



Briefing paper

Working with participants

Lessons from ReAct: focus on Neurodiversity

Introduction

Restart has supported a wide range of participants over the last few years, and the Restart Prime Providers have developed a deep understanding of what works to personalise employment support services to varied groups, designing and delivering personalised support. By the end of April 2025¹:

- 970,000 individuals had been referred to Restart since its launch²
- Of these, 320,000 participants had achieved first earnings from employment gained during their time on Restart. Note that many participants had received less than 12 months of support by this date.
- 200,000 participants achieved a job outcome.³

The ReAct Partnership, an industry-led collaboration of the eight employment Restart Prime providers, aims to support the continuous improvement of the Restart workforce through action research, shared and iterative learning, and the development of applied evidence-

¹ Restart Scheme statistics to April 2025; Department of Work and Pension

² 840,000 have started on Restart, of which 54% were recorded as male, and 46% recorded as female. 16% were aged between 18 and 24 years old, with 61% aged between 25 and 49 years old and 23% aged 50 years or over.

³ A job outcome is counted when someone earns the same amount they would by working 16 hours a week for 26 weeks at the National Living Wage; or when they are in gainful self-employment for a minimum of six months. Providers are eligible for an outcome payment for each participant that achieves a job outcome within 18 months of starting on the scheme

based resources. The ReAct partnership has conducted research into many of the key groups that engage with Restart, with research topics, amongst others, covering:

- [Working Carers](#): Helping carers gets into work, and stay in work.
- [Neurodiversity, Jobsearch and Work](#).
- [Supporting Highly Qualified Restart Participants](#).
- [Providing effective ESOL support](#)
- [Supporting Restart participants into Self-employment](#).
- [ReAct and Timewise Change Agent Programme](#).

ReAct research has explored ways of working with diverse participant groups to effectively tailor support. The research has highlighted the importance of adviser training, adviser skills, peer learning, building relationships and understanding the participant's needs. Through collaboration, providers have gained a deeper understanding of how to deliver the flexibility essential to participant-centred support, recognising that needs vary across individuals and groups.

This briefing paper explores strategies to support neurodiverse participants into work. While the Get Britain Working White Paper does not explicitly reference neurodiversity, it does note that too many neurodivergent people are excluded from the labour market and that greater support is needed for people to get a job, upskill and remain in good work.

For other papers in this series, please visit the [IES ReAct landing page](#) or the [ReAct website](#).

Neurodiversity, job search and work: insights for commissioning future employment support

One in ten people in the UK is neurodivergent, with typically lower than average employment rates⁴. There is an [autism employment gap](#), with just 22% of autistic adults in any type of employment. While not all autistic people can work, 77% of those who are unemployed want to work; but, only [7% of employers](#) have made neuroinclusion in their workplaces a priority. Consequently, even if a neurodivergent individual gains access to

⁴ Brinzea, V. M. (2019). Encouraging neurodiversity in the evolving workforce – The next frontier to a diverse workplace. *Scientific Bulletin-Economic Sciences*, 18(3), 13-25.

work, they may struggle to remain in the job. Employers have reported not knowing where to turn to for help when supporting neurodiverse employees at work⁵.

The ReAct partnership conducted research in 2024 called Neurodiversity, job search and work, which aimed to:

- further the understanding of neurodiversity within the employment sector;
- highlight the enablers and barriers neurodivergent people experience when finding and entering employment, and
- identify good practice that shows how employment providers can best support neurodivergent participants into work.

A mixed-methods approach was used, consisting of an evidence review focusing on neurodiversity-inclusive employment support, the role of employers and practices to aid transitions into employment; a focus group with representatives from five Restart providers, capturing frontline experiences of current support provided to both participants and employers when placing neurodivergent participants into employment; and an observational visit conducted at a Restart office that included discussions with employment and health advisors. There was a lack of published evidence on the role of employment providers, which led to a focus on using the adviser's expertise to adapt recommendations from the wider literature to an employment support environment. There is therefore value in continuing to collect and share good practice from Restart providers to inform better delivery, both now and for future programmes.

This briefing paper outlines four areas where strategies can be used to effectively support neurodiverse participants into work.

1. The principle of universal design

Universal design describes how products, services and environments can be developed to allow as many people as possible to use them and to minimise any barriers. This does not necessarily mean large workplace adaptations - small adjustments such as flexibility in methods of communication or the provision of quiet spaces are equally effective. Taking a universal design approach can benefit all in gaining access to good work, which could help reduce the stigma that neurodivergent individuals can experience. If employment support providers and employers can adopt universal design principles, then there will be opportunities for all to access good work and perform well at work.

⁵ https://www.achieveability.org.uk/files/1518955206/wac-report_2017_interactive-2.pdf

2. Recruitment and selection processes

Research has suggested that long-established recruitment and selection processes can automatically filter neurodivergent people out. Those who are neurodivergent may find it more difficult to recognise and understand how job-ready they are, and what employment opportunities they may be best suited to. **Job descriptions can create barriers**, requiring advisers to 'translate' recruitment materials to more accurately convey job requirements. This process not only enhances the opportunity for a successful 'job fit' but can also influence neurodivergent participants' confidence. Advisers can work with employers to gather **information about job specifications, 'essential' job requirements**, and provide **clear advice about application processes**.

Neurodivergent individuals may encounter challenges during the interview process, including how to answer interview questions and negotiate unfamiliar surroundings and situations. Advisers can provide support through **mock interviews** to prepare clients for interview situations and liaise with employers to provide **detailed information about the interview and any other recruitment activities**. Advisers can support with **disclosure**, and any **reasonable adjustments** employers could make throughout the recruitment process.

Upskilling advisers to provide personalised support during the recruitment process is essential. In the research, advisers recognised their role in understanding neurodivergent individuals' **previous recruitment experiences**, helping them **identify their strengths, knowledge and skills**, and guiding them towards **suitable roles and recruitment pathways**.

3. Knowledge and training

A **lack of understanding** around neurodiversity among employers and advisers, including participants' skills and abilities, can create barriers to employment. Improved knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity in the workplace will support positive employment outcomes. For employment support providers, this means **enhancing existing training and reviewing how services are delivered and communicated**. Importantly, practices must **avoid stereotypes and a 'one-size-fits-all' approach**; rather, it is better to understand both individual and organisational differences to ensure that **training is informed and appropriate for the context**.

While terms like 'neurodivergent people' or 'neurodiverse groups' are commonly used, it is essential to recognise that **each individual experiences the workplace differently**. Support should therefore be tailored to the individual, **acknowledging preferences and unique ways of working**. Advisers highlighted the importance of **building rapport** with jobseekers, **creating a safe space** to share past employment challenges. Advisers felt they could

champion jobseekers, but working with employers who were **informed and knowledgeable about neurodiversity would enable more inclusive approaches** to be implemented.

Training for employers was identified as a key enabler in supporting neurodivergent individuals into work. Suggested topics included **neurodiversity awareness, unconscious bias, inclusive communication, and broader inclusion strategies**. ‘Informal training’ or ‘experiential learning’ was found to be common, which led to trial-and-error techniques of support, whereas more concrete training, such as case study use and scenario planning, could be used to understand good practice. Utilising a more **‘joined-up’ approach**, where neurodivergent individuals, advisers, employers and experts work together to share knowledge and experiences can be beneficial learning opportunities for all.

Employers and hiring managers would also benefit from training to better understand neurodivergent conditions, **adapt interview processes and tailor management approaches**. It is also important that job advisers are appropriately trained to support neurodivergent jobseekers to ensure they can effectively guide and support them throughout their employment journey. **Collaboration between advisers and organisations** is essential to ensure successful transitions into work, including reviewing recruitment practices, neurodiversity policies, and the implementation of reasonable adjustments.

Gathering feedback from neurodivergent jobseekers and employers regarding what has previously been helpful when providing employment support can help to **understand any gaps** in support and training and inform more effective collaboration between employment services and employers.

4. Support policies and practices

As awareness and understanding of neurodiversity continue to grow, support policies and practices must be implemented to ensure employers and employees are well-informed and equipped with best practices to foster neuroinclusive workplaces.

- **Identify Disability Confident employers.** The scheme helps to challenge attitudes, increase understanding, remove barriers and provide opportunities for employees with disabilities or long-term health conditions, including neurodiversity. By understanding what organisations can provide for neurodivergent employees, they can solidify current practices into policy and address gaps.
- **Discuss tailored reasonable adjustments with employees.** This should be individual to the employee, so that they are getting the adjustments that they need and that will help them to succeed at work. The research found that only 30% of employees have formal

reasonable adjustments in place at work⁶ and in general, there is a poor understanding of reasonable adjustments in the workplace. However, very often, small adjustments can be extremely beneficial in helping employees enter and remain in employment. Therefore, advisers have an important role in helping neurodivergent individuals consider what adjustments may be helpful, especially if the individual has been out of work for some time.

- **Consider the working environment as part of the reasonable adjustments.** This could include light, noise and temperature. As well as suitable work environments, it is important that Restart offices are also suitable to support the needs of neurodivergent individuals. Where possible, arranging workplace visits or trial days can help assess suitability and comfort.
- **Identify organisational neurodiversity policies.** Neurodiversity is often missing from workplace policies and procedures, but this can help jobseekers to understand the culture and support within an organisation. Advisers may wish to engage with HR teams or line managers to explore current practices, ask about inclusive initiatives, or gather feedback from recently placed employees.
- **Tailor support to individual needs.** Employment advisers should work collaboratively with jobseekers to identify reasonable adjustments that align with the role. Neurodivergent individuals will have different needs, so it is best to understand their personal preferences.
- **Engage with external support providers.** Collaborate with charities, neurodiversity experts and training or support providers to ensure that information is unbiased, current and relevant. These partnerships can enhance the quality of guidance provided to both jobseekers and employers.
- **Promote inclusive communication practices.** Communicate clearly and concisely, taking care of tone of voice, jargon and facial expressions. Encourage conversation about neurodiversity in a safe and open space, as this will help neurodivergent people to feel comfortable disclosing at the recruitment stage and when they start work. Establish communication preferences early in the employment support relationship and use a variety of methods when working with a group.

⁶ McDowall, A., Doyle, N. & Kiseleva, M. (2023). Neurodiversity at work: demand, supply and a gap analysis. Birkbeck, University of London.