Neurodiversity & Inclusive Design

What is it for?

Neurodiversity describes the natural variations in how human brains function, process information, learn, and interact. This includes conditions like autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia. Under UK law (the Equality Act 2010), neurodivergence can count as a disability if it has a substantial, long-term effect on someone's day-to-day activities. But not all neurodivergent people see themselves as disabled.

Designing for neurodiversity is a way of making websites and apps that are clear, predictable, and easy to use for people with different ways of thinking. Bad design can create problems for thinking and processing, such as:

- Busy layouts, auto-playing videos, and flashing animations can cause cognitive overload, where there's too much information to take in at once
- Using jargon, complex words, or vague phrases means that some people simply can't understand what you're trying to say
- Menus, buttons, or layouts that change from page to page mean that people don't know what to expect, and it takes more cognitive work to understand
- Long blocks of text make it hard to find information
- Unnecessary urgency can cause stress, such as short time limits for submitting a form

This is a way of designing, not a single feature. Key web standards support this approach, especially the ‘Understandable’ and ‘Operable’ parts of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). It's about using standard HTML and CSS in a thoughtful way to create a better experience for everyone.

How to support it

To make an experience better for everyone, focus on making things clear, predictable, and flexible.

- Keep it simple and clear, use plain English and short sentences
- Choose simple, easy-to-read fonts
- Make it predictable, use headings and lists to organise content. Keep your layout the same on every page, and make sure buttons clearly say what they

do (e.g., "Submit your form")
- Reduce distractions, letting the user be in control. Avoid auto-playing videos or flashing animations
- Be forgiving. Write error messages that clearly explain what is wrong and how to fix it
- Make content easy to read by breaking up long text with headings, lists, and empty space

Useful links

- Neurodiversity and designing for difference
- Scott Logic: Designing for Neurodiversity