

# Unlocking potential: Embracing neurodiversity in recruitment practices

March 11, 2024



*More than 15 per cent of the UK population may identify as neurodivergent. Jo Lawrence from the*

*Occupational Psychology Centre (OPC) shares her thoughts about recruitment strategies for inclusion.*

The presence of neurodiversity in the workplace is becoming more widely acknowledged, with increased discussion and higher diagnosis rates. An estimated 15 per cent – 20 per cent of the UK population identify with a broad spectrum of cognitive variances like dyslexia, autism, or ADHD.

“As a minority, it’s key that we, as recruiters and employers, stay informed with the latest information, thinking and terminology and it’s very important that we have robust policies in place to support and safeguard neurodiverse individuals during recruitment and in the workplace,” said Jo Lawrence, Business Development Director at The OPC and OPC Assessment. “Ensuring a fair and accessible recruitment process has always been our mission at the OPC, whether neurotypical or neurodiverse.

“Neurodiverse individuals can feel isolated or vulnerable at work. They may fear appearing less capable or competitive in the job market and they sometimes struggle with tasks like concentration, memory, or time management. Yet, they can possess unique, beneficial talents like hyper-focus, technical proficiency, or creative problem-solving.



*Credit: Pexels*

“Alarmingly, many leave jobs due to harassment or victimisation. So, as employers, we’re missing out on valuable, diverse talent. We’re also responsible, and should want to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to support neurodiverse individuals. This is a tension we have to hold in a rule-bound and safety critical industry.”

With over 30 years’ experience in the rail industry, primarily in human resources, Jo’s expertise lies in the

recruitment of safety critical roles, particularly specialising in UK train driver recruitment, but also offering her expertise to European and international rail businesses. Jo also serves as Compliance Officer on the [Rail Assessment Centre Forum \(RACF\)](#), passionately advocating for neurodiversity and equitable treatment of candidates, particularly in safety critical train driver recruitment.

“More neurodivergent individuals are openly disclosing their conditions,” she said. “When we support client recruitment projects, we emphasise open communication and sensitivity between recruiters, line managers, candidates, and the OPC. This is essential to understanding a candidate’s needs. Any potential adjustments need to be deemed ‘reasonable’ based on the job profile, its demands, and whether it’s safety critical or not.”

Navigating recruitment processes as a neurodivergent candidate can be daunting, but reasonable adjustments can greatly ease anxiety, allowing candidates to showcase their abilities better.

For example, a candidate may request an individual assessment setting, assistive technology, or extra time. However, supporting candidates extends beyond recruitment and into their journey within an organisation.

Jo said: “We need to ensure that any reasonable adjustments made during recruitment and selection are applicable during training and follow through into the job – ensuring fairness for all as well as empowering neurodiverse candidates to succeed.



“At the OPC, we are proactively implementing supportive measures for neurodiverse candidates. OPC Assessment recently released neurodiversity guidance for clients around assessment testing. Additionally, we’re creating an ‘extra time’ feature in Candela, our user-friendly online testing platform. We offer a wide range of practice tests for candidates and we’re currently developing video guidance for train driver assessment days to help everyone attending.

“Furthermore, we’ve recently developed some practical assessment tools, and visual content to assist candidates, particularly those with reading and writing difficulties. Keep an eye out later this year for a neurodiversity webinar that we’ll be hosting too.”

Jo concluded: “As we continue to navigate this evolving landscape, the OPC remains committed to driving positive change and promoting inclusivity in the workplace whilst balancing the tensions we hold in a safety critical industry. With the right policies and practices in place, we can create a more equitable and supportive environment for all employees to thrive in.”

If you think the OPC can help with your organisation’s neurodiversity recruitment needs, email [admin@theopc.co.uk](mailto:admin@theopc.co.uk) or call +44 (0)1923 234646. For more information, visit <https://www.theopc.co.uk/>.