

A photograph of a modern office interior. A man in a dark suit is sitting in a black metal chair with a grey herringbone cushion, looking out a large window. He has a laptop on his lap. In the background, two women are sitting at a table. The room is filled with large potted plants and has a bright, airy atmosphere. The floor is made of light-colored stone tiles.

Design for DEIA

What is it and why does it matter?



Diversity and inclusion are important aspects of the social dimension of ESG, as they reflect how a business values and respects its employees, customers and communities.

It can also enhance the innovation, creativity and performance of a business, as well as its reputation and attractiveness to stakeholders. Some suggest that diversity and inclusion are more than the 'S' in ESG, as they can also influence the environmental and governance dimensions.

A diverse workforce can be more aware of the environmental challenges and opportunities that affect different regions, and can support the business to adopt more sustainable practices. Diverse leadership can improve governance and oversight, bringing different perspectives, experiences and skills to the decision-making process

The world is in a constant state of change and businesses who are prepared to embrace a diverse and inclusive journey will be best placed to respond and consciously adapt

Creativity and empathy is the human legacy.

What is DEIA?

And why does it matter?

DEIA stands for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility.

Employee inclusion is a fundamental element of our design ethos, accommodating a diverse workforce through workplace well-being attracts talent, and translates into productivity and bottom line benefits.

Sky lights, office fresh air, biophilia, rooftop terraces, balconies and courtyards: they all contribute to an enhanced working experience.

But taking it further, organisations need to create work environments that adapt to individuals and embed diversity into their culture.

Inclusive workplaces will engage employees who support the company vision and increase performance. This will contribute to commercial success, greater corporate responsibility and increase service value to clients.

DEIA is not only the right thing to do, but also a smart thing to do.

Three most popular metrics for diversity and inclusion are

77% Employee productivity
67% Employee morale
58% Employee turnover

Forbes

35%

increase in performance of racially diverse teams compared to their competitors

Sage

69%

of millennials / Gen Z more likely to stay 5 years or more at a firm with a diverse workforce

Deloitte Research

Diversity

Diversity in the workplace means having a workforce inclusive of different backgrounds and national origins.

It means gender, socioeconomic, and cultural diversity and more. It also means that the organisation fosters a sense of belonging that makes everyone feel like they are part of the team.

Equality or Equity?

Typically equality is used to partner with diversity and inclusion, but equity delivers stronger solutions:

Equality

Equality is about fair treatment and equal rights to opportunities. This delivers the same privileges, rules, and opportunities to all.

However, not everyone starts from the same starting point and by treating everyone the same, employee-specific needs are not taken into account.

Equity

Equity is fairness and equality in outcomes and not just support and resources.

Equity identifies and acknowledges specific needs: ethnicity, race, gender and gender identity, disabilities, and more.

In equity, all employees are empowered to perform to their very best and they should feel that they are fully supported to succeed within an inclusive workplace.

Inclusion

Inclusion is where people's differences are valued and enable everyone to thrive at work.

Where everyone feels that they belong, their contribution matters and able to perform to their full potential, no matter their background, identity or circumstances.

Accessibility

Accessibility means **'that people can do what they need to do in a similar amount of time and effort as someone that does not have a disability'**.

- **People** - Identify and respond to specific needs, providing dignity and independence.
- **Cultural Practice** - Address social, cultural, economic and technical bias
- **Usability** - Understanding the user community
- **Compliance** - Compliance with rules, regulations and laws Equality Act (2010)

Disability Models & UK Statistics

The **Medical Model of disability**, prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s, viewed people as 'disabled' by their differences or impairments. It worked on the principle that these could be 'fixed' or 'cured' with medical intervention regardless, without considering what the person needed.

In contrast, the **Social Model of disability**, developed in the 1980s by Disability Rights groups, re-frames disability as a civil rights and equality issue rather than a medical or charitable issue. In this model, disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. It is built on the principle that removing barriers enables disabled people to be independent and equal in society.



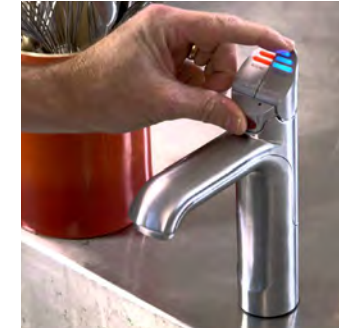
67.7m
UK population 2023
(DWP)



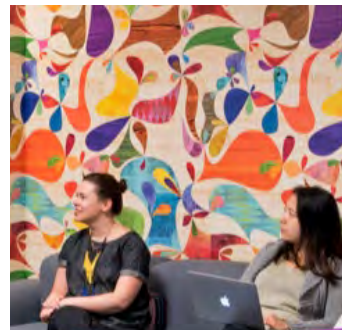
11%
have mobility impairment (includes wheelchair users and people with difficulty walking) (Gov.uk)



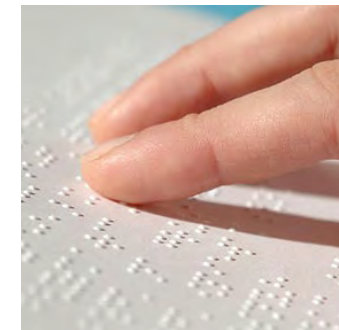
19%
of working age adults are disabled.
Only 50% of disabled adults are employed.
(Scope, Gov.uk, ONS)



6%
have difficulty with manual dexterity (3.9m) (CAE)



15%
are neurodivergent (13m) Only 22% of people with autism are employed
(Gov.uk, autism.uk)




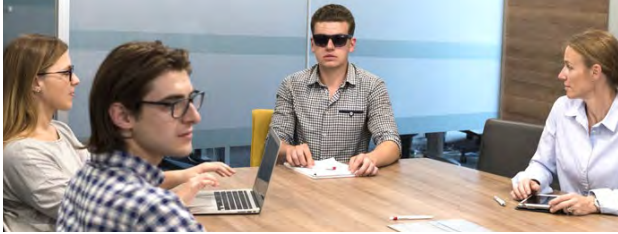




1 in 4
registered blind/partially sighted people employed.
(RNIB)

Spectrum of Needs

The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a 'long-term' or 'substantial' negative effect on an individual's ability to perform day to day duties.

However, the concept of disability is not limited to permanent impairments. It also encompasses temporary and situational impairments. For instance, a temporary impairment could be a broken leg that hinders mobility for a few weeks, while situational impairments could include environmental barriers such as lack of wheelchair access in public spaces.

Consideration too needs to be given to degenerative conditions that worsen over time such as diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and MS.

	Touch	Sight
Permanent	 <p>One Arm</p>	 <p>Permanent Visual Impairment</p>
Temporary	 <p>Broken Arm</p>	 <p>Temporary Visual Impairment (Cataracts)</p>
Situational	 <p>Deliveries</p>	 <p>Glare</p>

Small Changes, Big Impacts

The **Curb-Cut** Effect is a phenomenon in which accessibility features benefit a wider population than initially intended. The term was coined by Angela Glover Blackwell and comes from the ramps cut into the surfaces of pavements, which were initially designed to help people with disabilities navigate the streets more safely and easily.

When the walls of exclusion come down everyone benefits.

However, these curb cuts, as illustrated in the image, have also made it easier for people pushing buggies, wheeling suitcases, making deliveries, using crutches or sticks, as well as cyclists, skateboarders and even runners.

The Curb-Cut Effect has been used as a metaphor for other areas of life where small changes can have a big impact on society as a whole. This is an apt reminder that designing for accessibility can benefit everyone.



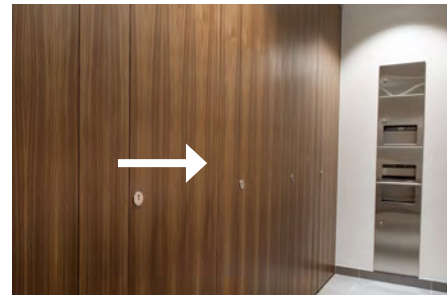
The Built Environment

In considering accessible environments there are common issues that arise in workplaces and other built environments:



DEXTERITY

Provide suitable door handles and openings for people with limited manual dexterity, such as levers instead of knobs, operable with a closed fist.



VISUAL

Create a visual contrast between the door and adjacent walls for identification when door is closed. This can be done by using different colours, textures, or materials.



MOBILITY

Ensure level access into the booth or pod for those with limited mobility.



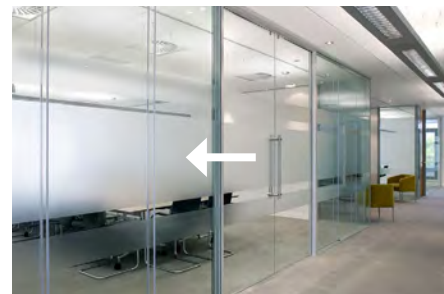
ACOUSTIC

Consider the purpose of space. Hard materials have a detrimental effect on acoustics, making it hard to hear in crowded environments.



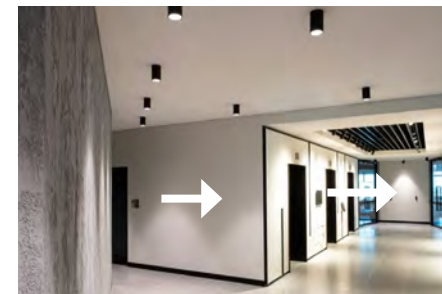
NEURODIVERSITY

Overuse of strong colours and patterns can be overwhelming and trigger anxiety in neurodiverse people.



WELCOMING

Corridor of frosted out offices are unwelcoming preventing people from feeling included.



WAYFINDING

Clear, concise and intuitive directions benefit everyone using the space.

Being Inclusive

Social factors came to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic, with increased awareness of not only health and physical activity but also well being.

The office plays a key role demonstrating commitment to social responsibilities. The S in ESG. People to come together, to learn alongside others and to be part of a greater whole.

It is a place to welcome people, whatever their background and beliefs, and allow people to feel able to bring their whole selves to work.

The Social in ESG helps businesses operate responsibly by addressing inequalities while providing a competitive advantage.

Social in ESG for employee well being as it relates to the workplace:

- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Working Conditions
- Training & Development
- Community Relations
- Communication
- Health

We all have a duty to embed these elements into workplace design and not only promote diversity and inclusion but wellness, satisfaction and deliver exemplar workplace experience. We should seek to exceed standard building regulations to enhance accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

Here we offer some thoughts on how we can improve environments for all.



Design for Neurodiversity

It is important to create an inclusive environment that caters to the needs of all individuals, including those who are neurodivergent.

Designing with neurodiversity in mind involves evaluating everything that engages the senses, such as texture, sound, layout, quality and colour of light, temperature, shape and function of furniture.

Neurodiversity is the future of progress and innovation.

In order to be a fully inclusive organisation and workplace, it is important that neurodivergent individuals are not excluded.

The CIPD has published a guide on neurodiversity at work which provides practical examples from organisations that have appreciated the benefits of a neurodiverse workforce and actively supported their staff. In 2022 British Standards Institution published Design for the Mind.

This is the first design standard that provides built environment guidance for multiple sensory processing differences and conditions.



The Nine Senses

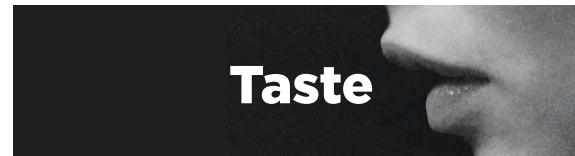
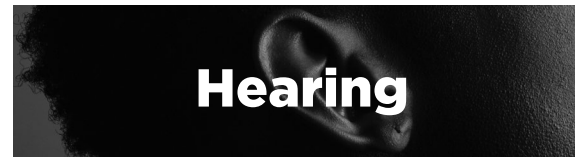
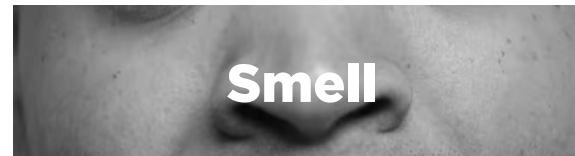
Neurodiversity is a concept that describes the differences in brain function from person to person that affect daily mental functions.

The human body has nine senses, including the five familiar senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch) and four additional senses; body awareness (proprioception), temperature (thermoception), balance (proprioception), and pain (nociception). Neurodivergent individuals may experience these senses differently than neuro-typical individuals.

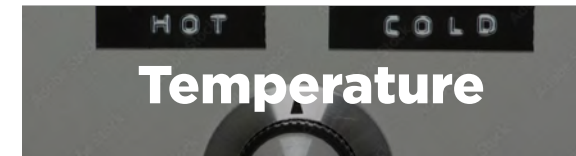
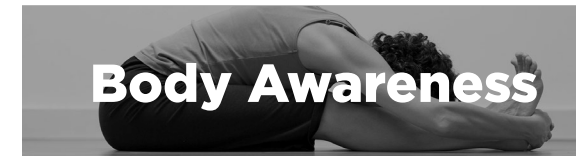
Differences in sensitivities amongst neurodivergent individuals may drastically affect how they experience their environment compared to neurotypical individuals.

Designing a workplace that appeals to all the senses will have a positive impact on employees' mood, thoughts, and behaviours, and well-being at work and create a more inclusive environment, to suit employees' unique needs and preferences.

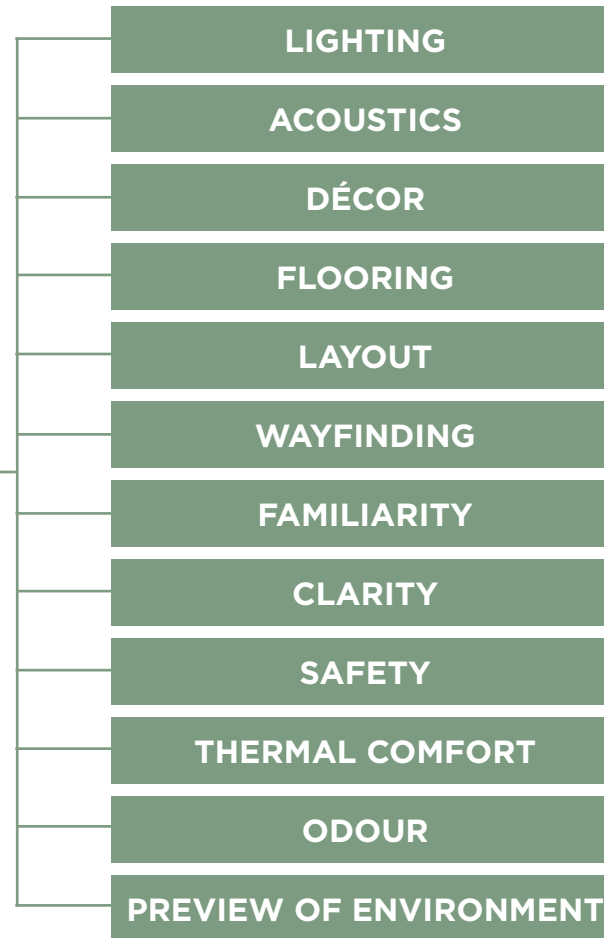
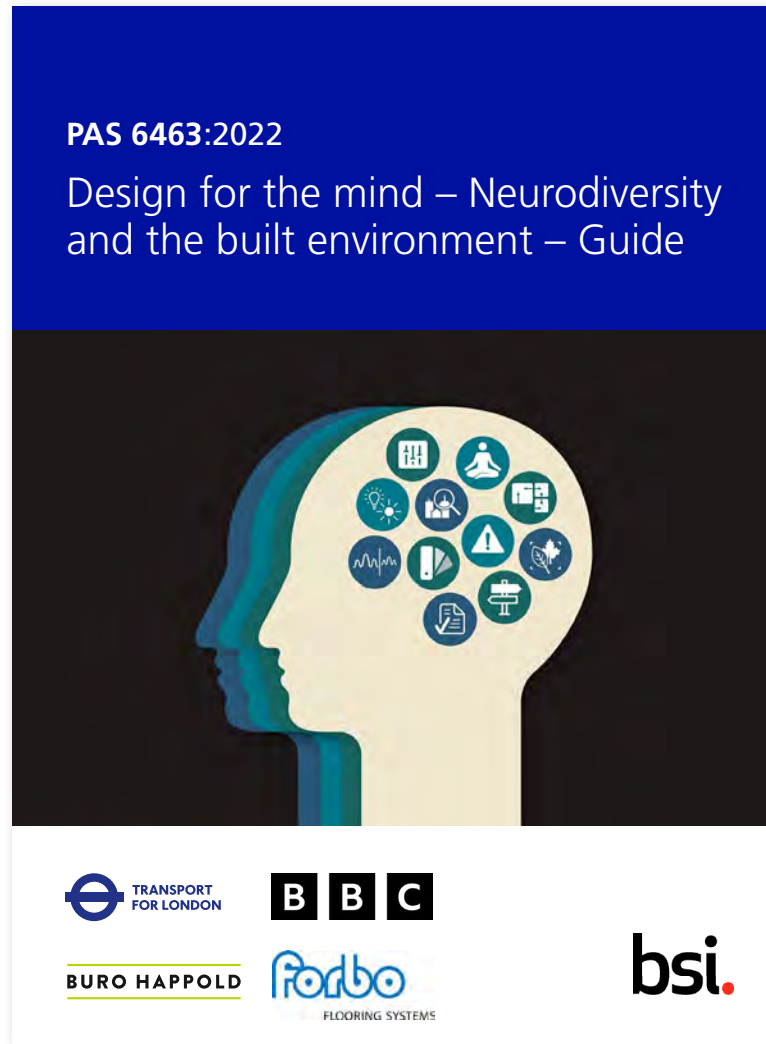
5 Traditional



4 Additional



Design for the Mind



This is a new standard written to give guidance on designing the built environment for our neurodiverse society, with information for designers, planners, specifiers, facilities managers and decision-makers on particular design features which can make places more inclusive for everyone.

The standard is written with input from world leading experts and those who experience neurodiverse conditions. It will help create environments that can enhance employee attraction and retention, enhance well-being and improve the performance of occupants. Its guidance will help organisations meet legal and social obligations.

Biophilic Design

Biophilia and DEIA intersect, the innate human affinity for nature leveraged to create safe and welcoming environments. These spaces can help mitigate mental health issues and are beneficial for neurodiversity.

Designing living and working environments with nature in mind is a concept that has gained traction. The biophilic concept, which underpins this approach, is based on the idea that connection with the natural world benefits our health and well-being.

Incorporating natural elements into building design, such as natural lighting, ventilation, and greenery, has been shown to have numerous benefits, including increased productivity, reduced stress levels, and improved mental health.

For example, exposure to natural light has been shown to improve sleep quality and reduce depression symptoms and incorporating greenery into indoor spaces can help to reduce stress levels and improve air quality.

Biophilic design can also be used in outdoor spaces to create a more natural environment that promotes relaxation and well-being.

Workers in offices with natural elements such as greenery and sunlight

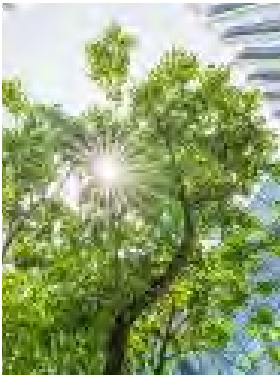
6% are more productive

15% report higher level of well-being

15% are more creative

(Human Spaces - The Global Impact of Biophilic Design in the Workplace)

17M
Lost work days 2021 to 2022 due to stress, depression, anxiety in UK



90%
Time an average person spends indoors



46min
Avg increased sleep for employee with proximity to windows



35%
improved productivity & cognitive function with better air quality

Design for Well-being

The increased focus on employee well-being has led to greater consideration being given to amenities that benefit physical and mental health. These should be supplied according to demand, and over provision should be avoided to prevent underutilisation.

These amenities spaces cover a wide spectrum of benefits for culture and community and range from collective to individual environments.

Collectively, social space is particularly valuable, as people return, much changed since the pandemic, and relearn how to be with others. The social environment is a foundation for re-engaging with the office culture and providing space to be away from their work settings and communicate less formally. If this then is paired with providing healthy food offer, the social space becomes a positive workplace experience supporting health and well-being.

For many, being able to exercise during the day forms part of the balance of personal / professional lives. Although gym membership can be highly valued, providing a multi-purpose space, in house, that can accommodate different exercise classes is both convenient and social.

Building on the health benefits of biophilic design, connection to outdoor spaces can further provide additional opportunities for relaxation, mental rejuvenation, and exposure to natural light and fresh air. This can enhance overall well-being and productivity.

Gardening and food-growing activities reduce stress and foster team building. They support ESG initiatives by promoting environmental sustainability and social well-being. Participating in these programs also allows employees to acquire new skills, enhancing their personal growth. In short, these programs offer benefits that extend beyond the workplace, contributing to personal health, team dynamics, and environmental sustainability.

Having choice of work settings is important. Initially, the return to the office was focused on seeing other colleagues. However, as routines settle, people need more, they need space to concentrate and focus. The mantra has long been about choice and variety, but having a quiet space to focus is becoming increasingly critical. This supports neurodivergent individuals who may need to step away from the hustle and bustle of the office for some quiet time.



Design for Well-being

Physical health is a priority, leading to an increase in end-of-journey facilities like bike parking and showers in new buildings. Existing provisions are also being upgraded. This supports active commuters and daytime exercisers. Fair facilities for both genders, including bike storage, rack types, and shower locations, should be provided.

To ensure maximum comfort at work, a variety of needs have to be considered. Including restorative spaces for those experiencing panic episodes, menopausal symptoms, or needing to regroup; prayer or meditation spaces for cultural needs; and a first aid room for those with migraines, other illnesses, or for use by diabetics. A mother's room with baby-change facilities should be available for women returning to work. Employee consultation can help understand the required facilities and can be anonymised if needed.

Workspace planning is vital for neurodiverse individuals. Distractions can come from proximity to equipment, high-traffic areas, or exposed seating positions. Noise in open-plan offices can increase stress and reduce productivity for everyone. Office protocols should manage noise and accommodate the increase in video calls.

Regardless of the organisation's size or the scale of interventions, balancing these elements contributes to a healthy workplace.



Design for Well-being Benefit Spectrum

ESG / SOCIAL	MENTAL HEALTH	PHYSICAL HEALTH	NEURODIVERSITY
Connection to nature / outdoor space			
Connection to nature / biophilic design			
Growing programme			
Dedicated eating space / social space			
Choice of work setting			
Common break areas / social space			
Wellness Room / Restorative Room			
Cycle parking, showers, lockers			
Multi-purpose fitness space			
Dedicated fitness space (gym, track)			
Physical movement (stairs, centralised facilities)			
Sit stand desks			
Medical Room / First Aid			
Mother's Room			
Relaxation / nap space			
Prayer / Meditation			



What does good look like?

An inclusive approach to office design means space will be universal and easy to use for all members of staff whether mobile or not. It is also important to consider every touch point to make getting around the office easy for everyone.



Clear wayfinding, strategic use of colour as totem or signposting



Circular meeting tables: non-hierarchical, easier communication and accessible. Acoustic treatment to screen



Biophilia is known to decrease stress and improve the feeling of wellness



Open plan: planting, natural materials, break space, acoustic panels - desk and ceiling, natural daylight



Quiet/restorative rooms offer solace to those experiencing anxiety, stress and symptoms of the menopause



Prayer rooms: dedicated, private space, appropriate usage protocols, occupancy indicator, centrally located



Consider wheelchair users and those of short stature: WCS, vending areas, lockers, storage



Add curtains to meeting/focus rooms to block out distractions from the open plan or overly busy manifestations on the glazing.



Engage your people in the process to ensure your space caters to a diverse set of needs



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