68	56%	28	51%

Verbal comprehension (understanding spoken words and language)	174	42%	61	50%	18	33%
Visual reasoning (visualising things in my head)	172	42%	75	61%	28	51%
Visual-spatial skills (able to tell where things are in space)	88	21%	44	36%	17	31%
Working with strong values	325	78%	107	88%	38	69%
Additional strength(s) not listed here (please specify)	44	10%	31	25%	5	9%

*Not weighted by neurotype

Challenges

Challenges	ND Employees (N = 428)		Entrepreneurs (N = 122)		Employer reps (N = 55)	
	Frequency	Cumulative %	Frequency	%*	Frequency	%
Asking for help when I need it	293	71%	83	68%	40	73%
Concentration	320	77%	77	63%	38	69%
Coping with changes to my job role	225	58%	38	31%	41	75%
Dealing with criticism	314	76%	82	67%	41	75%
Finding my way around	83	22%	26	21%	16	29%
Looking after myself mentally (e.g. taking breaks, self-care)	318	78%	80	66%	41	75%
Looking after myself physically (e.g. good nutrition, exercise)	270	66%	75	61%	28	51%
Managing boundaries at work (being clear about my responsibilities)	244	60%	64	52%	32	58%
Managing my feelings at work	220	55%	36	30%	25	45%
Managing sensory overwhelm	299	75%	67	55%	35	64%
Motor control (bumping into things, fine motor control)	129	37%	26	21%	12	22%
Multitasking	180	44%	46	38%	27	49%
Navigating politics at work	273	68%	57	47%	32	58%

Numeracy (thinking with numbers)	94	25%	36	30%	12	22%
Organising tasks (e.g. working towards deadlines)	169	41%	48	39%	29	53%
Prioritising and delegating	193	46%	55	45%	30	55%
Processing accuracy (e.g. copying things accurately)	84	22%	31	25%	10	18%
Processing speed (how quickly I understand and respond to information)	165	43%	45	37%	17	31%
Reading /Writing / Spelling	87	23%	31	25%	17	31%
Rumination (can't stop thinking about certain things)	289	71%	71	58%	21	38%
Social aspects of work (e.g. office parties)	258	63%	48	39%	27	49%
Understanding what I have heard or read	129	35%	30	25%	15	27%
Working memory (forgetting things)	234	59%	67	55%	21	38%
Working on my own	26	7%	26	21%	9	16%
Working under pressure	106	27%	22	18%	16	29%
Working with others (e.g. team work)	117	30%	31	25%	18	33%
Understanding others' intentions	234	59%	56	46%	30	55%
Additional challenge(s) not listed here (please specify):	59	14%	31	25%	5	9%

*Not weighted by neurotype

Wellbeing

Wellbeing measures by number of conditions

ND number of conditions (count)	1 (n = 124)	2 (n = 148)	3 (n = 109)	4+ (n = 46)	Total
	M	M	M	M	M
Wellbeing	3.1	2.8	2.7	2.9	2.9
Work engagement	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.7	3.4
Burnout	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.2
Psych safety	4.2	4.2	4.0	4.0	4.2
Job crafting	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.9	3.7
Work-life balance	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.5	3.6
Career satisfaction	3.2	3.1	3.0	3.0	3.1
Turnover intention	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.7

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