



EqualTech report 2023

How neurodiverse individuals bring
in-demand perspectives to tech

Foreword.

When Steve Jobs coined the slogan “Think Different” in the late 90s, I wonder if he was hinting at the power of neurodiversity.

Conversations around women and ethnic minorities in technology have rightfully been at the forefront of diversity and inclusion activity in recent years. Companies have proactively rethought their hiring policies and adapted working cultures to be more accommodating. But is there enough positive action happening around less visible diversities, such as the differences between how people’s brains work?

While some organisations recognise the powerful potential of building teams of people with neurological differences, stigmas and miseducation around neurodiverse communities are still rampant. *The global unemployment rate for people on the spectrum sits at around 80%*.*

Sparta Global was founded to combat the digital skills gap, attracting, training, and delivering a diverse community of technology talent that organisations can tap into to secure fresh-thinkers for the future. It was also built on the basis that much of the UK’s highest potential business and technology talent is excluded by traditional talent attraction. With the UK government reporting that we could face a shortage of 900,000 skilled IT workers by next year, the neurodiverse community presents perspectives and skills that could be transformative.

Consider people on the autism spectrum. They are known to have extraordinary cognitive abilities linked to memory, concentration, and analysis – skills most relevant in the digital and tech space.

When I set the team to research the topic of neurodiversity and technology, I had no idea that we would receive such overwhelming feedback. The survey, subsequent research and conclusions, have been truly eye-opening. I hope you glean as much insight, knowledge, and practical advice from it as I have.

by David Rai, CEO, Sparta Global

*Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2020

Contents.

Executive Summary by Purnima Sen	2
Introduction	4
Why neurodiversity in tech matters	6
Neurodiversity and in-demand skills and perspectives in tech	10
Covid-19 accelerated conversations around neurodiversity inclusion	14
Getting the language right	16
Neurodivergent employees: a demographic in evolution	18
Does awareness equal change?	20
How can employers attract neurodiverse talent in tech?	24
Tech training academies, work experience and hiring schemes	28
Sustaining neurodiversity in digital teams	32
An introduction to Market Field Farm	35
An introduction to Sparta Global	38

Executive Summary.

Employers are excluding neurodiverse individuals.

If employers do not assess and adapt their hiring processes to accommodate, support, and encourage neurodiverse professionals - this is the reality.

In 2022, Sparta Global surveyed more than 500 individuals from organisations across almost every industry sector to understand the unique perspectives neurodiverse professionals present to the technology industry - speaking with CEOs and CTOs, junior hiring professionals, HR, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion experts, community partners and graduate groups. With these insights, we pulled together a report that shines a light on the powerful potential of neurodiverse professionals in technology and the unique contributions they can present to fast-growing and innovative technology teams.

In an industry such as technology where there is a significant skills gap, and employers are crying out for innovative talent, the neurodiverse community offers a mass of untapped potential with fresh thinkers who bring unique and powerful perspectives to our industry. So why are companies in this sector still failing to take positive action?

by **Purnima Sen**,
Chief People and ED&I Officer
Sparta Global



In our research, we found that just 21% of respondents work for businesses that tailor their recruitment practices to neurodivergent candidates. In turn, this means

79%

of organisations we surveyed, have taken no steps to accommodate those with neurodiverse characteristics.

The biggest deficits in technology are expected to be in strategically important and rapidly expanding areas such as data analytics and IT services implementation - areas where responsibilities pair up with the abilities of a number of neurodiverse people. This is why Sparta Global's 2023 EqualTech report focusses on the unique perspectives neurodiverse individuals can bring to technology, presenting research that will inform employers of the value of diverse groups in digital. Diverse hiring and positive action is not only the right thing to do to promote inclusion - but is also an intelligent business decision that provides compelling competitive advantages.

In our report we touch on **why** neurodiversity matters, how Covid-19 has accelerated conversations around neurodiversity inclusion, and the ways in which organisations can drive change, sustain it and build a fair and inclusive talent attraction process for neurodiverse individuals. You will also read about the personal experiences of some of Sparta Global's neurodiverse employees now working in technology, how our early-careers partners are championing diversity in their teams, and why organisations such as ADHD girls are still having to fight for recognition.

We also break down the specific skills neurodiverse professionals traditionally bring to the table. Computational thinking, questioning how things are done, imagination, intuition, innovation - just some of the traits applicable to individuals with conditions such as autism, ADHD, and Dyslexia. Neurodiversity inclusion can help tech employers drive innovation, performance, and productivity.

Having people who see things differently, ask non-linear questions, and provoke conversations around accessibility, enables organisations to build products and services that will be viable for far wider audiences and skillsets. This is critical for businesses to succeed.

Before you read on, I remind you that we all have a part to play in turning these insights into action. First stage educators, university lecturers, employers, and vocational trainers - we must all commit to providing equal opportunities to neurodiverse professionals. It is only together that we can dispel long-standing - but entirely outdated - stigmas around working with neurodiverse people. Together, we can change the narrative and give an empowered community the skills to transform the digital landscape.

Introduction.

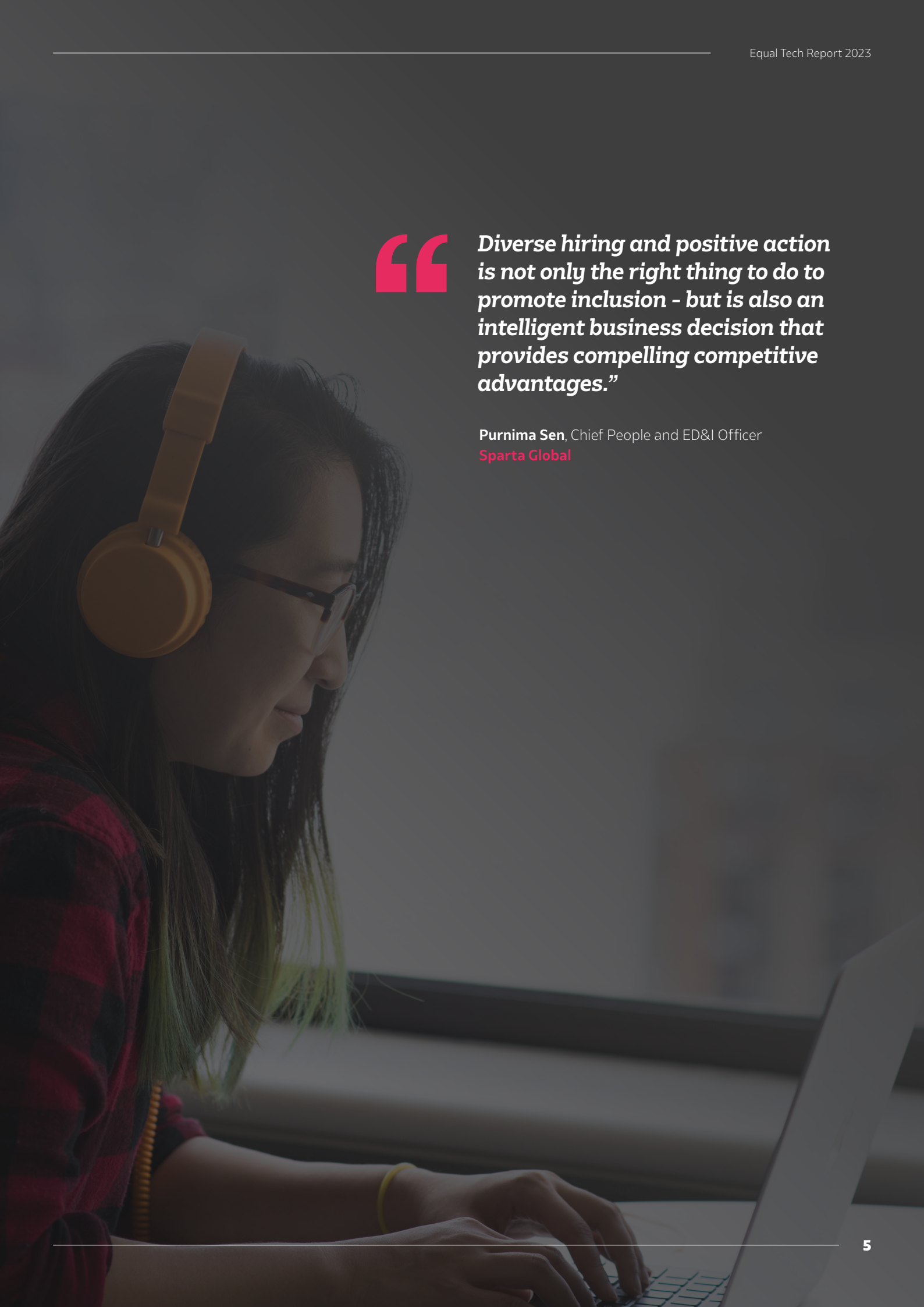
We are all neurodiverse: we all think differently, perceive the world differently, and do things in a unique way to others. No way is right or wrong. In fact, cognitive diversity is crucial. It means that we can rely on a mix of different perspectives, skills, and talents that lead novel approaches, innovations, and solutions.

The term *neurodiversity* was coined by Australian sociologist Judy Singer in the late 1990s. In her book, *Neurodiversity: The birth of an idea*, she explored the concept of biodiversity and how it applied to the neurocognitive variability found in humans. Singer came from a family of neurodivergent people. Her passion for the subject stemmed from her personal experience of exclusion and the belief that reducing stigmas associated with different neurological abilities would strongly benefit society.

Almost 30 years later, and the term *neurodiversity* has gained popularity across the globe. And yet, stigmas persist. Both in education and professional spaces, neurodivergent thinkers can still be labelled as less able or needing help from others for basic tasks, and they remain systemically underrepresented in senior positions.

In business and technology, such misconceptions can create a lack of opportunities for neurodiverse talent and these inequalities carry huge risks. Without cognitive diversity, the potential for innovation is drastically reduced, impoverishing technological progress and halting economic growth.

This report looks at how organisations can drive competitive advantage, productivity, and performance, by harnessing the power of a neuro-inclusive digital workforce.



“Diverse hiring and positive action is not only the right thing to do to promote inclusion - but is also an intelligent business decision that provides compelling competitive advantages.”

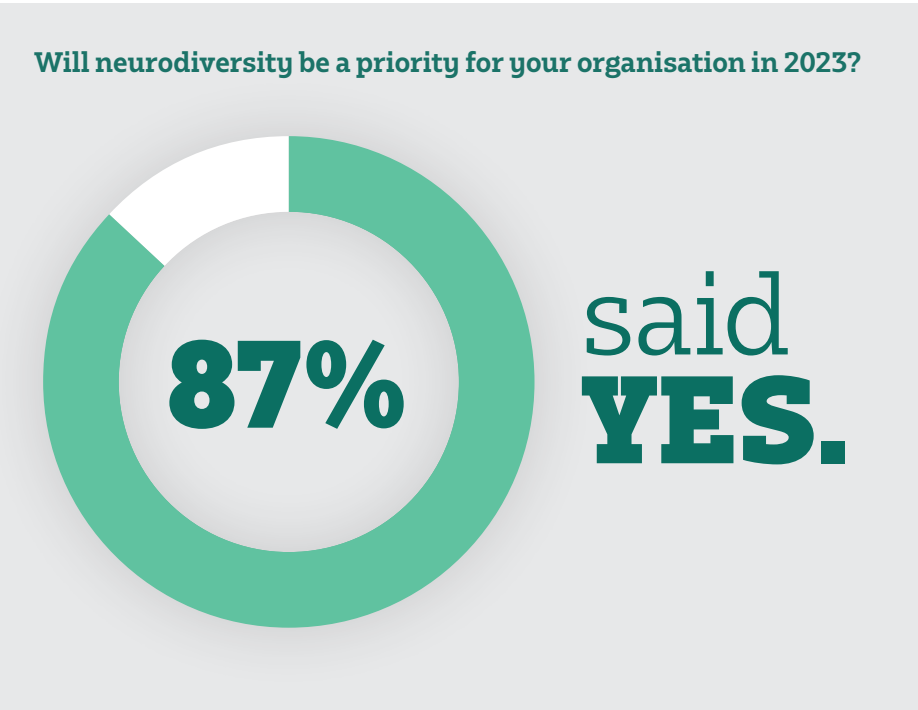
Purnima Sen, Chief People and ED&I Officer
Sparta Global

Chapter one.

Why neurodiversity in tech matters.

Our research suggests that **neurodiversity** inclusion is imperative for the future of business, particularly within digital spaces.

87% of digital leaders surveyed in our research believe that neurodiversity will be a top priority for their companies in 2023. This signals that digitally driven businesses are increasingly aware of the importance of neurodiversity, which is viewed as a strategic objective for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I).



Enhancing customer and business relations

Optimising business growth

Developing novel solutions

Attracting talent

Retaining the talent you have

Ethical responsibility

We asked our respondents to explain why they believe that neurodiversity in tech is important. The top reasons reported were:

Ethical and moral responsibility: digital leaders recognise that neurodivergent thinkers have been systematically excluded from business conversations. Our respondents feel that businesses have an ethical and moral responsibility to ensure that everyone “gets a spot at the table” going forward.

Attracting new talent: a frequently cited reason for investing in neurodiversity inclusion is the desire to engage and onboard new talent. Our respondents feel that this is particularly important in the post-Covid economy, as the demand for fresh tech talent continues to grow.

Retaining existing talent: a structured approach to neurodiversity inclusion can also help companies retain current employees. Our research suggests that looking inside the organisation – recognising and supporting existing neurodivergent employees – is just as important as venturing out in search of new talent.

Developing novel solutions: digital leaders in our study believe that now more than ever, tech innovation is critical for solving complex business challenges. Having neuro-complementary teams within the organisation is perceived as an asset to develop creative and innovative digital products.

Optimising business growth: a common perception held by our respondents is that a neuro-inclusive workforce could directly promote communication and effectiveness in digital processes, resulting in a greater competitive advantage and sustainable growth.

Enhancing customer and business relations: finally, there is a belief that a neurodiverse workforce is better equipped for understanding the needs of stakeholders. Our respondents feel that by attracting more neurodivergent employees, their companies could develop stronger capabilities to diversify their customer and business relations.

Contributor quotes.

It's very important for organisations to listen to the voices of underrepresented groups, allowing team members to share their backgrounds and lived experiences. As a neurodiverse Black woman in the workplace, I think this is where the real work begins. Constantly having to reach out for adjustments even when you have already disclosed your learning differences, being misunderstood and unable to be your whole self, and fearing that you won't be able to reach your full potential because you don't have the right resources and support in place, can leave you feeling like you don't belong. By truly understanding that diversity, inclusion, equity, and belonging should be at the heart of a company's operations, businesses can create environments where employees feel psychologically safe to connect.

Marcia Brissett-Bailey
Independent Dyslexia and Neurodiversity champion and advocate



I was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia as an adult and have experienced significant barriers in my personal and professional life. This research is important because it will help demystify neurodiversity and break stigmas. This research by Sparta is groundbreaking because of the specific focus on neurodiversity in the tech industry. I strongly believe that in a knowledge economy, intellectual capital will be huge contributor to competitive advantage especially in the world of tech. This means tech leaders cannot ignore embedding neurodiversity in their D&I strategies. I believe Sparta's research will increase awareness of the benefits of neurodiverse teams and give the industry practical steps in changing how they can approach engaging with neurodiverse talent. It has been very rewarding for me to collaborate with Sparta Global's ED&I department because they are truly leaders in the field of diversity in tech. It is very rare for me to meet professionals who truly understand neurodiversity and want to put energy into improving outcomes for my community. As part of our collaboration, I am engaged in coaching one of Sparta's employees as an ADHD coach. I think all organisations should encourage coaching for neurodiverse employees because it helps build new skills, self-awareness and increases productivity.

Kim To
Launch Lab and Accelerator Manager at City, University of London & Founder of Flair, Coaching and Neurodiversity Consulting company



Contributor quotes.

I am interested in this research because, after being diagnosed later in life, I now understand how my previous professional experiences were influenced by my undiagnosed, untreated and unsupported ADHD. A person with ADHD is more likely to earn less than their peers, miss work or even get fired, and feel less confident at work. This research will have a multitude of benefits, but most importantly, it will raise awareness about the unique challenges faced by neurodiverse employees, and hopefully result in lasting change. Companies that support their neurodiverse employees can only stand to benefit. The best selves of people with ADHD can be brought to work when they are given the right support, every day. ADHD individuals are known to be enthusiastic, spontaneous, creative and inventive. Working with Sparta has already been such a positive experience. My ADHD was first disclosed during my onboarding, and I have been offered support throughout. Sparta offers its employees support and meets them where they are, which is refreshing.

Maddy Kilsby-McMurray
Spartan



As a social entrepreneur with a background in medical science and lived experience of multiple neurodivergence, I believe I bring a unique insight to neurodiversity. It has helped me see that society as a whole isn't fully ready to accept those who appear to be different - outside of what is perceived as normal - but the concept of normal changes overtime. With the maturation of the neurodiversity movement, I believe that we will move towards seeing each neurodivergent as what they truly are, humans with a sum of strengths and challenges, abilities and needs. I love that Sparta share the same mission as me. Increased advocacy and awareness can catalyse positive conversations and actions, facilitating integration. We are human beings with over 86 billion brain cells, and the way neurodivergence manifests depends on our beginnings and the experiences that shape our thought process and behaviours. When we look at each person, we can cater to their individual needs, which enables neurodivergents to get the most out of their environment in schools, workplaces, and life, and preserving this diversity of thought can only move society forward.

Samantha Hiew
Founder and Director of ADHD Girls



Chapter two.

Neurodiversity and in-demand skills and perspectives in tech.

Crucially, our research indicates that when companies attract and retain **neuro-inclusive digital teams**, they are more likely to gain and sustain a competitive advantage.

To understand the impact of neurodiversity on business technology, we set out to identify some of the key skills associated with neurodiversity and how they reflect on team performances. Our data shows that neurodiverse teams bring in-demand skills and perspectives that can greatly benefit technology.



According to our study, these skills include:

Computational thinking.	The jobs of tomorrow will require us to express problems and their solutions in ways that a computer could execute. High levels of computational thinking are often associated with autism, particularly in relation to pattern recognition, pattern abstraction, and algorithm design. Our survey suggests that digital employees with autism are achieving exceptional results in areas such as machine learning and quantum computing, where computational thinking skills are highly sought-after.
Questioning how things are done.	Asking why things are the way they are is the foundation of problem-solving. As technology evolves to address complex business problems, having an inquisitive mindset is a must for digital workers. We found that teams that embrace neurodiversity tend to be more inquisitive, paving the way for effective troubleshooting in areas such as testing and project management.
Imagination.	The pace of technology is accelerating at an unprecedented rate. Some of the most successful people working in tech are highly imaginative: by envisioning what the technology of the future may look like, they are pivotal in advancing new ideas. In our study, imagination skills are often associated with dyslexia. Digital teams that embrace dyslexia are shown to excel at innovation, bringing new cutting-edge technologies to life.
Intuition and innovation.	Digital employers are increasingly looking for individuals who are inventive, creative, and risk-takers. These skills are often linked with ADHD. In our study, we spoke with employees with ADHD whose intuition skills have helped them achieve great results in areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and User Experience (UX) design.
Drawing connections.	Understanding relationships between information and business processes is a strength associated with both autism and dyslexia. It is also one of the most in-demand skills in areas such as data visualisation and analytics, where neuro-inclusive teams show higher productivity levels.
Observational skills.	We found a correlation between observational skills and forms of neurodiversity, particularly dyspraxia and autism. Employees with these traits are often capable of enhanced observation and detail processing, fuelling ground-breaking developments in areas such as robotics and augmented reality.

Design mindset.

While traditional design is problem-focused, digital employers are increasingly looking for solution-oriented individuals to address existing business issues. In our study, we see that employees with dyslexia can bring a novel design mindset to their teams, one that is focused on imagining solutions.

Adaptability.

The ability to respond to unexpected change is a key requirement of many technical jobs. We observed that neurodiverse teams show higher adaptability levels. This is because they leverage diverse perspectives and problem-solving approaches to address complex issues both quickly and efficiently. In areas such as AI and machine learning, these competencies can drive new solutions to meet the needs and challenges of our everyday lives.

Focus.

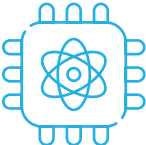
Inclusive employers understand that by leveraging the perspectives of their neurodiverse employees, they can improve results. Some of the most successful digital companies we spoke to are allowing neurodiverse talent to specialise in roles and tasks that require their unique skills. This approach empowers neurodivergent thinkers to focus on their strengths, which leads to happier and more engaged teams.

Depth of thinking.

Finally, we found that companies that succeed in establishing transparent conversations about neurodiversity can also boost mental health within teams. Psychological safety is directly linked with emotional and social well-being, improving how employees think, feel, and act. In our study, neurodiversity inclusion is shown to promote communication and freedom of expression, which in turn fosters mental health.



When we analyse these findings collectively, we learn that skills associated with neurodiversity can directly increase efficiency in technical teams. The positive impact of neurodiversity can be observed in many fast-growing digital areas, including:

	Software engineering		Project management
	AI and machine learning		UX design
	Quantum computing		Data analysis
	Testing		Data visualisation

Far from being just a “nice thing to do”, neurodiversity inclusion can help tech employers drive innovation, performance, and productivity.

Chapter three.

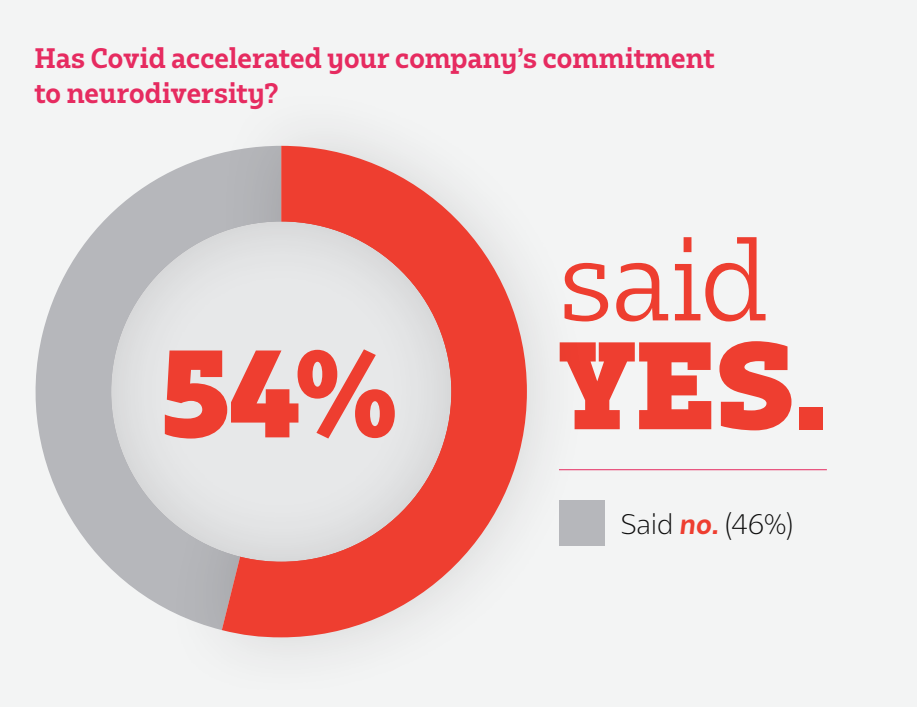
Covid-19 accelerated conversations about neurodiversity inclusion.



Interestingly, more than half of digital leaders in our study believe that the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the commitment of their companies towards neurodiversity.

In most companies, we see that neurodiversity conversations are quite recent. The majority of businesses only started to strategise neurodiversity in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the shift to remote working prompted a renewed focus on employee wellbeing and different ways of working.

When we consider these responses collectively, we learn that neurodiversity is becoming a new focus area for digital inclusion and business recovery. This is a promising sign, as more tech employers are starting to pay attention to the role of neurodiversity as something that is integral for the success of their ED&I objectives post Covid-19.



Chapter four.

Getting the language right.

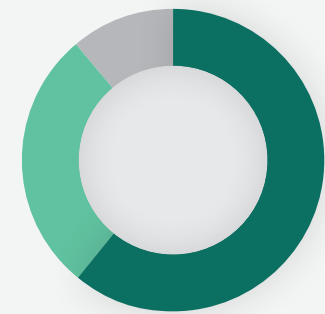
A prominent theme that emerged from our research is a fear of getting the terminology wrong when discussing neurodiversity. Our respondents shared that they are often afraid to get their words wrong, offend someone, or even cause social media storms by using inappropriate language, despite having good intentions. This fear can prevent employees from participating in important discussions and slow down the pace of progress.

In our study, we considered whether we should even use categories such as “neurodivergent” and “neurodiverse”. After all, neurodiversity is not a single label or exclusive category, but a wide spectrum that includes a multitude of function, communication, and thought traits. Are categories helpful at all when talking about neurodiversity?

61% of our respondents feel that a certain degree of categorisation is OK, because it provides a language to enable conversations. Without this, it can be difficult to engage in dialogue, discuss individual needs, and provide support. Conversely, 28% of our respondents are fearful that categories may be perceived as discriminatory, and a further 11% are generally unsure about which language they should use.

Here we can observe that people often refrain from joining the conversation on neurodiversity because they are worried that they may make mistakes. While these feelings are valid, it is important that we enable dialogue.

Are categories helpful when talking about neurodiversity?



- Said **yes**. (61%)
- Said **no**. (28%)
- Said **not sure how to use them**. (11%)

Our research signals that:

- It is OK to feel uncomfortable with categories and labels, just like it is OK not to have all the answers. What’s important, is that we are all empowered to talk about existing issues and the changes that are required.
- Having a language to discuss the subject of neurodiversity is important to empower people to have a voice and create positive change. Categories such as “neurodiverse” and “neurodivergent” can provide a starting point for conversation.
- However, categories do not fully describe individuals. While they serve as a starting point of conversation, they should never be used to isolate neurodivergent individuals.
- Everyone’s experience of neurodiversity is different. Each person has a unique mix of strengths and challenges that can evolve with time. We cannot put people into rigid categories or boxes.
- The terminology someone uses to describe themselves is personal. Some people openly identify as neurodiverse, while others may not want to be defined by a specific label. It is important to listen to these preferences. When in doubt about which terms to use, it is always good practice to ask.

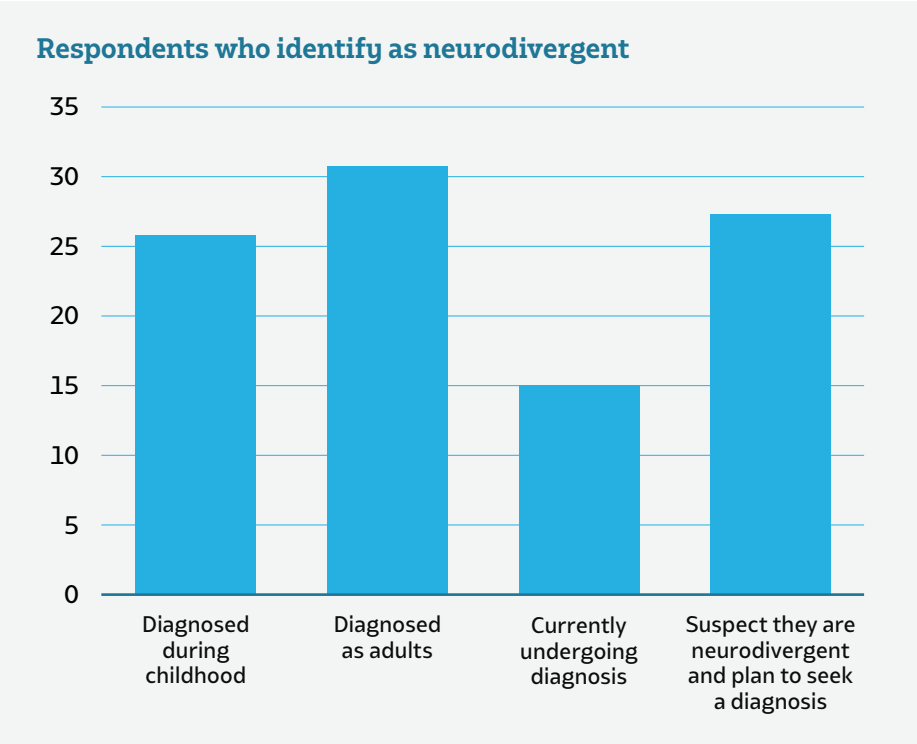
Chapter five.

Neurodivergent employees: a demographic in evolution.

As part of our research, we explored the experiences of digital workers who identify as neurodivergent.

This set of data shows that neurodivergent employees in tech are a demographic in constant evolution. As medical research accelerates, and advanced neurodiversity assessments become available, more working professionals are choosing to undergo a diagnosis when they suspect they may be neurodivergent.

In our research, we see that the largest proportion of neurodivergent employees is diagnosed later in life. Of those surveyed who identified as neurodivergent, only 26% were diagnosed during childhood, while 31% were diagnosed as adults. A further 15% told us that they are currently undergoing a diagnosis, while 28% are planning to seek an assessment in the near future.



Based on these indicators, we can predict that the number of employees with a neurodiversity diagnosis is likely to rise over the next few years. This calls for urgent action from employers. Only by ensuring they are adequately equipped to support an increasingly diverse workforce can businesses hope to attract and retain top talent.

Chapter six.

Does awareness equal change?

Our research highlights that **neurodiversity** awareness is on the rise. However, it also warns that awareness doesn’t always translate into action.

68% of our respondents believe that their organisations are not moving fast enough to remove existing barriers to entry for neurodivergent talent.



Our respondents identified five key areas in which barriers persist:

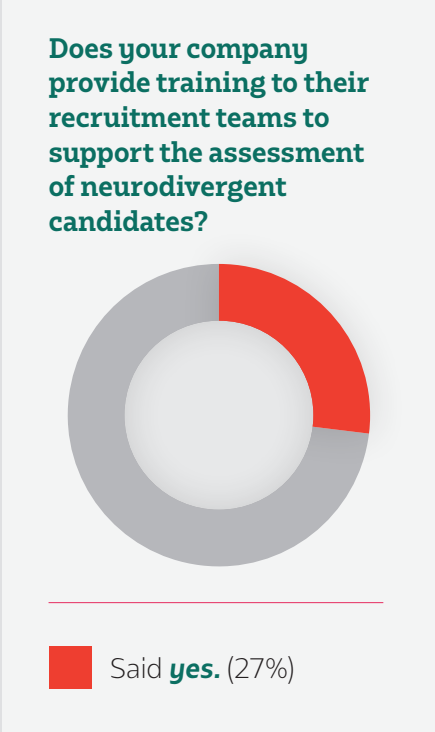
Stigmas associated with neurodiversity: a lack of understanding of neurodiversity can lead employers to perpetuate stigmas that undermine neurodivergent talent. Misconceptions such as “*all neurodivergent candidates require extra support at work*”, “*all neurodivergent candidates experience difficulties working in teams*”, and “*all neurodivergent candidates lack social skills*” are shown to produce conscious and unconscious bias within the recruitment process.

Lack of tailored recruitment efforts: only 21% of businesses in our study tailor their recruitment practices to neurodivergent candidates. Worryingly, most companies are yet to adapt their processes to be fully inclusive of neurodivergent applicants. When employers fail to re-think their talent efforts, they risk overlooking the specific needs of neurodiverse candidates.

Lack of internal training for recruitment teams: only 27% of companies analysed in our research work with their internal talent teams to improve neurodiversity inclusion within recruitment. The general picture shows that recruiters often lack access to the organisational resources they need to build neuro-inclusive talent pipelines. With more training available, internal talent teams could become significantly more effective at engaging and championing neurodivergent talent.

Rigid entry requirements: traditional entry requirements – particularly those that relate to educational history – can hinder the success odds of candidates who experienced difficulties and lack of support within the education system. Job descriptions that require 2.1-degree qualifications, for example, may automatically disqualify neurodivergent applicants who lacked the support they needed in school/university to achieve top grades.

Lack of understanding concerning the provision of reasonable adjustments: finally, our data shows that employers are often unsure about their legal obligations when it comes to neurodiversity inclusion. This lack of legal knowledge – particularly around the provision of reasonable adjustments – can leave companies hesitant to take concrete steps toward positive change.



Contributor quotes.

Schroders values a diverse workforce, and the wide ranging benefits this brings to our culture and business performance. We constantly strive for better ways to attract diverse, differently talented individuals to work with us. Schroders is ideally placed to welcome neurodiversity. The work we do in the Global Technology team includes data analysis, IT operations, engineering, architecture and design. It is hugely appealing to anyone with an eye for detail and the ability to absorb complex technical architectures and data in a ‘behind the scenes’ environment, while still enabling individuals to make a difference at a world class asset management organisation.

Sarah Gibbons
Head of Shared Service Operations, Schroders Global
and Alex Lewis
Head of Corporate Data & Reporting, Schroders Global Technology



In the ever-changing technology industry, automation is expanding rapidly to put more emphasis on the value of innovation, platform agnostic skills and good old human ingenuity. The heavy focus on creative problem-solving skills greatly benefits neurodiverse people because they process information differently. The typical outcome focused approach to work in the sector leaves plenty of room for individuals to dynamically design their solution, which can give neurodiversity a competitive advantage. The inherent digital nature of the industry can generally mitigate additional needs neurodiverse people may have: such as, the prevalence of remote working, the availability of specialist support software or small workarounds like splitting the story into smaller logical sections. Neurodiverse people can actively change the approach of pastoral care provided by the employer, which in turn can act as a catalyst to improve the work environment, work rhythm, and learning approach for everyone.

Christian Faber
Chapter Leader at Admiral Group



Contributor quotes.



Many tech companies, and companies such as my own that rely on tech expertise and IT professionals, are realising the benefits of inclusive hiring practices. Technology is never straightforward and is diverse in its nature. There are many traits associated with neurodiverse people which include, but are by no means limited to, outside of the box, analytical and creative thinking, plus the ability to focus with attention to detail. All of these traits are valuable assets across many technology job role functions e.g. robust code writing and execution, detailed documented analysis, quality assurance in testing, as well as thinking of things others have not thought about. This creates natural opportunities for role development and career progression in various areas within technology. Why would neurodiverse individuals not want to use their unique skills in the technology space and, more importantly, why would companies not want this talent in their technology teams?



Victoria Ratford
Associate IT Director – Europe, Middle East and Asia and I&D Disability Workstream Lead at Gallagher



Emphasising the exceptional benefits of neurodiverse talent has been a passion for me and our large global organisation for several years now. Working with Sparta Global has truly helped to build awareness of the massive advantages of embedding neurodiverse talent across all of our Global teams. The specialised skillsets, creative genius, innovation and exceptional problem-solving skills, are just some of the key attributes of neurodiverse individuals. It was truly compelling to discover that there are many outstanding leaders both within, and outside the organisation that have one or more neurodiverse conditions. Featuring successful neurodiverse leaders helps to build self-confidence and provides for great role models to identify with. Ensuring the workplace environment is appropriate for fostering and supporting all types of talent, facilitates maximising people’s potential, and results in teams becoming more diverse, productive, innovative and successful in the workplace.

Head of Risk and Compliance/Regional Delivery Lead, Wholesale IT, Digital Channels, (Large Global Financial Organisation)

Chapter seven.

How can employers attract neurodiverse talent in tech?

As part of our research, we analysed evidence-based interventions that have been shown to positively affect the recruitment of neurodivergent tech talent.

Using this data, we collated an 7-step action plan for employers:

1. **Understand your legal duties:** Start by understanding the local legislation and your responsibilities as an employer. In the UK, the key piece of legislation for employers is the Equality Act 2010, which consolidates previous discrimination and harassment law and sets out what employers must do to ensure fair and inclusive practices.

Remember:

- All employers in the UK must comply with the Equality Act.
- As an employer, you can take a protected characteristic into consideration when designing your talent strategy. However, you can only do this when you have candidates that are as qualified as each other for a role.
- Employees have no legal or professional duty to disclose that they are neurodivergent. Creating a culture of inclusion from the get-go – by making it clear in the talent attraction process that the company welcomes and champions neurodiversity – can encourage new applicants to start an open conversation as to whether they identify as neurodivergent and/or require any reasonable adjustments. It creates an environment of psychological safety that allows open and transparent dialogues with prospective talent.
- Anticipatory adjustments – such as tailoring interviews, psychometric tests, and other assessments – play an important role in ensuring that you don't put neurodivergent candidates at a disadvantage due to lack of awareness.

- 2.** **Make neurodiversity a key pillar of your ED&I strategy:** inclusive employers think about neurodiversity as crucial for the success of their ED&I strategy. Start from the top and ensure the support of your senior leadership team to establish the company's strategic priorities when it comes to neurodiversity inclusion.

Securing the support of boards sends a strong message both internally and externally that the company is serious about its inclusion plans.
- 3.** **Engage employees from across the organisation and listen to their feedback:** companies that are successfully moving the dial for neurodiversity inclusion have managed to engage and involve employees from across the company. You can do this by proactively inviting employees to share ideas and suggestions on how to improve your inclusion practices. Encourage team members to share their lived experiences. This includes paying attention to feedback and being open to change. What can you learn from the feedback of neurodivergent candidates who have gone through your recruitment process? What does it say about the efficiency and impact of your change initiatives? Check your blind spots and biases and be open to use feedback and criticism to inform positive action.
- 4.** **Look at the language you use to advertise your tech roles:** the words we use in job adverts can mean different things to different people. Our research suggests that the way job adverts are written can impact candidates' perceptions and the way they feel about the job on offer.
- 5.** **Explore inclusion mechanisms in interviews and assessments:** Start by understanding the local legislation and what your responsibilities are as an employer. In the UK, the key piece of legislation for employers is the Equality Act 2010, which consolidates previous discrimination and harassment law and sets out what employers should do to ensure fair and inclusive practices.
- 6.** **Consider the accessibility of the wider application process:** how long does it take an applicant to complete an application online? Do they have a time limit to complete an application form? Our data suggests that neurodivergent applicants can face difficulties when working on application forms that time out. Consider whether you may offer an alternative process to neurodivergent applicants. For example, by offering phone or video calls to complete the process.

Some practical tips:

- Avoid a long list of skills if they are not necessary for the role. Instead, be specific: indicate which ones are “must-haves” and which ones are “nice to haves”. Focus on what is important and required for the job.
- Avoid using too many superlatives and exaggerated terms, such as “world-class”, “industry-leading”, “coding wizard”, and “tech guru”. Instead, aim to spell out exactly which competencies are needed and their relevance within the specific context of the job you are advertising.
- Avoid using words that may be difficult to interpret, such as “flexible” or “dynamic”. Instead, be clear about what is intended: what do “flexibility” or “dynamism” mean in practice?
- Consider readability: this includes fonts, colours, and paragraphs. Neurodivergent candidates can be more sensitive to sensory stimulation. Choosing a consistent colour scheme with a good contrast ratio and avoiding pictures obscuring the words can drastically improve the readability of your job ads. It also helps to break your text into shorter paragraphs and bullet points to draw attention to important information.
- Take the opportunity to clearly state that you care about neurodiversity. For example, you could explain that your company is committed to digital equality and that it encourages and values applications from neurodivergent thinkers.

7.

Offer reasonable adjustments early on: be explicit in explaining that you offer support to neurodivergent candidates. Remember, candidates are not obliged to let you know if they require additional support. A good way to establish open conversations around support is to state that you care about providing reasonable adjustments. Add a statement in your job ads to let applicants know that the company is open to consider reasonable adjustments and ask whether they have any workplace adjustments they wish to discuss. This demonstrates that you are committed to providing support and sets the tone for inclusive conversations within talent engagement, assessment, and onboarding.

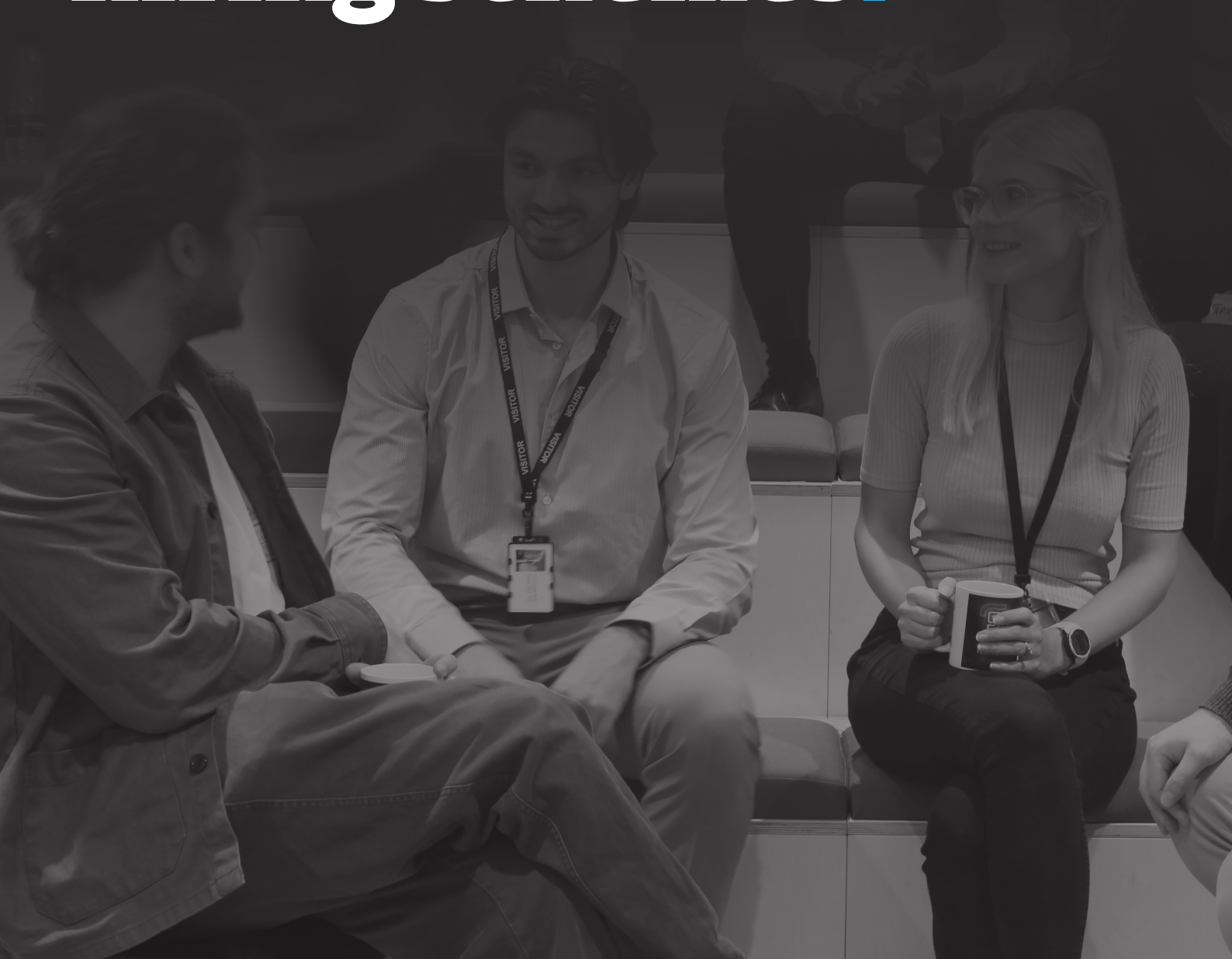
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With the UK government reporting that we could face a shortage of 900,000 skilled IT workers by next year, the neurodiverse community presents perspectives and skills that could be transformative.”

David Rai, CEO, Sparta Global

Chapter eight.

Tech training academies, work experience and hiring schemes.



Crucially, our research highlights the value of non-academic pathways in promoting tech employment among neurodivergent communities.

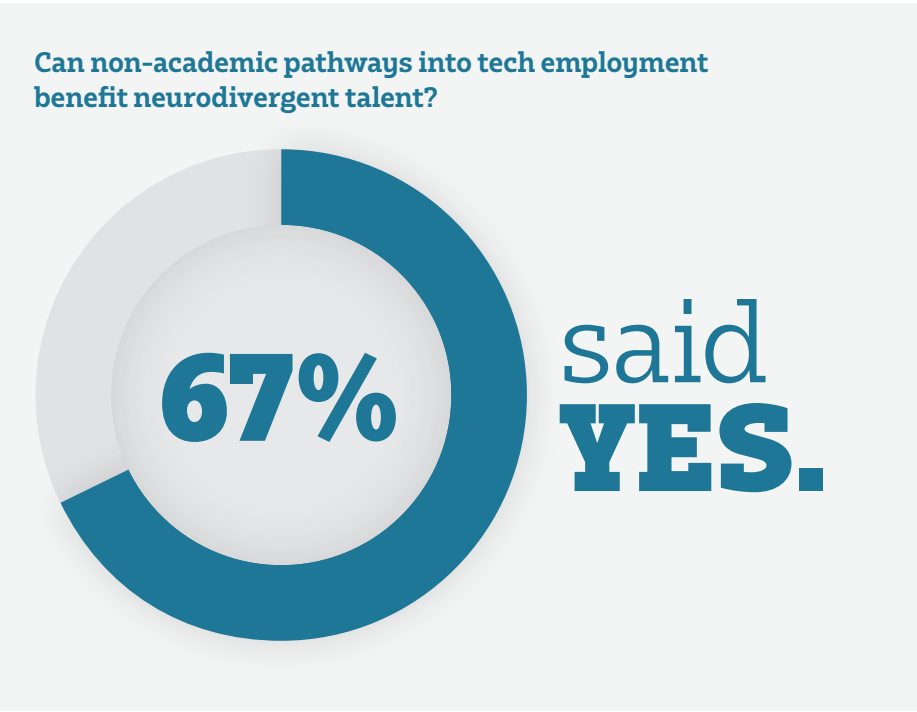
67% of our respondents find that non-academic schemes – such as training academies, on-the-job learning schemes, and work experiences – can enhance the success odds of neurodiverse individuals who want to access digital professions.

Work-based learning and training can be transformational for neurodiverse applicants who may have previously struggled with traditional education pathways or lacked the support they needed in schools and universities.

By working closely with tech training academies and other experiential learning talent schemes, employers can strategically plan their neurodiversity recruitment efforts and open the door to more diverse talent pipelines.

While adopting this approach can drastically advance your company’s neurodiversity hiring plans, it’s also important to have adequate support mechanisms in place to champion and retain incoming talent.

Ensure that your employees – particularly line managers – are prepared and equipped with the knowledge and confidence they need to have ongoing conversations about on-the-job support.



Contributor quotes.

As a trainer, I am passionate about inclusive education and employment. I have many neurodivergent friends and family members, so this research is also very personal to me. I know the transition from education to the workplace is often a difficult one for people that don't seem to "fit in". However, in 2023, there is no longer any excuse, we need to drive this change in our sector. At Sparta Global, we are doing just that. No one should be excluded where their talents are so desperately needed. It frustrates me that many employers have no idea what they're missing out on. People with autism, dyslexia, ADHD and other neurodiverse traits offer a fresh perspective that opens up the world a bit more for everyone. When companies commit to neurodiversity inclusion, they gain employees who are meticulous, diligent, trustworthy, talented and absolutely driven in their field. Their experiences mean they have a lot of empathy, which makes them excellent team members and leaders. In the future, I want to see more of our neurodivergent trainees in leadership roles, as this would be a catalyst to boost the confidence of others and bring them into the conversation."

Laura Tozer
Trainer at Sparta Global

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No one will ever expect you to be an expert on this subject matter and to know the ins and out of every condition. However this shouldn't stop us from asking questions, doing research, or listening to the lived experiences of neurodivergent colleagues. Sparta has built an inclusive environment where people are encouraged to continue learning about diversity types, and this is evident in how my colleagues work with me. It truly has dispelled my anxieties about working with ADHD."

Fahmida Begum
Talent Coordinator at Sparta Global

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No one should be excluded where their talents are so desperately needed. It frustrates me that many employers have no idea what they're missing out on. People with autism, dyslexia, ADHD and other neurodiverse traits offer a fresh perspective that opens up the world a bit more for everyone.

Laura Tozer
Trainer at Sparta Global

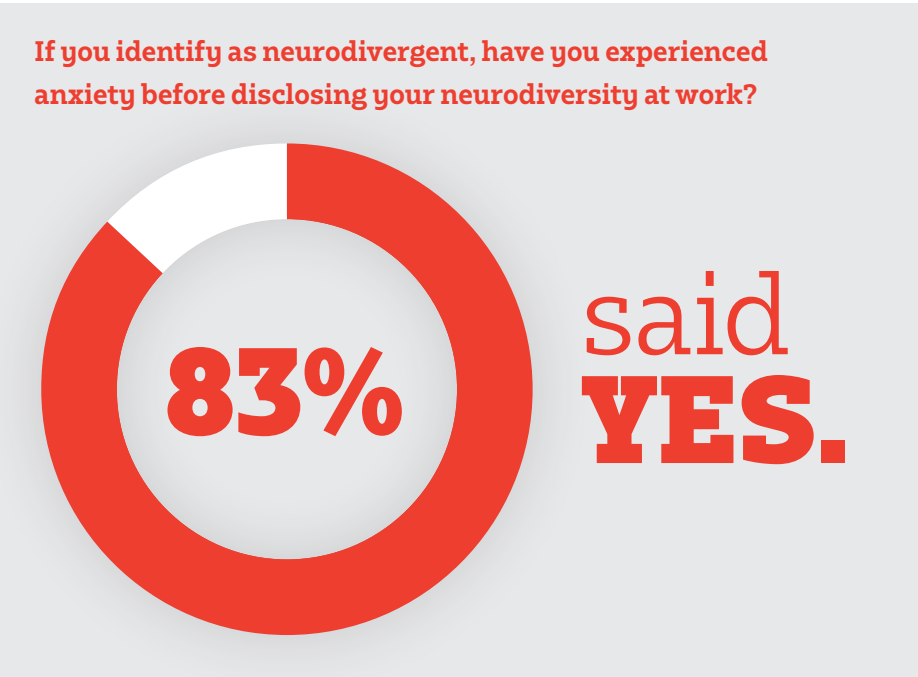
Chapter nine.

Sustaining neurodiversity in digital teams.

Importantly, our research shows that neurodiversity inclusion requires more than just changing your hiring habits. It’s about implementing the right mechanisms to retain neurodivergent talent.

One theme that emerged from our survey is that neurodivergent employees often experience anxiety when considering whether to disclose their neurodivergence to line managers.

83% of neurodivergent workers surveyed reported feeling worried, nervous, and fearful about having conversations with their employer regarding their neurodiversity.



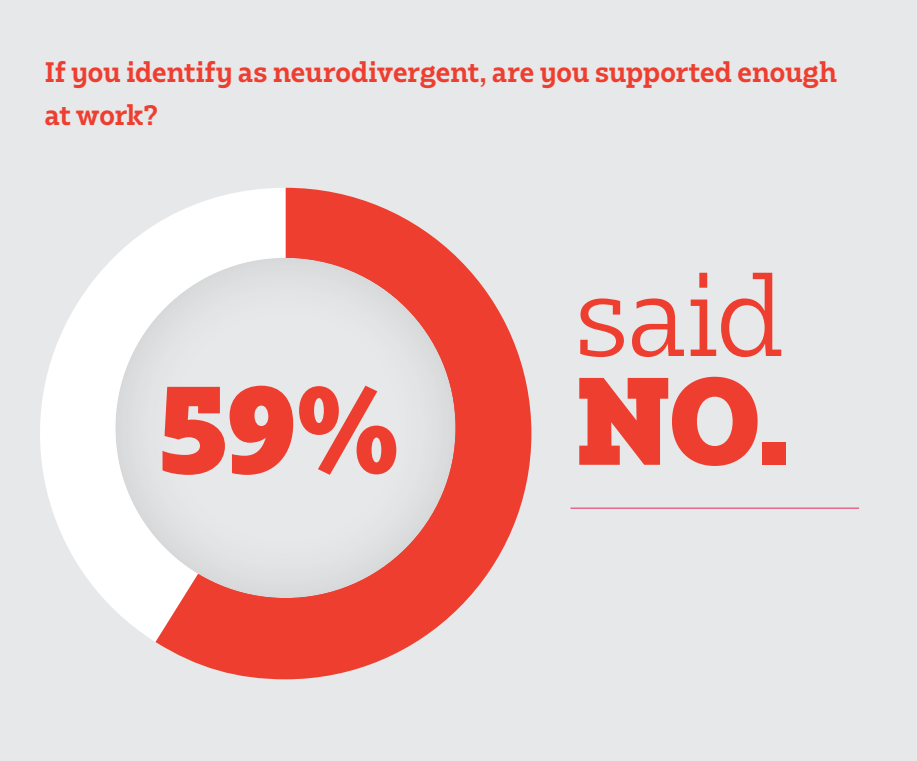
We see that a fear of disclosing neurodiversity in the workplace can stem from:

- A negative experience, such as being stereotyped, excluded, or devalued following disclosure with a previous employer.
- A lack of confidence that the line manager is ready to embrace a dialogue about neurodiversity.
- A fear of missing out on progression opportunities.
- A fear to be labelled as “inadequate” or “not as capable” to carry out the requirements of the role.
- A sense of uneasiness with sharing personal information that may impact how colleagues think about you.

Crucially, 59% of respondents feel that there isn’t enough support available in their organisations, and fear that disclosing their neurodiversity may have negative repercussions on their future within their companies.

It emerges that a critical part of neurodiversity inclusion is creating an environment of psychological safety: a culture in which employees feel empowered to disclose their neurodiversity, without worrying that they may compromise their careers.

Line managers play a pivotal role in making these conversations possible. In fact, our study shows that good line management is fundamentally about enabling constructive dialogues.



Some practical tips for line managers:

- Value different skillsets and competencies among your team members. Effective teams are made of people who bring different perspectives; value team members who think, communicate, and solve problems in new and non-traditional ways.
- You don't have to be a neurodiversity expert to be a neuro-inclusive leader. Just be prepared to have transparent conversations. Make it clear that anyone working with you can approach you to discuss on-the-job support and ways to enhance their performance.
- Explore what support each person requires, and what you could do about it. It's OK not to have all the answers from the get-go. Instead, listen to your staff and consider which resources are available within the organisation to support them.
- Remember that neurodiversity is different for different people: everyone has different skills and challenges. There is no one-size-fits-all guidebook for inclusive management. Employ a person-centered approach to understand exactly what the individual's specific needs are and how you could help.
- Being able to establish and sustain open conversations is a mark of great leadership: if you are a line manager and have experience working with neurodivergent employees, share your learnings with other managers within the organisation and use your voice to help the company create lasting change.



Market Field Farm.

During the research phase of this 2023 EqualTech report, Sparta Global donated £5 to the Market Field Farm Charity for every completed survey.

Only 5.1% of people with a learning disability, autism or ADHD will find and sustain paid employment during their lifetime. 95 out of 100 college leavers have no prospect of a purposeful future past full-time education.

The Trustees of Market Field Farm, know that neurodiverse communities deserve the opportunity to enjoy a rewarding career. Our purpose is to ensure young people with learning disabilities, autism, and ADHD can secure and retain paid employment. We believe experiencing a job provides purpose and cultivates a bright future.

Many of the job programmes designed to help neurodiverse individuals in their early careers, are based in cities or towns and with large employers. What opportunities and support is available for those living in rural areas? What niche could young people fulfil for rural communities, landowners, farmers, and businesses? What could provide steady and rewarding work?

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In one way or another, we are all neurodiverse. Every one of us is different. We all respond to environments, situations and our surroundings in a way which is unique to us. For some, it is more pronounced and plays a larger part in their day-to-day existence at home, play, and in the workplace. Too many people are being cast aside and a huge swathe of the younger generation are being forgotten. By making small adaptations within our environments, individuality can be embraced, talents can be unearthed and nurtured, and bright futures can be created.”

Naomi Andrews

Project Manager and Trustee



Conservation.

Market Field Farm is a registered charity - recognised in 2020. Managed and championed by a small but dedicated team of trustees, it aims to "support young people with autistic conditions and learning difficulties, in particular by providing resources, education, work experience and employment opportunities and facilities".

Market Field Grows, an enterprise within the charity, works with local landowners and organisations in Northeast Essex to plant trees, hedgerows, and build wild habitats. Teams of neurodiverse young people are employed directly by the charity to carry out conservation projects on a large scale. Whilst working and earning a good wage, the team members learn practical skills and support environmental causes through planting in their communities. It's hands-on - outdoors from 9am to 4pm, five days a week – but it is also fun, good exercise, and great for a person's mental health.

Between November 2021 to April 2022, Market Field Grows planted 46,024 trees across its local region - connecting woodlands and creating important wildlife corridors for protected species, such as dormice and red squirrels.

Market Field Grows supports the long-term strategy of Market Field Farm; to deliver a five-acre site on the outskirts of Elmstead Market. Market Field Farm will incorporate a bakery, café, library, flower farm, and workshops to create 48 jobs within three years.

An introduction to Sparta Global.



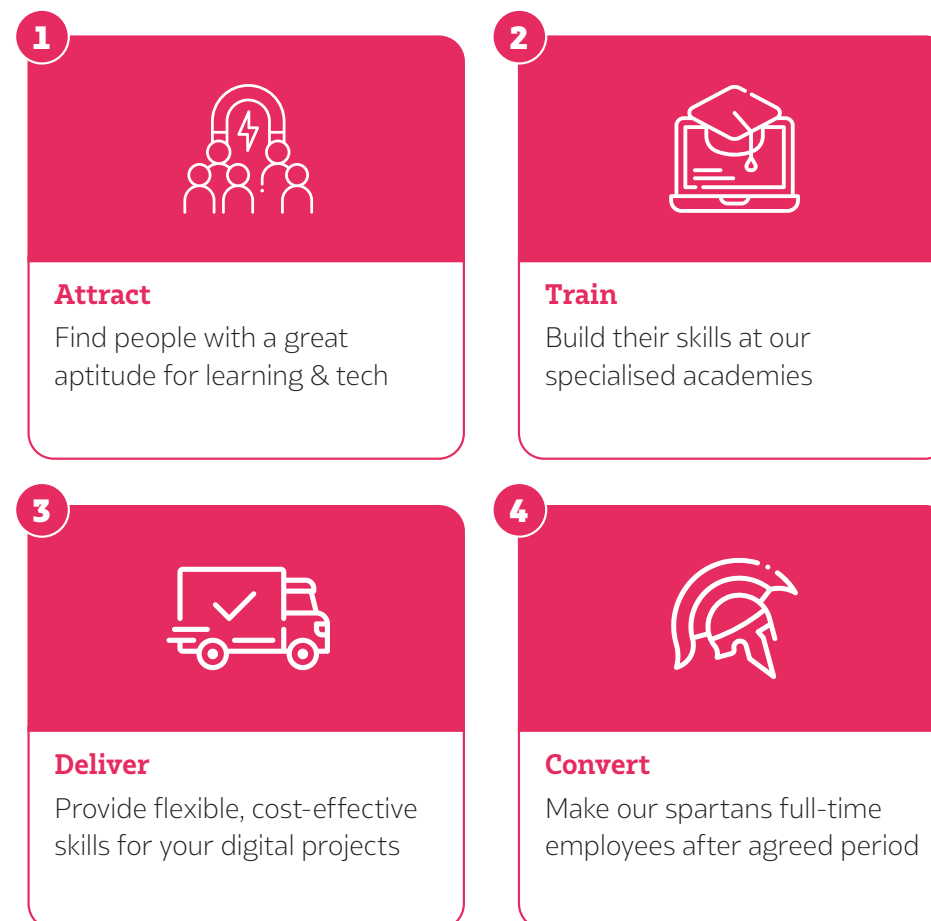
At Sparta Global, we believe the future of tech talent must be reflective of society today – innovative, creative and inclusive. This is why we are committed to providing award-winning technology training and career opportunities to passionate people from diverse communities - irrespective of gender, ethnicity, neurodiversity or socio-economic background.

We help graduates, non-graduates, returners and career changers to kickstart a career in technology through paid training programmes in Data, Development, Engineering, Test, Business Analysis, Cyber security, DevOps and more.

Across our custom training programmes, we equip our “Spartan” consultants with the technical and collaborative skills they need to hit the ground running on digital projects. Spartans are then assigned to work with our clients, helping them to meet digital demand, provide diversity, and join their pipeline of future leaders for a career with progression and longevity.

Much of the UK’s highest potential business and technology talent is excluded by traditional talent attraction.

Our approach is designed to solve this challenge:



Being an inclusive employer is a fundamental aspect of the Sparta Global business model and championing diversity is firmly embedded in our DNA. We are committed to fostering equal opportunities in technology through our dedicated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) function and client advisory services (known as EDITs), our innovative approach to talent acquisition, and a willingness to accept candidates into our programme based on their attitude and aptitude – not experience.

Our organisation is:

32%
female

52%
ethnic minority

58%
first in family to
go to university

17%
career changers

Some of the awards Sparta Global has proudly achieved:





*If you have a digital skills demand, and want to support the progression of diverse early careers talent with our Spartan resources, get in contact today at: **contactus@spartaglobal.com***

www.spartaglobal.com

