

INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT & ONBOARDING TOOLKIT

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CREATING
INCLUSIVE PATHWAYS INTO WORK



INTRODUCTION

What is inclusive recruitment?

Inclusive recruitment is about creating fair, accessible, and psychologically safe recruitment experiences that allow candidates to demonstrate their skills and potential without unnecessary barriers.

Many inclusive recruitment practices are good practice for all candidates. However, this toolkit has been developed with particular consideration for people who may experience additional barriers during recruitment and onboarding, including candidates with mental health difficulties, neurodivergent candidates, disabled candidates, and those with other support needs.

Employers often want to create inclusive recruitment experiences but may feel unsure about:

- What good practice looks like
- What reasonable adjustments involve
- How to respond appropriately when candidates share support needs
- How to build confidence in inclusive recruitment and onboarding processes

This toolkit provides practical, evidence-informed guidance to help employers create clearer, fairer, and more supportive recruitment and onboarding experiences.

Why it matters

Inclusive recruitment can help organisations:

- ✓ Attract wider talent pools
- ✓ Improve candidate experience
- ✓ Strengthen retention and engagement
- ✓ Improve fairness and consistency
- ✓ Create psychologically safer workplaces
- ✓ Support legal and ethical responsibilities

Inclusive recruitment is about removing unnecessary barriers so candidates can show the skills, strengths and potential they bring to a role. It supports fairer decision-making without changing the job standards.

Many inclusive practices, such as clear communication, structured interviews, transparent timelines, and supportive onboarding, improve the experience for all candidates, not just those with support needs.

This toolkit may be particularly helpful for supporting:

- 👤 Candidates with mental health difficulties
- 👤 Disabled candidates
- 👤 Candidates experiencing anxiety, stress or cognitive overload during recruitment
- 👤 Candidates who benefit from clear structure and communication
- 👤 Neurodivergent candidates
- 👤 Candidates who benefit from adjustments
- 👤 People transitioning into employment or returning to work
- 👤 Candidates who have previously experienced barriers in employment

What's inside this toolkit

This toolkit includes:

- Practical recruitment guidance
- Interview and communication tips
- Reasonable adjustment examples
- Guidance on responding when candidates share support needs
- Onboarding and transition support
- Information on Access to Work
- Templates, checklists, and reflection tools

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit has been designed primarily for SMEs and micro-employers, recognising that many organisations may not have dedicated HR, occupational health, or diversity and inclusion teams.

You can:

- Use individual sections independently
- Focus on specific recruitment stages
- Dip into templates and checklists as needed
- Revisit sections throughout recruitment and onboarding

The aim is to provide practical, realistic actions that can be implemented immediately. The following icons are used throughout the toolkit to highlight important guidance and help you navigate the content quickly:



Tips

Practical actions you can take to improve recruitment and onboarding processes.



Mental health consideration

Insights into how recruitment experiences may affect people's mental health and wellbeing.



Template

Ready-to-use tools, examples, or resources that can be adapted for your organisation.



Common barrier

Typical issues within recruitment or onboarding that can unintentionally create stress, confusion, or disadvantage for candidates.

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01

Understanding Inclusive Recruitment

1.1 What do we mean by inclusive recruitment?

Inclusive recruitment means designing recruitment processes that are fair, accessible, and supportive for a wide range of candidates.

It is not about lowering standards or giving certain candidates an unfair advantage. It is about making sure candidates have a fair opportunity to demonstrate their skills, experience, and potential.

Recruitment processes are not always neutral. The way a role is advertised, how interviews are structured, how quickly candidates are expected to respond, and how information is communicated can all affect whether someone is able to perform at their best.

Many traditional recruitment processes are built around assumptions about:

- Communication style
- Confidence under pressure
- Social interaction
- Processing speed
- Workplace behaviour

These assumptions can unintentionally disadvantage candidates who think, communicate, process information, or manage stress differently.

Inclusive recruitment helps employers focus on what really matters:

- The skills genuinely needed for the role
- Clear and structured recruitment processes
- Fair and objective assessment
- Supportive communication
- Practical and proportionate adjustments where appropriate



Tips

Inclusive recruitment is good recruitment. Clearer processes, better communication, and fairer assessment benefit both employers and candidates.

1.2 Understanding barriers and support needs

People understand disability, mental health, and neurodivergence in different ways.

Some approaches focus mainly on what individuals cannot do, which can lead to inaccurate or discriminatory assumptions about capability, communication style, professionalism, or whether someone will succeed in a role.

A more helpful approach is to recognise that recruitment and onboarding processes themselves can create barriers. In other words, the limitation is often not the person, but the way the process, environment, communication, or expectations are designed. For example, a highly capable candidate may struggle in an unstructured or high-pressure interview, even if they could perform the role well.

Inclusive recruitment means looking at the process first: what could be unclear, inaccessible, overwhelming, or unnecessarily difficult, and what can we change so candidates have a fair opportunity to show their skills?



Common barrier

Assuming that confidence, eye contact, quick responses, or ease with small talk are reliable indicators of ability. These reflect interview style more than job performance.

1.3 Common myths about inclusive recruitment

Myth	Reality
"Inclusive recruitment lowers standards."	Inclusive recruitment helps candidates demonstrate their abilities fairly. Standards remain linked to the role.
"Adjustments are expensive."	Many adjustments are free or low-cost and involve simple changes to communication, structure, or flexibility.
"We need specialist HR knowledge to be inclusive."	Small practical actions, many of which are included throughout this toolkit, can make a meaningful difference.
"We might say the wrong thing."	Open, respectful, and supportive communication is usually more important than using perfect language.
"Inclusive recruitment unfairly favours some candidates."	Inclusive recruitment helps reduce unnecessary barriers so candidates can compete fairly.

1.4 Strengths and contributions

Many people with lived experience of mental health difficulties, neurodivergence, or disability may bring valuable strengths and perspectives into the workplace.

These can include:

- Creativity and innovation
- Problem-solving skills
- Attention to detail
- Empathy and emotional insight
- Resilience and adaptability
- Different ways of thinking and approaching tasks

It is important not to make assumptions about someone's strengths or challenges based on a label or diagnosis. The best approach is to create recruitment processes that allow each candidate to show what they can do.

Small changes to structure, communication, flexibility, and expectations can often make recruitment more accessible for everyone, not only those who have shared support needs.

QUICK REFLECTION

Before moving through the rest of this toolkit, consider your current recruitment process:

- ? Could any part of your recruitment process unintentionally create barriers for candidates?
- ? Are you assessing the skills needed for the role, or relying on assumptions about confidence, communication style, or "fit"?
- ? Do candidates have enough clarity to understand what to expect and how to ask for support?



02

The Law and Inclusive Recruitment

Inclusive recruitment is not only good practice but a part of an employer's legal and ethical responsibility to treat candidates fairly.

Many employers want to do the right thing but feel unsure about:

- What the law expects
- What counts as a reasonable adjustment
- How to respond when someone shares support needs
- What information can and cannot be shared
- How to balance inclusion with the requirements of the role

In practice, inclusive recruitment usually comes down to a few core principles:

- Create fair and accessible processes
- Give candidates clear opportunities to request support
- Respond reasonably and respectfully
- Keep personal information confidential
- Make decisions based on role-relevant skills and evidence



Tips

You do not need to be an expert to improve inclusive recruitment. Clear communication, consistency, confidentiality and fair assessment go a long way.

2.1 What the law expects

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination, including in recruitment and employment.

Under the Act, a person may be considered disabled if they have a physical or mental health difficulty, are neurodivergent, have an illness, or other long-term difficulty that has a substantial and long-term impact on their day-to-day life.

Importantly, someone does not necessarily need a formal diagnosis to ask for support or adjustments. Employers should focus on the barriers the person is experiencing and what support may help, rather than relying only on diagnostic labels or medical evidence.



Tips

Focus on support, not diagnosis. You do not need detailed medical information to provide reasonable support.

The law requires employers to make reasonable adjustments for job applicants as well as employees where needed. Reasonable adjustments are changes that remove or reduce a disadvantage related to disability.

2.2 When someone shares support needs

Sharing support needs is personal. Some people will feel comfortable raising this early in recruitment. Others may feel anxious, uncertain, or worried about being judged.

People may choose not to share support needs because of:

- Previous negative experiences
- Concerns about stigma or bias
- Uncertainty about how information will be used
- Privacy or confidence concerns



Mental health consideration

Candidates may worry that sharing a mental health difficulty or support need will affect how they are judged. Calm, respectful responses help build trust and reduce anxiety.

If someone chooses to share a disability, mental health difficulty, neurodivergent need, or other support need, respond kindly and practically.

A helpful response could be:

“Thank you for sharing that, I appreciate you letting us know. Is there anything that would support you during the process?”



Common barrier

If candidates are not clearly invited to request support, many will not raise it. This may mean they struggle unnecessarily or are assessed unfairly because the process has not been made accessible.

Example wording:

“We want our recruitment process to be accessible. Please let us know if there is anything that would support you during the application, interview or assessment process.”

2.3 Confidentiality and sensitive information

Information about someone’s health, disability, neurodivergence, or support needs should be handled sensitively and confidentially.

In most cases:

- Only collect information that is needed
- Explain why the information is being requested
- Share information only where necessary and with permission
- Focus on support needs rather than medical details
- Store information securely

You do not need to know everything about a person’s diagnosis to support them appropriately.



Common barrier

Sharing personal information with people who do not need it can create bias and reduce trust. Interviewers usually need to know what adjustment is required, not the person’s diagnosis or personal history.

For example, when sharing with an interview panel about a candidate with anxiety, instead of sharing their diagnosis, you could say:

“This candidate has requested the interview questions in advance and may need extra processing time during the interview.”

This keeps the focus on support and reduces the risk of bias.

2.4 Examples of good practice and poor practice

Good practice	Poor practice
Inviting all candidates to request support or adjustments	Only inviting a discussion about adjustments after someone struggles
Asking what would help the candidate participate fairly	Asking intrusive medical questions that are not needed
Keeping personal information confidential	Sharing health or disability information unnecessarily or without permission
Making decisions based on skills and role requirements	Making assumptions about capability based on diagnosis or communication style
Using structured interviews and agreed scoring criteria	Relying on “gut feel”, personality fit, or inconsistent criteria
Considering reasonable adjustments promptly	Delaying support unnecessarily or ignoring requests

QUICK REFLECTION

Before moving on, consider:

- ? Do candidates have a clear opportunity to share support needs or ask for adjustments?
- ? Are you only collecting and sharing information that is genuinely needed?
- ? Are decisions based on role-relevant evidence rather than assumptions?



03

Understanding Reasonable Adjustments & Practical Examples

3.1 What are reasonable adjustments?

Reasonable adjustments are changes to a process, environment, or way of working that reduce barriers and allow people to participate fairly. Reasonable adjustments help reduce the impact of barriers in the recruitment process, so candidates can participate fairly and be assessed on role-relevant skills.

In practice, many adjustments are simple, free or low-cost, and quick to implement.

They often involve clearer communication, more structure, flexibility, or small changes to how recruitment and onboarding are delivered.

Many adjustments can also be offered as part of standard good practice. For example, giving all candidates clear interview information in advance can reduce anxiety, support preparation and improve fairness across the whole process.

Why reasonable adjustments matter

Without adjustments, some candidates may be disadvantaged by the way recruitment is designed rather than their ability to do the job.

For example, a candidate may:

- Need more time to process questions or written information
- Experience anxiety when expectations are unclear
- Find sensory environments difficult, such as bright lighting, noise or busy waiting areas

With small adjustments, that same candidate may be able to demonstrate their abilities more effectively.



Tips

Adjustments are often about removing barriers in the process, not changing the standard required for the role.



Mental health consideration

Recruitment processes can increase stress and anxiety, particularly when they are unclear, unpredictable, time-pressured, or high stakes.

Clear information, predictable timelines, supportive communication and flexibility can reduce anxiety and help candidates feel more able to participate.

Many of these changes benefit all candidates, not just those who share support needs.

Important principles

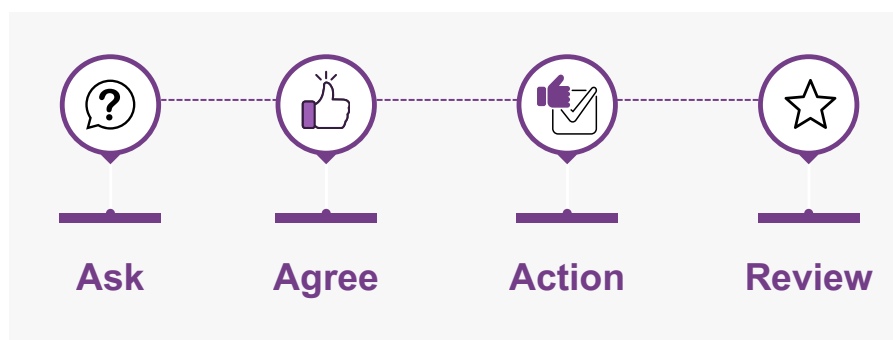
When considering reasonable adjustments:

- ✓ Ask what would help; do not assume
- ✓ Focus on barriers and support needs, not diagnosis
- ✓ Remember that a formal diagnosis is not required to offer support
- ✓ Keep adjustments proportionate and relevant to the process
- ✓ Consider whether some adjustments could become standard practice for all candidates
- ✓ Review support where the process changes or where someone moves into the role

What this means in practice

Reasonable adjustments work best when they are discussed early, agreed clearly and reviewed when needed. Employers do not need to have all the answers straight away. The most important starting point is to ask what would help, listen without judgement and focus on reducing barriers in the process.

Use this simple cycle whenever a candidate or employee requests support:



3.2 Examples of free or low-cost reasonable adjustments

Many adjustments are practical, easy to implement, and cost little or nothing. The examples below are not exhaustive, but they show how small changes can improve fairness and accessibility.

Communication and information

- Providing a clear recruitment timeline
- Explaining each stage of the process in advance
- Sharing interview structure or question themes before the interview
- Providing interview questions in advance where appropriate
- Giving written instructions as well as verbal instructions
- Avoiding jargon, acronyms, or internal terminology
- Providing a named contact for questions
- Explaining how candidates can request support or adjustments
- Sending reminders or confirmation emails before key stages

Application forms, written submissions and online systems

- Keeping application forms as short and relevant as possible
- Separating essential and desirable criteria clearly
- Allowing candidates to save and return to an online form
- Providing word limits or guidance on expected detail
- Allowing alternative formats where appropriate
- Making sure online forms are accessible and compatible with assistive technology
- Avoiding timed written responses unless speed is genuinely required for the role
- Providing clear instructions on what evidence or examples are needed
- Providing a contact if a candidate experiences technical issues

Interviews, assessments and selection tools

- Using structured interviews with consistent questions
- Sharing interview structure or questions in advance where appropriate
- Allowing thinking time before answering
- Rephrasing or breaking down questions if needed
- Offering written copies of questions during the interview
- Offering additional time during assessments where appropriate
- Providing practice examples or sample questions
- Allowing breaks during longer assessments
- Explaining what each assessment is for and how it will be used
- Interpreting test or questionnaire results alongside other evidence

Environment and visit information

- Offering a quieter waiting area where possible
- Reducing background noise
- Avoiding bright or flickering lighting where possible
- Providing clear directions and arrival instructions
- Sharing photos of the building entrance or reception
- Letting candidates know whom to ask for
- Offering breaks during longer sessions
- Considering the accessibility of toilets, lifts and entrances
- Providing parking information or instructions

Onboarding and transition into work

- Providing a clear, written induction plan
- Sharing key information in writing
- Setting clear priorities for the first few weeks
- Offering regular check-ins
- Assigning a buddy or mentor
- Phasing introduction to systems and tasks
- Reviewing adjustments after the person has started
- Signposting to Access to Work where relevant

3.3 Adjustment conversations

When discussing reasonable adjustments, simple, supportive questions can make a big difference. You could ask:

“Is there anything that would help you perform at your best during this process?”

or:

“Is there anything about the recruitment process that may create a barrier for you?”

If someone shares a response, avoid:

- Making assumptions
- Asking for unnecessary medical details
- Treating adjustments as unusual or difficult
- Expecting candidates to justify every request in detail



Tips

Focus on support,
not diagnosis.

3.4 When an adjustment may not be possible as requested

Most adjustments are simple and low-cost, but there may be times when an employer cannot provide exactly what has been requested.

If this happens, avoid simply saying “no”. Instead, have a supportive conversation to understand the barrier and explore alternatives.

When considering whether an adjustment is reasonable, think about:

- Whether it removes or reduces a barrier
- How practical it is to implement
- The size and resources of the organisation
- The impact on the recruitment process or role
- Whether there is another way to provide similar support



Tips

If you cannot provide the requested adjustment, explain why clearly and respectfully, consider alternatives, and keep a record of what was discussed and agreed.

If you are unable to provide a requested support, you could say:

“Thank you for letting us know what would help. We may not be able to provide that exact adjustment, but we’d like to understand the barrier and explore what support may be reasonable and practical to help you.”

Quick adjustment planning

Before each stage, consider:

- Is the process clear and structured?
- Have candidates been invited to request support?
- Could any adjustment be offered as standard practice?
- Is this stage assessing role-relevant skills, or unintentionally assessing confidence, speed or familiarity with recruitment processes?



Tips

Proactively reducing barriers benefits everyone, not only those who request support.

3.5 Access to Work

Access to Work is a UK Government programme that can provide practical and, in some cases, financial support for people with a disability, mental health condition, neurodivergence, illness or health condition.

It can support people who are:

- Starting work
- In work
- Returning to work
- Attending a job interview

Access to Work may help with things such as:

- Specialist equipment or assistive technology
- Travel support where someone cannot use public transport because of their condition or disability
- Communication support for interviews
- Job coaching or support workers
- Mental health support at work
- Practical workplace support or adaptations

Individuals usually apply themselves through the UK Government Access to Work service. Employers can signpost to the service, support the person with information where needed, and help implement any agreed support.



Tips

Access to Work does **not** replace an employer's duty to make reasonable adjustments. Employers should still make adjustments they can reasonably put in place themselves, rather than waiting for an Access to Work application.



04

Applying Inclusive Practice Across the Recruitment Journey

The recruitment journey is made up of several stages, from designing the role and advertising it, through to applications, communication, interviews, decision-making, offers and onboarding.

Each stage can either create barriers or reduce them.

For many SMEs and micro-employers, recruitment is managed by one person or a small team. You may not have a dedicated HR team, occupational health service, or specialist inclusion lead. This section is designed to help you think through the process step by step and identify practical changes that are realistic to implement.

At each stage, ask:

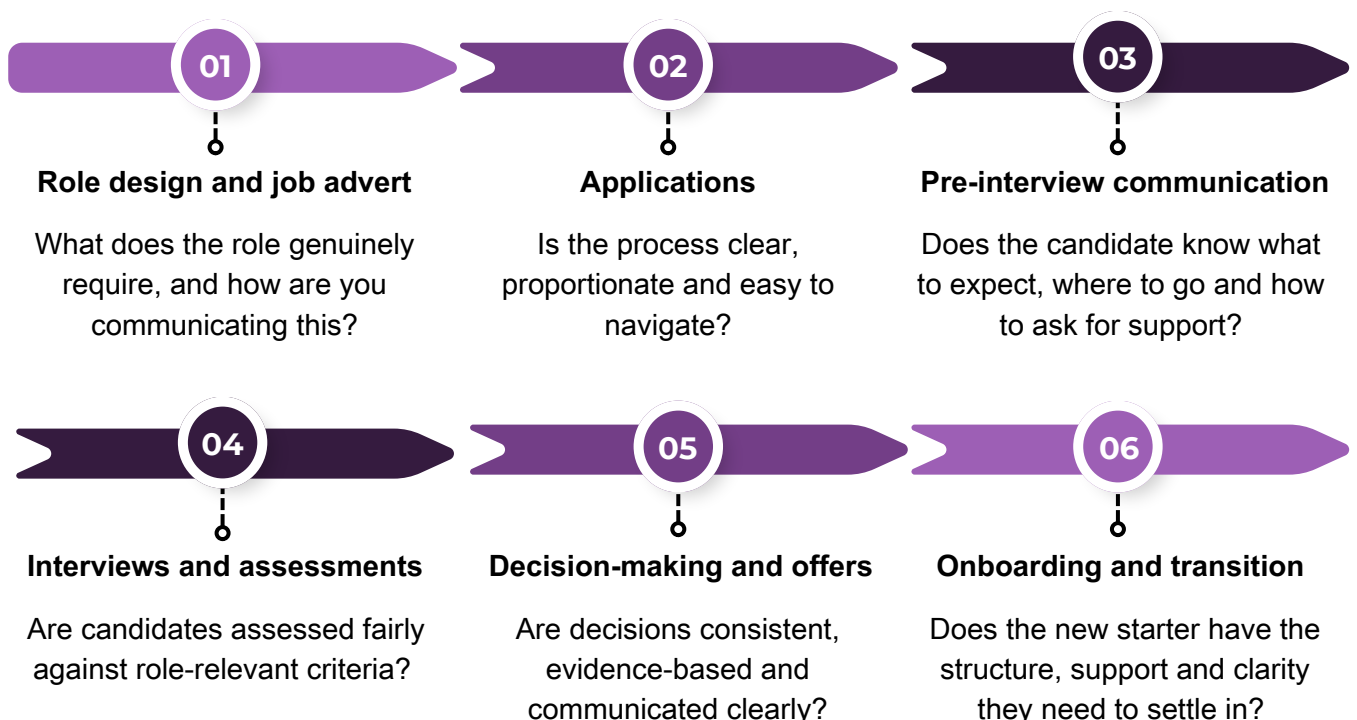
- ◉ What information does the candidate need?
- ◉ What could create unnecessary stress, uncertainty or confusion?
- ◉ What can we do to make the process clearer and fairer?
- ◉ What should we avoid?
- ◉ What support or adjustments could help someone participate fairly?



Mental health consideration

Recruitment can feel uncertain and emotionally demanding. Providing clear communication, predictable processes and supportive interactions can reduce anxiety and help candidates perform at their best.

A simple recruitment and onboarding journey



4.1 Role design and job adverts

Before writing a job advert, take time to clarify what the role genuinely requires. This helps avoid accidentally excluding capable candidates through vague wording, inflated criteria or assumptions about the “type” of person who would fit the role.



Common barrier

Vague or unrealistic job descriptions can discourage capable candidates from applying. Talented candidates may not apply if they are unsure whether they meet the requirements, if the advert uses unclear language, or if expectations appear unnecessarily demanding.

Good practice

- Consider the essential tasks and responsibilities of the role
- Use clear, specific language
- Separate essential and desirable criteria
- Focus on the skills and tasks genuinely needed for the role
- Include salary information where possible
- Explain the recruitment process and expected timeline
- Include a short EDI statement that explains your commitment to fair and accessible recruitment.

Avoid

- Vague traits such as “must be confident” or “must thrive under pressure” unless genuinely essential
- Inflated requirements that are not needed for the role
- Unexplained jargon, acronyms or internal language
- “Culture fit” language that may encourage subjective decision-making
- Long lists of desirable criteria that may discourage applicants

Example of language in job adverts

Instead of:

“We are looking for a confident person who thrives in a fast-paced environment.”

Consider:

“This role involves managing several accounts, communicating clearly with colleagues and clients, and asking for support or clarification where needed.”

Sample EDI statement:

We welcome applications from a wide range of candidates and want our recruitment process to be fair and accessible. If there is anything that would help you apply or take part in our recruitment process, please let us know.

4.2 Applications and recruitment processes

The application process should help you understand whether someone has the skills and experience needed for the role. It should not create unnecessary barriers through complexity, repetition or unclear expectations.



Common barrier

Complex or unclear processes can create confusion and increase candidate drop-off. Candidates may disengage if they do not understand what is expected, how long the process will take, or what each stage assesses.

Good practice

- Keep application forms as simple and focused as possible
- Provide clear instructions and deadlines
- Explain how long the process is expected to take
- Allow candidates to save and return to online forms where possible
- Provide a contact for questions or access issues
- Make sure online forms and systems are accessible
- Explain how candidates can request support or adjustments

Avoid

- Long, repetitive forms
- Unclear instructions
- Unnecessary written tasks
- Timed questions unless speed is genuinely required
- Systems that time out without warning
- Lack of updates or “ghosting”



Mental health consideration

Unclear or lengthy processes can increase anxiety and cognitive load. Clear timelines and regular updates help candidates feel more prepared and reduce unnecessary stress.

Adjustment examples

- Allowing extra time for written tasks or online assessments
- Providing written instructions in advance
- Allowing candidates to save and return to their application
- Providing a named contact for support

4.3 Communication and candidate experience

Communication is one of the simplest and most powerful ways to make recruitment more inclusive. Candidates are more likely to feel prepared and able to perform well when they know what to expect, who they will meet, where to go and how to ask for support.



Common barrier

Candidates often receive unclear, incomplete or last-minute information about interviews and assessments. This can increase anxiety, reduce confidence and make it harder for candidates to focus on demonstrating their skills.

Good practice

- Send a clear, structured interview invitation in advance
- Explain the interview format, duration and who will be present
- Provide practical details such as location, access, parking and contact details
- Explain what the candidate should prepare, if anything
- Share the interview structure or questions where appropriate
- Invite candidates to request support or adjustments
- Provide a contact if they have questions before the interview

Avoid

- Sending minimal or vague invitations
- Assuming candidates know what to expect
- Providing information too late
- Not offering an opportunity to request support
- Using overly formal or intimidating language
- Only providing practical information if someone asks for it



Mental health consideration

Interviews can often be the most nerve-wracking experience in the recruitment process. Providing clear information prior can help reduce anxiety and give candidates a better opportunity to demonstrate their skills and strengths.



Template

See **Section 5.4** for the Interview Invitation Template.

Providing clear visit information

Visiting an unfamiliar workplace can create stress, especially where candidates are unsure about where to go, who to speak to, or what the environment will be like.

To reduce this, it is helpful to provide:

- Full address and postcode
- Directions and transport information
- Parking information
- Building entry instructions
- Who to ask for on arrival
- Contact details for the day
- Photos of the building entrance or reception
- Information about waiting areas, toilets, lifts or accessibility considerations
- Health and safety information where relevant



Template

See **Section 5.5** for the Candidate Information Pack Checklist.

4.4 Interviews

Interviews should help you evaluate whether a candidate can meet the requirements of the role. They should not unintentionally reward confidence, speed, eye contact, small talk or familiarity with recruitment processes unless these are genuinely required for the role.



Common barrier

Interviews often reward confidence and quick thinking rather than job-relevant skills. This can disadvantage candidates who need more time to process information, communicate differently, experience anxiety or are unfamiliar with the interview process.

Good practice

- Use structured interviews
- Ask broadly consistent questions across candidates
- Agree scoring or marking criteria in advance
- Assess against competencies or role-relevant behaviours
- Provide interview structure or questions in advance where appropriate
- Allow thinking time and clarification
- Break down multi-part questions
- Offer written copies of questions where helpful
- Provide breaks during long days

Avoid

- Using unplanned or inconsistent scoring/marking criteria
- Relying on “gut feel”, “vibe” or personal rapport
- Changing the format unexpectedly
- Asking completely different questions without clear reason
- Treating eye contact, confidence or small talk as indicators of capability
- Creating unnecessary time pressure
- Using assessments that are not clearly linked to the role
- Using group interviews or group tasks unless they are relevant to the role



Mental health consideration

High-pressure interviews can reduce performance, even for capable candidates. Structure, clarity and supportive communication can help candidates show what they can do.

Adjustment examples

- Providing interview questions or themes and in advance
- Offering breaks
- Providing written instructions of the interview process and expectations
- Using a quieter interview space
- Providing information about the interview panel

4.5 Ability tests, personality tools and assessment centres

Some recruitment processes include additional selection methods, such as ability tests, personality questionnaires, work samples, presentations, role plays or assessment centres. These can be useful when they are clearly linked to the role and used appropriately.



Common barrier

Selection tools can unintentionally assess speed, test confidence, social ease or familiarity with assessment formats rather than role-relevant skills.

Good practice

- Explain what the assessment is for
- Explain what skill or behaviour it is assessing
- Use validated tools where appropriate
- Make sure the assessment is relevant to the role
- Provide clear instructions
- Allow additional time where appropriate
- Offer breaks during longer assessments
- Consider alternative ways to demonstrate the same skill
- Interpret results alongside other evidence
- Ensure assessors are trained to use the tool appropriately

Avoid

- Using tests or tools that are not relevant to the role
- Treating psychometric results as pass/fail in isolation
- Over-relying on speed where speed is not essential
- Using personality tools to search for a “preferred type”
- Labelling candidates negatively
- Treating group confidence or dominance as leadership potential
- Scoring candidates based on who speaks most in group tasks



Mental health consideration

Long assessment days can be draining for candidates experiencing anxiety, fatigue, sensory sensitivity or cognitive overload. Clear agendas, breaks, quiet spaces and written instructions can make the process more accessible and support performance.

Adjustment examples

- Providing a separate, quiet room for assessments
- Allowing assessments to be completed online, where appropriate
- Written instructions for each task
- Practice questions or examples, where appropriate

4.6 Decision-making and offers

Inclusive recruitment also depends on how decisions are made. A process can be accessible up to interview stage but still become unfair if decisions are based on subjective impressions or inconsistent criteria.



Common barrier

Decisions based on “fit”, confidence or interviewer preference can introduce bias.

Good practice

- Use agreed scoring criteria
- Compare candidates against role requirements
- Record evidence for decisions
- Consider all relevant assessment evidence
- Discuss adjustments separately from suitability
- Communicate decisions clearly and respectfully
- Provide feedback where possible

Avoid

- Making decisions based on “gut feel”
- Penalising candidates for communication style
- Treating support needs as a concern about capability
- Allowing one interviewer’s personal preference to dominate
- Changing criteria after meeting candidates



Tips

When making final decisions, return to the role design, essential criteria and agreed scoring framework. This helps keep the discussion focused on the evidence gathered during the recruitment process, rather than relying on instinct, personal preference or who felt most “likeable” in the interview.

4.7 Onboarding and transition

Inclusive recruitment does not end when someone accepts a role. The first few weeks and months are important for confidence, psychological safety, adjustment and retention.

New starters may be learning the role, the team, the systems, the expectations and the unwritten rules of the workplace all at once. This can be particularly demanding for people experiencing anxiety, neurodivergent candidates, disabled people, or anyone who benefits from structure and clarity.



Common barrier

New starters can feel overwhelmed and struggle to adapt to their new workplace when onboarding is informal or unclear.

Good practice

- Provide a structured induction plan
- Set clear priorities for the first few weeks
- Give written summaries of key information
- Hold regular check-ins
- Introduce systems and tasks gradually
- Arrange a short, informal meeting with their line manager
- Assign a buddy or mentor
- Encourage questions and normalise uncertainty
- Review adjustments after the person has started
- Signpost to Access to Work where relevant

Avoid

- Assuming new starters know workplace norms
- Giving too much information at once
- Waiting until someone struggles before offering support
- Treating adjustments as a one-off conversation
- Assuming silence means everything is fine
- Leaving the new starter without a clear point of contact



Mental health consideration

The first few weeks can heighten anxiety, self-doubt or overwhelm, which can affect confidence, performance and retention. Clear expectations, regular check-ins and permission to ask questions can help new starters feel safer and more confident.

QUICK REFLECTION

Before moving on, consider:

- ? Where might your current recruitment process create uncertainty or unnecessary pressure?
- ? Are you giving candidates enough information to prepare and participate fairly?
- ? Are decisions based on role-relevant evidence?
- ? What could be standardised or clarified to improve fairness for everyone?



Template

See **Section 5.6** for the Wellbeing and Support at Work Template.



05

Practical Tools and Templates

This section brings together practical resources you can adapt and use within your own recruitment and onboarding process.

You do not need to use every template. Start with the tools that would make the biggest difference to your current process.

5.1 Inclusive recruitment checklist

Use this checklist before, during and after recruitment to identify simple ways to improve accessibility, fairness and candidate experience.

Before recruitment

- ☐ Is the role clearly defined?
- ☐ Are essential and desirable criteria separated?
- ☐ Is the job advert written in clear, accessible language?
- ☐ Have unnecessary requirements been removed?
- ☐ Is salary information included where possible?
- ☐ Is the recruitment process explained clearly?
- ☐ Are candidates invited to request support or adjustments?

During recruitment

- ☐ Are candidates given clear information about each stage?
- ☐ Are timelines and expectations communicated?
- ☐ Are interview details, including questions, shared in advance?
- ☐ Are interviews structured and consistent?
- ☐ Are questions and scoring criteria linked to the role?
- ☐ Are candidates given opportunities to ask questions or request support?
- ☐ Is personal information handled confidentially?

After recruitment

- ☐ Are decisions based on evidence and role-relevant criteria?
- ☐ Are candidates informed of outcomes clearly and respectfully?
- ☐ Is feedback provided where possible?
- ☐ Is onboarding planned before the person starts?
- ☐ Are support needs and adjustments reviewed before the person starts?
- ☐ Is there a clear point of contact for the new starter?

5.2 Reasonable adjustment self-audit

Use this audit when planning recruitment stages or responding to a support request.

Ask yourself:

- Have we asked the candidate whether they need any adjustments or support?
- Have we explained clearly what adjustments can be requested and how to request them?
- Have we responded to any requests in a timely, supportive and non-judgemental way?
- Have we focused on what the person needs to perform at their best?
- Could an adjustment be offered as standard practice for all candidates?
- Have we agreed what will be put in place, who is responsible and when it will happen?
- Have appropriate people been informed about how to provide support, with permission?
- Have we protected confidentiality and handled sensitive information appropriately?
- Have we checked whether the adjustment is working?
- Have we reviewed whether the process itself could be changed to reduce the need for individual adjustments in future?

Next steps

If you answered “no” or “not sure” to any of these questions, choose one action to take before the next stage of recruitment or onboarding.

5.3 Helpful phrases for supportive conversations

The language used when offering support can affect whether candidates feel safe to ask for what they need. Aim to keep wording simple, respectful and focused on practical support rather than diagnosis.

When inviting candidates to share their support needs

“We want our recruitment process to be accessible and supportive. Please let us know if there is anything that would help you participate fully or perform at your best.”

After someone shares support needs

“Thank you for sharing this. That is helpful to know. Can you tell us what support or adjustments would help you?”

When discussing adjustments

“Let’s look at what would help you perform at your best. What would you find most helpful? Would it be helpful to [suggest appropriate reasonable adjustments]?”

When an adjustment may not be possible exactly as requested

“Thank you for letting us know what would help. We may not be able to provide that exact adjustment, but we’d like to understand the barrier and explore what support we can provide.”

When discussing sharing information with others

“Can we agree who needs to know, what information they need, and what you are comfortable with us sharing?”

5.4 Interview invitation template

Use this template to provide clear, friendly and supportive interview information.

Subject: Interview invitation for [Role Title]

Hi **[Name]**,

Thank you for your application for the role of **[Job Title]**. We're pleased to invite you to an interview and are really looking forward to meeting you.

The details are below. If you have any questions at any point, please feel free to get in touch. We will also provide the interview questions 24 hours in advance to help you prepare.

Interview details:

Date: []

Time: []

Location: []

Duration: []

On arrival

Please **[enter via / report to reception / press the buzzer]** and ask for **[name]**. If you need anything on the day, you can contact us on **[number]**.

What to expect

You'll be meeting **[names/roles]**. The interview will include **[brief structure]**, and there will be time for you to ask any questions.

Support and adjustments

We want this to be a positive and supportive experience. If there is anything that would help you during the interview, for example adjustments to the format, timing or communication, please let us know. We're happy to help.

Best wishes,

[Name / Team]

5.5 Candidate information pack checklist

A candidate information pack can be a short PDF shared before an interview or assessment. It helps candidates understand what to expect and reduces uncertainty.

Include:

- ☐ Organisation overview
- ☐ Role title and interview purpose
- ☐ Date, time and duration
- ☐ Interview format and structure
- ☐ Who candidates will meet
- ☐ What candidates need to prepare
- ☐ Full address and postcode
- ☐ Directions, parking and public transport information
- ☐ Building entry instructions
- ☐ Photos of the building entrance or reception where possible
- ☐ Where to report on arrival
- ☐ Contact details for the day
- ☐ Waiting area information
- ☐ Health and safety information
- ☐ Accessibility information, such as lifts, toilets or step-free access
- ☐ How to request support or adjustments



Tips

This does not need to be long or highly designed. A clear one or two-page PDF can make a big difference.

5.6 Wellbeing and support at work template

This optional template can be used during onboarding or early check-ins. It helps managers understand what supports a person to feel safe, clear and able to do their best work. It should always be optional. The person can complete it, talk it through with their manager, or return to it later.

Supporting you to work at your best

At [Company Name], we want people who work with us to feel safe, supported and able to do their best. We understand that everyone has different experiences, needs and ways of working. This tool is here to help us understand what works best for you.

Important information

- You do not have to complete this form.
- You can choose to talk to your manager instead.
- You can complete this at any time, not just at the start.
- You only need to share what you feel comfortable sharing.
- If there is anything important relating to your safety, such as allergies or medical needs, we encourage you to share this.

Your details

Name:

Manager:

Role:

Date:

What helps me be at my best at work

For example: structure, communication, environment, working patterns, flexibility.

What would support me at work

For example: adjustments, tools, regular check-ins, written instructions, quiet space, flexibility.

Communication preferences

For example: written follow-ups, time to process information, direct communication, regular check-ins.

Anything that may make work more difficult (optional)

In an emergency, it would help to know (optional)

Health, medication, equipment or
access needs I want you to be aware of

What is not helpful for me in stressful
situations?

Agreed support plan

What I need	What my manager / organisation will do

Review date



Tips

This should be reviewed regularly and updated as needed. The aim is to create an ongoing, supportive conversation, not a one-off form.

5.7 Recruitment self-reflection tool

Use this as a quick audit of your current process.

Area	Reflection questions	Yes	Partly	Not yet
Role design	- Have we clearly identified the skills, tasks and responsibilities genuinely needed for the role? - Have we removed requirements that are not essential?			
Job advert	- Is the advert written in clear, accessible language? - Are essential and desirable criteria clearly separated? - Have we avoided vague wording such as “must be confident” or “culture fit”?			
Application process	- Is the process proportionate and easy to navigate? - Are instructions, deadlines and expected time commitments clear? - Can candidates ask questions or request support if needed?			
Support and adjustments	- Are candidates clearly invited to ask for support or adjustments? - Are we focusing on barriers and support needs rather than diagnosis? - Could any adjustments be offered as standard practice for all candidates?			
Communication	- Do candidates know what to expect at each stage? - Do candidates know who to contact if they have questions? - Are updates provided consistently throughout the process?			
Interview preparation	- Do candidates receive clear information before interview? - Do we provide interview structure, question themes or questions in advance where appropriate? - Is practical visit information provided, such as location, parking, arrival instructions and who to ask for?			

Area	Reflection questions	Yes	Partly	Not yet
Interviews and assessments	• Are interviews structured and broadly consistent across candidates? • Are questions and scoring criteria agreed in advance? • Are we assessing role-relevant skills rather than confidence, speed, “vibe” or communication style?			
Selection tools	• Are any tests, questionnaires or assessment tasks clearly linked to the role? • Have we considered whether the format may create barriers for some candidates? • Are results interpreted alongside other evidence rather than used in isolation?			
Decision-making	• Are decisions based on evidence and role-relevant criteria? • Are personal information and support needs kept separate from suitability decisions? • Can we explain and justify the decision-making process fairly?			
Confidentiality	• Is personal or health-related information only collected where needed? • Is information only shared with permission and where necessary?			
Onboarding	• Is onboarding structured and planned before the person starts? • Are expectations, priorities and key information clearly explained? • Are regular check-ins, buddy support or review points in place?			

Next step

Choose one “Not yet” or “Partly” response and identify one small action you can take before your next recruitment process.



06

Conclusion & Helpful Resources

6.1 Final reflections

Inclusive recruitment is not about perfection. It is about making a genuine effort to reduce barriers, improve clarity and create a process where candidates have a fairer opportunity to demonstrate their skills and potential.

For employers, small changes can make a meaningful difference. Clear communication, structured interviews, accessible information, thoughtful adjustments and supportive onboarding can improve candidate experience, widen access to talent and support legal and ethical responsibilities. For candidates, these changes can reduce anxiety, increase confidence and create a stronger foundation for success at work.

The best place to start is with the Recruitment Self-Reflection Tool in Section 5.7. Use it to identify the areas where your current process may need the most attention, then return to the sections of this toolkit that relate to those areas.

Start with one or two realistic changes before your next recruitment process. Small, consistent improvements can reduce barriers, improve candidate experience and help you build a fairer, more inclusive approach over time.

6.2 Helpful resources

The following organisations provide useful guidance on inclusive recruitment, reasonable adjustments, mental health, neurodiversity, disability inclusion and workplace support.

For further support with inclusive recruitment, onboarding, reasonable adjustments or workplace inclusion, please contact us.

Careers and Employment

 careers@herts.ac.uk

 +44 (0)1707 284791

 careers.herts.ac.uk

  @UHCareers

 **University of Hertfordshire**
Hutton Hub
College Lane Campus, LB416
Hatfield
AL10 9AB



Tips

Signposting can be helpful, but it does not replace an employer's responsibility to create fair, accessible and supportive recruitment and onboarding processes.

Employment, legal and workplace guidance

- **ACAS**
Practical guidance on employment rights, reasonable adjustments and supporting disabled people at work.
- **Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)**
Guidance on the Equality Act 2010 and employer responsibilities.
- **Access to Work**
UK Government support that may help with practical or financial support for eligible people with disabilities, health difficulties, mental health difficulties or neurodivergent needs.
- **CIPD**
Guidance on inclusive recruitment, fair selection, people management and workplace wellbeing.

Mental health support

- **Mind**
Information and guidance on mental health, including mental health at work.
- **Student Minds**
Resources relating to student and graduate mental health and transition into employment.
- **Rethink Mental Illness**
Information and support for people affected by mental illness.

Neurodiversity and disability inclusion

- **National Autistic Society**
Guidance on autism, employment and reasonable adjustments.
- **Autistica**
Research and resources relating to autism and employment.
- **ADHD Foundation**
Information and guidance on ADHD and neurodiversity.