becg

Neurodiversity in Planning

Engagement Toolkit | 2021

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Defining Neurodiversity

- **Neurodiversity:** Neurodiversity is the concept that all humans vary in terms of neurocognition. The term neurodiversity recognises the unique strengths and challenges that may derive from thinking, learning and communicating differently.

- **Neurodivergence:** When an individual diverges from the dominant societal standards of 'typical' neurocognitive functioning, they don't 'have neurodiversity', they're neurodivergent. Types of neurodivergent conditions include for example: Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Autism, ADHD and Tourette Syndrome. Being neurodivergent often brings exceptional skills and talents, such as innovation, creativity and problem solving. Neurodivergent and neurominority are terms which may be used interchangeably.

- The graphic on the right hand side shows types of neurodiversity (marked in orange) and common traits (written in white) that neurodivergent people can experience.

- However, being neurodivergent in a world set up for neurotypical people can lead to the experience of barriers that result in exclusion. For example, some may find themselves overwhelmed by dense written content or busy visual stimulus in some physical environments.

- **Neurotypical:** Is sometimes used to describe people who are not neurodivergent.

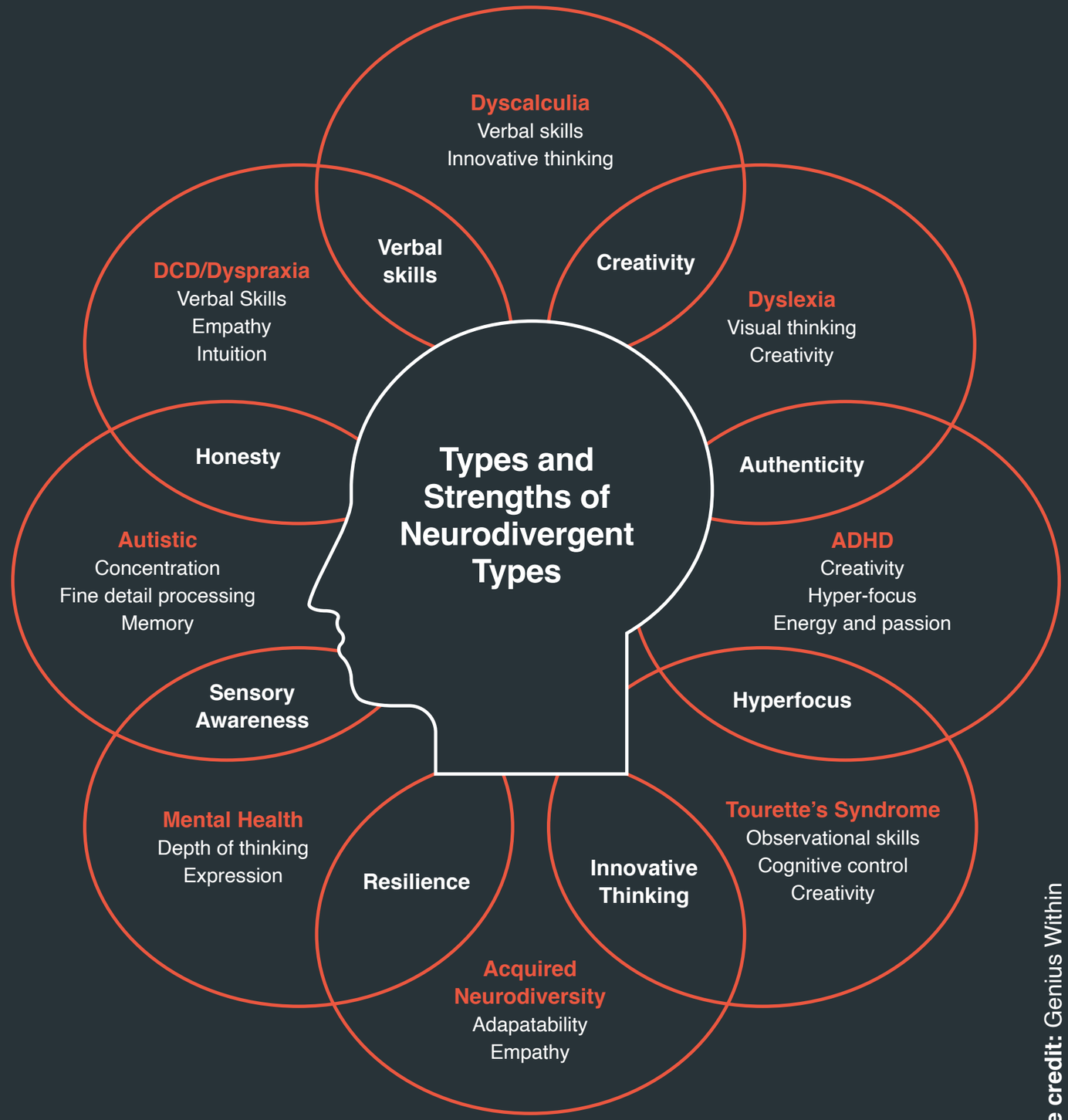


Image credit: Genius Within

Introduction

Our mission: To help facilitate and encourage greater neurodiverse engagement at all stages of the planning process

As a leading communications agency specialising in the built environment, one of our key priorities when delivering any engagement activity is that it is accessible. We are all affected by the built and natural environment and should all have a stake in how it is managed and developed.

However, accessibility measures often have a narrow focus. Emphasis may often be placed on ensuring that residents and stakeholders can physically obtain information. As a result, less regard is given to whether individuals can actually use the information to take part in the consultation and planning process.

The impact is that those who need communications in a more accessible format are excluded from the consultation process.

That's why this toolkit is focussed on neurodivergent individuals, who comprise over 15% of the UK's total population.

This toolkit provides seven principles to guide you on how those engaging with the public and stakeholders as part of planning and infrastructure development, can make infrastructure and planning consultation and engagement, be it online or in person, accessible for a neurodiverse audience. The principles aim to make it easier for all people to be able to contribute to, influence and participate in planning, and to support people to be able to contribute to planning as suits them best rather than as is easiest for us as industry professionals.

The toolkit is written to endure, and we hope will inform changes in planning and the ways in which we engage with each other. Whilst the principles provide a guide to improving accessibility, it is worth remembering though that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Engagement should still be tailored to individual needs on a project-by-project basis.

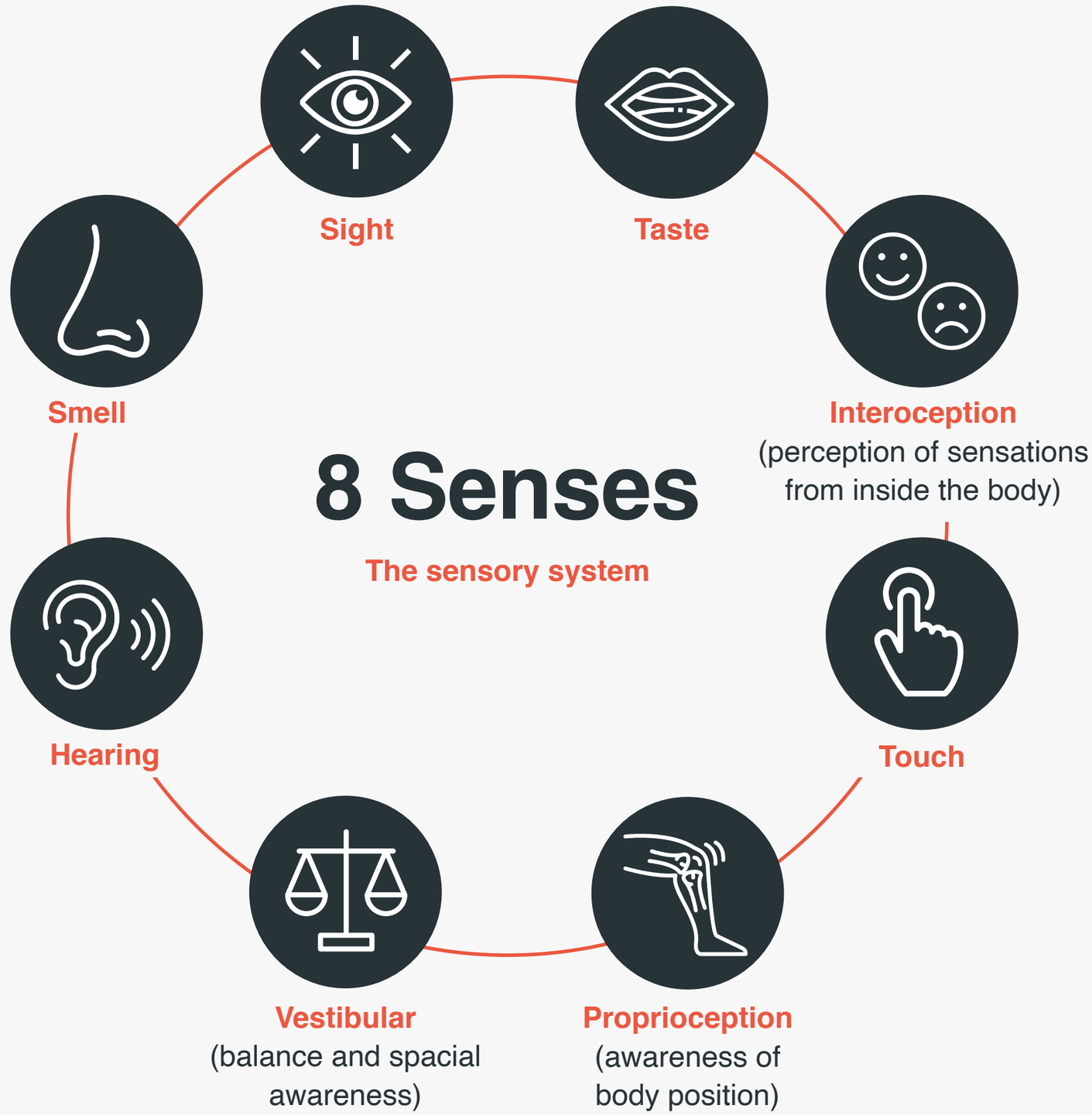
A lot of what we set out is just good communications practice – we could all be better at communicating more concisely, clearly and impactfully. However, the incorporation of these principles could be the difference between a neurodivergent person being able to take part in your engagement activity or being excluded from the process. We need to be aware of our bias as planning professionals and the resultant echo chamber that impacts how we communicate.

We all think, learn, communicate and experience the world differently.

Neurodiversity refers to the different ways the brain works and interprets information.

It highlights that people naturally think, learn, communicate and experience the world differently.

We therefore need to think about the neurodiversity in our user experience when designing and conducting our engagement work.



The principles

These seven principles are intended to guide you on how to make planning and infrastructure engagement accessible for a neurodiverse audience. They are explained in greater detail across the following pages, and we have also provided details and links to other resources and contacts that can provide for the further insight and detail that we cannot provide within this concise toolkit.

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1

Involve neurodiverse voices

Before beginning to plan the delivery of any engagement, it's important to first have a clear strategy and set of objectives. Who are you reaching out to? What are you setting out to achieve? What feedback are you looking for?

Once you've done this, the best means of measuring whether your planned activity will be accessible is by asking other people for their view.

You might have preferences or unconscious bias that means something that seems accessible or easy to understand to you is not accessible for other people. Seek to involve others in your team, or reach out to experts (such as the resources listed at the end of this toolkit).

Consultations often take place across multiple stages, so you could provide this flexibility through adding to your offering as you move through to subsequent stages of consultation.

As part of this, try also to build in the flexibility to evolve your engagement in response to feedback during the consultation process (not just before or afterwards).

Consider appointing Neurodiversity Champions within your organisation to focus on making all communications as accessible as possible to as many people as possible.

2

Big picture first

Keep the main theme or area of focus of your engagement activity at the forefront of what you're doing. From there, ensure that your event, website and other material and media has a clear structure and user journey.

Clutter can divide attention, cause people to miss things and increase the amount of time and concentration it takes to digest information.
For example:

- If designing a project website, ensure the website has a clear hierarchy/page order, so that visitors to your website are getting all the information they need.
- For printed material, make sure you format text correctly (don't use bold/underline etc excessively outside of headings) and make sure that the most important things catch the reader's eye first.
- When holding an event, start by considering the venue itself. Ensure you provide clear directions (perhaps including a picture of the venue), along with clear wayfinding signage inside. During the event itself, avoid flickering lights and intensely bright lights and colours, unless these are optional and visitors are warned that certain areas will include these elements.

It is important that content flows and reads naturally. The direction of movement between one section and the next should be clear, with no 'dead ends'. Consider the order and manner in which you would want an end user to engage with your content.

3

Show what matters

Different members of your audience will have different priorities when engaging with you.

This may mean you need to provide a lot of information, each competing for the user's attention. However, there will also be common interests that the majority of your visitors are seeking out, and it's important that this information is the clearest to find and focus on.

Key information should contrast with its surroundings and be given priority – it should be distinguishable from surrounding information so the degree of relationship is clear.

As part of this, ensure that text is formatted correctly and avoid things like fully justifying text, which can make it more difficult for some people to read.

When preparing key messaging, consider what message you would want an individual to take away if they only took in one piece of information, and tailor your messaging around this. What do you want your engagement activity to be remembered for?

However, whilst simplifying ideas can make it easier for some people, showing what matters shouldn't mean removing all detail. With thought, complex information can still be presented in an accessible way.

4

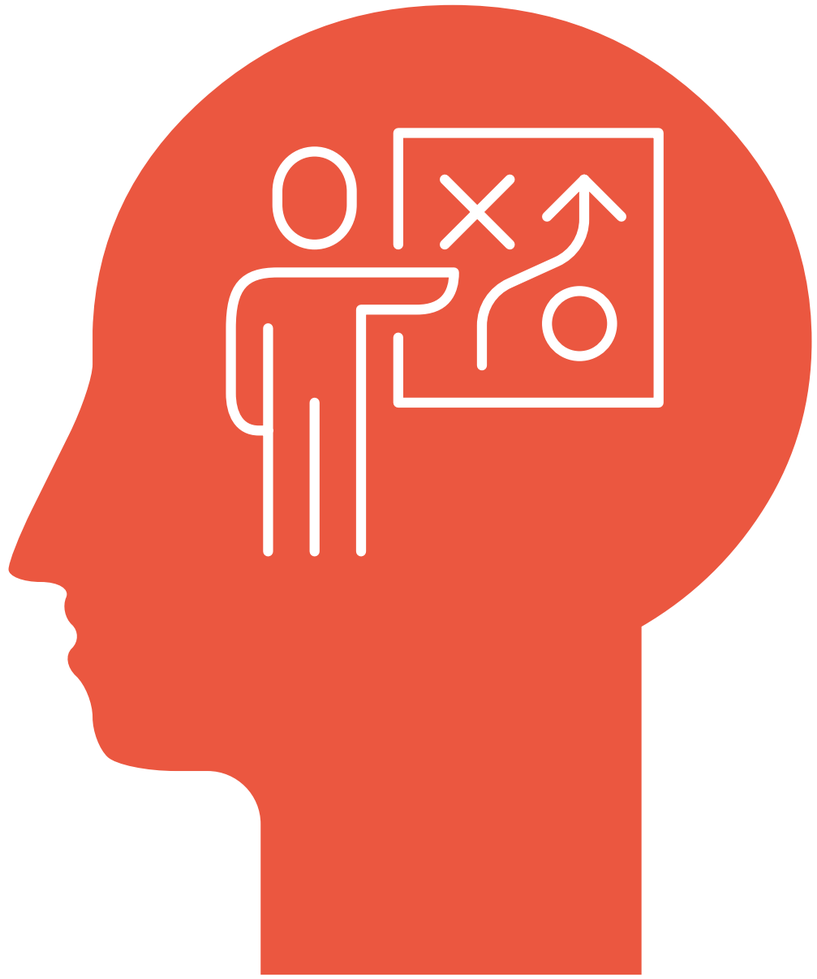
Keep it clear

All engagement has a desired outcome, whether that be providing feedback, informing or addressing fears and concerns.

As such, engagement work needs to be clear, compelling and impossible to miss. When preparing information, use plain language and avoid the use of jargon. It is really important that language selected is clear and well considered. For example:

- A picture tells a thousand words. Where possible, use imagery to help explain your text. This can make your content much easier to understand amongst those who struggle with reading and digesting large blocks of text.
- For written text, ensure that your content is legible. Avoid detailed or distracting backgrounds and ensure that there is contrast between background content and text, utilising legible fonts and appropriate font sizes. Too much clutter and information can lead to visual stress.
- Make use of plain language and avoid jargon.
- For recorded words and video, ensure the mouth is clear, that words are slowed and that the person speaking is not directly looking at the camera. Alongside the video, consider providing captions and/or a transcript, which in the UK may be considered a ‘reasonable adjustment’ under the Equalities Act 2010.
- Be aware of unwritten rules – you will be taken literally by some.

Consider how the information you present will be interpreted – could it be taken literally? What impact would this outcome have?



5

User choice

Try to be flexible and provide choice for those taking part in your activity. What works for you may not work for them, and so all engagement should have the flexibility to give the user choice of how they wish to engage with the subject matter.

Presenting information in different ways also maximises the opportunities people have to digest and understand it.

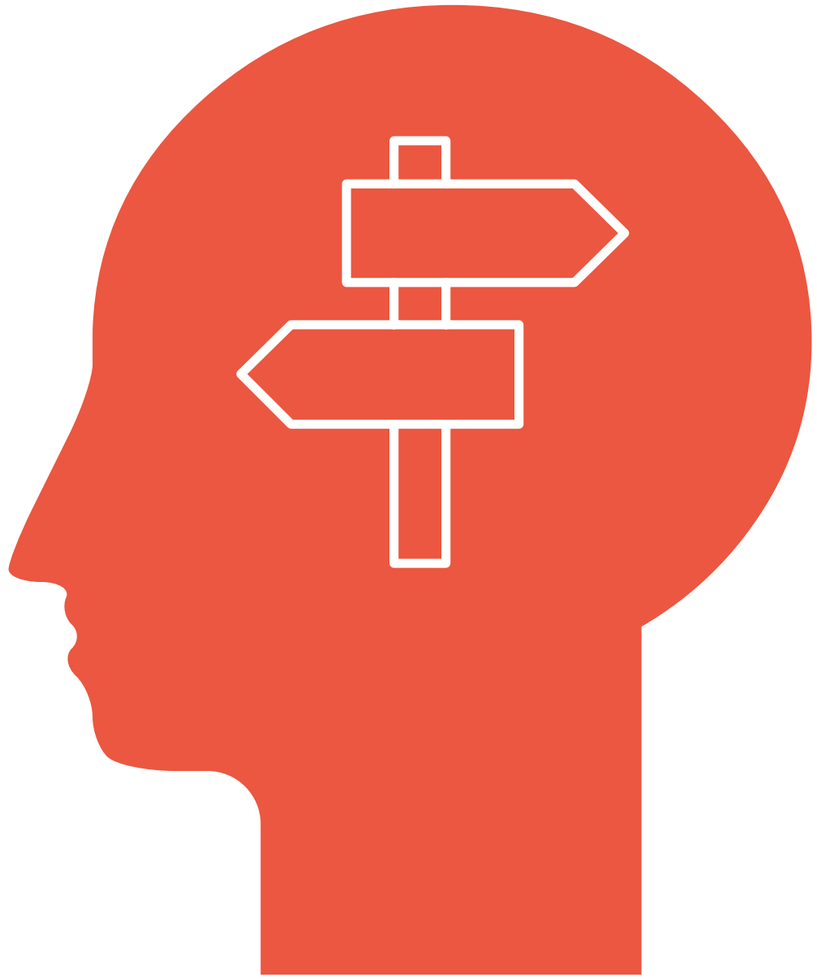
Provide information in a variety of formats. This is more than just providing content in large print – think about the use of images, videos, audio versions of written collateral or even providing content in multiple languages. Importantly, try to make this information readily available – the act of having to request it can switch people off and disenfranchise them.

As part of this, do not be afraid to experiment and incorporate new technologies. For example, many people (not just those that are neurodivergent) may struggle to visualise 2D plans in a 3D space. New technology such as VR or online mapping tools can boost accessibility in a way that may not have previously been possible.

Give people choice in how they contact you. Do not force users down the route of just getting in touch via a webform – they might prefer to speak over the phone, in writing or at a face-to-face event.

If holding an event, consider introducing either a quiet space for those who need it, or even block out dedicated ‘quiet hours’ within the exhibition run time.

Think about how you are asking people to take part in engagement activity - are you asking people to provide written feedback on paper forms etc? If so, why not also offer the ability for people to take part via laptops, tablets or their own personal devices? This can allow those who struggle with writing out their thoughts to use voice to text tools to still give their feedback. Likewise, some people may not feel comfortable being approached, so ensure that your activity includes options for people who feel this way.



6

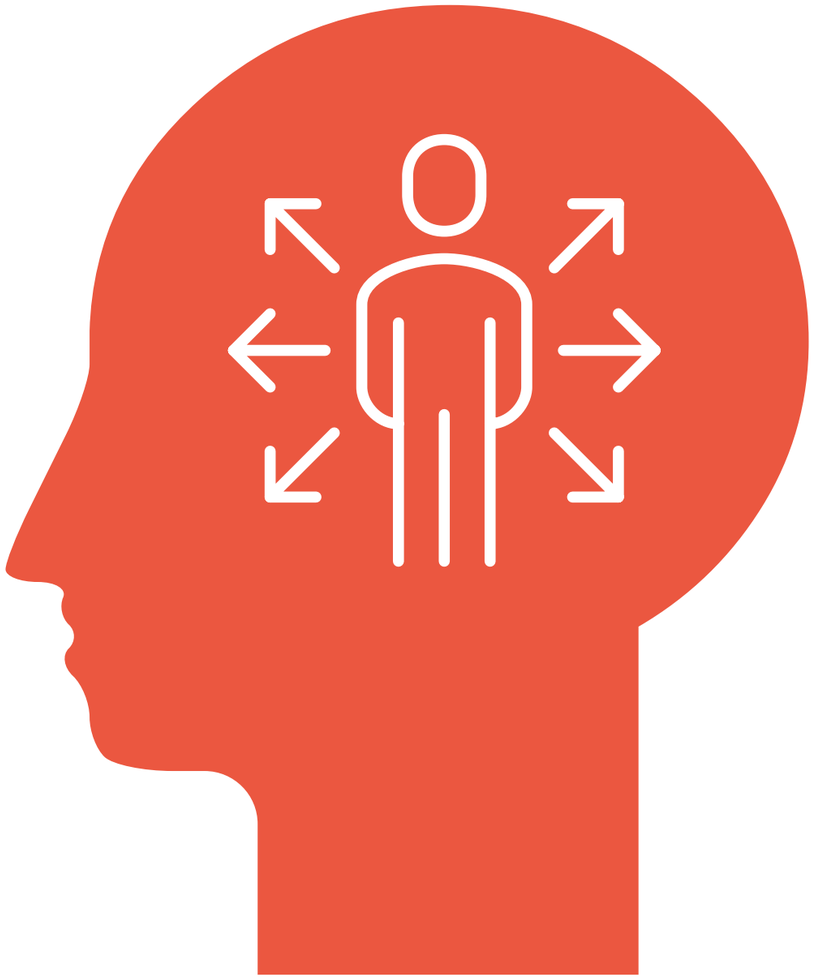
Be considerate

Give careful thought to the overall sensory experience of any communications effort and create a welcoming environment, acknowledging that one size does not fit all.

If you're hosting an event, is the atmosphere welcoming and inclusive? Will people want to spend time at the venue in order to take part fully? Connect other principles of this toolkit, such as the layout of the space, attitude of staff and even the temperature, which can all impact whether people are willing to engage with you.

When holding an event at an external venue, there will be some things you cannot control (such as confusing venue layouts and overwhelming sensory stimuli, depending on the venue's location). However, you can still try to mitigate these, such as through providing wayfinding signage in a clear, distinct design.

There are other design considerations you can make when producing collateral, too. For example, consider reducing visual stress by avoiding bright white backgrounds.



7

Continue to adapt

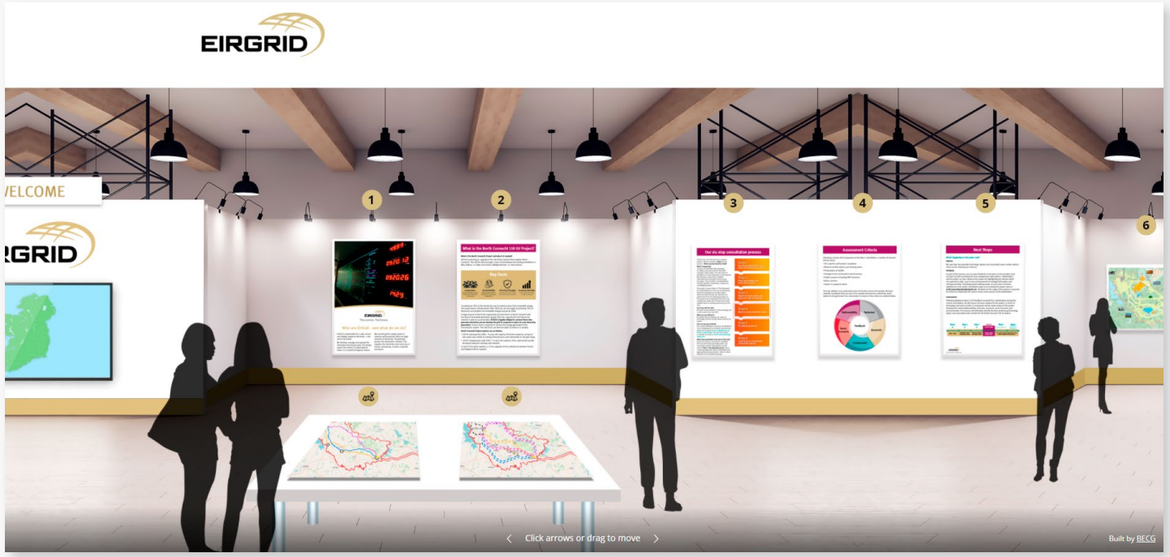
Be open to feedback and be prepared to act on it. As part of this, you should be clear on the purpose of providing feedback and how it will be considered.

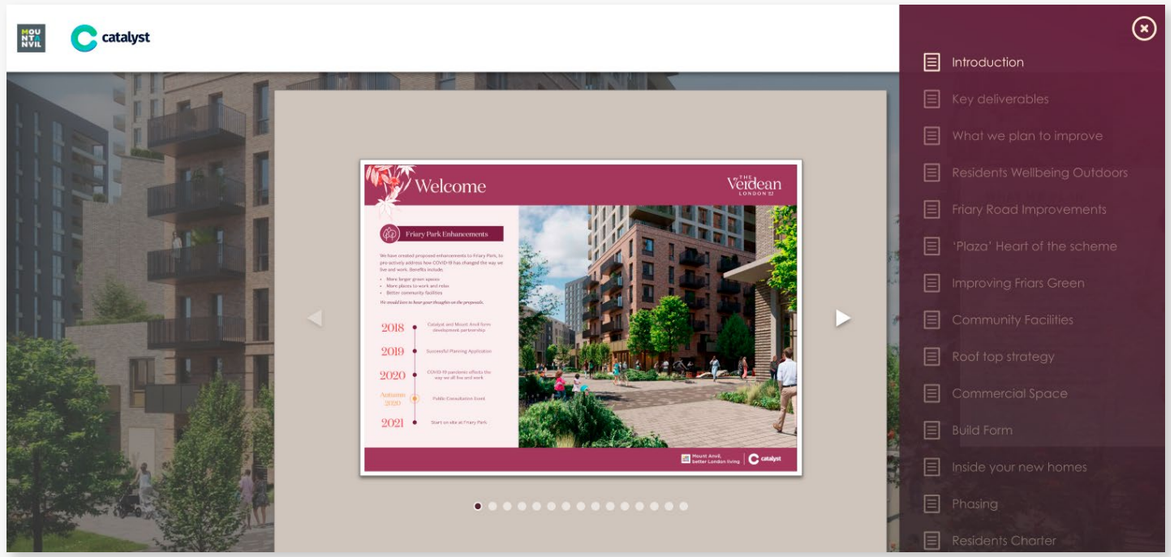
In addition to taking feedback on your proposals, why not incorporate a mechanism that allows for feedback on how the engagement work itself was conducted? This could be as simple as a smiley face feedback tool on how easy people found it to engage with your website/exhibition/etc.

Making mistakes is an important part of being human, too. Your engagement is unlikely to be perfect, but this is useful in providing learnings for future work.

Likewise, we would love to hear about how useful this toolkit was. Please get in touch on info@becg.com or 020 3697 7630.

Examples



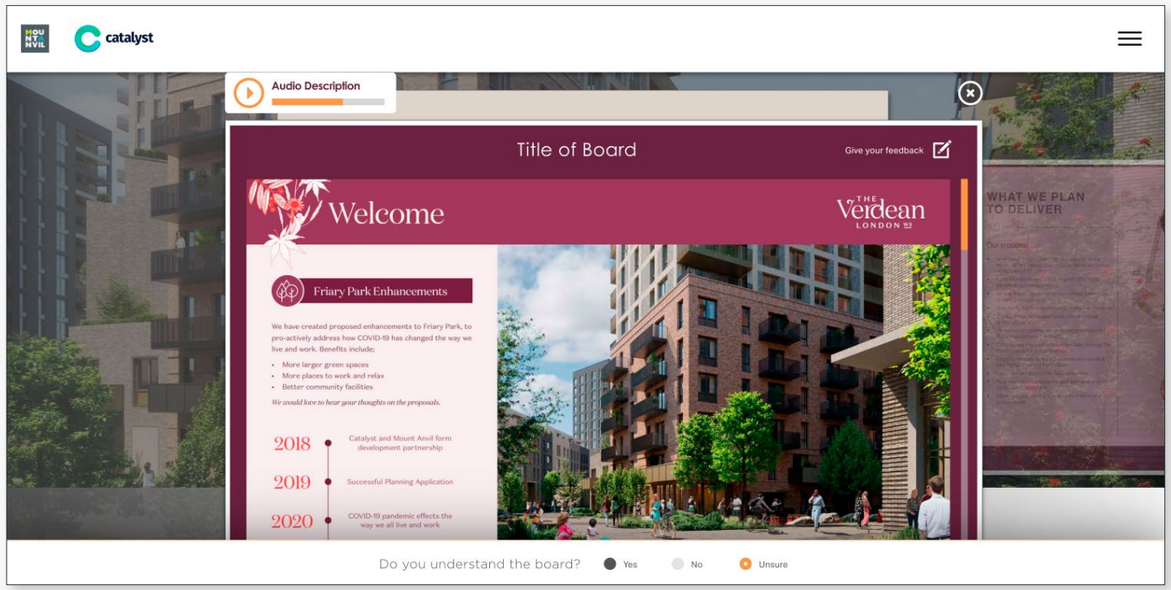


Virtual Exhibition

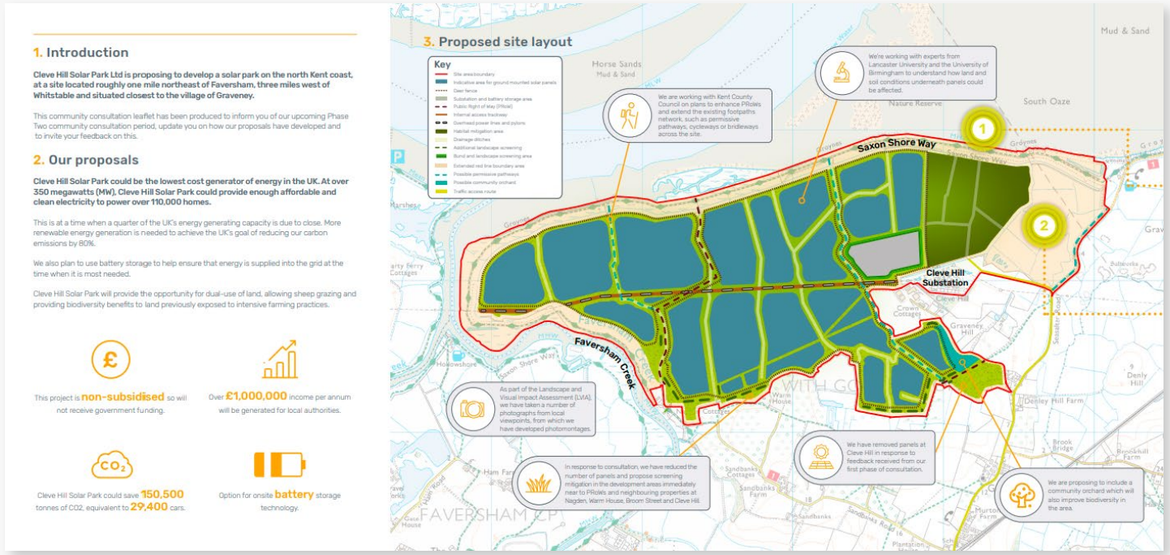
- Clear layout
- Use of numbers above exhibition boards to show clear journey and hierarchy
- Audio versions of exhibition

Consultation Website

- Guided user journey
- Contrasting use of colours
- Choice of navigation based on preference (arrows or menu)
- Audio description of boards for those who prefer different formats



Examples



1. Introduction

Cleve Hill Solar Park Ltd is proposing to develop a solar park on the north Kent coast, at a site located roughly one mile northeast of Faversham, three miles west of Whitstable and situated closest to the village of Graveney.

This community consultation leaflet has been produced to inform you of our upcoming Phase Two community consultation period, update you on how our proposals have developed and to invite your feedback on this.

2. Our proposals

Cleve Hill Solar Park could be the lowest cost generator of energy in the UK. At over 350 megawatts (MW), Cleve Hill Solar Park could provide enough affordable and clean electricity to power over 110,000 homes.

This is at a time when a quarter of the UK's energy generating capacity is due to close. More renewable energy generation is needed to achieve the UK's goal of reducing our carbon emissions by 80%.

We also plan to use battery storage to help ensure that energy is supplied into the grid at the time when it is most needed.

Cleve Hill Solar Park will provide the opportunity for dual-use of land, allowing sheep grazing and providing biodiversity benefits to land previously exposed to intensive farming practices.

This project is **non-subsidised** so will not receive government funding.

Over **£1,000,000** income per annum will be generated for local authorities.

Cleve Hill Solar Park could save **150,500** tonnes of CO_2, equivalent to **29,400** cars.

Option for onsite **battery** storage technology.

3. Proposed site layout

Key

We're working with experts from Lancaster University and the University of Birmingham to understand how land and soil conditions underneath panels could be affected.

We are working with Kent County Council on plans to enhance PRoWs and extend the existing footpaths network, such as permissive pathways, cycleways or bridleways across the site.

Saxon Shore Way

Cleve Hill Substation

Faversham Creek

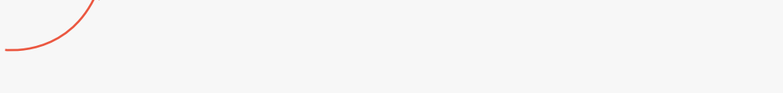
As part of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), we have taken a number of photographs from local viewpoints, from which we have developed photomontages.

We have removed panels at Cleve Hill in response to feedback received from our first phase of consultation.

In response to consultation, we have reduced the number of panels and propose screening mitigation in the development areas immediately near to PRoWs and neighbouring properties at Nagden, Warm House, Broom Street and Cleve Hill.

We are proposing to include a community orchard which will also improve biodiversity in the area.

FAVERSHAM DEP

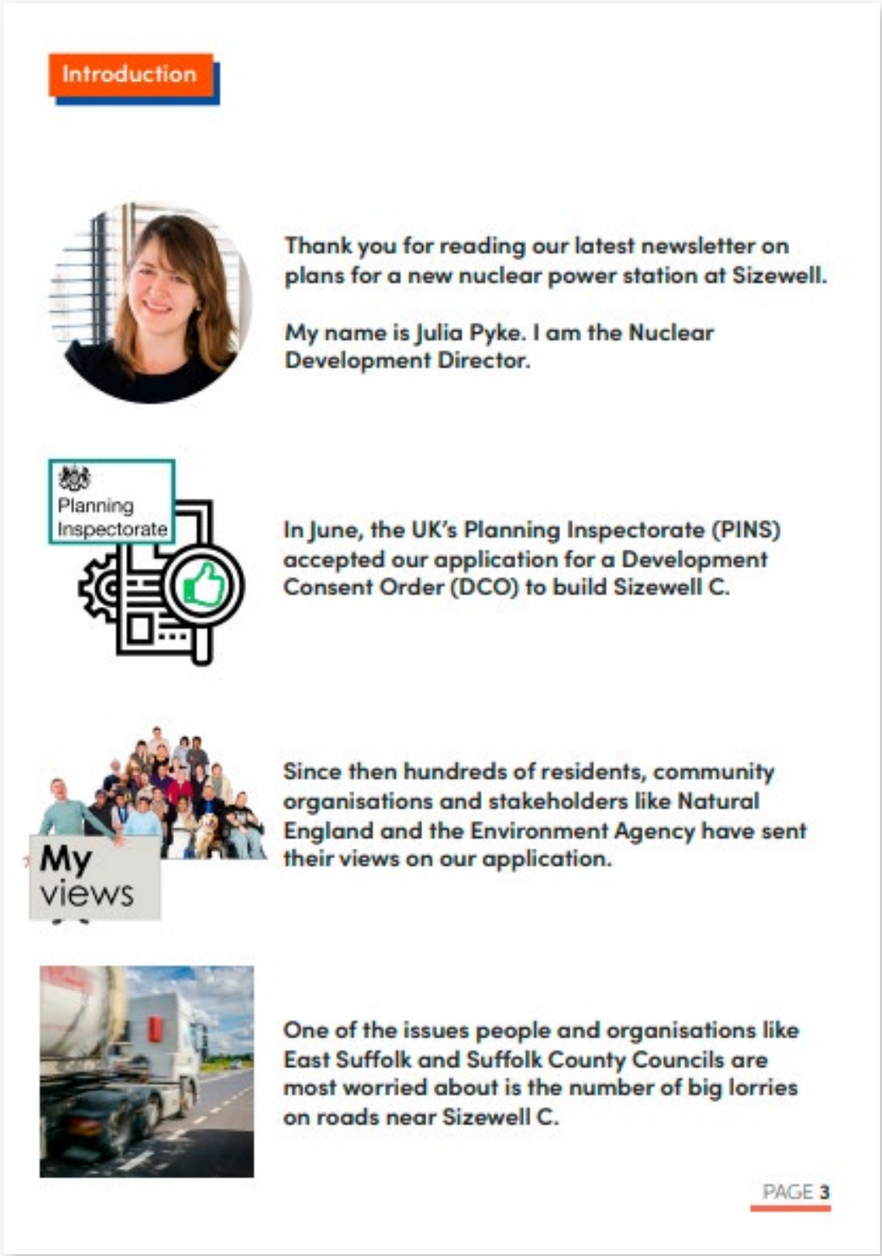


Consultation Asset

- Clear user journey
- Clean and consistent layout
- Plain English
- Also available in alternative formats (audio, large print)

Tailored Material

- Easy read version of consultation material
- Use of alternative format, simpler layout, readily available rather than on request



Introduction

Thank you for reading our latest newsletter on plans for a new nuclear power station at Sizewell.

My name is Julia Pyke. I am the Nuclear Development Director.

Planning Inspectorate

In June, the UK's Planning Inspectorate (PINS) accepted our application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) to build Sizewell C.

My views

Since then hundreds of residents, community organisations and stakeholders like Natural England and the Environment Agency have sent their views on our application.

One of the issues people and organisations like East Suffolk and Suffolk County Councils are most worried about is the number of big lorries on roads near Sizewell C.

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Conclusion

You may have noticed that much that sits behind our seven principles for engaging with a neurodiverse audience is just good communications practice – we could all be better at communicating more concisely, clearly and impactfully.

But that is part of our message; so many people are neurodivergent that these principles should apply to all of your communications efforts.

And we also hope that you take away initiatives that are specific to neurodiverse audiences, such as getting the input from neurodivergent people at the strategy-setting stage and considering appointing Neurodiversity Champions.

So many people are neurodivergent that these principles should apply to all of your communications efforts.

To develop the toolkit, BECG led a working group of planning professionals. Alongside Krystian Groom, Alex Smith, Will Balme and Charli Edwards of BECG, the working group included Jenny Offord (Neurodiversity in Planning), Jan Bessell (Strategic Planning Adviser, Pinsent Masons), Rebecca Skinner (Senior Development Manager, Mount Anvil) and Paul Kallee-Grover (Group Planning Director, Leith Planning Group). The group also sought input from an array of neurodivergent voices and neurodiversity experts.

Terminology

Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and Dysgraphia

- These are all types of *applied* developmental neurominority.
- People are born with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia or Dysgraphia.
- The impact shows up in a specific setting or with a task involving a specific skill, such as reading or motor control.
- They are not considered a health condition.

Tourette Syndrome, Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Non- Verbal Learning Difference

- These are all types of clinical developmental neurominority.
- People are born with Tourette Syndrome, Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Non- Verbal Learning Difference.
- The impact shows up across all aspects of a person's behaviour.
- They are currently considered as health conditions.

Mental Ill Health and Acquired Neurominority (potentially transient)

- This develops in response to a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression.
- People could return to "neurotypical" if their health condition resolves.

Neurological Illness or Brain Injury

- These are acquired neurominority experiences.
- They develop in response to a health condition such as anxiety or depression.
- They have the potential to resolve as the heals or worsen as health deteriorates.

Credit: Dr Nancy Doyle, Genius Within (geniuswithin.org)

Bibliography

What is Neurodiversity (Genius Within, 2021) – available at: https://www.geniuswithin.co.uk/what-is-neurodiversity/

Neurodiversity at Work (National Institute of Economic and Social Research for ACAS, 2016) - available at: https://archive.acas.org.uk/media/4655/Neurodiversity-at-work/pdf/Neurodiversity_at_work_0916(2).pdf

Designing accessible services (UK Government, 2016) - available at: https://ukhomeoffice.github.io/accessibility-posters/

Inclusion Standards Guide (Alliance for Inclusive Education, 2011) – available at: https://www.allfie.org.uk/inclusion-resources/inclusion-standards-guide/

Neurodiversity at work (CIPD, 2018) – available at: https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/neurodiversity-work#gref

A guide to understanding what makes a typeface accessible (The Readability Group, 2020) - https://uxdesign.cc/a-guide-to-understanding-what-makes-a-typeface-accessible-and-how-to-make-informed-decisions-9e5c0b9040a0

Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and Dysgraphia Line Managers Toolkit (UK Government, 2020) – available at: https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/86/2020/03/Dyslexia-Dyspraxia-Dyscalculia-and-Dysgraphia-Line-Manager-Toolkit.pdf

Neurodiverse voices: Opening doors to employment (AchieveAbility, 2018) – available at: http://www.achieveability.org.uk/files/1516612947/wac-neurodiverse-voices-opening-doors-to-employment-report_2018_interactive.pdf

When every day is sensory overload (Planning, 2018): https://www.planning.org/planning/2018/oct/sensoryoverload/

Thank you

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