

Neurodiversity behind the wheel

Driving Change - Part 1



Introduction

Fleet managers know vehicles. They are not neurodiversity specialists, and they are not required to be, but they should understand that drivers – like other employees – are different.

A business with 10 vehicles, where the manager knows everyone's name, is just as likely to include neurodivergent drivers as a four-figure megafleet. That does not mean the organisation should completely upend its practices, then trumpet its new-found efforts in an ostentatious episode of virtue signalling. It does mean that, if organisations like the idea of retaining employees for longer, potentially lowering accident rates and matching drivers with roles in which they can excel, they need to accept that one size does not fit all.

It is not necessary to buy a new fleet to accommodate neurodivergent drivers and, as we describe on page 13, what is often standard vehicle specification, used correctly, can optimise a cab or a car interior. Speccing vehicles to accommodate all drivers – neurodivergent and neurotypical – may also be cheaper and conforms to the (also cheaper) 'universal design' of gearing organisations to suit as broad a group of employees as possible. See page 7 for details.

You might also want to think about communication, management style and the rigidity of your policies and practices, which we discuss on pages 11-14. A little flexibility and a smattering of individualisation go a long way and can account for differences in perception and processing.

Channel neurodivergent qualities, and you can end up with some of the most efficient, productive and dynamic employees on a fleet. The case studies on pages 15-17 are real-world examples of neurodivergent drivers known for their efficacy, and the managers who gave them a shot. The latter freely admit that there are challenges, but they also explain how the drivers in question buck industry trends with their youth, take fewer days off than their contemporaries and fill vital roles in a sector in which employers often grumble that they, 'can't get the staff'.

We reiterate, fleet managers are not experts in neurodiversity, and they do not have to be. This white paper is for those keen to tailor their fleets for drivers of all types and get the best out of them behind the wheel.





What is Neurodiversity?

What does neurodiversity mean and how common is it?

Everyone has a knack for something, and everyone finds certain things more difficult than others. For some people, the difference between the knack and the difficulty is more distinct, which can be useful or restricting depending on the conditions.

Neurodiversity is the concept that people experience and interact with the world in different ways and that their cognitive makeup means they have distinct strengths and difficulties. Such differences – which often correlate to verbal and visual skills, working memory and processing speed – are sometimes referred to as a 'spiky profile'.

Neurodivergent people often have a real flair for particular tasks and methods but can find certain activities or situations incredibly tough. That can come into sharp focus when they are at work, and lead to inconsistent performance or difficulties with adapting or fitting in.

Neurodivergent individuals often flourish when they spend less energy trying to overcome challenges and instead work in environments that complement their strengths.

What are neurotypes?

The expressions 'neurotype' and 'neurominority' refer to the different forms of neurodiversity. They include:

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): people who have ADHD may struggle with memory, organisation, time management, stress, concentration, listening and note-taking. It is often referred to as an inability to focus, but that is not entirely correct, because hyperfocusing on tasks is also a feature of ADHD, along with strong visualisation skills, problem solving, creativity and enthusiasm.

Autism: autistic people may find socialising confusing or tiring and may become overwhelmed in loud or busy environments. They may use repeated movements or actions to calm themselves or express joy and potentially mask their discomfort to fit in with others. They may also have intense interests and react well to order and routine, which means they can be exceptionally efficient in the right circumstances.

Dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia: dyslexia literally means 'difficulties with words' and primarily affects reading and writing skills. Dyscalculia refers to someone who struggles with maths and dysgraphia to someone who struggles with handwriting. They predominantly relate to processing, which means organisation and remembering information can be challenging. Strengths often include visual thinking, verbal skills and long-term memory.

Dyspraxia: also known as Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), dyspraxia impacts motor coordination skills and affects muscle coordination and perception – vision, hearing or spatial awareness. Strengths often include big picture thinking, problem solving, tenacity, creativity and empathy.

Tourette syndrome: TS is characterised by involuntary movements and sounds known as tics, which can include blinking, shoulder shrugging, throat clearing or grunting. A common misconception is that individuals display severe tics or involuntarily swear – a symptom known as coprolalia, which affects only around 10% of people with TS. Individuals often display strong verbal skills, tenacity and resilience, innovation, emotional intelligence and attention to detail.

The aforementioned conditions exist from birth. The following are acquired neurotypes, which develop later in life.

Acquired brain injury (ABI): usually occurs after an accident or an illness and can cause difficulties similar to those associated with ADHD or dyslexia. ABIs do not apply to every part of the brain, and elements such as visual, memory or practical skills can be augmented with rehabilitation.

Mental health conditions: the term is widely used, but common mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, can affect motivation and self-esteem. Individuals frequently exhibit abilities such as creativity, empathy and deep detailed thinking.

It is not unusual for a neurodivergent individual to have more than one neurotype.

How common is neurodiversity?

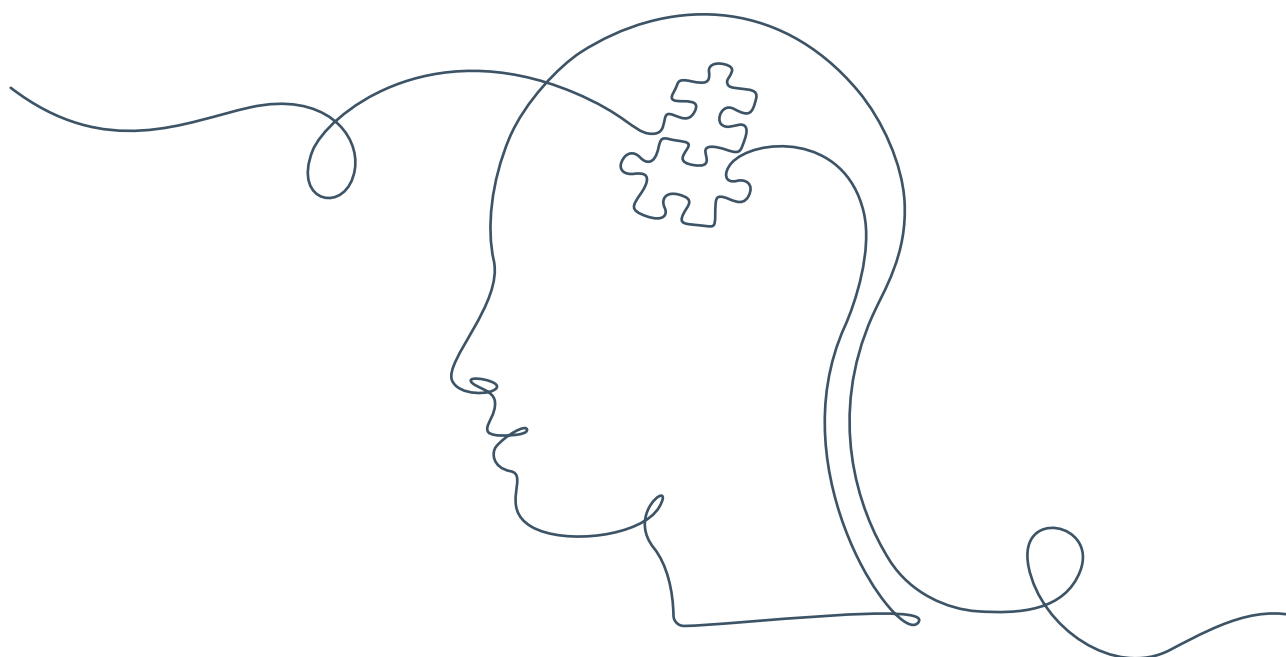
Neurodiversity is a popular topic and widely discussed. While a broader awareness of it is positive, it can be incredibly difficult to sort the informative wheat from the chaff, because it is a subject that divides opinion and attracts a lot of misinformation.

As a result, the true extent to which neurodiversity is present within the population is often misrepresented in commonly reported figures. For this white paper, we consulted and were informed by Genius Within – a community interest company that specialises in neurodiversity support for adults in the workplace.

According to Genius Within:

- *90% of disabilities are invisible*
- *5% of the population has ADHD*
- *1-2% of the population is autistic*
- *10% of the population is dyslexic*
- *5% of the population is dyspraxic*
- *1-2% of the population has Tourette Syndrome*
- *14% of the population has mental health needs*
- *5% of the population has an acquired brain injury*

Neurodivergence affects between 15% and 20% of the population, and those figures apply just as much to those who drive for work.



Neurodiversity and Drivers

What challenges might neurodivergent drivers experience at work and how can fleets support them?

“We’re experts in running vehicles but we’re not experts in neurodiversity, so we need to leverage external support”

That is Geraint Davies, director of the Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS) and a former transport manager, deftly summing up the challenge facing fleets.

Those with personal or familial experience of neurodiversity may be in tune with some of the associated strengths and difficulties, but such knowledge does not extend to a fleet manager’s job description. However, fleet operators are responsible for and have a duty of care to drivers, and a basic understanding of what a neurodivergent employee might experience at the wheel or when they interact with a vehicle is unquestionably beneficial.



Geraint Davies
FLEET OPERATOR RECOGNITION SCHEME DIRECTOR



Sense data: Challenges for neurodivergent drivers

Sensory elements, such as light and sound, can have a significant effect on neurodivergent individuals, which can vary dramatically from person-to-person and by neurotype. What might be complimentary noises or visual stimuli for one individual could be anathema to another.

“Sensory sensitivity can be very common across a lot of neurodiversion subtypes,” says Dr Nancy Doyle, founder and chief science officer at Genius Within, who has ADHD. She describes how, for her, sound is an aid behind the wheel.

“If I’m just driving with no music, I’m so bored that I’m in my own head and I’m not paying attention to the road, because I’m daydreaming. I actually need to be listening to some music I really care about, or a podcast, or an audiobook book that will hold my attention. It’s actually necessary for me to have distractions, if that makes sense, because the more distractions there are, the more my senses are engaged, the more I am able to be present, keep my dopamine receptors happy and not dissociate.”

The opposite may be true for different neurotypes, such as autism (see the driver case studies on pages 15-16 for examples), for which noise and other sensory stimuli could present a challenge.

“Some people like bright lights; some people do not like bright lights,” continues Dr Doyle, **“some people will really want noise and things happening around them; other people really will not. Some people want the noise of music, but the noise of the air going past the window will completely throw them, so they need to have their windows rolled up, which means the air-con needs to be working so they don’t boil. There are all of those variables.”**

Planning, organisation and spatial memory

Genius Within says the majority of its clients, across all neurotypes, seek help for:

- **Memory/concentration: 92%**
- **Organisation skills: 83%**
- **Time management: 78%**

Each of those applies to driving, and may be especially relevant to certain roles, such as delivery drivers. Some individuals may be happy to jump in a vehicle and figure out a route on the fly, which is a good match for interchangeable, reactive jobs. For others, deviating from a pre-planned journey could be a major challenge, particularly when combined with stressful factors such as traffic jams, rush hour or – a common feature of modern company car fleets – electric vehicle range anxiety.

Driving might be the primary way in which an employee interacts with a vehicle, but it is not the only one, and the layout and labelling of a van or a trailer's cargo area may be hugely relevant to neurodivergent drivers.

“Standardisation is a really good idea,” says Dr Doyle, “the thing there is to accommodate different types of memory. You’ll have people who really rely on a spatial memory, so if the layout of those areas is consistent, that will improve their efficiency no end. And then you’ll have people who don’t really care about spatial layout, but they need the words and the terminology to be consistent. Then you’ll have people who operate by colour coding.

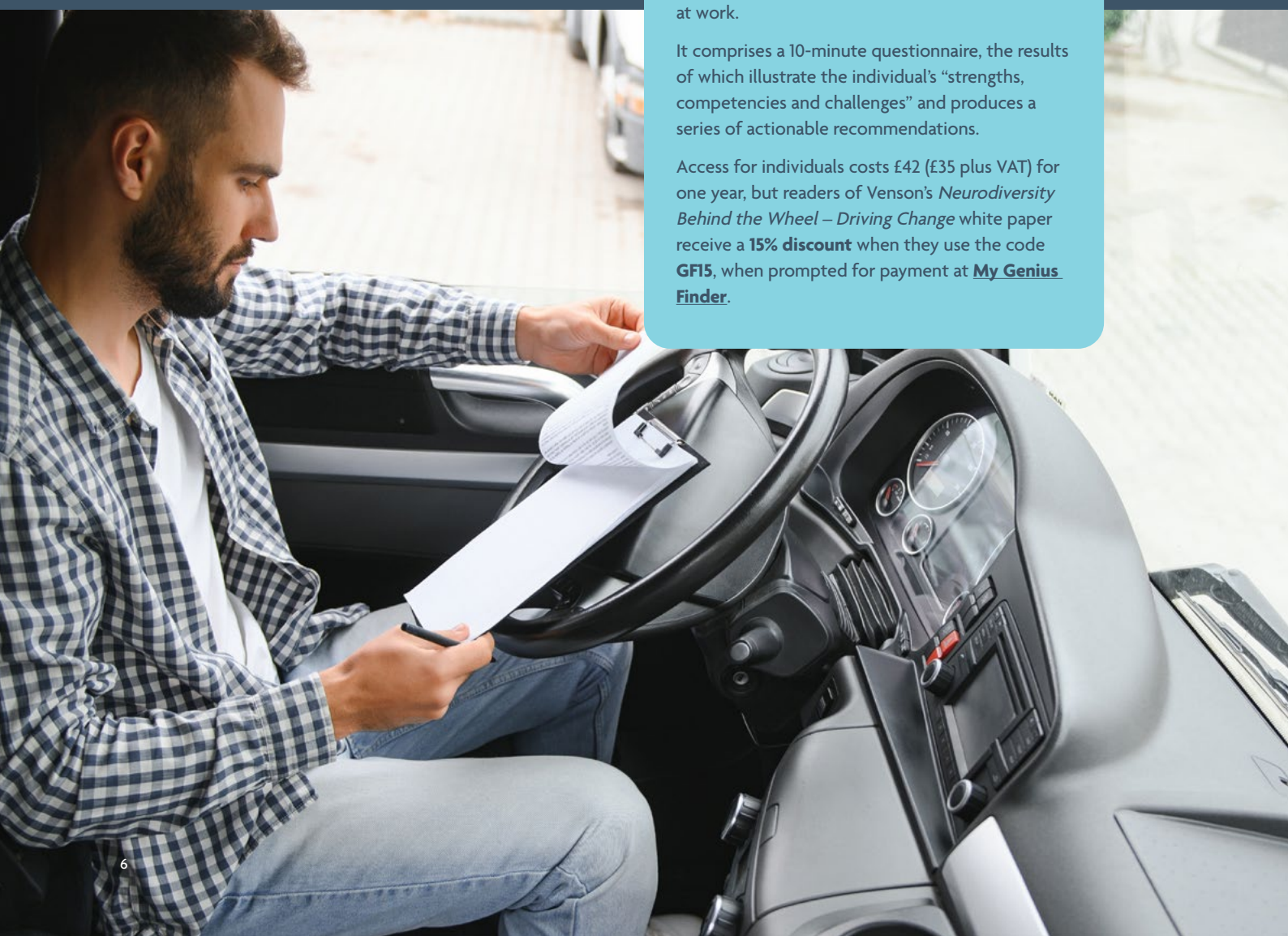
“It’s kind of taking care of that full range of potential sensory representations of memory – and memory is always a sensory representation. Are you the kind of person that remembers sound, or where things are or what things look like? Having consistent iconography, consistent colouring, consistent language and consistent spacing of the order that things go in is incredibly neuroinclusive... but who isn’t going to benefit from that?”

Genius Finder: Reader discount

Genius Finder is an online platform developed by Genius Within designed to help neurodivergent and neurotypical people and their employers better understand their strengths and challenges at work.

It comprises a 10-minute questionnaire, the results of which illustrate the individual’s “strengths, competencies and challenges” and produces a series of actionable recommendations.

Access for individuals costs £42 (£35 plus VAT) for one year, but readers of Venson’s *Neurodiversity Behind the Wheel – Driving Change* white paper receive a **15% discount** when they use the code **GF15**, when prompted for payment at [My Genius Finder](#).



One for all and all for one: Where to start with support for drivers

The most useful start point for supporting drivers is to assume that around a fifth of any workforce is neurodivergent and to calibrate the fleet accordingly. That would involve neither a complete overhaul nor even mentioning the word neurodiversity, rather a series of tweaks, adaptations and considerations to make the vehicles and the operation as accessible as possible to all employees.

“I would start by making that assumption and then making the provisions that would make neurodivergence less of a barrier at work without relying on diagnosis and disclosure,” explains Dr Doyle, **“I would move away from the disability compliance model, and I would consider universal design.”**

The disability compliance model is when a business is set up for able-bodied and neurotypical staff and reasonable adjustments are made for neurodivergent and disabled people, typically after a paid-for assessment. It is the way most organisations operate and complies with the 2010 Equality Act.

“The idea is we can solve most people’s problems before we get to that level, but the existing practice is to start with the assessments, and I think it’s a waste of money and time,” adds Dr Doyle, **“it’s using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. We’re spending £3,000 telling people they need to have a more comfortable**

break room or to tell office workers they need a pair of noise cancelling headphones. It’s ludicrous.”

A universal design sets up an organisation in the most inclusive possible way and effectively bypasses the need to make one-off, paid-for assessments and adaptations. As well as accommodating neurodivergent and disabled people, a universal design might also benefit employees with illnesses, pain or fatigue or those returning to work after a pregnancy or a significant medical procedure.

“A much better approach is to consider what might be the range of possible needs and strengths and how they interact with the workplace, because the other thing about neurodivergent needs is that they’re not really distinct from other needs,” says Dr Doyle, **“if we separate off the neurodivergent people, treat them as a special case and only support them when they put their hand up and ask for help, we’re missing the opportunity to optimise performance across our entire staff by taking the lessons of the neurodiversity movement and saying, ‘what does this teach us about human functioning? What does this teach us about human performance and how can we make work more human-centred?’**

“That’s really the lesson of the neurodiversity movement – that neurodivergence is a fact of life. It’s in lots of places and, in fact, it’s pretty handy.”

Access to Work explained with pros and cons

Access to Work is the government’s scheme to help disabled people get or remain in a job, and provides funding for practical, mental health and communication support. Grants are allocated according to eligibility and can cover anything from specialist equipment, to support workers or physical changes to the workplace.

The spectrum of eligibility is wide, but includes conditions such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia, along with physical disabilities and even temporary physical issues, such as a broken leg. Employees can apply for the grant irrespective of how much they earn, it does not have to be paid back and does not impact any other benefits they may claim.

Separately from the grant, the government requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to allow disabled employees to work, and the Health Adjustment Passport is a document designed to record the support and changes they may need. It can be used to support an Access to Work application but is chiefly designed to facilitate conversations about disabilities at work (it is owned by the individual and cannot be shared without their permission) to help managers understand current or potential employees’ requirements.

At the time of writing, the government was consulting on what it said were improvements to Access to Work, so the existing parameters could change. The scheme has its critics, too. The online movement #accesstonowhere, led by campaigner Shani Dhandar, underscores its bureaucratic flaws, while Dr Doyle believes larger organisations are better off avoiding it.

“Access to Work will do a free assessment, but they won’t always provide free adjustments,” she explains, **“if you are a large company, there is literally no point in sending people to Access to Work, because you’re going to have to pay for the adjustments anyway and they will do their own assessment without talking to you, so they might tell your employee they need a list of things and you have no control over that list. If you don’t want to do some of the things on that list, you’re basically taking a massive tribunal risk. My recommendation to large organisations is to not go anywhere near Access to Work and to set up your own triage model.”**

“However, if you are self-employed or a small business, then Access to Work will fund adjustments. They will fund technology, training, coaching and support for managers, so that is worthwhile and it’s worth persisting if your business is small, because the costs can run into the thousands – although the average cost for a neurodiversity assessment adjustment is about £1,000. If it’s worth waiting six months to save £1,000, then do it, but if you think there are productivity gains to be leveraged from just paying for an assessment up front, then go with that.”

- [Gov.uk: Access to Work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)
- [Gov.uk: Health Adjustment Passport](https://www.gov.uk/health-adjustment-passport)

How to Raise and Talk About *Neurodiversity*



Employees and employers can be reticent to discuss neurodiversity, but it does not have to be that way.

Talking about neurodiversity can be a double-edged sword. Many organisations are unsure about how to raise it and afraid of repercussions if they say or do the wrong thing, so may avoid it entirely. Neurodivergent employees may be equally unwilling to raise the subject; those aware of their condition (some may not be) may fear discrimination or that disclosure could count against their position or job prospects.

Then there are drivers, who are, by their very nature, mobile. It is easier to apply aspects of occupational health, duty of care and health and safety to a workforce in a fixed location – and they apply equally to those who work behind the wheel – but all too often, drivers are out of sight, out of mind.

It does not have to be that way, though. There are plenty of ways to get a message out to a mobile workforce, along with tried and tested techniques that allow employers and employees to talk about neurodiversity in a mutually beneficial way.

Starter for ten: Kicking off the conversation

Awareness is an over-used word and can easily conjure up images of tokenistic diversity initiatives with little or no substance. There is, however, a big difference between a vacuum and a setting in which an issue is discussed and up for discussion, and if an issue has never been mentioned at work, it is much more difficult to talk about it with colleagues and managers.

It is entirely at employees' discretion as to what they disclose, and they should not be obliged to reveal their neurotype to facilitate necessary adjustments (see page 7 for the difference between the common disability compliance model and the recommended universal design). It is nonetheless in a fleet manager's interests to be aware of anything that might present a challenge to drivers or whether they might excel in particular roles.

"There's a fear of being sacked or being treated differently, so awareness is a trust thing as much as anything," says Venson's head of human resources, Kellie Shaw, **"disclosure and discussion need to be taken at the pace the individual wants to take them."**

"There's also a huge lag depending on class, race, LGBTQ and ethnicity, in particular," adds Dr Nancy Doyle, founder and chief science officer at Genius Within, **"if you have another identity/label which is potentially stigmatising, you're less likely to come forward and add another one to your list."**

Neurodivergent senior managers can make a huge difference. According to Dr Doyle, those willing to openly discuss their condition make the subject much more approachable for the workforce.

"A big thing that increases disclosure is senior leaders being honest about their own neurodivergence," she explains, **"role modelling tends to really work."**

Management training is also advisable. According to Shaw, a basic overview of neurodiversity is useful both to familiarise managers and to tune them into staff who may choose not to disclose their neurotype.

"You don't have to go into lots and lots of detail, but just at a top level: this is what neurodiversity is, this is what it means and this is how to identify it," she explains, **"particularly for fleet managers, if somebody hasn't disclosed it, then they at least have an awareness of it, and might think, 'hang on a minute, is this because of X, Y or Z?'. It might just help them to understand that there's a pertinent issue, but it might be something that needs to be addressed in a particular way."**

"You can also apply this to the onboarding process for new joiners. It could be that, as part of what you would call compliance training, every new member of staff takes a course about neurodiversity."

What not to do

Direct, personal questions that attempt to establish whether an individual is neurodivergent are not appropriate and open up the organisation to an employment tribunal. Discussions about neurodivergence must be initiated by the employee, and anything that could be considered probing, however well-meaning, is discriminatory.

Refusing to touch it with a bargepole is not the answer. If fleet managers suspect a colleague may be struggling at work for whatever reason, then it is perfectly acceptable – and, indeed, a good idea – to initiate a conversation. It should simply avoid references to or suggestions of neurodiversity or disability.

A good HR department is a fleet stakeholder, so fleet managers should not be afraid to ask for help and guidance before such conversations or allow HR to lead the process where appropriate. If your organisation has access to neurodiversity specialists, then they really are the experts in this case – so lean on them.



Help is at hand: Resources for discussion

There is no shortage of resources for employers unsure about how to discuss neurodiversity or how to support employees, some of which are listed below. Neurodiversity is far from immune to misinformation, so it is always worth applying a critical eye to the credibility of the source, but many authoritative resources are free or inexpensive, while trade bodies may offer equivalents.

“I’ve used resources from the National Autistic Society and ADHD UK as a basis for our own requirements,” says Shaw, “we’re a member of the CIPD, which has a whole library. You can also work with other organisations that will provide you with the literature, and you can incorporate it into your own company documents. I’ve done that, and there’s no need to reinvent the wheel, especially when it’s expert-driven.”

- [National Autistic Society’s For Employer’s page](#)
- [ADHD UK’s ADHD at Work Welfare Pack](#)
- [British Dyslexia Association’s Employer page](#)



Spread the word: Getting the message out to drivers

A campaign to underscore neurodiversity demonstrates that the organisation takes it seriously. According to Shaw, it should be **“a top-down approach to build awareness around the organisation”**.

“It should be HR-led, and the directors and managers need to be on board and understand before you roll it out to staff.

It’s about creating an environment where those that know or think they are neurodivergent feel comfortable. You just need to consider that some people are quite happy to disclose everything, whereas others aren’t.”

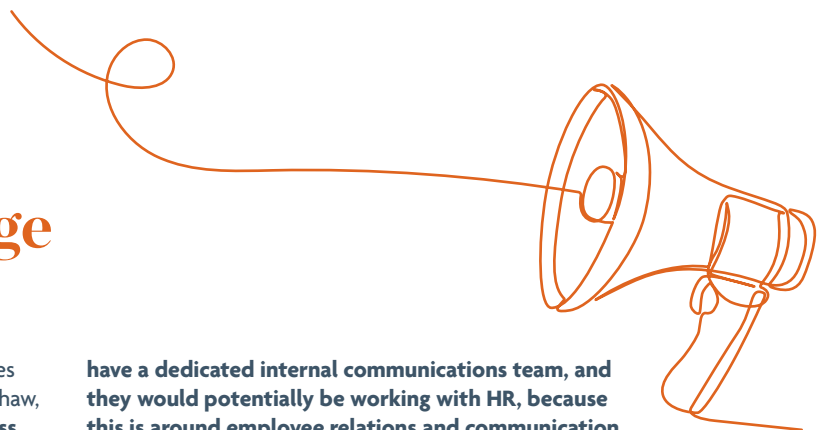
As we discuss on pages 11-12, communication with drivers needs to be served up in form that suits them – not office-based staff – and any campaign must conform to that. Once again, effective execution starts with collaboration between fleet stakeholders, in this case, fleet managers, HR and marketing.

“It depends on the size of the organisation,” explains Alison Bell, marketing specialist at Venson, **“some will**

have a dedicated internal communications team, and they would potentially be working with HR, because this is around employee relations and communication. For organisations without a comms team, the internal marketing function should be able to support HR. It is, after all, about tailoring messages to an audience, which is something the marketing department does every day.”

“HR might have an understanding of what messages need to be communicated, and where marketing comes in is packaging that up to suit the types of employees you’re communicating with. For drivers, it could be more of a visual thing, or something that’s in the vehicle. Toolbox talks are a good one.”

“On the vehicle condition sheet, there might be a strapline across the top of it talking about neurodiversity,” adds Shaw, **“or if they use something like a vehicle check app – something they’re opening every day – that could include a message or a continuation of messages every day of the week. You could do that for something like ADHD awareness month.”**



Creating a *Neuroinclusive Fleet*

Communication, management and vehicles optimised for all drivers

Communication is like a gearbox. There are multiple options within easy reach, and you would no more use first gear on a motorway than you would sixth to pull away from a junction.

The same applies in the workplace and to fleet management, but organisations that use third or fourth for all of their communication all of the time are all too easy to find.

Communication is critical for neurodivergent drivers because of the extraordinary variance in how individuals process information, but it is also paradoxical. Neurodiversity is incidental when organisations communicate in a variety of formats, consider the context in which employees might receive it and make it as accessible as possible.

The same applies to management styles and even the ways in which drivers set-up their vehicles. While a fleet policy must clearly set out what is expected of drivers, a rigid format with no room for manoeuvre does not equal good performance. In short, drop the one-size-fits-all approach, go with best practice and the entire workforce benefits.



Who are your drivers and when, where and how will they read your messages?

“Whether you’re a CEO or a bricklayer, you need to be able to understand whatever information the fleet sends you, so we need to talk to both of them,” explains Matt Neale, board director at the Association of Fleet Professionals (AFP) and Fleet News’s 2025 fleet manager of the year.

He points out that the UK’s average reading age is nine years old, which has nothing to do with neurodiversity. Gov.uk aims for that level so most people can understand its publications, while a 2023 survey of adult skills by the OECD claimed 18% of adults in England had literacy levels at or below those of a five-to-seven-year-old.

“It’s about making it accessible and easily understandable,” adds Neale, **“when you’re putting out information or requests for information, people switch off if you make it unreadable. It might mean you need to add more in the way of diagrams and pictures rather than all words. That’s why we’ve started to break our fleet policy down into bite-sized snippets and make it into little videos.”**

Even in an age of seemingly endless communication methods, many organisations choose just one. Emails or the company intranet may be perfect for office-based employees, but there is no guarantee they are as effective a means of disseminating information to field-based and/or neurodivergent drivers.

“We stick all the information on our intranet, because everybody puts everything on there,” says Neale of his own fleet, Platform Housing Group, **“but the thing is, the driver jumps in their van – and they**

might be an electrician, a carpenter or whatever their trade is – and the only access they have to the business is reading an iPad, so the intranet is probably not the most easily accessible place for them. All of our drivers have access to a driver app, so we convert any information they need into little PDFs and load them onto that. It’s all in one place, and it’s like a one-stop shop solution for them.”

Neale concedes that apps and digital communication don’t automatically suit everyone, particularly in a multigenerational environment, encompassing a variety of roles.

“We’ve got such a diverse range of drivers,” he explains, **“some of them are young, coming into the business as apprentices, some are older guys in their 60s and they might be, say, bricklayers. You shouldn’t assume or categorise people, but you should ask yourself how you communicate with them effectively.”**

“I’ve had first-hand experience with this,” adds Neale, **“a brickie came up to me with his app, and said, ‘can you just sort this thing out? I’m a bricklayer, I’m close to retirement, I don’t know what to do with it and you’re asking me to click all these buttons. I don’t understand it’.**

“I sat down with him and explained it, and he was so grateful, but we obviously hadn’t made it easy enough for him – even though we thought we had. You need to ask yourself: is it really clear, is it accessible enough and can everybody who needs to actually read it and digest it?”

Why multiple choice is more than just good comms

The perks of varied, considered and thorough communication extend beyond the basic transfer of information, because employees are much more likely to absorb and act on it when it is served up in an accessible format.

“This applies to learning and memory as well as to communication,” says Dr Nancy Doyle, founder and chief science officer at Genius Within, **“if you just send out written documents and expect people to read them – forget it. If you wanted to have a really important safety briefing, for example – something absolutely critical – what I would recommend is an in-person event, which is also filmed so people can dial in, backed up by a written document and possibly a bit of e-learning, and that you do those things sequentially.”**

That should be followed with a debrief and a Q&A session, the latter with the option of further questions for those who have had time to soak up the topic. It is both the most neuroinclusive method and a highly effective way of getting employees to actually take on board what the organisation is saying.

“If you’d have asked me this before I became a neurodiversity specialist, I would have told you the same thing,” continues Dr Doyle, **“it’s just very good psychology for the transfer of training and best practice and learning at work. Multiple formats, multiple opportunities and don’t expect people to take it in first time.”**

In the metal: *how to optimise a vehicle for neurodivergent drivers*

Setting up a vehicle to suit neurodivergent drivers does not require expensive equipment or modifications. It does require some forethought, attention to the basic specification – the key components of which are likely fitted as standard to most modern vehicles – and an emphasis on personalisation.

Given the relevance of sensory stimuli to multiple neurotypes (see page 5), fleets should aim to procure vehicles with the following basic specification:

- **Air conditioning:** to allow drivers the choice of windows up or down, while maintaining a comfortable temperature.
- **An infotainment system with a dark mode:** to provide drivers with the option of an illuminated screen and a dimmer, less distracting display, according to their sensory preferences.

Messaging to draw drivers' attention to such components and announcing that the company is happy for them to tweak the settings accordingly may also be beneficial. Not every neurodivergent driver will have a diagnosis, and some may have a better understanding of their requirements than others, so it may be useful to highlight such elements and their potential to optimise the cab or car interior.

There is a strong case for simplifying vehicles to render them as accessible as possible to all drivers. This may not be specific to neurodivergent employees but conforms to a neuroinclusive policy by removing unnecessary complication and making vehicles familiar to the workforce. It is also cheaper than the bells and whistles approach and more practical for fleets in which drivers regularly hop in and out of different vehicles.

Venson's marketing specialist, Alison Bell, explains: **"We've worked this way for several years, helping customers review vehicle conversion specifications to match the operational requirements of their fleets. We'd often say, 'hang on a minute, three quarters of what you have in one spec is relevant to all of these vehicles, so let's try and thin it down from, say, 21 specs to 11, which will actually do the job for your entire fleet and ensure that critical balance of achieving operational needs versus meeting financial objectives.**

"You reduce the cost, and it means you can move those vehicles around within your fleet without too

many problems. If you've got a vehicle off the road, you've much more flexibility. That's the approach we took with one of the housing associations we were working with, and we saved them about £300,000.

"You should also try to get some input from a subsection of your drivers, because at the end of the day, that vehicle is their tool kit and it's their office. It has to suit the way they need to work, and if you get buy-in from the drivers, they're grateful for being part and parcel of the decision-making."

Directing drivers to commonly used apps, such as Waze for navigation and Zap Map for identifying public chargers and EV-specific route planning may also be useful. Neither is revolutionary and many drivers already use them, but a reminder and a recommendation may help those who would benefit from a planning and organisation perspective. Ensuring that company phones are permitted to accommodate such apps, where appropriate, is also worthwhile.

Dr Doyle recommends incorporating personalisation into the onboarding process with new drivers: **"Maybe when somebody is in the onboarding phase, when they're just starting a job, part of that is for them to get a sense of how to personalise their driving environment and what can be done to various vehicles so they can think at their best when they're driving. That's a perfect example of neuroinclusion and a universal design, rather than having a straightforward policy that says, 'all drivers will do this; all drivers will do that'.**

"If you have those rigid rules, you're basically waiting for them to trip somebody up and make them feel really stressed, then you've got to allow them the adjustment not to have to play by those rules one person at a time. But you can quite clearly say, 'we know human brains work in different ways, and for some of you, the [infotainment screen's] light mode will be perfect and for others, the dark mode will be perfect, so our policy is personalisation and working out what works for you.'"

Role with it: the right management style for the right employee

Peter Eldridge is the AFP Fleet Academy's training consultant and specialises in skilling up novice and seasoned fleet managers alike. He is a big advocate of situational leadership – the concept that a single leadership style is rarely, if ever, appropriate for a workforce, and that employees react and perform better when managers adopt interchangeable dynamics and meet colleagues at their level.

The concept comprises four styles – directing, coaching, supporting and delegating – which can be engaged to match employees' attributes and remain fluid throughout their time with the organisation.

“If you think of somebody brand new going into a fleet arena, maybe straight out of university. They don't know too much at that point, so they're going to be low on competence, but they might be very high on commitment, and you've got to adapt your leadership style to match where they are now. At that level, they won't have any specific skills for the job in hand; they'll need to be motivated, they'll need guidance and steering and they'll need a style that absolutely supports that. A directing style would work well with that kind of employee, because they'd be very happy to listen to somebody who knows what they are talking about.

“But there's a time limit on that, because they're not going to be low on competence forever. They're going to move up to the next level and gain some competence. But potentially, they might be a bit less committed, because that initial excitement of, 'I've got a new job; I want to do well,' is beginning to wear off. If you take that to its extreme and you get through all four stages, they're very high on competence and high on commitment. At that level, they're probably not going to take too kindly to a directing style. What they'll want is much more delegation, because they'll want to be trusted.

“There is a definitive link between what situational leadership requires of leaders in the context of the employees' growth and development within their role and within the business.”

Eldridge concedes that it takes a deft leader to constantly flip between styles, but done right, it matches the needs, requirements and capabilities of those who report to them.

“You'll have teams at different levels, so good leaders really do know how to show empathy when empathy is required, to be more directional when more direction is needed, blunter when that's required, when to have a two-way conversation or a one-way conversation and when to just back off and let them spread their wings.”

He adds that day-to-day operations frequently eclipse the bigger picture aspects of fleet management, particularly when it comes to colleagues, and stresses the need to make time for the more personal aspects of the job.

“Fleet managers are often focused on the metal – the movement, time scales, goal setting, hitting targets – and this is where management sometimes gets it wrong. They don't allow enough time to let some of the softer skill elements that can really support efficiency, cost saving and success bed in.

“I'm not suggesting for a minute that any fleet manager just stops taking care of business, but they've got to find some time to be able to bring into play the importance of the people and the importance of the stakeholders in their arena. It's so important.”

Situational leadership is not specifically designed for neurodivergent employees, but it does not need to be. A personalised, adaptable approach just works well for all employees.



Case Studies

Neurodivergent employees who work behind the wheel share their experiences – and so do their managers

The drivers

Bailey Griffin, 23

Bailey is a class-one HGV driver at M&H Carriers, a Scottish logistics company that specialises in last-mile deliveries for major companies such as DPD and DX.

Based out of M&H's Inverness depot, Bailey, who is autistic, passed his class-one test before he joined the company and started as an agency van driver.

“When I first got my HGV licence I was, I think, 20 at the time, and insurance was a bit of an issue,” he explains, **“the first place I was put was M&H, as a van driver, and after a few weeks, they just kept asking for me. I was agency for four months and, I think, three weeks of that was the only time I wasn't with M&H.”**

“It got to the point where they said, ‘we know you, you know us, we work well together, do you want a full-time job?’”

Enable – a Scottish organisation that helps to connect neurodivergent and disabled people with employers – got Bailey and M&H together. He now drives a 36-tonne urban artic, typically on local runs to the likes of large shops, industrial areas and warehouses around Inverness, and is a fan of the job's steady rhythm.

“I quite like the routine,” he says, **“I like being on the same route every day, and in my head, I know exactly where I'm going and what order to do it in.”**

“I'm quite particular about the way things have got to be done, so once you've taught me the way to do the



paperwork or whatever it is – that's how I do it. Once I've learned the route and the order, it's boom, boom, boom – that's how it's done.

Bailey says he finds unforeseen events difficult: **“I get quite anxious if it's, ‘oh, you going to this place,’ and I haven't a clue where it is or where I'm going. I've got to look up every single place on the map, and it's, ‘how do I get here? How do I get there?’”**

“When I do ask for help, they [M&H] are quite good,” he adds, **“if I need a bit of a shorter day or to be done by a certain time, then they definitely won't send me further away. They're pretty good at getting me done when I need to be.”**

Summing up the job, he says, **“For people that perhaps like a routine, it's good. It's knowing ‘this is the sort of job you'll be doing every day,’ rather than it being a lottery of a driving job”.**

Josh Flaherty, 27

Josh is a forklift driver at M&H's Argyll depot. Also autistic, he describes how the specificity of his visualisation makes him adept at packing trailers, and that he is sometimes drafted in when colleagues struggle with tricky or bulky cargo.

"I see things in grids, so everything has its place," he says, "somebody will be trying to load a truck, and they can't get it [the cargo] in a certain way, so they give up. But then I'll get everything in, because I see it completely differently to everybody else."

"It's the same when trucks come into the yard – finding the correct place and the right angle for them. I can see that, so I'm able to get more trucks in exactly where I want them so I can unload them."

When we ask Josh about the challenges he faces in a warehouse environment, **"noise and things being correct,"** is his initial response. Curveballs or anything that prevents the job from being done in a conventional way can also be difficult.



"If I do something a certain way and then somebody does something completely differently, that can set me off," he explains, "or if we're late/off schedule. When I was scanning [he previously scanned parcels in the warehouse], when the network would go down and I couldn't scan the boxes, that would really mess with my head, because then I couldn't do my job."

Josh has a spot in his line manager's office where he can take a breather if he feels overwhelmed. M&H also retrofitted a set of doors and windows to his forklift, effectively creating a cab, so he can tuck himself quietly inside, pop in his headphones and concentrate on the job.

Like Bailey, Josh is known for his efficiency and productivity. **"I've had how many changes of tyres now?"** he says, with a chuckle, in reference to his forklift's mileage, **"I don't hang around, let's say that."**



The managers

Fraser MacLean

Fraser, managing director of M&H Carriers, is as candid about the challenges of hiring neurodivergent staff as he is about the benefits they bring to the business, and stresses that he recruits to fill positions, not to tick a diversity box.

He explains that Bailey and Josh will have particularly challenging days – but not many. **“You’re looking at one bad day a year, but they’re never off sick,”** he said, **“whereas your other staff might have an average of seven days off sick a year. Well, you’re six days up, then, aren’t you?”**

“It’s just a different challenge and a different way of looking at it. That day’s not pleasant. It’s really bad for them and it’s not good for the business, either – but it’s still better than someone that’s off sick seven days a year.”

M&H has hubs in several of Scotland’s larger towns and cities but many of its satellite depots are in

sparsely populated rural areas. The country’s ageing demographic (the 2022 census reported that 20.2% of the population was over 65; that was up 22.5% on 2011), combined with the long-term shortage of HGV drivers and warehouse employees, makes recruitment one of its biggest challenges. **Employees under 30, such as Bailey and Josh, are rare finds, and Fraser believes the company’s efforts and adaptations have genuinely helped to address staff shortages.**

“Rather than just say, ‘I can’t get the staff,’ you need to try a bit harder, and say, ‘OK, if they don’t come to us, we’ll come to them,’” he says.

“These people are a credit to themselves, never mind the business. They go through a battle every day that [other] people don’t get, but they contribute massively to the business. My biggest thing, I think, that we’ve taken from this, is don’t write anybody off.”

Geraint Davies

Geraint Davies is director of the Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS), prior to which he worked at haulage firm John Raymond Transport for 22 years, where he held a variety of roles including transport manager and latterly chief operating officer. He worked with several neurodivergent and disabled drivers and vehicle technicians during his tenure, some with formal diagnoses, some without.

He describes his experience of managing a young, autistic technician, who was non-verbal until age 14: **“He came to us as an apprentice at 16 and was quite challenged. We invested quite a bit of time and effort into him, because we didn’t want to give up, and he had support from the local college as well. I effectively became his work dad.”**

Like Fraser at M&H, Geraint is frank about the challenges of working with neurodivergent employees as well as their aptitudes: **“His reactions and interpersonal skills could be challenging, and a lot of it can come down to the dynamics of the team, but he could also be very, very diligent and very, very thorough.”**

“He had a really difficult day once when he locked himself in the stores [vehicle parts storage area]. I was called over and sat down in there with him – among all the oil filters and bits of truck – and the initial reaction was to send him home, but I thought, ‘that’s not going to achieve anything; it’s not how you get back on the horse’. So I just sat there with him, we had a sensible chat and three quarters of an hour later, he was back on the tools and that was that.”

Considering vehicle technicians are even scarcer than drivers, Geraint’s efforts paid off. Along with help from the local college during the apprenticeship – both for the employee and guidance for the employer – he would conduct **“discreet, regular one-to-ones”** as part of a development plan.

“With support from the college, we were able to gain an understanding and gradually build his confidence and feeling of self-worth.”

His competence and capability developed to the point where he was more inclined to push himself, to be more inquisitive and to explore new things. After about two years, he became a qualified technician and was going out independently in the van to do breakdowns.”

Geraint has also worked with autistic drivers and recounted their diligence with vehicle checks and potential to perform well in complementary roles.

“If you think about things like daily checks and doing things in a systematic way, an autistic driver is very unlikely to drop a trailer on its nose, because they would have gone through a systematic process and would not deviate from that process. Daft incidents – like not applying the handbrake on a tractor unit when it’s coupled to a trailer – are highly unlikely to happen.”

“You probably wouldn’t want to put them on tramping [long-distance driving] because it’d be different every day, whereas if you put them on something like a night-trunk or a day trunk – down to the Midlands and back five days a week or something like that – that would be done to the highest quality and the highest standard.”

The Fleet Manager's Neurodiversity Action Plan

Understanding neurodiversity

- Assume around 20% of any workforce is neurodivergent.
- Common challenges include memory, concentration, organisation and time management.
- Sensory elements, such as light and sound, affect neurodivergent individuals differently. Some may respond well to certain stimuli, while others may find them difficult.
- A universal design, that accounts for all employees and works well for everyone, is preferable to the standard-issue disability compliance model, where adaptations are made on request.
- Basic management training is a good move. It can help managers understand and identify neurodiversity.

Vehicle spec

- Aim for a minimum standard specification of air conditioning and an infotainment system with a dark mode. Both allow drivers to raise or lower the level of stimuli inside the vehicle.
- Racking and/or cargo and storage areas in vans or trailers should be as cleanly and as clearly organised as possible, with consistent iconography, colouring, language and spacing.
- Simplifying specifications can make vehicles more cost-effective, more flexible during periods of downtime and more familiar to drivers.

Discussing neurodiversity

- Do not overlook drivers because they are out and about. They should be just as much a part of the conversation as office-based staff.
- Employees are not obliged to disclose their neurotype and should not be pressured to. Direct, personal questions about neurodiversity are inappropriate and discriminatory. Disclosure and discussion should be led by them and conducted in consultation with HR.
- Neurodivergent senior managers can make neurodiversity a much more approachable topic for a workforce if they speak out.
- Help and resources are available for employers from workplace neurodiversity specialists and from organisations such as the National Autistic Society, ADHD UK and the British Dyslexia Association.

Supporting drivers

- Draw attention to apps such as Waze and Zap Map or equivalents, because they help with organisation and planning. Also ensure they can be downloaded to company mobile devices.
- Effective communication is critical for neurodivergent drivers due to the variance in how individuals process information.
- Use different communication formats to make information as accessible as possible. Diagrams, pictures, and bite-sized videos can all help, and are preferable to a large block of text.
- Messages should be clear and understandable to all employees, regardless of their role or reading level.
- Personalised and adaptable management styles work well for all employees – neurodivergent or neurotypical.
- Get to know your drivers if you can. Understanding their strengths and challenges can help you channel them into a role in which they may flourish.

Summary

What's in it for us? The benefits of a neuroinclusive fleet

The case studies on pages 15-17 illustrate how fleets even with an informal approach to neuroinclusivity have addressed employee shortages in industries and locations where drivers and vehicle technicians are in short supply. None were without their challenges, but each was an example of a young, diligent and productive individual.

Cars, vans and lorries require little in the way of adaptation for neurodivergent employees, and the equipment that can optimise their driving environment is generally fitted as standard – it is simply a matter of awareness and flexibility. Meaningful changes in layout and labelling can be made to vehicle cargo areas, but they would benefit any driver – as would

considered communication and management styles – while simplifying and standardising vehicles can save significant sums and make for a more practical and adaptable fleet.

“I would expect to see fewer accidents, improved performance, improved engagement, loyalty, buy-in and reduced turnover,” says Dr Nancy Doyle, founder and chief science officer at Genius Within, when asked about the results fleets could expect from implementing neuroinclusive practices.

“When you make people comfortable and well and you communicate with them in a way that they can understand, guess what? They will be better at their job, they are less likely to leave and they are less likely to be unwell or make mistakes.”

Credits and Sources

Our research for this white paper was based on interviews with the following individuals. We are extremely grateful for their assistance.

Alison Bell marketing specialist, Venson Automotive Solutions

Mark Cartwright head of commercial vehicle incident prevention safety, engineering and standards, National Highways

Geraint Davies director, Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS)

Dr Nancy Doyle founder and chief science officer, Genius Within

Peter Eldridge training consultant, Association of Fleet Professionals Fleet Academy

Josh Flaherty warehouse operative/forklift driver, M&H Carriers

Bailey Griffin class 1 HGV driver, M&H Carriers

Fraser MacLean managing director, M&H Carriers

Matt Neale board director, Association of Fleet Professionals and Head of Fleet and MaaS, Platform Housing Group

Kellie Shaw head of human resources, Venson Automotive Solutions

In addition to the interviewees, we consulted the following sources for information about neurodiversity, neurotypes, the associated language/terminology, reporting best practice and general statistics:

ADHD UK

- [About ADHD](#)
- [ADHD Language Style Guide](#)

British Dyslexia Association

- [About Dyslexia](#)
- [What is Dyscalculia?](#)

British Medical Bulletin: [Neurodiversity at Work: a Biopsychosocial Model and the Impact on Working Adults](#)

Dyspraxia UK: [Definition of Dyspraxia](#)

Genius Within: [What is Neurodiversity?](#)

Gov.uk: [Content Design: Planning, Writing and Managing Content](#)

International Dyslexia Association: [Understanding Dysgraphia](#)

Journalism.co.uk: [How to Report on Neurodiversity Accurately and Ethically](#)

National Autistic Society

- [What is Autism?](#)
- [How to Talk and Write About Autism](#)

OECD: [Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World?](#)

Press Gazette: [Reporting Neurodiversity](#)

Scotland's Census 2022

Venson Fleet Management Solutions

Company vehicles are an important asset for supporting core business operations and that's why our contract hire and fleet management solutions are created in response to our clients' needs and are based on our commitment to long term partnership and exceptional customer service. Testimony to this is our client retention rate of 95%.

Along with exceptional service, we ensure our clients receive great value from their fleet, by delivering solutions that are based on impartial advice and that provide tangible financial return. We can do this because we've only ever specialised in managing fleets, so our knowledge and in-depth understanding of the market is the best in this sector and relevant to public, private, not for profit and emergency service organisations.

We also believe in true partnership, working with fleet operators and their drivers to ensure they always receive the most appropriate solution to support their operational and financial needs.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the future of your fleet, please call 0330 094 7803 and speak to one of our fleet consultants or visit www.venson.com for more information.



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