

# Designing inclusive organisations:

a scalable governance approach to  
neurodiversity & disability

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Essays in Sports Governance  
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If you have any feedback on the content of these resources or additional questions that you'd like to discuss, please contact the SGA:

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# Author

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I am a passionate advocate for diversity and inclusion. I have held several management positions across 6 countries in the past 15 years. I have experience in scaling early-stage startups, creating sustainable growth, coaching and mentoring and advocating for the Neurodivergent community. Until mid-2026, I worked at Google, helping businesses strategically grow, and previously served as the Neurodiversity Advocacy lead for Google Ireland. I also have experience as a Non-executive director and board advisor. Now I am retraining to become a psychotherapist.

I was diagnosed Autistic in 2022, after years of being misdiagnosed, unheard and misunderstood, that is why my mission today is to support late-diagnosed neurodivergent individuals find their place in the world and thrive, even in systems that weren't designed for them.

I am on the board of trustees of [Aspire Ireland](#) and a member of the advisory subcommittee of the [Photography Museum](#)(Dublin). I'm also a director at [Neurodiverse Sport](#). Additionally, I am a visiting research policy fellow at the [University of Cambridge's ThinkLab](#) and provide support to Autistic/ADHD Adults through [Thriving Autistic](#) and its [Neurodivergent practitioners network](#).

I have been a Career coach at Google since 2023 and obtained a [Professional Diploma in Coaching & Mentoring](#) from Kingstown College in 2024. I now run a coaching business called [The Neurodiversity Advantage](#).

# Foreword

This series of essays aims to provide a deeper dive into topics of interest and relevance to the Sports Governance Academy (SGA) community. Authored by experts in particular disciplines and by practitioners in sports governance and management, they will give the reader a closer look at current themes, best practices and initiatives in the sector.

By inviting authors to present their topics in essay form, we want to give them the scope and freedom to explore more deeply areas of governance affecting sports organisations, predominantly in the UK, but drawing on comparative international examples where appropriate. The approach taken will vary from essay to essay. Some will provide a case study to help the community get to grips with developments in the sports governance landscape. Others will present the results of original ongoing research. Others still will offer intriguing perspectives on governance debates, approaching familiar topics from a different angle.

We hope that you find plenty in the series to get you thinking and to help you and your organisations in your approach to governance and in facing the challenges ahead of us. Through the SGA website, you can access further essays in the series as they are released. There you will also find our knowledge base, a library of trusted, free resources to help you get to grips with governance and start to develop good practice. Visit <https://sportsgovernanceacademy.org.uk/>.

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For the past couple of years, the Sports Governance Academy has sought to play its part in promoting diversity and inclusion in all parts of organisations across our sector. There are at least two reasons why it deserves continued effort from all of us. From a governance point of view, the evidence is clear that teams, boards and organisations are more resilient when they are composed of and give voice to people from all walks of life and with a broad range of experience, perspectives and backgrounds. Decisions are better, blindspots are fewer. But from an equity point of view, sport and physical activity belongs to all and our organisations should be places where everyone can feel at home and where anyone can feel comfortable to be an authentic version of themselves.

In this essay, Aurelia Deflandre makes the case for treating inclusion as a core governance, risk management and ethical leadership issue. Using the prism of neurodiversity and neuroinclusion, she argues for embedding considerations about inclusion into all parts of an organisation and its ways of working, not simply something which is consigned to the HR function or to largely unread and under-utilised policies.

What follows is a persuasive argument for proactively designing in inclusive practices. The beauty of Aurelia's recommendations is not just their simplicity nor their scalability as an organisation may grow and its needs change. It is the way in which many of them will almost certainly benefit all employees, volunteers, board members – in fact, anyone coming into contact with the organisation – regardless of whether they themselves have a diagnosed disability or identify as being disabled or neurodivergent.

Better ways of working are simply that: better ways of working.

**Craig Beeston**  
**Sports Governance Academy**  
**July 2026**

# Introduction

Disability inclusion is often treated as something for large corporations, usually parked in the HR department and discussed in the language of policy, process and compliance. But that framing misses the point. For smaller organisations, including SMEs and sports bodies, the issue is not whether they have a formal inclusion strategy in place, but whether they are prepared – in both the sense of ‘equipped’ and ‘willing’ – to meet legal obligations, retain good people, manage operational risk and act with the level of care that inclusion demands.<sup>1</sup>

This matters because disability is not a marginal issue. The World Health Organisation estimated in 2022 that around 1.3 billion people globally, or 16 per cent of the world’s population, experience significant disability and both the UK and Ireland continue to show serious employment gaps for disabled people. It’s worth noting that a disability may take various forms; it can be permanent/lifelong or acquired/temporary, which means an organisation must have a solid system to deal with it, as a lot of people are likely to be affected at some point in their lives. Disability Inclusion is not a specialist topic for a few big employers; it is a mainstream governance issue that affects every organisation that employs people, makes decisions, or has a duty of care.<sup>2</sup>

Looking forward, the demographic landscape of the workplace is also shifting. Current prevalence estimates often rely on theoretical models rather than clinical diagnosis, but this is rapidly changing as awareness grows and stigma diminishes. Younger generations (Gen Z and Gen Alpha) are leading a significant shift in self-identification; research from Disability:IN indicates that these cohorts are increasingly likely to identify as neurodivergent, a trend expected to intensify as neuro-affirming language becomes standard. Projections suggest that by 2030, upwards of 40% of the population may identify as neurodivergent. For any organisation, this shift reflects a broader cultural transition where neurological differences are increasingly recognised and validated, moving from a niche consideration to a core component of sustainable workforce governance.

I want people to read this essay because the cost of getting inclusion wrong is not abstract; it shows up in avoidable complaints, lost talent, lower trust, poor retention, harm done to individuals and organisational cultures that quietly ask people to work around the system. Just as importantly, I want this piece to show that the care aspect of the “duty of care” is not “nice to

## Neurodiversity

The natural variation in how human brains function. It includes differences in attention, sensory processing, communication, memory, emotional regulation and problem-solving. Autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette’s syndrome and many others sit within this umbrella, though not everyone identifies with labels or has a formal diagnosis.

Estimates suggest that around 15-20% of the population is neurodivergent. This is not a small or exceptional group. It includes people with a wide range of cognitive profiles, strengths and support needs, many of whom are already operating at senior levels, often without ever disclosing. Some research suggests that by 2030, 40% of the population will identify as neurodivergent.

have”; care is part of good governance, part of risk management and part of the basic standard we should expect from any organisation that says it values people.<sup>3</sup>

What follows is a practical argument for why inclusion must be built into routine decision making, not treated as a specialist add-on. It may seem daunting to get started, but it is essential to build safe workplaces for all. We hope this guide will help you in starting your inclusion journey.

#### **A note from the author:**

This guide provides a broad understanding of Inclusion, Diversity and Belonging (ID&B) and practical guidance for supporting disabled people in the workplace. Please note that the primary focus here is on neurodevelopmental conditions. By utilising a neuro-affirming lens, this essay explores workplace challenges specifically as they relate to neurodivergent individuals.

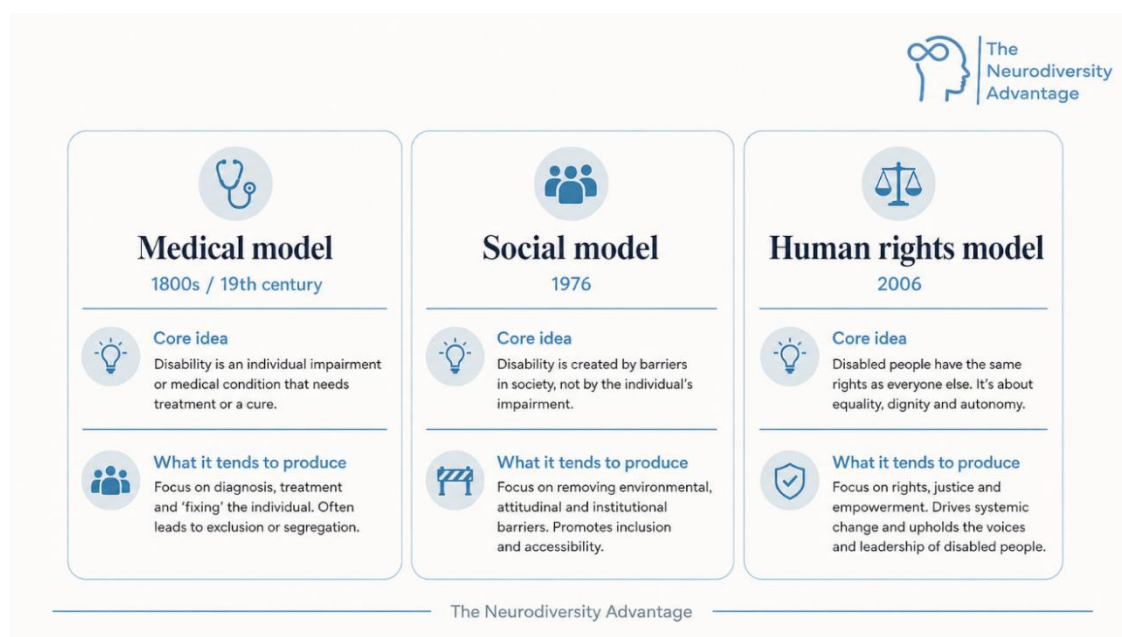
# Ethical leadership and disability inclusion

Disability inclusion is a matter that often sits in a policy folder or gets handed off to HR when there is a problem. That framing is too small for what is actually at stake. In reality, disability inclusion is a corporate responsibility, a governance issue and a business sustainability issue, because the way an organisation responds to disabled and neurodivergent people tells you a great deal about how it understands fairness, accountability and long-term leadership.

That is especially true in smaller organisations, where leadership and organisational cultures are often one and the same. In a large company, there may be layers between the decisionmaker and the employee's lived experience. In a small organisation, informal decisions land quickly and visibly and they frequently shape inclusion more than any formal policy ever will. Who is listened to, what gets adjusted, how disclosure is handled, whether flexibility is offered and whether someone feels safe to speak honestly, all of that becomes culture in practice rather than culture on paper. Leaders and managers can and should model inclusion (disability or otherwise) in their day-to-day behaviours.

This is why I think ethical leadership matters so much here: it is not just about being a decent person or having good intentions. Brown, Treviño and Harrison's work is useful because it frames ethical leadership as something observable, something leaders do through their actions, their relationships and the way they communicate and make decisions. In other words, ethics is not an abstract value sitting above the work; it is part of how the work gets done. When that lens is applied to disability inclusion, the question becomes very practical: are leaders creating conditions where people are treated fairly, where access is normalised and where people do not have to fight for basic dignity to contribute well?<sup>4</sup>

## Models of Disability



| Model                     | Core idea                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | What it tends to produce                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Medical Model</b>      | The problem sits in the individual, who is seen as needing fixing or correction.                                                                                                                                                                                           | Deficit thinking, delay, gatekeeping, over-reliance on diagnosis.                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Social Model</b>       | The problem sits in the barriers created by the environment, systems and culture.                                                                                                                                                                                          | Design-led thinking, accessibility, adjustment, accountability.                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Human Rights Model</b> | Disability is understood within a framework of equal rights, dignity, participation and state or organisational responsibility.<br><br>It builds on the social model but goes further by treating disabled people as rights holders, not just people affected by barriers. | A stronger focus on equality, dignity, participation, legal protection, inclusive policy and the duty of institutions to create conditions in which rights can actually be exercised in practice. |

(Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO), 2026), (Olkin, 2022), (United Nations, 2012), (United Nations, 2006)

What I like about the Social/Human Rights models is that they move the conversation from deficit to design, prompting us to stop asking what is wrong with the person and start asking what is getting in the way. So many exclusionary experiences are not created by malice, they are created by default.

A meeting is scheduled without notice. A role is designed around hidden assumptions. A board or team meeting rewards fast verbal processing and punishes people who need more time or who answer better in writing. A policy technically exists, but nobody feels safe enough to use it. None of these practices look dramatic on their own, but together they tell people whether they belong. Or don't.

The curb cut/dropped kerb effect is a good way to understand this: what begins as an adjustment for a specific group often improves the experience for many more people, which is the logic of universal design and it applies well past physical access. Clear instructions, predictable processes, accessible formats for documents, reports and papers, flexible working and transparent expectations help disabled and neurodivergent people, but they also help staff and volunteers in general, as well as new joiners and people navigating change or overload. Inclusion is not a separate track from performance. In practice, it is one of the ways performance becomes more sustainable.

***“...so many exclusionary experiences are not created by malice, they are created by default.”***

This is also where governance comes in; ethical leadership is a governance competence because it is tied to risk oversight, accountability and the quality of decision making. If leaders do not understand the impact of their choices on disabled and neurodivergent people, then they are not fully governing the organisation – they are only managing the visible part of it while overlooking deeper potential issues in the name of “culture fit”. Disability inclusion belongs in the same conversation as trust, retention, psychological safety and organisational robustness, because when people feel excluded or forced to mask, the organisation pays for it later through turnover, disengagement, loss of talent, avoidable conflict and potentially more serious outcomes such as burnout, lawsuits, or reputational damage.<sup>5</sup>

***“... ethical leadership creates the conditions for people to do good work without having to spend all their energy navigating avoidable barriers.”***

The business case is real, but I think it works best when it is grounded in care rather than reduced to numbers alone. Research from Accenture and Disability:IN has consistently shown that organisations that lead on disability inclusion outperform peers and build stronger cultures of trust and engagement. But the deeper point is not simply that inclusion is profitable because that’s a dehumanising consideration; it is that ethical leadership creates the conditions for people to do good work without having to spend all their energy navigating avoidable barriers. For example, if I’m an employee with ADHD who needs written instructions, many AI tools can now provide what was costly and cumbersome a few years ago (a note taker); this method can, in turn, help anyone who has a better understanding or recollection from written material.

For me, this is why disability inclusion cannot be left to informal goodwill; it has to be designed into how an organisation works, beginning at recruitment and threaded through everyday communication, flexibility, adjustments and decision making. If leaders want people to trust the organisation, they need to show that fairness is not accidental. If they want people to stay, they need to make accessibility the norm. If they want sustainable performance, they should also trust their staff to make decisions that are best for them.<sup>6</sup>

A common misconception is that people may misuse the system by pretending to be disabled in order to gain benefits such as working from home or flexible hours. In reality, this is rare and concerns can be managed through normal processes, such as occupational health or a conversation about the support needed. Most people do not ask for disability-related support lightly and the request itself can be difficult to make because it involves risk, stigma and the possibility of not being believed. Being asked to justify a disability repeatedly can be emotionally draining and mentally costly, so individuals should be treated with trust, dignity and a practical desire to help.

# Sustainability and scalability

Sustainability is where inclusion stops being a value statement and becomes part of how an organisation works. In small organisations, that shift matters because people often hire informally, cover gaps on the fly and manage problems only when they become visible. This can work for a while but it does not scale. Once the team grows, or the first accommodation request arrives, or a grievance lands on someone's desk, reactive systems like this start to show their limits.<sup>7</sup>

I have seen this pattern often in smaller sports and community settings. There may be a strong culture and good intentions, but no HR layer, no consistent process and no clear answer to the simplest questions: who does what, when and how? That is exactly why inclusion has to be treated as operational infrastructure, not an optional extra. If the system depends on memory, goodwill, or the personal competence of a single person, it is inherently fragile.<sup>8</sup>

## Why scale matters

Scalability is about ensuring the same standards of fairness and support continue to work as the organisation grows, changes, or comes under pressure. A one-page policy, a basic adjustment process and clear communication norms can do a lot of work early on by reducing ambiguity before it turns into friction. That is also what makes them sustainable: they are simple enough to use, though clear enough to repeat.<sup>9</sup> For a small organisation, this might all sit with the CEO or owner, so if someone needs an adjustment, they may simply speak directly to that person and the decision is made there and then. While that can work in a team of ten, it obviously does not scale, which is why organisations need a clearer process as they grow. The same manager cannot reasonably be expected to both support someone's performance and act as the neutral decisionmaker on whether the adjustment is working. Additionally, there should be some form of external or independent review to look at the functional impact for the individual as well as the operational impact for the business, with business needs taken seriously but not treated as more important than accommodation unless undue hardship or disproportionate burden can actually be shown. In such a case the organisation should look at alternative arrangements rather than simply stopping there.

***“...scalable inclusion is not a niche accommodation model. It is a way of building a workplace that can hold complexity but without falling apart.”***

This is where the business case becomes practical. McKinsey's research links inclusion to stronger performance, while Disability:IN's neuroinclusive human capital management report shows that flexible work, accessible communication and better manager practice improve productivity and retention for everyone, not just neurodivergent staff. In other words, scalable inclusion is not a niche accommodation model. It is a way of building a workplace that can hold complexity but without falling apart.<sup>10</sup>

## **Support without diagnosis**

A sustainable organisation does not wait for a formal diagnosis before it makes things usable. That approach is too slow, too narrow and too dependent on how comfortable a person feels disclosing. A better model is to support the need first, then work out whether the person wants to share more. This is also more in line with modern accommodation practice, where the focus is on whether the person can do the job with support, not on whether they fit a narrow category.<sup>11</sup>

This matters because disability and neurodivergence do not always show up in the same way and not everyone will come forward in the same way. Some people will request help early, while others will struggle until burnout or conflict forces the issue. A process that only works after a crisis is not a good process; organisations need to address this proactively.

## **Inclusion as infrastructure**

The simplest way to make inclusion sustainable is to build it into existing routines. Start with a one-page policy, clear adjustment steps and manager guidance on how to handle requests without making them awkward or defensive. Then fold inclusion into onboarding, leadership training, pulse surveys and regular adjustment reviews. It should be part of normal day-to-day conversations, not once-a-year “awareness training”.

This is also where stakeholder mapping helps. In a small organisation, inclusion is not owned solely by HR, as there may be no HR function at all. The owner or CEO sets the tone, managers shape daily reality, peers reinforce or undermine norms and external advisers can support when specialist knowledge is needed. If those roles aren’t clear, people improvise and this is where inclusion usually becomes uneven.<sup>12</sup>

## **A wider benefit**

One of the strongest reasons to design for disability and neurodiversity is that the benefits do not stay in one lane. Clear meeting agendas and better written communication help everyone who is under pressure, tired, or juggling too much. This is the curb cut effect in practice: what removes friction for one group often improves the system for many others.

Below is a table listing common, simple and easy-to-implement accommodations and their expected benefits – for all.

Ask a simple question during onboarding and as part of regular dialogue with staff:

**“What helps you do your best work?”**

| Accommodation                                                                               | Typical barrier addressed                                                 | Example in practice                                                                 | Expected impact on barriers removed                                                     | Broader workforce benefit                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Structured onboarding</b>                                                                | Information overload, unclear informal norms, too much unspoken knowledge | Provide a written onboarding plan, key contacts, glossary and first-30-day roadmap. | Reduces uncertainty and speeds up adjustment into role                                  | Improves ramp-up time and consistency for all new starters                        |
| <b>Advance notice of meetings and questions, setting out purpose and expected decisions</b> | Processing time, anxiety, slower verbal retrieval                         | Share agenda items, timings, key questions and supporting documents in advance      | Improves preparation, contribution quality and participation confidence                 | <a href="#">Leads to better meetings and more thoughtful decisions</a>            |
| <b>Clear, concrete instructions</b>                                                         | Vague expectations, hidden rules, inconsistent interpretation             | Replace “do this soon” with exact deliverables, format, owner and deadline          | Removes ambiguity and lowers cognitive load around task initiation and prioritisation   | Better execution, less slippage and fewer avoidable errors across teams           |
| <b>Written follow-up after meetings</b>                                                     | Verbal processing load, memory load, ambiguity                            | Send actions, deadlines and decisions in writing after meetings                     | Reduces misunderstanding, reliance on memory and anxiety caused by unclear expectations | <a href="#">Improves clarity, accountability and follow-through for all staff</a> |
| <b>Hybrid or remote working options</b>                                                     | Sensory overload, commuting strain, distraction, reduced recovery time    | Allow home working for part or all of the week where role permits                   | Reduces sensory and energy drain, making sustained performance more likely              | Often improves flexibility, retention and productivity more broadly               |

| Accommodation                                        | Typical barrier addressed                                               | Example in practice                                                             | Expected impact on barriers removed                                    | Broader workforce benefit                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Quiet workspace or low-stimulation area</b>       | Noise sensitivity, interruptions, sensory overload                      | Provide access to a quiet room, desk relocation, or noise-cancelling headphones | Removes environmental barriers that impair focus and regulation        | <a href="#">Improves concentration for anyone doing deep work</a>                  |
| <b>Lighting and sensory adjustments</b>              | Harsh light, glare, visual overload                                     | Use lamps, reduce fluorescent exposure, allow screen filters or seating choice  | Reduces physical discomfort, fatigue and sensory distress              | Creates a more comfortable and usable workspace for many employees                 |
| <b>Prioritised task lists</b>                        | Executive functioning strain, competing demands, task paralysis         | Manager provides ranked weekly priorities                                       | Helps with sequencing, starting and completing work without overload   | Makes workload management more transparent for whole teams                         |
| <b>Protected focus time</b>                          | Constant interruptions, attention switching, meeting overload           | Block no-meeting time or focus hours in calendars                               | Reduces task-switching costs and improves sustained attention          | <a href="#">Increases productivity and quality for knowledge workers generally</a> |
| <b>Alternative communication routes*</b>             | Pressure to respond verbally in real time, communication style mismatch | Allow chat, email, written follow-up, or asynchronous input                     | Removes barriers created by speed-based communication norms            | <a href="#">Captures better ideas and creates more inclusive collaboration</a>     |
| <b>Captions, transcripts, or note-taking support</b> | Auditory processing differences, working memory load                    | Enable captions in calls and provide transcripts or notes                       | <a href="#">Improves information access and reduces missed content</a> | Useful for multilingual teams, tired staff and anyone multitasking carefully       |

| Accommodation                                     | Typical barrier addressed                                        | Example in practice                                                        | Expected impact on barriers removed                                                | Broader workforce benefit                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Assistive technology</b>                       | Reading, writing, attention and information processing barriers  | Text-to-speech, speech-to-text, spellcheck, dictation, planning tools      | Reduces friction in core tasks and increases independence                          | <a href="#">Can improve efficiency and accessibility for a much wider group</a>      |
| <b>Reduced multitasking where possible</b>        | Executive overload, mistakes caused by switching                 | Batch work by project or reduce simultaneous priorities                    | Lowers error rates and supports better output quality                              | <a href="#">Helps most employees produce better work under less fragmentation</a>    |
| <b>Regular check-ins with clear review points</b> | Lack of feedback, uncertainty, late escalation of issues         | Short weekly check-ins with agenda: priorities, blockers, support needed   | Helps identify problems early and adjust before performance deteriorates           | <a href="#">Improves management quality and reduces avoidable issues team-wide</a>   |
| <b>Manager training on neurodiversity</b>         | Behavioural misinterpretation, stigma, poor adjustment handling  | Train managers on communication, accommodations and bias                   | Reduces risk of misreading traits as poor attitude or low capability smartclinic+1 | Builds stronger people management and fairer decision-making                         |
| <b>Simple adjustment request process</b>          | Employees do not know how to ask for support, managers improvise | One-page process with named contact, timescale and review point            | Removes procedural barriers and increases consistency                              | <a href="#">Better governance, lower legal risk and more efficient case handling</a> |
| <b>Role design around strengths</b>               | Persistent mismatch between task demands and cognitive strengths | Shift non-essential tasks, rebalance workload, use strengths intentionally | Reduces avoidable strain and enables stronger performance                          | <a href="#">Better job design and talent use across the organisation</a>             |

\* For meetings which involve formal decision making (e.g. board meetings), the correct procedures for legally compliant decisions must be followed. It may be necessary for the decision to be taken in an appropriately constituted meeting, by written resolution, etc. The organisation's governing document should be consulted.

# Risk, compliance and organisational sustainability

As we previously stated, Inclusion is not only a culture issue but also a governance, legal and risk issue. Small organisations sometimes assume that because they are informal, values-led, or community-based, their exposure is lower. In practice, the opposite can be true. When decisions are made informally, responsibilities are unclear and support relies on individual goodwill, risk increases rather than falls.<sup>13</sup>

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 places a duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers and job applicants. That duty is not optional and failing to meet it can amount to disability discrimination. In Ireland, Section 16 of the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2015 places a positive duty on employers to provide appropriate measures, unless doing so would impose a disproportionate burden. The legal framework is clear on the principle and the gap is usually not a lack of awareness of the law but rather a lack of consistent systems for applying it.<sup>14</sup>

That matters because disability-related risk rarely starts with a tribunal (though of course it can certainly end in one). It usually starts much earlier, in ordinary moments that are easy to dismiss:

- A noisy environment that leaves someone overloaded
- Instructions that are given verbally and then forgotten
- Fatigue is misread as a poor attitude
- A direct communication style is misread as defiance
- Performance concerns are raised before support has been properly considered.

These are not minor operational malfunctions but the kind of day-to-day failures that create legal exposure, conflict, harm and avoidable loss.

This is where psychological safety matters. Amy Edmondson defines it as a shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. In plain terms, people need to be able to ask for help, raise concerns, admit mistakes and say when something is not working without fearing punishment or humiliation. For disabled and neurodivergent staff, that matters even more because if people do not feel safe to disclose, question, or ask for adjustments, organisations lose the chance to solve problems early and issues then surface later as underperformance, sickness absence, conflict, grievance, or resignation.<sup>15</sup> Psychological safety gives authenticity to policies or to an organisation's publicly stated values; its absence undermines them or risks negating them entirely.

A common enough example could be an employee with an invisible difference, for example chronic illness, ADHD, traumatic brain injury recovery or Autism. That employee might start to struggle because the organisation hasn't provided the option to get support or proactively offered and therefore the employee doesn't know what's available to them (remember that advocacy is a learnt skill and is also sometimes costly to the individual to have to advocate for themselves constantly). The employee's performance starts to drop as their capacity becomes overloaded. The manager addresses the concerns but doesn't offer support or

consider any functional limitations. The employee might end up consistently under-performing, quitting, being let go or going on sick leave repeatedly. This could have probably been avoided if the organisation had provided proactive support from Day One.

There is also a health and safety dimension that organisations often underplay. Risk assessment should not be limited to obvious physical hazards but should also include sensory overload, fatigue, communication breakdown, cognitive overload and the effects of poorly designed processes on concentration and functioning. In many roles, especially in sport, community and volunteer-led settings, those risks can directly affect well-being, performance and decision making. A workplace that ignores these factors is not only less inclusive but is less safe and less effective.<sup>16</sup>

Data handling and confidentiality are another part of the picture. Disability and health information is sensitive and if an employee shares information about a condition, support need, or adjustment, that information must be treated in an appropriate manner. People need to know who will see it, why it is needed and how it will be stored and used (GDPR, Special Category Data, UK Data Protection Act 2018, UK Data Use and Access Act 2025). Poor handling of personal information erodes trust quickly and once trust is lost, an unwillingness to disclose often follows. That leaves organisations managing risk with less information, not more. It is worth noting that ignorance cannot usually be used as a legal defence in employment tribunals if the employee made the organisation aware of a need related to a disability.

There is also a performance management risk that many organisations still fail to recognise, as behaviour is often judged before context is understood. An employee may be labelled difficult, disengaged, inconsistent or a poor fit when the real issue is sensory overload, unclear expectations, executive functioning strain, or the cumulative effects of masking and fatigue. When behaviour is interpreted without context, performance processes become distorted and while the organisation thinks it is managing standards, it may, in reality, be penalising differences.<sup>17</sup>

For small organisations, reputational risk is just as important as legal risk. In sport, community and volunteer-led environments, trust travels fast. And so does damage. A poorly handled complaint, a public dispute, or a pattern of exclusion can affect recruitment, retention, funding relationships and wider confidence in leadership. That is especially important in organisations that rely on goodwill, membership, or local credibility.

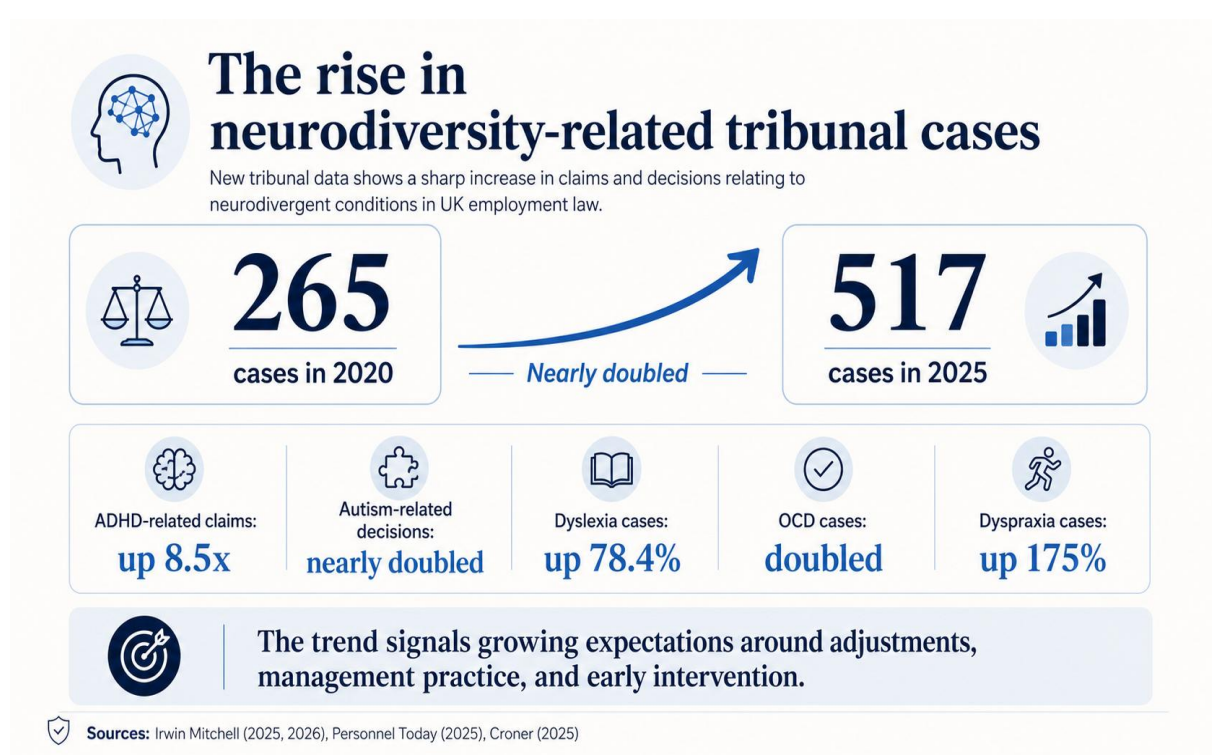
This is why policy integration matters. A disability or inclusion policy on its own is not enough and the real question is whether inclusion shows up across recruitment, onboarding, communication, supervision, performance management and complaints handling. If it sits in one policy and nowhere else, it is unlikely to hold up under pressure. Leadership accountability plays an important role here, too, as someone must own the process, review whether it works and check whether the same issues keep coming up.

A practical standard for small organisations is not perfection, but whether it is repeatable. Can managers recognise when support may be needed? Is there a simple way to request adjustments? Is there a one-page summary in the employee handbook? Are cases handled consistently? Are processes reviewed after grievances, absences, or failed hires? Those questions matter because good governance is not only about having the right policy. It is about knowing whether the policy is being used, whether it is working and where it is failing. One should also note that the approach to adjustments or reasonable accommodations

should always be tailored to the individual. An organisation cannot have a blanket policy regarding disability accommodations, as every person and their needs are unique.

That brings us back to a theme running through [my articles on the SGA website](#). Access matters, but access alone is not enough. If organisations want inclusion to be credible, it has to move beyond entry points and into the conditions that shape day-to-day participation, influence and sustainability. From a governance perspective, the goal is not simply to reduce tribunal risk but to build organisations where support is clear, accountability is visible and avoidable harm is less likely to happen in the first place.<sup>18</sup>

In the technological age, it's worth considering that AI tools can support disability accommodations by making the process faster, more consistent and less dependent on a single manager's judgement, while also helping employees access tools such as transcription, captioning, plain-language summaries and other assistive features that reduce barriers to participation. Used well, technology can help organisations identify patterns, recommend possible adjustments and improve accessibility at scale, but it still needs human monitoring, privacy safeguards and a clear accommodation process so that its use supports inclusion rather than replacing it.



## UK and Ireland summary

| Topic                  | UK                                                                                         | Ireland                                                                                  | Practical risk if missed                                                                                                                |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Core law</b>        | Equality Act 2010                                                                          | Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015                                                       | Non-compliance can lead to legal claims, compensation and reputational harm                                                             |
| <b>Duty to adjust</b>  | Duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers and applicants                    | Duty to do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability | Barrier removal happens too late or not at all, increasing attrition and conflict                                                       |
| <b>Trigger</b>         | Where a disabled person is placed at a substantial disadvantage                            | Once the employer knows, or ought reasonably to know, the need for accommodation         | Managers wait for crisis instead of acting early<br><br><i>(NB: no need for an official diagnosis to trigger the legal requirement)</i> |
| <b>Scope</b>           | Applies to recruitment and employment, including accessible information and auxiliary aids | Applies across employment and reasonable accommodation decisions                         | Performance and absence decisions may be challenged if accommodation is not considered                                                  |
| <b>Practical focus</b> | Remove or reduce disadvantage through changes to process, environment, or support          | Provide appropriate measures unless disproportionate burden applies                      | A poor process can become a legal and cultural problem at the same time                                                                 |

The difference that matters most in practice is this: UK guidance is framed around reasonable adjustments for disadvantage, while Irish law is framed around reasonable accommodation and appropriate measures, with a positive duty to do what is reasonable. In both systems, the operational lesson is the same: do not wait until the issue has become a grievance, a resignation, or a tribunal claim.

## Retention, engagement and workforce sustainability

Building on the earlier sections, retention is where all the previous points stop being abstract and start showing evidence in the numbers. If access is weak, support is inconsistent, adjustments are handled poorly and performance is judged through the wrong lens, people do not usually stay long enough for the organisation to benefit from hiring them in the first place. That is why retention is not some separate HR issue; it's one of the clearest indicators of whether inclusion is functioning at all.<sup>19</sup>

This also connects directly to the earlier discussion of sustainability and scalable systems. A small organisation can get away with improvisation for a while, possibly relying on goodwill, informal workarounds and one person who somehow remembers everything without ever writing it down. But once complexity rises, those same habits start producing confusion, friction and avoidable exits and, in that sense, it's the organisation's job to create an environment where it is realistic and sustainable for people to stay.<sup>20</sup>

Recruitment is expensive and losing people is expensive in ways organisations often underestimate. The cost is not just the advert, the recruitment agency, or the onboarding hours. It is also the drag on delivery, the disruption to relationships, the loss of knowledge and the time spent getting the next person to a point where they can fully contribute (ramp-up time). Retention speaks to stewardship, risk, continuity and whether the organisation is using its people well or wasting them.<sup>21</sup>

For neurodivergent employees, attrition is often less about capability than about fit. People do not leave because they are unable to do the work, but because the conditions around the work steadily become too costly to navigate. Sensory strain, unclear expectations, constant context-switching, poorly managed feedback, social misreading and the pressure to mask all chip away at engagement long before anyone resigns. By the time someone is described as being disengaged, difficult, or no longer a good fit, they may already have spent months trying to bend themselves around a system that was never especially interested in bending back.

***“By the time someone is described as being disengaged, difficult, or no longer a good fit, they may already have spent months trying to bend themselves around a system that was never especially interested in bending back.”***

This is where the double empathy problem is especially useful. The point is not simply that neurodivergent people communicate differently but that misunderstanding is mutual. In workplace settings, that means managers can misread directness as rudeness, slower processing as lack of confidence, discomfort in meetings as disengagement, or different working rhythms as inconsistency. A system that assumes only one valid way of signalling effort or competence will reliably misjudge some of the people inside it and once that happens, performance management starts drifting away from actual performance and towards the theatre of who looks right doing the job.

That matters because performance management is one of the fastest routes from under-support to attrition. When expectations are vague, feedback is delayed and behavioural norms are left unspoken, neurodivergent employees are more likely to be judged unfairly before anyone has properly examined whether the work itself is accessible. This is one of the more frustrating dynamics inside organisations, because the same system that creates the difficulty then treats the resulting strain as proof that the employee is the problem. In plain terms, the workplace sets a maze and then acts surprised when someone struggles to run through it elegantly.

A more useful way to frame the issue is not “who is underperforming?” but “what exactly is being measured and how clearly has it been communicated?” In practice, that means style can end up being rewarded over substance. The person who sounds polished in meetings may be rated more highly than the person who produces excellent work but communicates differently, processes more slowly in real time, or needs written clarity to do their best thinking. That is not an objective system. It is simply a familiar one.<sup>22</sup>

| Performance approach              | What it assumes                                                      | Why it often fails for neurodivergent staff                             | Better alternative                                            |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Annual review with vague criteria | People can infer what “good” looks like                              | Hidden expectations and delayed feedback create confusion and anxiety   | Clear goals, written examples, regular check-ins              |
| Behaviour-led assessment          | Confidence, eye contact, speed and verbal fluency signal performance | Style is mistaken for substance, especially where communication differs | Assess outcomes, quality, reliability and impact              |
| PIP as an early response          | Underperformance sits mainly with the individual                     | Support, barriers and adjustments may not have been explored first      | Check environment, support, communication, then review fairly |
| One-size-fits-all KPIs            | Everyone works best in the same format and rhythm                    | Ignores sensory load, executive functioning and different work patterns | Same outcomes, flexible routes                                |
| Ad hoc manager judgment           | Good managers can simply “tell” who is performing well               | Unspoken norms increase bias and misinterpretation                      | Standard criteria, manager training, documented process       |

This is not only a fairness issue. It is a workforce sustainability issue. When people are managed through systems that do not recognise how they work, capacity gets underused. Neurodivergent employees often bring high levels of pattern recognition, focus, creativity, problem-solving and strategic thinking, yet those strengths can be lost if too much effort is

spent managing noise, ambiguity, or impression management. The organisation then ends up paying for full capability while only accessing part of it and also possibly causing harm to the employee long term.<sup>23</sup>

Inclusion, when done properly, improves retention by reducing the cost of participation. HBR's work on belonging makes this point clearly: when people feel they belong, performance rises and turnover risk falls. That matters here because belonging is not about making work cosy or endlessly comfortable; it is about whether people can contribute without continually second-guessing whether they are being misread, excluded, or quietly penalised for difference. If people spend half their energy decoding the room, that energy is no longer available for the work.<sup>24</sup>

This is also where burnout and disengagement sit. "Quiet quitting" is often treated as a motivational failure, when in many cases it is a late-stage response to a chronic

***"'Quiet quitting' is often treated as a motivational failure, when in many cases it is a late-stage response to a chronic mismatch."***

mismatch. People reduce effort when the cost of full participation has become too high, when extra energy is rarely recognised, or when trying harder simply means colliding harder with the same barriers. In neurodivergent employees, this may be intensified by masking, sensory strain and the accumulation of minor misunderstandings that, individually, may not seem dramatic enough but become exhausting in combination.<sup>25</sup>

Intersectional barriers make this even more complex: neurodivergence does not appear in isolation from gender, race, class, age, disability, language, or caring responsibilities. That means the people most at risk of being overlooked, misread, or managed out may also be carrying multiple layers of bias at once. A retention strategy that looks only at top-line turnover will miss these patterns. Organisations need to know who is leaving, where, when and under what conditions; otherwise, they end up describing structural loss as a personal choice.<sup>26</sup>

This is why Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging strategies and workplace measurement matter, provided they are used properly. Pulse surveys, stay interviews, exit interviews, engagement data and promotion analysis can all help organisations see where inclusion is breaking down and where capability is being lost.



But the measures need to go beyond broad sentiment. Questions about clarity, psychological safety, manager support, workload realism, fairness in performance evaluation and access to adjustments are much more useful than vague invitations to say whether work feels good this month. Data is only as useful as the question behind it, which is mildly annoying but repeatedly true.<sup>27</sup>

Disability:IN's work on neuroinclusive human capital management is useful here because it moves the conversation away from accommodation as a niche exception and towards systems that improve engagement and productivity and lower attrition more broadly. Their framework points to better manager capability, clearer communication, more flexible work arrangements and more universal approaches to support as drivers of stronger workforce outcomes. This fits closely with the argument

***“If organisations build systems that are easier for neurodivergent people to use, they often become better systems for many others too.”***

running through this essay: if organisations build systems that are easier for neurodivergent people to use, they often become better systems for many others too.<sup>28</sup>

From a governance perspective, retention is about protecting capability, reducing avoidable loss and creating conditions in which people can contribute fully over time. When organisations fail at this, the costs show up in staff and volunteer turnover, grievances, burnout, weaker performance and reputational damage. When they do it well, the gains are not only moral but operational, financial and strategic.<sup>29</sup>

## Practical implementation

If the earlier sections make the case for why disability and neurodiversity inclusion matters, this final section is about what to do on Monday morning. Practical implementation is what turns inclusion from a set of good instincts into something people can actually use.<sup>30</sup>

This is especially important in small and mid-sized organisations, where formal HR structures may be light or non-existent. In those settings, inclusion often lives in habits, relationships and unwritten rules rather than in a mature people function. That makes it even more important to be clear about who is responsible for what, what documents are in place and which simple changes can reduce friction quickly and at low cost.<sup>31</sup>

### *Who owns what?*

Implementation works best when responsibility is spread clearly rather than vaguely shared by everyone and therefore owned by no one. Inclusion is not a one-person project; it should be part of everyone's role and function and it certainly shouldn't rely on voluntary initiatives such as Employee Resource Groups. It needs visible leadership, day-to-day management, peer behaviours that support rather than punish difference, and access to external expertise when a case becomes more complex.

| Role                                                         | Core responsibility                                                                                               | What good looks like                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Board/Trustees</b>                                        | Sets the governance culture, oversees strategy and risk, ensures ethical oversight and models inclusive behaviour | Creates a culture of psychological safety, ensures inclusion is on the board agenda, listens to diverse perspectives and holds executive leadership accountable for inclusive outcomes |
| <b>CEO/owner</b>                                             | Sets tone, priorities and accountability                                                                          | Makes inclusion visible in strategy, policy and leadership behaviour; funds basic supports; reviews whether practice matches intent                                                    |
| <b>Manager</b>                                               | Shapes day-to-day experience                                                                                      | Gives clear expectations, agrees adjustments, checks what is working, notices friction early and avoids treating confusion as misconduct                                               |
| <b>Peers</b>                                                 | Influence team culture and belonging                                                                              | Respect communication differences, reward inclusive habits, avoid informal exclusion and support alternative participation styles                                                      |
| <b>External support: HR, consultant, occupational health</b> | Adds structure and specialist input                                                                               | Helps with complex cases, policy design, legal risk, training and review of adjustments without making the process heavier than it needs to be                                         |

The practical point here is simple. If the owner thinks the manager is handling it, the manager thinks HR is handling it and HR only hears about the issue after something has already gone wrong, the system is not working. Clarity of responsibility is not bureaucracy. It is prevention.<sup>32</sup>

### *Workplace artefacts that make a difference*

A neuroinclusive workplace does not need a shelf full of glossy policies before it can start. It does, however, need a few simple artefacts to clarify expectations and make access easier. AskJAN and related accommodation guidance are useful here because they focus on practical tools, checklists, forms and low-friction ways to start the accommodation process.<sup>33</sup>

The most useful artefacts for a small organisation are:

- A one-page inclusion and adjustment policy
- A simple adjustment request template
- A short onboarding checklist
- Team communication norms
- A lightweight review process for checking whether agreed-upon supports still work

None of these needs to be elaborate. In fact, overdesign is often part of the problem. If the form is too complex, people avoid using it. If the policy reads like a legal document rather than a practical guide, managers do not know what to do with it. We're looking to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity for everyone involved in the process.

### *Process audit*

Before writing new documents, it helps to audit the processes that already shape employee experience. In most organisations, the pressure points are predictable: recruitment, onboarding, communication, performance management and the policies that sit behind them. If inclusion is absent in those areas, it will usually manifest later as conflict, disengagement, missed opportunities, or avoidable attrition.<sup>34</sup>

A quick audit can be done with a few blunt but useful questions:

#### **Recruitment:**

Are job descriptions clear, realistic and focused on outcomes rather than personality style?

#### **Onboarding:**

Does a new starter know what to expect, who to ask and how to request support?

#### **Communication:**

Are important expectations given clearly and in writing?

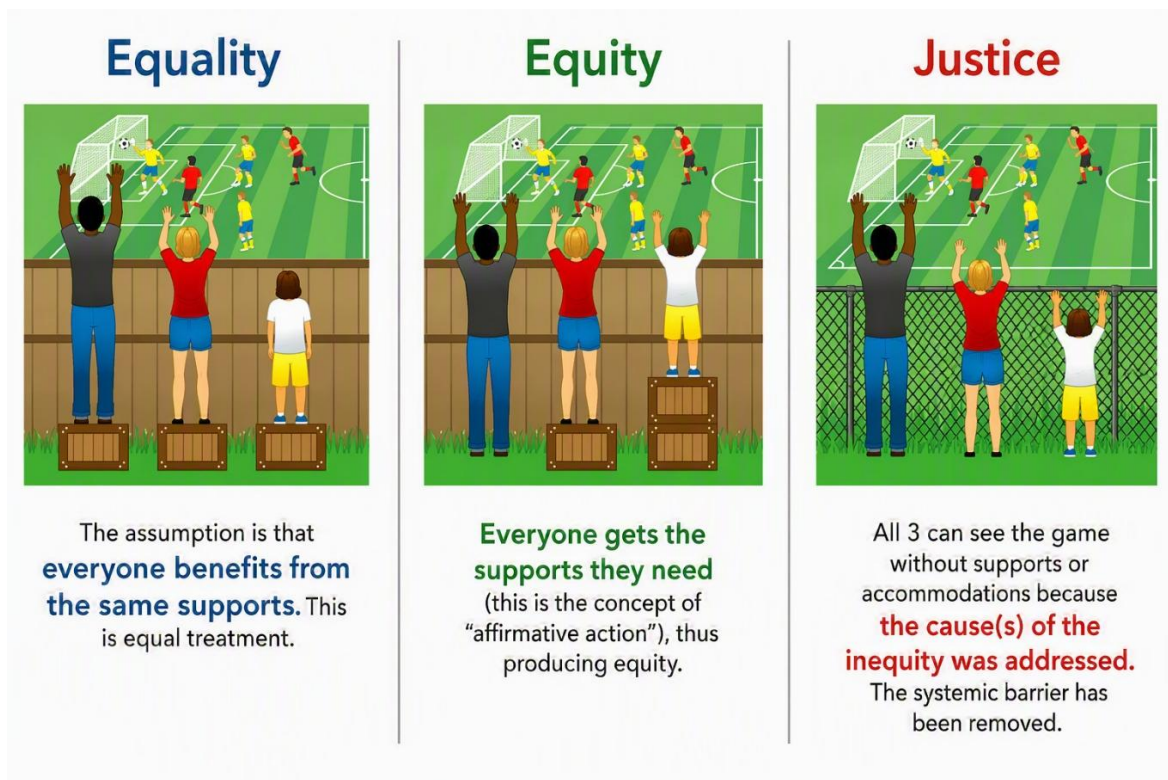
#### **Performance:**

Are managers judging outcomes fairly, or rewarding one narrow style of performance?

If the honest answer to several of those questions is no, that is not a reason to panic. It is simply a sign that the next phase of work must focus on the basics before moving on to strategy decks.<sup>35</sup>

Some additional suggestions to help remove barriers for applicants could be:

- **Prioritise outcomes in role design:** Move away from subjective metrics like "culture fit" or vague "strong verbal communication" traits. By focusing on concrete, measurable deliverables, organisations can evaluate essential functions rather than penalising a specific personality style or a different communication rhythm.
- **Ensure pre-interview transparency:** Share the agenda, specific format (such as task-based or panel) and questions ahead of time. This reduces the cognitive processing load and avoidable anxiety, allowing candidates to show their actual capability rather than just their ability to "think on their feet."
- **Utilise flexible demonstration methods:** Enable candidates to showcase their expertise through various formats. Providing the choice to submit written material, a pre-recorded task, or a portfolio ensures performance is not exclusively tied to real-time verbal retrieval.
- **Normalise the adjustment request process:** Clearly state in all job postings that reasonable support is available. Providing a named contact and assuring candidates that requesting adjustments carries no risk helps build the trust needed for disclosure.
- **Standardise the assessment framework:** Use structured interview formats with objective, pre-defined scoring. This mitigates the risk of "gut feeling" bias, which frequently penalises neurodivergent individuals who may process or communicate in non-standard ways.
- **Optimise the physical and virtual environment:** For in-person meetings, detail the sensory environment (like lighting or noise). Offering remote attendance as a standard option, rather than an exception, removes environmental barriers by default.
- **Educate hiring teams on the "Double Empathy Problem":** Ensure interviewers understand that different communication traits (such as directness, varied speech rhythms, or less eye contact) are not indicators of low competence, poor attitude, or lack of engagement.
- **Audit job postings for inclusion:** Remove unnecessary jargon or aggressive phrasing that may discourage potential applicants. Using plain language to describe what is strictly essential for the role makes the entry point far more accessible for everyone.



There is still an unspoken fear in some spaces that improving accessibility means compromising on quality. Addressing disability access is not about granting free passes or compromising recruitment quality; rather, it is about identifying and removing systemic barriers in order to level the playing field, ensuring every candidate has an equitable opportunity to demonstrate their full potential. Clear expectations, structured recruitment and working processes, transparent criteria and objectives and flexibility in how people deliver allow organisations – and the people in them – to focus on what actually matters.

The good news is that many of the most useful improvements are not expensive. They are often small choices that reduce ambiguity and sensory strain or make communication more usable. Moreover, the suggested practices provided on pp. 10-12 are the sort of changes that benefit neurodivergent staff and volunteers, but also help the wider workforce, volunteers, board members, or anyone who has ever tried to follow a vague meeting with no agenda and a confusing follow-up email.

These changes are not a complete strategy, but they are often enough to start shifting the everyday experience of work.

### Ready-to-use templates

Included in the appendix of this essay are templates which are designed for small and mid-sized organisations and which can be adapted easily.

They are intentionally short. A template that's used is better than a perfect template that sits untouched on a shared drive. Remember that, for privacy and confidentiality, and to comply with GDPR, no medical data should ever be included in these forms.

## Conclusion

Disability inclusion is not an optional extra or a nice-to-have line in a strategy document. It reduces risk, strengthens the organisation, supports sustainability and improves both governance and day-to-day cohesion when it is built into the way work actually happens.

That is the thread running through this essay. The earlier sections showed that access without influence is not enough; sustainability depends on systems that can scale; retention depends on whether people can stay well enough to do good work; and performance management fails when organisations judge style before substance. Put simply, inclusion is not a side project. It is operational design.<sup>36</sup>

When organisations get this right, the benefits are practical as well as ethical. People understand expectations more clearly, managers have better tools, teams waste less energy on confusion and leaders reduce the risk of avoidable conflict, grievance, turnover and reputational damage. The result is a stronger, steadier organisation that can actually hold onto its talent rather than slowly burning through it.

The essay's final message is straightforward. If organisations want better governance, stronger culture and more sustainable performance, they need to treat disability inclusion as part of the core operating model, not as a separate inclusion task that only appears when things go wrong. The practical tools provided are there to make that shift easier, because good intentions are welcome, but usable systems are what actually change outcomes.

# Glossary

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Neurodiversity</b>         | <p>The natural variation in how human brains function. It includes differences in attention, sensory processing, communication, memory, emotional regulation and problem-solving. Autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's syndrome and many others sit within this umbrella, though not everyone identifies with labels or has a formal diagnosis. There are other words people can use to describe themselves and that should always be respected.</p> <p>Estimates suggest that around 15-20% of the population is neurodivergent. This is not a small or exceptional group. It includes people with a wide range of cognitive profiles, strengths and support needs, many of whom are already operating at senior levels, often without ever disclosing. Some research suggests that by 2030, 40% of the population will identify as neurodivergent.</p> <p>For organisations, this warrants attention for at least two reasons. First, from an equity point of view, addressing obstacles to neuroinclusion forms part of a culture and approach of recognising differences and understanding the need to enable equality of opportunity for all. Secondly, there is a potentially sizeable risk in business and performance terms in effectively sidelining such a significant section of society - or not enabling them to give fully of themselves - and as such missing out on reserves of talent, experience, skills and perspectives.</p> |
| <b>Curb Cut Effect</b>        | <p>A design principle where accommodations initially created for a specific group (e.g., dropped kerbs for wheelchair users) end up benefiting a much wider range of people (e.g., parents with prams, travellers with luggage). In this essay, it refers to inclusive practices that remove friction for everyone.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Double Empathy Problem</b> | <p>A theory that challenges the idea that autistic people lack empathy. Instead, it suggests that communication breakdowns are a two-way process occurring when neurodivergent and neurotypical people have different styles of perception and interaction, leading to mutual misunderstanding.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Executive Functioning</b>  | <p>A set of mental skills that include working memory, flexible thinking and self-control. Challenges in this area can affect a person's ability to plan, focus, remember instructions and juggle multiple tasks.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Human Rights Model</b>          | A framework that understands disability within the context of equal rights, dignity and participation. It treats disabled people as rights-holders and emphasises the duty of institutions to create conditions where these rights can be exercised.   |
| <b>Intersectionality</b>           | An analytical framework for understanding how different social identities (e.g., race, gender, class, disability and neurodivergence) overlap and compound to create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege.                                |
| <b>Masking</b>                     | The process of consciously or unconsciously suppressing neurodivergent traits and mimicking neurotypical behaviours in order to "fit in" or survive in environments not designed for neurodivergent needs. This often leads to exhaustion and burnout. |
| <b>Medical Model of Disability</b> | A traditional approach that views disability as a "problem" or "deficit" residing within the individual, focusing on fixing, curing, or correcting the person rather than the environment.                                                             |
| <b>Neuro-affirming</b>             | An approach that validates and accepts neurodivergent traits as natural human variations rather than pathologising them or viewing them as defects to be "fixed."                                                                                      |
| <b>Psychological Safety</b>        | A shared belief within a team that it is safe to take interpersonal risks - such as asking for help, admitting a mistake, or raising a concern - without fear of punishment, humiliation, or negative consequences.                                    |
| <b>Social Model of Disability</b>  | A framework asserting that disability is not caused by an individual's impairment, but by the barriers (environmental, systemic and cultural) created by society that prevent disabled people from participating fully.                                |
| <b>Tokenism</b>                    | The practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to be inclusive (e.g., recruiting a single neurodivergent person to represent a group) without providing them with genuine influence, power, or systemic support.                         |

## Appendix: Ready-to-use templates

On the following pages you will find some handy, ready-to-use templates to help you embed inclusion in daily operations.

Aimed at CEOs, founders, managers, HR, consultants and board leads in a range of community and sports organisations, they are designed to be editable, printable and genuinely usable.

Use these templates to:

- **Reduce ambiguity** – clear forms and prompts prevent support from becoming guesswork.
- **Start earlier** – good systems catch friction before it becomes burnout, grievance or attrition.
- **Support managers** – managers need structure, not just good intentions.
- **Keep it usable** – short, fillable layouts are more likely to be used across the organisation.

The templates can be edited digitally, printed for meetings, or adapted into your employee handbook or onboarding pack.

They are intentionally clean, low-noise layouts with clear sections, writing space and calm visual hierarchy.

# One-page inclusion and adjustments policy

A short policy that can sit in a handbook, onboarding pack, manager guide or HR manual

Best for: small and mid-sized organisations that need a usable starting point.

ORGANISATION NAME

POLICY OWNER

DATE ISSUED

REVIEW DATE

PURPOSE

WHO THIS POLICY APPLIES TO

## CORE PRINCIPLES

- ☐ People should not have to struggle in silence before asking for support.
- ☐ Support should focus on barriers, work requirements, and practical solutions.
- ☐ Requests will be handled respectfully, promptly, and confidentially.
- ☐ Adjustments may be temporary, ongoing, or reviewed as roles change.

## HOW TO REQUEST SUPPORT

- Name the barrier, task, or part of the work creating difficulty.
- Suggest what might help, if known.
- Agree actions, owner, and review date.
- Seek HR, occupational health, or specialist advice if needed.

FURTHER SUPPORT ROUTES

Use for employees, applicants, or volunteers where a support conversation needs structure.

# Adjustment request form

A fillable form for identifying the barrier, the context, and what support might help. Short on purpose.

NAME

ROLE / TEAM

DATE

MANAGER / CONTACT

1. WHAT PART OF YOUR WORK, ENVIRONMENT, OR COMMUNICATION IS CREATING DIFFICULTY OR IS CHALLENGING FOR YOU?

2. WHEN IS THE ISSUE MOST NOTICEABLE?

3. WHAT SUPPORT OR ADJUSTMENT MIGHT HELP?

4. IS THIS NEEDED ALL THE TIME OR IN SPECIFIC SITUATIONS?

5. ANYTHING ELSE THAT WOULD HELP THE ORGANISATION SUPPORT YOU WELL?

Best completed within 24 hours of the conversation.

# Manager response and action record

A companion form so that support conversations do not vanish into memory or HR processes. Remember that, by law, any disclosure of disability must be acted on promptly. For GDPR reason, do NOT record any medical information in this form, focus on functional impact and solutions.

EMPLOYEE NAME

MANAGER NAME

DATE OF CONVERSATION

DATE WRITTEN SUMMARY SENT

SUMMARY OF REQUEST OR ISSUE RAISED

BARRIERS IDENTIFIED

ADJUSTMENTS OR ACTIONS AGREED

TEMPORARY OR ONGOING?

REVIEW DATE

SUPPORT NEEDED FROM HR / OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH / EXTERNAL ADVISER

# Inclusive onboarding checklist

A practical checklist for reducing uncertainty from day one.

Use before day one, during week one, and again at 30 days.

## BEFORE DAY ONE

- ☐
 Send first-day plan in writing
- ☐
 Confirm working hours, location, and practical arrangements
- ☐
 Share who to contact with questions
- ☐
 Ask whether any support would help from the start and proactively send a list of available adjustments
- ☐
 Check workspace, technology, and sensory considerations

## FIRST WEEK

- ☐
 Explain expectations clearly and in writing
- ☐
 Break training into manageable steps
- ☐
 Provide written summaries after key meetings
- ☐
 Clarify team norms and feedback routes
- ☐
 Avoid information overload where possible

## FIRST MONTH REVIEW NOTES

WHAT IS WORKING WELL?

WHAT IS CREATING FRICTION?

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE, CLARIFY, OR BE REVIEWED?

# Team communication norms

A short team agreement that reduces ambiguity

Use in workshops, leadership meetings, or new team set-up.

TEAM / DEPARTMENT

---

DATE AGREED

---

OWNER

---

REVIEW DATE

---

OUR PRINCIPLES

☐ We aim to be clear and understood by all.

☐ Important actions and deadlines are confirmed in writing.

☐ People can contribute verbally or in writing.

☐ We communicate clearly when priorities change.

MEETING NORMS

☐ Agendas are sent in writing, 24h in advance

☐ Expected decisions are made explicit.

☐ Follow-up actions are written down.

☐ Participation in meetings is valued regardless of the medium (speech, writing)

ANYTHING SPECIFIC THIS TEAM WANTS TO ADD

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# Quick wins and process audit

A simple review sheet for spotting where inclusion breaks down in ordinary processes.

Good for leadership reviews, board discussions, or implementation planning.

## QUICK WINS TRACKER

- ☐
 Send agendas in advance
- ☐
 Provide written follow-up after meetings
- ☐
 Offer written and verbal input routes
- ☐
 Identify a quiet or low-stimulation space
- ☐
 Ask about support needs during onboarding
- ☐
 Review flexibility around hours, breaks, or location

## AUDIT PROMPTS

- Are job descriptions clear and realistic?
- Do new starters know what to expect?
- Are important expectations confirmed in writing?
- Are managers judging outcomes fairly?
- Can employees find support routes quickly?

OWNER

START DATE

REVIEW DATE

STATUS

TOP THREE CHANGES TO MAKE FIRST

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# About the SGA

The Sports Governance Academy is the governance support hub for the sport and physical activity sector. A partnership between The Chartered Governance Institute UK & Ireland and all of the Sports Councils across the UK, we champion good governance because we are passionate about the role it plays in enabling the success of individual organisations and the sector as a whole.

Our goal is to improve the standard of governance in sport and physical activity organisations by supporting, developing and connecting the people in the sector who work with, and have an interest in governance. Our services are designed to meet the diverse needs of an audience that includes governance leads, those with governance responsibilities as part of their role, chief executives, board members and everyone who has an interest in improving the way their organisation operates.

We provide:

## Resources

A trusted set of free resources that support all areas of governance activity. Our guidance, templates, checklists, webinars and blogs are designed to help you get to grips with governance and drive success in your organisation.

## Learning

Our practical training will build your governance skills and confidence. We currently offer sports governance courses at introductory and intermediate level, as well as training for chairs, trustees and directors. Our expanding portfolio of courses is designed to support you throughout your governance journey. The SGA's bursary schemes provide free bespoke board development and free access to the Institute's Certificate in Sports Governance.

## Community

Our community is an active network of people who are facing similar governance challenges in the sports sector. Being part of it provides you with the support and experience of others and creates new opportunities for collaboration. We are committed to supporting the SGA community through providing a range of in-person and virtual opportunities, including our flagship annual conference.

<https://sportsgovernanceacademy.org.uk>