RISE | Retrofit information, support & expertise

Supporting neurodiversity in retrofit

Supply chain advice pack

March, 2026

Funded by:

Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

Introduction

Retrofit projects depend on diverse teams working across offices, sites and within people's homes. During retrofit projects it is common to work with people who think differently, such as those who are neurodiverse.

Neurodiversity refers to the natural differences in how people think, learn and process information. Across the construction sector, of which retrofit is part of, it is around 1 in 4 workers identify as neurodivergent, significantly higher than the general UK estimate (1 in 7)[1]. Project-based research shows 46% of construction project professionals consider themselves neurodivergent, compared to 31% in other sectors[2].

When organisations understand and support neurodiverse ways of thinking, they see improvements in problem-solving, innovation, risk management and overall quality. But without the right support, challenges such as stigma, unclear communication and sensory overload can negatively affect performance and wellbeing, often leading to more absences and higher staff turnover.

This advice pack offers practical, evidence-based steps to help organisations embed neuro-inclusive practices across the retrofit environment.

What is neurodiversity?

Types of neurodivergence

Barriers to work

Internal inclusive practices

External inclusive practices

Case study

[1] CIPD, Neuroinclusion at work, available here
[2] CIPD, Neuroinclusion at work, available here

What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is the idea that people naturally think, learn and process information in different ways.

Some key terms associated with neurodiversity include:

Key terms	Solutions
Neurodivergent	• Someone whose thinking style differs from typical expectations (e.g., ADHD, autism, dyslexia)
Neurotypical	• Someone whose cognitive processing aligns with typical societal expectations.
Neurodiverse group	• Any group containing different thinking styles (i.e., every workforce).

No two people of any neurotype are the same. Many individuals experience co-occurrence (e.g., autism and ADHD), creating uniquely varied thinkers across the retrofit supply chain.

According to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), many neurodivergent individuals try to conceal their natural traits to avoid standing out at work. While understandable, this can be exhausting and negatively affect wellbeing. This is referred to as 'masking'[3].

Under the Equality Act 2010, many forms of neurodivergence legally qualify as a disability, giving employees rights to reasonable adjustments and protection from discrimination[4].

Types of neurodivergence

There are several well-recognised forms of neurodivergence:

ADHD | **Autism** | **Dyslexia**

Dyspraxia | **Dyscalculia** | **Tourette's**

[3] ACAS, Neurodiversity at work, Understanding neurodiversity, available here
[4] UK Government, Equality Act 2010, available here

Form of neurodivergence	Strength	Challenge
ADHD	• Creativity, energy and hyperfocus - can help with solving unexpected site issues quickly or focusing intensely on hands-on tasks.	• Attention and/or time management e.g. arriving to customer appointments on time, managing travel between multiple site visits, sustaining focus on long compliance documentation (PAS 2030/2035), or following step-by-step installation sequences.
Autism	• Detail focus, logical thinking, consistency - valuable for quality assurance, specification checks, and following technical standards.	• Sensory input and/or social expectations e.g. working in homes with strong smells/noise, unexpected customer interactions, busy retrofit sites, or environments that differ from routine. May find ambiguous instructions or changing priorities challenging.
Dyslexia	• Big-picture thinking, communication, 3D reasoning - useful for understanding whole-house retrofit design, ventilation pathways, and workflow sequencing.	• Reading and/or working memory e.g., interpreting warranty guidance, navigating PAS documentation, reading product specs, completing written compliance forms, or remembering multi-step written instructions on installs.
Dyspraxia	• Creative thinking and communication - often strong at customer conversations, idea generation, and verbal problem-solving.	• Motor coordination and/or sequencing — e.g., handling tools, accurate measuring, following installation sequences (insulation → airtightness → ventilation), or organising equipment

		efficiently across the retrofit workflow.
Dyscalculia	• Pattern recognition, creative thinking, strong verbal reasoning - can support diagnostic thinking and spotting unusual building-fabric issues.	• Challenges with numbers and sequencing — e.g., taking accurate measurements on site, calculating U-values or airflow requirements, following numerical checklists, or completing parts of compliance documentation that require numerical data.
Tourette's	• High resilience, strong task persistence - helpful in fast-moving or physically demanding retrofit environments.	• Involuntary movements or sounds (tics), often worsened by stress — e.g., working in time-pressured retrofit environments, dealing with customer scrutiny, completing tasks in confined spaces, or managing unexpected technical issues that increase stress levels.

CITB[5] and RICS[6] highlight strengths frequently seen across neurotypes, including:

- **Problem-solving and creativity:** useful for site challenges, design constraints.
- **Pattern recognition & logical reasoning:** supports diagnostics, QA and risk spotting.
- **Attention to detail:** valuable for specification checks and quality assurance.
- **Strong memory or deep focus:** beneficial during assessments, modelling, or report writing.

Challenges often arise from environments, communication styles or processes, not the neurodivergence itself:

- Working-memory overload from fast verbal briefings
- Sensory overwhelm (noise, lighting, smells) in homes or sites
- Ambiguous instructions or shifting priorities
- Social demands or unstructured meetings
- Organisation and time perception differences

[5] CIPD, Neuroinclusion at work, available here
[6] RICS, Embracing neurodiversity in the built environment, available here

Barriers to work

Neurodivergent colleagues often face challenges not because of their neurotype, but because workplaces are typically built around neurotypical expectations. In retrofit, these barriers can be amplified by noisy sites, changing environments and fast-paced communication.

Stigma and non-disclosure

Many neurodivergent workers do not feel safe sharing their needs

- 36% have not disclosed their neurotype, and 38% feel there is little or no empathy in the sector[7].
- Some workers hide their traits to fit in, known as masking, which can lead to stress and reduced wellbeing.

Example: A retrofit assessor may mask autistic traits during customer appointments to avoid judgment, causing stress and burnout.

Sensory overload

Retrofit environments can be noisy, bright, cramped or full of strong smells. These common sensory barriers can make it harder for some workers to concentrate, communicate or stay comfortable on site or in people's homes.

Example: Retrofit installers often work in lofts, cramped plant-rooms, or older homes with dust, loud tools, or strong chemical odours, all known sensory stressors for autistic or ADHD workers.

Communication

Neurodivergent colleagues may struggle with:

- Fast-paced verbal instructions,
- Vague or figurative language, and
- Last-minute changes without clear reasoning.

Phrases like "ASAP" or "be proactive", along with fast-paced toolbox talks, can be challenging for neurodivergent colleagues. Some process language literally or need a moment to absorb information, so unclear or rushed messages can easily become barriers.

Unclear processes and hidden expectations

CIPD warns that many workplaces rely on "unwritten rules", unclear priorities and inconsistent processes, all of which disproportionately affect neurodivergent employees. Only 19% of employers have reviewed people policies for neuro-inclusion.

Example: Retrofit Coordinators or Installers may receive inconsistent expectations about PAS 2035 evidence photos, how much detail is required in documentation,

[7] National Federation of Builders (NFB), Neurodiverstiy Report, available here

or what the "right" customer interaction approach should be, leading to confusion and anxiety.

Recruitment and progression

Traditional recruitment can disadvantage neurodivergent candidates through:

- Socially biased interviews,
- Unclear job descriptions, or
- Rushed assessments.

These practices can cause strong candidates to be overlooked.

Example: A candidate for a Retrofit Assessor role may be rejected because they struggle with eye contact (misread as disinterest) despite strong technical skills.

Manager confidence

It has been reported by CIPD that only 53–56% of leaders/HR feel confident supporting neurodivergent staff, leading to inconsistent adjustments and missed opportunities for support.

When managers feel unsure or untrained, they may:

- Avoid sensitive conversations for fear of "getting it wrong",
- Interpret neurodivergent behaviours through a neurotypical lens (e.g., seeing literal communication as rude, or fidgeting as disengagement),
- Delay or deny reasonable adjustments because they don't know what's possible,
- Rely on rigid procedures instead of flexible problem solving.

Policy and processes

Most employers have never reviewed their people policies with a neuro-inclusive lens, with CIPD reporting that only 19% have done so.

Some common policy-related barriers may look like:

- Strict break schedules
- Rigid conduct or "zero tolerance" behaviour
- No flexibility for alternative PPE for sensory sensitive workers.
- Standardised performance measures
- One-path career progressions
- Recruitment routes that rely heavily on interviews

Internal inclusive practices

Internal inclusive practices are the day-to-day behaviours, communication habits and organisational systems that shape how neurodivergent colleagues experience their work. These internal systems directly influence psychological safety, disclosure confidence and performance. Good internal practice benefits everyone, not just neurodivergent staff.

Communication

Predictable communication is one of the most effective ways to support neurodivergent colleagues. Some examples may include:

- Advance notice of tasks and changes e.g. customer appointment changes, access issues, design specification changes, or additional measures needed.
- Multiple formats (verbal + written + visual)
- Plain language
- Avoiding ambiguous terms like "ASAP", "be proactive" or "use your initiative".

It is important to note that neurodivergent people may interpret language literally or require processing time, making clarity essential.

Meetings and briefings

Meetings can create high cognitive load if not structured well. It is recommended that organisations should:

- Share agendas and documents in advance,
- Allow breaks in longer meetings,
- Enable contributions by chat or follow-up message, and
- Writing clear action summaries afterwards.

These simple habits reduce anxiety and ensure information is retained accurately.

Work design and role clarity

Neurodivergent colleagues work best when expectations are explicit. Organisations can help neurodivergent people by ensuring that:

- The definition of 'complete' is written at the start of each task
- Priorities are clearly labelled (e.g., critical today, nice to have)
- Routines are made predictable where possible
- Tasks are allocated based on strengths, not assumptions

This creates fairness and confidence across teams.

Sensory-aware workspaces

Internal environments greatly affect focus and comfort. Barriers such as noise, harsh lighting and inconsistent layouts can be combatted by providing neurodiverse workers with:

- Quiet breakout spaces for focused work
- Task lighting rather than fluorescent overhead lighting
- Predictable workstation layouts
- Noise-reducing headphones available for all

These adaptations are inexpensive but highly impactful.

Recruitment and onboarding

Traditional recruitment often unintentionally disadvantages neurodivergent candidates.

Inclusive recruitment practices should include:

- Clear, concise, jargon-free job descriptions (no unnecessary "must-haves")
- Sharing interview structure and directions in advance
- Providing questions or tasks ahead of time
- Offering practical assessments (e.g., a sample survey, work trial)
- Adjusting lighting/noise for interview rooms

Onboarding should provide predictable schedules, written guides, and opportunities for new staff to share their working preferences early.

Reasonable Adjustments

ACAS states that reasonable adjustments are a legal duty where disability applies[8].

Some practical examples tailored to retrofit include:

- Consistent routines,
- Flexible training,
- Noise-cancelling PPE,
- Tablets with visual plans,
- Staggered start times.

Adjustments do not require a formal diagnosis, they must be collaborative and should be reviewed regularly.

Manager capability and support

Managers have a huge influence on how neurodivergent staff experience work. Yet CIPD research shows that only 53–56% of leaders and HR professionals feel confident supporting neurodivergent colleagues, meaning many want to help, but don't always have the tools.

Helpful training for managers includes:

- Responding positively and safely to disclosure
- Giving clear, concrete instructions
- Breaking tasks into clear steps
- Offering clean, non-judgemental feedback
- Understanding common sensory triggers
- Asking the individual how to best support them

When managers feel equipped, they can prevent most misunderstandings and create a far more supportive working environment.

Psychological safety and culture

Psychological safety is a key predictor of neurodiverse staff satisfaction and retention. Deloitte stresses that leaders must model openness, align inclusion with organisational purpose, and clearly communicate commitment[9].

In practice this means:

- Inviting everyone (not just neurodiverse staff) to share working preferences
- Recognising diverse thinking styles as strengths

[8] ACAS, Reasonable adjustments at work, available here
[9] Deloitte, Building the neuroinclusive workplace, available here

- Challenging unhelpful assumptions or stereotypes
- Making adjustments part of "how we work", not special treatment

A psychologically safe culture reduces masking and increases performance.

External inclusive practices

External inclusive practices focus on how retrofit work is delivered in homes, on sites, and across supply chains. These environments can be unpredictable, sensory-intense, and socially demanding, meaning neuro-inclusion must extend beyond the office. Small, thoughtful changes can significantly improve safety, communication and resident experience.

In occupied homes

Retrofit work in lived-in homes involves noise, sensory variation, unpredictable layouts and resident interaction.

The National Federation of Builders (NFB) highlights challenges such as noise, smells, clutter and social demands[10].

Inclusive practices:

- Provide property details before the visit (e.g., pets, clutter, known hazards)
- Share clear appointment windows and visit agendas
- Use visual materials to explain works
- Allow "reset breaks" between visits
- Provide scripts or FAQs for resident conversations

This supports both neurodivergent staff and residents.

On retrofit and construction sites

On retrofit sites, workers are often exposed to intense sensory stimuli such as drilling, bright lighting, dust and heat. To help reduce this impact, the CITB recommends several practical measures, including:

- Maintaining predictable site layouts,
- Using clear and consistent signage,
- Carrying out noise surveys,
- Providing quiet or shaded areas for reviews or breaks, and
- Offering alternative communication methods when ear defenders are worn.

Together, these adjustments help neurodiverse and neurotypical workers by lowering stress levels, reducing errors and improving overall site safety.

Toolbox talks, inductions and safety briefings

Toolbox talks are frequently fast, verbal and dense, a known barrier.

CITB advises:

[10] National Federation of Builders (NFB), Neurodiversity in Construction, A Manager's Toolkit, available here

- Providing printed or digital summaries,
- Using plain English,
- Allowing time for questions,
- Explaining why as well as what.

This helps ensure clarity and reduces cognitive overload.

Resident and stakeholder communication

RLOs and site teams must communicate clearly with residents, housing providers and local authorities, often in high-stress contexts.

Inclusive approaches:

- Written follow-ups after visits
- Say–show–write (verbal explanation → visual → written)
- Clear reasons for schedule changes ("change alerts")
- Allowing choice of communication method (email, text, voice note)

Supply chain consistency

Retrofit relies on many subcontractors, installers and consultants. RICS and NFB note that inconsistency across partners can create confusion and inequity for ND staff rotating across sites.

Good practice:

- Include neuro-inclusive expectations in tenders and inductions
- Use shared templates, signage and communication standards
- Provide basic neuro-inclusion training for subcontractor supervisors

External standards, compliance and documentation

PAS 2035 requires clear documentation and quality assurance, which aligns naturally with neuro-inclusive practice.

It also includes a specific requirement that the resident handover must be suitable for the resident's individual circumstances, meaning information should be accessible, understandable and tailored.

Using plain language, visuals, and consistent templates supports this requirement and benefits both residents and neurodivergent colleagues involved in delivering retrofit.

Environmental and sensory planning

CITB stresses planning for sensory hazards like noise, light, dust and smells.

Examples:

- Scheduling louder activities at predictable times
- Providing tinted glasses, alternative PPE or sensory breaks
- Allowing staff to step away when overwhelmed without judgement

Sensory-aware planning reduces risk, rework and distress.

Case study

Baxall Construction – Neuro-inclusive workplace initiative

Project overview:

- Baxall Construction began a focussed initiative to improve neuro-inclusion across its workforce, supported by Loch Associates Group.
- The approach was shaped by findings from the 2023 NFB neurodiversity report.

Barriers addressed:

- Stigma and low disclosure confidence
- Sensory challenges on construction sites (noise, lighting, temperature, smells)
- Communication gaps and misunderstandings between colleagues
- Lack of awareness and inconsistent empathy across teams
- Policies and working practices not designed with neurodiverse needs in mind

How neurodiversity in retrofit was approached:

- Leadership-driven culture change, commitment from senior staff to champion neuro-inclusion.
- Awareness training delivered to staff to reduce stigma and build understanding.
- Sensory-aware adjustments to workplaces, acknowledging the impact of noise, airflow, temperature and layout.
- Clearer communication practices, reducing ambiguity and encouraging open conversations about working preferences.
- Policy updates to embed neurodiversity inclusion into everyday practice.
- A shift towards recognising neurodivergence as a **strength**, reflected in the message *"Great minds don't all think alike."*

Source: Platinum Media Group

Summary

This advice pack provides practical guidance to help retrofit organisations support neurodivergent colleagues across offices, sites and people's homes. Neurodiversity refers to the natural differences in how people think, learn and process information. It is highly relevant to construction, where around 1 in 4 workers identify as neurodivergent[11].

Neurodivergent colleagues bring valuable strengths, such as problem solving, creativity, attention to detail and pattern recognition, which directly enhance retrofit quality, safety and innovation. However, without supportive environments, they can face barriers including unclear communication, sensory overload, stigma and rigid processes.

The pack outlines what neurodiversity means, the strengths and challenges that may appear in retrofit roles, and the steps organisations can take to create more inclusive workplaces. It highlights the importance of clear communication, predictable routines, sensory aware environments, flexible work design and effective reasonable adjustments.

Leadership and manager confidence are essential for embedding these practices, yet only around half of leaders feel equipped to support neurodivergent staff, emphasising the need for training and consistent expectations across the supply chain.

Overall, the advice pack provides practical, evidence-based steps to help organisations build environments where neurodivergent colleagues can thrive improving the experience for staff, residents and the wider retrofit supply chain.

[11] National Federation of Builders, Neurodiversity in construction, available here

Resources

Podcast: All RISE podcasts are available here.

Podcast: "Embedding social value and EDI in retrofit programmes" available here.

Masterclass: All RISE masterclasses are available here.

Masterclass "Delivering EDI in the retrofit supply chain" available here.

Advice pack: All RISE advice packs available here.

Advice pack: "Introduction to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for the supply chain" available here).

This pack aims to share insights, good practices, and lessons learned from the sector. It is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute as recommendations or endorsements of specific suppliers, products, or services or as legal advice. Please always check the latest regulations.

www.riseretrofit.org.uk

RISE – Retrofit information, support & expertise