

Neurodiversity at Northern



We want Northern to be a great place to work for everyone, where all our colleagues can bring their ‘whole self’ to work knowing they will be valued and supported. As part of commitment to diversity and inclusion, we have introduced a new Neurodiversity Policy, which supports our intention to be a truly inclusive employer. The policy provides support and guidance for neurodivergent colleagues, as well as their managers and colleagues who are interested in learning more about neurodiversity in general. The creation of this policy demonstrates our continued commitment to FREDIE – Fairness, Respect, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Engagement.

Neurodivergent people find themselves in a world that is not built for them, it’s built to meet the needs of the majority, the 80% of the population that are neurotypical. For neurodivergent people it can be a challenging place to exist – filled with sensory overwhelm, confusing social rules, and demands to do things in a particular way.

Our approach to Neurodiversity at Northern is about understanding and embracing the fact that we all think, learn and communicate in specific ways, have varying attention spans and experience a wide range of moods. Many of the adjustments we can make for our neurodivergent colleagues are incredibly simple – clarity in our communications; an understanding that for many, long teams meetings requiring extended periods of concentration are simply not possible; outlining what to expect in any given situation or exactly what is required from a piece of work. There are many outdated stereotypes associated with neurodivergent conditions, but the reality is that neurodivergence will bring all kinds of strengths to a workplace through a fresh perspective that supports us to progress in all we do as a business.

To bring this policy to life Northern invited neurodivergent colleagues, and those with an interest in neurodiversity, to be part of a new working group. The group’s purpose is to bring together lived experience of how neurodiversity can present itself in the workplace, and how we can improve the experience at each stage of the colleague life cycle, from attraction and recruitment, onboarding, learning and development, and right through to colleague retention.

For years I felt like a black sheep among family, friends, and colleagues – the way I think, act, and feel as I have combined ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Autistic traits can be really isolating. This group provides a platform where Neurodivergent colleagues can discuss not only our challenges and how Northern can help us face them, but how we can also help our Neurodivergent customers as well.

Alexander Wildash.

Alexander Wildash, Procurement Manager – Depot & Infrastructure explained that being part of the Neurodiversity group has enabled him to feel less isolated in life, being able to talk with others who face similar challenges in and outside the working environment. The Neurodiversity group provides a platform/ safe space for individuals to have a voice and discuss potential changes Northern could make to help. The first session focused on recruitment, and the group concluded there are several things that could be reviewed & adjusted to support neurodivergent candidates in their application and interviews.

Within this session were a number Neurotypical 'allies' looking to support the aims of the group, who got to hear things from a range of different perspectives that will enable them look how their department can support the group in making positive changes.

The group is important as it helps understand challenges in the workplace we all face, and find potential solutions. By Northern understanding its Neurodivergent colleagues my view is it will help us to understand our Neurodivergent customers and help to remove any barriers to using our network. This policy is an excellent step in the right direction for Northern and we look forward to seeing the enhancements in the future not only for me & other ND colleagues but also considerations for our customers. Alexander Wildash

We're excited to see the positive impact this group will have in all areas of the business, and we hope that this further positions us as an employer that truly recognises the value of diversity in our workplace.