



THE SOCIETY OF PENSION
PROFESSIONALS
making pensions work

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion:
Neurodiversity

The Society of Pension Professionals
& The Donaldson Trust

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Making Pensions Neuro-Inclusive

By Lynn Wassell, Chief Executive, The Donaldson Trust

Imagine navigating your retirement savings through a maze of jargon, paperwork, and complex systems - while also managing sensory overwhelm, anxiety, or communication differences. For many neurodivergent individuals, this is a daily reality.

In the UK, around 15–20% of the population is estimated to be neurodivergent, though the actual number is likely higher due to underdiagnosis and non-disclosure.

In a complex and essential sector like pensions - where over 20 million people are saving for retirement and thousands of pension professionals support them - creating a neuro-inclusive environment is not just ethical: it's strategic.

Connect, The Donaldson Trust's neurodiversity training, consultancy and advisory service supports organisations to embrace neurodiversity by tackling some fundamentals to improve access and opportunity for neurodivergent people.

Clear Communication for Better Engagement

Pensions are complicated, and for neurodivergent individuals, this complexity is often amplified by communication differences. Technical jargon, dense documents, and abstract language can create confusion and discourage engagement.

The first step toward inclusion we recommend is clear, accessible communication. Use plain language and break down information into small, digestible steps. Replace lengthy brochures with short, easy-to-follow guides that allow people to learn at their own pace.

Use visual tools like infographics, flowcharts, and videos to improve pensions literacy. We know that adjustments that are beneficial for neurodivergent people are often just as beneficial for the population overall.

Recognising that people process information differently, offer multiple formats: written documents, podcasts, animations, and interactive tools. Giving users choice helps build a more inclusive experience for everyone.

Inclusive Hiring Practices

To create a truly inclusive pension sector, hiring practices must also evolve. Standard approaches - such as group interviews, timed tasks, or vague job descriptions - can unintentionally exclude neurodivergent candidates. These systems often filter out talent not because of ability, but because they weren't designed with neurodivergent people in mind.

We recommend simplifying job descriptions by focusing on essential skills and responsibilities. Avoid ambiguous language like "excellent communication skills" unless clearly defined, to avoid discouraging capable candidates who communicate differently.

Offer interview accommodations by default to all candidates. This might include providing questions in advance, accepting written or video responses, or creating waiting areas that are inclusive of neurodivergent sensory and social-communicatory needs. These adjustments signal to candidates that inclusion is a priority, not an afterthought.

The Buckland Review of Autism Employment found that many neurodivergent individuals fear disclosing their diagnosis due to stigma. A supportive recruitment process - with built-in adjustments - helps candidates feel safe, welcome, and valued.

Designing Inclusive Workplaces

Inclusion doesn't stop at hiring. Neurodivergent professionals need environments where they can thrive.

Fostering an open, supportive culture is essential. We've worked with clients to support the creation of neurodiversity networks and employee resource groups, helping to provide safe spaces for sharing experiences, building community, and driving change. These initiatives also help raise awareness across teams and leadership.

The physical workspace matters, too. Some individuals require quieter, low-stimulation areas to focus, while others prefer collaborative spaces. Flexible working environments and sensory maps can empower employees to choose what works best for them.

Remote and hybrid working models, when designed and implemented thoughtfully, also support inclusion by giving individuals greater control over their work environments and schedule.

The Value of Neuro-Inclusion

Embracing neurodiversity is more than a moral imperative - it's a driver of innovation, creativity, and resilience. A more inclusive pensions sector means a stronger, more adaptable workforce and better service for a diverse population.

Neuro-inclusion is about recognising and valuing difference, not as a challenge to overcome, but as a strength to harness.



Understanding neurodiversity

By Niraj Shah, Investment Analyst at LCP and a member of The Society of Pension Professionals

Being autistic has influenced my experiences in the workplace in a number of ways. While there have been challenges, I've also been fortunate that the majority of my professional experiences have been positive, due to receiving the right support and understanding.

I began my career at Barnett Waddingham in 2020, where I worked across both the actuarial consulting and investment consulting teams. In 2023, I moved to Lane Clark & Peacock to join their investment team. During my time at both firms, I was also studying for actuarial exams, which I completed in 2024.

As a neurodivergent individual, I've found that when my needs are understood and accommodated, I am able to perform at my best. There have been a number of accommodations which have been particularly helpful in ensuring that I can contribute effectively and feel included as part of the team.

Receiving tasks in written format

Before I begin a piece of client work, there is typically a call or meeting to discuss the task in hand. However, I've found it extremely helpful to receive a written summary afterwards. With the way I process information, being able to receive information in a written format enables me to refer back to it and ask questions as I go along. This ultimately leads to better quality work.

Support beyond the core job role

Inclusion in the workplace isn't just about providing accommodations for the core job role, it's also about feeling like a valued part of the team. For me, social events play a big role in that. At my current firm, before every social event, clear information is shared about the timings and what the event will involve (LCP shares their internal guidance on their website - making events and team activities more inclusive). This helps reduce anxiety. Additionally, there's no pressure to drink alcohol or conform to social norms that might make me feel uncomfortable. These thoughtful approaches have made it much easier for me to take part in team activities and feel genuinely included.

Regular catchups with my manager

Another key part of my positive experience has been having regular, open conversations with my manager. In my experience, workplace accommodations often need to evolve. For example, because of a change in my role, or possibly because the current accommodations aren't being effective. I have regular catchups where we talk about how I'm doing from a wellbeing perspective, and whether any adjustments need to be changed. These discussions have helped ensure that the support I receive continues to meet my needs as they evolve.

My hopes for neurodivergent individuals entering the industry

For neurodivergent individuals who are entering the pensions industry or even the workplace more generally, I would hope that they have the same, largely positive, experience as I have had. One piece of advice I'd offer is to take some time to reflect on your strengths, the challenges you may face, and how both are relevant in a work setting. This is something I wish I had done more of at the start of my career. Having a strong understanding of your strengths helps you seek opportunities that play to them. At the same time, being aware of your challenges is just as important in ensuring the right support and accommodations are provided.

Ultimately, creating a workplace culture that supports neurodivergent individuals isn't just about ticking boxes, it is about enabling people to bring their best selves to work. When we feel included and supported, we all benefit.

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