ND-Friendly Job Description & Recruitment Guidelines

Reduce bias, reduce overwhelm, and attract neurodivergent talent.

By Neal Glendenning

Contact: info@theneuroinclusionproject.co.uk

Important note

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

A clear orientation (for organisations)

This is not a diversity marketing guide.
It is not a checklist to prove inclusivity.
It is not about lowering standards.

These guidelines exist because **recruitment is one of the highest-load, highest-bias points in organisational systems…** and many neurodivergent (ND) candidates are filtered out long before their capability is visible.

ND-inclusive recruitment:

- reduces unnecessary cognitive and sensory load
- removes avoidable bias and ambiguity
- makes expectations legible
- widens the talent pool without changing the role's core requirements

This resource is intended to **change the system**, not train candidates to cope better with it.

1. A foundational reframe: recruitment is a design problem

When ND candidates struggle in recruitment, it is often attributed to:

- confidence
- communication style
- interview performance
- "culture fit"

In reality, common recruitment practices:

- reward masking and impression management
- prioritise speed and ambiguity
- conflate social ease with competence
- test stress tolerance rather than job skills

ND-friendly recruitment begins with this assumption:

If capable candidates consistently drop out or underperform at the same stage, the process is the problem… not the people.

2. What ND-friendly recruitment is *not*

To prevent misuse, be explicit.

ND-friendly recruitment is **not**:

- asking candidates to disclose diagnoses
- creating separate or "special" processes
- lowering expectations or responsibilities
- assessing resilience, personality, or "grit"
- relying on intuition or "gut feel"

Inclusive recruitment works best when it:

- benefits everyone
- is standardised, not exceptional
- focuses on *how work is done*, not how people perform under scrutiny

3. Why job descriptions matter more than you think

For many ND candidates, the job description is not just information…
it is a **signal of safety, clarity, and fit**.

Job descriptions often unintentionally:

- overwhelm with long lists
- hide real expectations
- use vague or coded language
- imply constant urgency
- conflate traits with tasks

This leads capable candidates to:

- self-exclude
- doubt fit
- over-prepare or burn out before applying

Clear descriptions reduce anxiety **and** improve applicant quality.

4. Writing ND-friendly job descriptions

4.1 Start with purpose, not pressure

Avoid opening with hype or intensity.

Instead of:

"Fast-paced, high-pressure environment looking for a rockstar…"

Try:

"This role exists to support X outcome by doing Y work."

This grounds candidates in **meaning**, not adrenaline.

4.2 Be precise about responsibilities

Replace broad, bundled expectations with clear task groupings.

Avoid:

- "Wears many hats"
- "Manages competing priorities"
- "Excellent communication skills"

Instead, specify:

- key responsibilities
- frequency (daily / weekly / project-based)
- scope (what is and isn't included)

Clarity reduces guesswork and self-doubt.

4.3 Separate *essential* from *desirable*

Long "wish lists" disproportionately exclude ND candidates.

Good practice:

- list **essential requirements only**
- place optional skills in a clearly marked section
- state explicitly that candidates do not need to meet every item

For example:

"You do not need to meet every point below to apply."

This single sentence significantly increases ND applications.

4.4 Avoid trait-based language

Many job ads describe *people* instead of *work*.

Avoid trait language such as:

- resilient
- confident
- energetic
- people-person
- self-starter

These terms are subjective and bias-laden.

Instead, describe:

- tasks
- outputs
- working conditions
- support structures

Let candidates decide if the work fits them.

4.5 Make expectations explicit

Include information candidates usually have to infer:

- working hours and flexibility
- remote / hybrid options
- communication norms
- team structure
- decision-making style
- feedback cadence

Transparency reduces anxiety and improves retention later.

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5. Language that reduces bias and overwhelm

Prefer:

- plain language
- short paragraphs
- bullet points
- concrete examples

Avoid:

- jargon
- idioms ("hit the ground running")
- metaphors
- overly promotional tone

ND-friendly language is not dull.
It is **legible**.

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6. Signalling inclusion without forcing disclosure

You can signal ND-inclusivity without asking candidates to out themselves.

Helpful signals include:

- stating that alternative application formats are welcome
- offering interview adjustments proactively
- naming clarity, predictability, and flexibility as values
- avoiding "culture fit" language

For example:

"We aim to make our recruitment process accessible. Adjustments are available at any stage."

This invites access **without pressure**.

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7. ND-friendly application processes

7.1 Reduce unnecessary friction

Audit your application process:

- Is the form long or repetitive?
- Are candidates required to re-enter CV information?
- Are there arbitrary word limits?
- Is the platform accessible and stable?

Each extra step disproportionately filters ND candidates.

7.2 Rethink cover letters

Cover letters often measure:

- persuasive writing
- self-promotion
- narrative coherence under pressure

These are rarely core job requirements.

Consider alternatives:

- short role-specific questions
- work samples
- structured prompts

If you do request a cover letter, clarify:

- length
- purpose
- what you are (and are not) assessing

8. Interview design: assessing capability, not masking

8.1 Give structure in advance

ND-friendly interviews provide:

- agenda
- timing
- format
- names and roles of interviewers
- types of questions

Surprise is not a neutral condition.

8.2 Ask concrete, job-relevant questions

Avoid abstract or performative prompts like:

- "Tell me about a time you failed"
- "What's your biggest weakness?"
- "How do you handle pressure?"

Instead, ask:

- "How would you approach X task?"
- "What tools or conditions help you do your best work?"

- "Here's a scenario… what would you do first?"

These assess **thinking**, not theatre.

8.3 Allow processing time

Good practice includes:

- pausing between questions
- allowing notes
- offering questions in writing
- permitting follow-up responses after the interview

Speed is not a proxy for competence.

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9. Rethinking "culture fit"

"Culture fit" often functions as:

- similarity bias
- comfort with norms
- reward for masking

Shift the frame to:

"Conditions for contribution."

Ask:

- What behaviours are actually required?
- Which norms are optional, historical, or exclusionary?
- Where could difference strengthen the team?

Diversity fails when fit means sameness.

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10. Feedback, outcomes, and closure

Recruitment itself can be destabilising.

ND-friendly practices include:

- clear timelines
- updates if delays occur

- specific, neutral feedback where possible
- explicit closure

Ambiguity and silence are often more distressing than rejection.

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11. Common mistakes to avoid

Avoid:

- assuming "good communication" equals verbal fluency
- reading anxiety as lack of interest
- equating eye contact with honesty
- interpreting flat affect as disengagement
- rewarding confidence over clarity

These patterns systematically exclude ND talent.

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12. What good ND-inclusive recruitment achieves

Organisations that apply these principles often see:

- wider and more diverse applicant pools
- stronger job-fit matches
- reduced early attrition
- improved employer reputation
- less burnout post-hire

These outcomes result from **better signal-to-noise**, not concessions.

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13. Organisational guardrails (non-negotiable)

These guidelines must not be used to:

- pressure disclosure
- create separate "ND tracks"
- tokenise candidates
- lower accountability post-hire
- outsource inclusion to individuals

Inclusion fails when it is conditional.

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14. A brief recruitment self-check (optional)

Before publishing a role, ask:

- Would this description overwhelm me if I were already anxious?
- Are expectations explicit or implied?
- Are we assessing job skills… or performance under scrutiny?
- Where might capable candidates self-exclude?
- What could we clarify or remove?

This is not about perfection.
It is about **reducing unnecessary harm**.

A closing note for organisations

ND-inclusive recruitment is not about being "nice."

It is about:

- designing fairer systems
- seeing talent more clearly
- removing barriers that never needed to be there

When recruitment is calmer, clearer, and more humane,
organisations do not attract *less capable* people.

They finally see the ones they were missing.