

Neurodivergent Entrepreneurship in the UK

Building a Better System for Founders, Businesses and the Economy

A Note on Language

The term “neurodiversity” recognises that differences in how people think, learn and process information are a natural part of human variation. Within this framework, “neurodivergence” refers to individuals whose cognitive functioning differs from what is often considered typical. “Neurodivergent” is therefore used as a non-medical term to describe people whose brains function, learn or process information differently from dominant norms. This can include conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia and others.

We recognise that neurodivergence encompasses a wide range of experiences, and that many individuals have more than one neurodivergent condition or other co-occurring health or disability needs.

While these differences are important, this report uses “neurodivergent entrepreneurs” as an umbrella term in order to identify shared systemic barriers and highlight practical changes that could improve entrepreneurship for a broad range of founders.

FOREWORD 1

Michelle Ovens CBE

Founder and CEO, Small Business Britain

Entrepreneurship should be one of the most inclusive ways to work. It offers autonomy, flexibility and the chance to build something shaped around individual strengths. For many neurodivergent people, starting a business is not simply a career choice, it is a response to exclusion from traditional employment, inflexible workplaces and systems that do not accommodate difference.

There is much misunderstanding in the world about neurodivergence, and there exist many stereotypes that can be challenging and at times very damaging. There is also a huge variety of experiences encompassed in the terminology, and people experience neurodivergence in markedly different ways. Picking apart the challenges to understand common threads of needs that can be addressed by systems and stakeholders in the entrepreneurial eco-system is a challenge but will also bring us some incredibly useful insights into how to make the world of entrepreneurship more accessible to all.

When we hear from entrepreneurs about overwhelm, burnout, stress and systemic barriers, we are looking at an acute window of the challenges facing many marginalised groups. A common thread throughout the Neurodivergent Entrepreneurs research is the challenge of accessing, understanding and communicating information. If we can make this easier, simpler and more stress-free, we also widen the opportunities for entrepreneurship for other groups struggling with the overwhelming burden of business complexities.

The challenge for neurodivergent entrepreneurs is not a lack of ambition or ability. It is confidence eroded by repeated barriers, administrative systems that drain time and energy, and support that arrives

too late or in the wrong form. However, with the right changes, neurodivergent founders could build greater business growth, create jobs and contribute even more to the UK economy. This report sets out what needs to change and how we can build a better system that works for everyone.

FOREWORD 2

Entrepreneurship plays a vitally important role in the UK economy, and its full potential is best realised when the systems around it work for a broad range of founders.

For Lloyds, this agenda aligns closely with our purpose of Helping Britain Prosper - supporting more inclusive growth while unlocking commercial opportunity by enabling more viable businesses to start, grow and succeed.

We are pleased to support the development of this report, building on the foundations of the Lilac Review and our role as a founding partner of the LILAC Centre. The Lilac Review highlighted that Disabled founders are often not constrained by a lack of ability or ambition, but by the way everyday systems are designed. This report, focused on neurodivergent founders, helps to deepen the evidence base for change. Its findings can help inform ongoing activity under the Disability Finance Code for Entrepreneurship, underlining the importance of continued progress across financial services in supporting Disabled and neurodivergent entrepreneurs.

The findings point to a set of persistent challenges. Many neurodivergent founders (61%) report facing barriers to starting or scaling a business, suggesting that existing systems may not always work as effectively as they could. Importantly, the report highlights the need to view access to finance not as a single interaction or product, but as an end-to-end journey. This includes day-to-day banking, intuitive digital application processes, relationship-led support where needed, and the ability to navigate a wider ecosystem of grants, programmes, government-backed schemes, community finance and investment options.

Progress is likely to depend not only on improvements, but also on continued engagement - ensuring Disabled and neurodivergent founders are able to shape how products, services and journeys evolve over time. That is why we will continue to work with partners, including the LILAC Centre and our 400 strong Disabled and neurodivergent entrepreneur research panel, to better understand what works in practice and to share insights across the sector. By addressing the barriers faced by neurodivergent founders, there is an opportunity to strengthen mainstream systems in ways that support a broader range of entrepreneurs, helping more businesses to start and scale, and driving job creation and innovation across the UK.

Chris Loring

Managing Director of Lending & Working Capital, Business & Commercial Banking, *Lloyds*

FOREWORD 3

The UK's entrepreneurial ecosystem thrives on diversity, yet for many, the path to starting and scaling a business remains unnecessarily challenging.

This report offers a crucial lens on the experience of neurodivergent founders, whose creativity and problem-solving skills represent a significant driver of economic growth.

Self-employment and online business models can offer neurodivergent people the autonomy and flexibility they are often unable to find in traditional employment settings. Our platform at eBay, which enables hundreds of thousands of small businesses to thrive, from side hustles to full-time businesses, provides a direct route to market where a great idea and a strong product are often all that is needed to succeed.

However, the findings of this report resonate deeply with the practical challenges entrepreneurs, and our sellers, face daily: administrative complexity, inaccessible finance processes, as well as the exhaustion that comes from masking, and burnout. These are structural barriers to entrepreneurship for neurodivergent founders, and the current system we have in place requires excessive cognitive load just to file taxes or apply for a loan, we are losing out on the valuable economic contribution of highly capable founders.

This research, built on the voices and experiences of over 600 neurodivergent entrepreneurs is a blueprint for better system design, as was the final report of the Lilac Review, which led to the creation of the LILAC Centre. The recommendations, focused on administrative simplification, and flexible finance pathways, and boosting adoption of new technology, are precisely the changes needed to unlock potential. Significantly, the report highlights the growing role of technology, including AI, as an essential “accessibility scaffolding” that helps entrepreneurs manage daily tasks, communicate effectively and in ways that work for them, and focus on growth.

As a major platform connecting millions of customers to small businesses, eBay is committed to acting on these insights. We will continue to explore how we can simplify our seller journeys, provide more tailored and flexible support, and use AI to reduce administrative burdens for neurodivergent and Disabled sellers. By championing systems that work for diverse thinkers, we strengthen our entire community and ensure that the future of commerce is truly inclusive.

We are proud to partner on this vital research and look forward to working with Government, financial institutions, and the wider business support ecosystem to build a UK enterprise environment where every founder, regardless of how they think or communicate, can achieve their full potential. The work of the LILAC Centre will be instrumental in achieving these goals and coordinating important actors in the UK economy to action these recommendations for a more inclusive entrepreneurship landscape.

Eve Williams
General Manager, *eBay UK*

Executive Summary

Summary of Recommendations

1. Design neurodivergent-aware business support as standard

Make mainstream programmes flexible, modular and accessible by default, so they work for different communication styles, processing speeds and sensory needs rather than relying on specialist or separate provision.

2. Reform Access to Work and the benefits system for self-employed and entrepreneurial founders

Create clearer, faster and more predictable support for founders, including improved Access to Work continuity and guidance, and benefits rules and decision-making that reflect irregular self-employment income and do not penalise founders as they start or grow

3. Reduce administrative complexity across all business-facing systems

Lower the cognitive burden created by complex forms, opaque criteria and rigid digital processes through plain English, transparency, universal design principles and flexible application formats.

4. Create neurodivergent-accessible finance pathways across the full system

Ensure founders can navigate and access the full range of finance options through clear signposting and guided routes, and can present business cases in formats that do not penalise different communication styles, from credit applications through to equity pitches.

5. Invest in neurodivergent-led peer communities as core infrastructure

Fund neurodivergent-led networks as essential business infrastructure that reduces isolation, supports learning and creates safe spaces without the need for masking.

6. Recognise and fund AI and digital tools as reasonable adjustments

Include AI subscriptions and digital productivity tools within Access to Work eligible expenditure, and fund digital literacy programmes designed for neurodivergent entrepreneurs.

7. Specify neurodivergent-friendly procurement and trading standards

Strengthen the Disability Trading Framework with specific guidance on plain English contracts, flexible meeting formats, sensory-considerate environments and clear communication expectations.

8. Establish a national neurodivergent entrepreneurship evidence programme

Create an ongoing national research and data programme to track outcomes and barriers over time, positioning the UK as a global leader in neurodivergent entrepreneurship policy.

Why this report and why now?

This report builds on the findings of the Lilac Review, published in May 2025 which examined the barriers and opportunities facing Disabled entrepreneurs across the UK.¹ During that work, neurodivergent entrepreneurs consistently emerged as one of the largest groups represented in the research, highlighting the need to better understand their specific experiences.

Existing evidence also shows that neurodivergent people often face barriers in the traditional labour market. As a result, many neurodivergent people turn to self-employment as a pathway to work in ways that better suit their strengths and needs. This report calls for a shift from a one-size-fits-all approaches to business support, towards systems that are more flexible, strengths- based and, vitally, informed by lived experience.

The changes required are not radical. Many could be implemented within existing frameworks. Together they represent a significant cultural shift: from expecting neurodivergent founders to adapt to rigid systems, towards designing support structures that better accommodate different ways of working and thinking.

[FOUNDER CASE STUDY]

¹ [The Lilac Review](#), 2025

Emma Heathcote-James, Little Soap Company

"I've always worked for myself; I've always been totally unemployable and never knew why, until I received a late diagnosis of Autism and ADHD in 2022. It was a lot to get my head around, like growing up being told you're a cat and doing all to be cat like to only then be told no actually, you're a dog.

I created the business back in 2008 and unwittingly built it around my neurodivergence without even realising. I knew I couldn't stand synthetic smells, so I started creating my own products using only essential oils and totally natural ingredients. Standard office environments simply don't work for me: the textured noise, the mess, the people and perhaps most of all fluorescent lighting flickers, and while others may not notice it, I can see nothing else. Creating my own workspace and orchestrating a team remotely has allowed me to totally thrive.

I now run a fully remote team of 15 across the UK, using Teams to communicate. When lockdown happened, everything continued as it had been for us. It's proof that you can run a successful business outside of a traditional setting. We meet up quarterly for 3 days at a time where we do all the things we can't online. Quite simply I've never tried to fit in and conform - I've created our own way of working, and I think that's why we perhaps have attracted other neurodivergent people to the team.

I see strengths in my tenacity, different ways of thinking, strong moral compass and empathy. Hyperfocus can be a gift, even if it comes with challenges. For me, it's about difference, not deficit, and building a business that reflects that.

[END OF CASE STUDY]

The timing is significant. Across the UK there is renewed national focus on how disability support systems can better reflect modern working lives and unlock opportunity. In October 2025, the government launched the Timms Review, led by Sir Stephen Timms, to examine whether the Personal Independence Payment system is fair and fit for the future. While focused on welfare support, the review reflects a broader policy question: whether public systems are keeping pace with how Disabled and neurodivergent people work and run businesses today.

Neurodivergent entrepreneurs are an important, creative and often under-recognised part of the UK's small business community. They are building businesses across every sector of the economy, often demonstrating exceptional innovation and problem-solving ability. Yet they are doing so within systems that were not designed with them in mind.

[FOUNDER CASE STUDY]

Kim McDermottroe, Greener Lavelle

"I've definitely become more confident sharing my neurodivergence over time, and doing a TEDx talk really helped with that. There were moments where people suggested talking about it might stop me getting work, but my instinct was the opposite, if there's still stigma, then we need more conversations, not less.

I'm always going to be an artist first. Autism isn't my full identity, but getting my diagnosis was life-changing. Before that, I felt like my brain was working against me; afterwards, I realised it was actually doing its best. It's given me more headspace and helped me understand how I work. My attention to detail is epic, and while it can slow me down, it means clients get a higher quality product. I'm also great at pattern spotting and thinking ideas through from start to finish.

There are still challenges. Things like phone calls can feel overwhelming, and that's where accessibility really matters. I moved to Lloyds after difficulties with another bank that relied on phone communication. Having more flexible options, like written communication, makes a huge difference.

Overall, I believe being neurodivergent has made me a better artist and a stronger advocate, for myself and for others. It's about showing that you can run a business, be creative, and do things your own way."

[END OF CASE STUDY]

This report draws on a national survey of more than 600 neurodivergent founders, alongside focus groups and lived-experience interviews. The findings are clear: neurodivergent entrepreneurs are not lacking ambition or capability. They are being held back by structural barriers, administrative complexity and support systems that assume a single "normal" way of thinking, communicating and working.

"I'm trying to get into the mindset of using the ADHD as my superpower, and I'm starting to now. My attention to detail is unlike anyone else I've ever known, and because of that it means I'm a great nail tech who produces insane art." - Nikki Holliday, *Nikki Nailed It*

[FOUNDER CASE STUDY]

Olma Edeki

Patricia Anne PreLoved

"I was diagnosed with ADHD at 38 and soon realised that all the things I thought were normal were not. I turned 42 in March, and I still feel like I'm figuring it all out. Sometimes I feel like I should be so much further ahead than I am.

Before my diagnosis, I created my own barrier by not wanting to ask for, or look for, support. I felt a lot of shame from struggling to do what "normal" people seemed able to do. It was such an internal process, made harder because I had no context for ADHD.

Being self-employed has allowed me to create my own bubble where I feel safe. I can understand why neurodivergent people often end up creating their own lane. Working for myself has taught me that I work more in ebbs and flows, and that traditional 9–5 roles did not suit me.

Once I had my diagnosis, I looked at what I had been most consistent with without support, and that was eBay. It has allowed me to build a business around my family and create a flexi routine that works for me. It's taken years to build daily consistency, but now I am an active seller.

Being the first London eBay Meet Up host has also been incredibly rewarding. I've always learnt so much through engaging with other sellers, and when the opportunity came up to I knew it was something that could genuinely benefit others.

I wanted to help build a community where people could learn from each other, share experiences, ask questions and build confidence together.

I've seen first-hand how much motivation people take away from these events, and creating an environment where people feel inspired, supported and less isolated has been one of the most meaningful parts of being involved."

[END OF CASE STUDY]

Why neurodivergent people start businesses

Entrepreneurship is often framed as a risky or unconventional career choice. For many neurodivergent people, it is a practical solution to exclusion from traditional employment.

- 76% started a business to work in a way that suits them.
- 54% wanted to turn a passion or special interest into a career
- 53% cited difficulty fitting into traditional workplaces

"I'm not a 'normal' person. I can't get a job. I've applied for hundreds, thousands of jobs. Despite having a high IQ and a masters in psychology, employment just isn't a path that seems to be open to me. That is why entrepreneurship matters for so many neurodivergent people: it can become the route we take when conventional employment systems fail to recognise, accommodate or make proper use of our abilities." - Robert Annis, Co-Founder & Organisational Psychologist, *NEURO*

This report sets out how neurodivergent-aware business support and accessible finance pathways, as well as reduced administrative burdens would ensure that when neurodivergent people choose entrepreneurship, the systems around them are designed to help them succeed.

Confidence is the missing ingredient

Confidence and self-belief emerge as some of the most significant barriers to business success.

These challenges are not about intelligence or talent. They reflect systems that erode confidence through repeated friction, inaccessible processes and lack of validation.

- 65% cited confidence or self-belief as a challenge when starting
- 54% struggled to find the right support or mentorship
- 53% struggled with business planning or strategy

This reflects systems that erode confidence through repeated friction and lack of validation. This report sets out how neurodivergent-aware business support and investment in peer-led communities as core infrastructure could help rebuild it.

The support that was missing when it mattered

Access to support is inconsistent and often absent at the point it matters most.

- 65% said mentoring from someone who understands neurodivergence would have helped
- 56% wanted accessible financial support and funding information
- 55% wanted practical business advice delivered accessibly

These gaps point to the need for a fundamentally different approach, one where neurodivergent-aware business support is designed as standard, Access to Work is reformed to better serve self-

employed founders, peer-led communities are funded as core infrastructure and AI is recognised as a genuine reasonable adjustment.

Death by Admin: When Systems Get in the Way

Administrative burden is a structural barrier to growth for neurodivergent entrepreneurs. Complex systems around tax, funding, banking and compliance create disproportionate cognitive load. Founders report spending excessive time navigating forms, portals and unclear criteria.

- 61% avoided starting or scaling a business because of barriers related to being neurodivergent
- 46% struggled with legal or administrative processes when starting
- 41% say support with compliance and regulations has been missing or inadequate

This report sets out how reducing administrative complexity across all business-facing systems and creating neurodivergent-accessible finance pathways would free neurodivergent founders to focus their time and energy where it matters most.

“The ADHD tax meant I didn’t read the small print, and I ended up in £45k of debt.” - Maddy Alexander, Author of *Mad About Money*

To Disclose or Not to Disclose

Disclosure remains a calculated risk for many neurodivergent entrepreneurs

- 51% disclose depending on context
- Only 7% say other businesses often or always understand/accommodate their needs

With so few neurodivergent founders feeling consistently understood by the businesses they work with, the responsibility for change cannot rest with founders alone. This report calls for neurodivergent-friendly procurement and trading standards that shift that responsibility onto the wider system.

“I’m really comfortable with verbal disclosure, but I’m a masking autistic, and I think there’s a big difference between an unmasked autistic and verbal disclosure. I will tell anyone I’m autistic, but you will never see me unmasked.” - Jane McNeice, Founder, *Mind Matters Training*

Burnout Isn’t a Personal Failure

Workload management and burnout are widespread.

- 79% face workload management or burnout challenges as they grow

Burnout is not the result of individual weakness, but of systems that place excessive demands on founders without adequate support.

Burnout at this scale points to a system that places excessive demands on founders without adequate support, and this report sets out how reforming Access to Work, investing in peer-led communities and recognising AI and digital tools as legitimate workplace adjustments could together significantly reduce that burden.

“I work until the point of burnout, which can help me get my brain out of a rabbit hole and onto a piece of art that I need to focus on. It’s not therapeutic, it’s like a physical release of trying” - Dez, *LoveArtPix*

What Good Support Actually Looks Like

Founders consistently describe effective support as: Flexible and modular, delivered by people with lived experience, focused on confidence as well as skills, ongoing rather than one-off.

- 79% say support from someone with lived experience is important
- 59% say access to mentors and networks has been missing
- 55% wanted practical advice delivered accessibly

“Running your own business is a roller coaster anyway, but when you add neurodivergence into the mix, it can make it even more complicated and messy. I think when people hear those case studies, it helps them feel they’re not on their own, and that they’re not just on a hiding to nothing with their business idea.” - Rob Edwards, *Neurodiversity & Entrepreneurship Association (NEA)*

These findings point to a clear pattern of systemic barriers faced by neurodivergent founders who are navigating systems that were not designed with them in mind. The recommendations that follow respond directly to each of these challenges, setting out practical, achievable changes to business support, finance, procurement and administrative design that would significantly improve outcomes for this group of entrepreneurs as well as the wider economy. Establishing a national evidence programme to track that progress over time will be essential to ensuring those changes are working.

[FOUNDER CASE STUDY]

Dez

Founder, *LoveArtPix*

“For much of my life, I knew certain things affected me, but I didn’t understand why. Receiving an autism diagnosis helped me make sense of my experiences, and now I choose to be open about it. Sharing my diagnosis helps people understand how I communicate and work best, which makes collaboration easier from the start.

However, openness can be a double-edged sword. While some people respond positively, others either dismiss it or make assumptions based on outdated stereotypes. Too often, autism is misunderstood as an intellectual disability, shaped by narrow portrayals in TV and film. Comments like “you don’t look autistic” show how much awareness still needs to improve.

Communication differences can create barriers, so I’ve developed practical solutions. I’m creating an introduction questionnaire for organisations I collaborate with, giving them the opportunity to understand how we can communicate effectively. I work best one-to-one rather than through group emails or Zoom calls, where it is easier to engage and check understanding.

Becoming an artist has given me the freedom to be honest and authentic. I still struggle daily but no longer feel pressure to mask who I am. By sharing my experiences through my projects and artwork, I help others feel more comfortable opening up too. Being true to myself in an often surface level society has become one of my greatest strengths.

[END OF CASE STUDY]

Neurodivergent entrepreneurs do not need “special treatment”, but they do need systems that work with them rather than against them. The following recommendations set out practical, achievable changes that could significantly improve outcomes, many of which can be implemented quickly, if the will exists.

Recommendation 1

Design Neurodivergent-Aware Business Support as Standard

Business support should be one of the clearest and most empowering parts of starting and growing a company. Too often, however, mainstream support is still designed around a narrow assumption of how founders communicate and engage.

Many programmes rely heavily on rapid verbal delivery, unstructured workshops, networking-led formats, complex written materials and one-size-fits-all pathways. For many neurodivergent entrepreneurs, these approaches can create avoidable barriers before support has even begun.

Many support systems do not yet reflect the diversity of how people engage with information, and it is this, rather than any lack of ambition or capability among neurodivergent founders, that creates the barrier.

Our survey found that 54% of neurodivergent entrepreneurs struggled to find the right support or mentorship when starting their business, while 55% said more accessible business support would have made the biggest difference in the early stages of their journey.

By improving mainstream business support so that it works better for a wider range of founders, everyone benefits

Why this matters

Neurodiversity is population-level, not marginal

Neurodevelopmental conditions are common. UK prevalence estimates suggest:

- ADHD affects approximately 3–4% of adults².
- Autism prevalence is estimated at around 1–2% of the population.³
- Dyslexia estimates range between 5–10%.⁴

² National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2018)

³ NHS England; Traolach S Brugha et al. (2011)

⁴ British Dyslexia Association

Research also suggests higher rates of self-employment among neurodivergent individuals. According to studies, 29% of founders report ADHD⁵ and around 35% report dyslexia.⁶

Many neurodivergent people choose entrepreneurship because it offers the autonomy to work in ways that better suit their strengths, and due to barriers in traditional employment (ONS, 2021; National Autistic Society reports). Of the businesses we surveyed:

- 75% started a business to work in a way that suits them
- 42% cited the desire for autonomy and control

So when business support systems are difficult to access or poorly designed, the UK risks losing growth from a significant pool of entrepreneurial talent.

Communication style is often the barrier

Many founders shared that barriers arise not from the support itself, but from how that support is delivered.

Our survey found that 60% of respondents face communication or social interaction challenges when trading or collaborating with other businesses.

Founders described difficulties with:

- ambiguous advice
- fast-paced sessions with little structure
- verbal-heavy delivery with no written follow-up
- pressure to network in unfamiliar environments
- unclear next steps after programmes end

Research in cognitive psychology shows that people absorb and retain information differently. Clear structure, predictable formats and information delivered in multiple formats can significantly improve understanding.⁷

What good support looks like

The most effective business support for neurodivergent founders is mainstream support that has been designed to accommodate different ways of thinking and engaging from the very beginning.

This could include:

- clear agendas and learning outcomes
- written summaries after workshops or meetings

⁵ Journal of Business Venturing; Edward Freeman et al. (2019)

⁶ Julie Logan (2009), Dyslexic Entrepreneurs: The Incidence; Their Coping Strategies and Their Business Skills

⁷ Richard E Mayer (2009), Multimedia Learning (2nd ed.)

- modular programmes completed in stages
- recorded and asynchronous learning options
- small-group and one-to-one alternatives
- visual process maps and checklists
- predictable communication and timelines
- structured follow-up support after sessions
- advisers who understand masking, burnout and executive function differences

Universal design improves usability for everyone. Many adjustments originally developed as accessibility tools, such as dictation software, captioning and flexible digital interfaces, are now mainstream productivity tools used widely across society. The same principle should apply to business support.

Why better support matters economically

When mainstream business support is designed to work for everyone, the benefits extend well beyond inclusion; they appear in business growth and economic contribution.

When founders receive support in formats they can engage with effectively:

- confidence increases
- uptake improves
- implementation rates rise
- dropout reduces
- businesses scale faster

Currently, too many neurodivergent founders spend time navigating systems rather than growing their business.

Recommendations for Government

Embed neurodivergence awareness into publicly funded business support standards

Publicly funded business support programmes should embed neurodivergence awareness into their design and delivery standards as a baseline requirement, ensuring that providers are equipped to support founders with a range of cognitive and communication styles.

Include lived experience in programme design

Neurodivergent founders should help shape the services intended to support them through advisory panels, consultation and co-design, ensuring programmes reflect real-world needs and experiences.

Recommendations for Business Support Organisations

Train advisers, mentors and programme staff

Training should cover neurodivergence awareness, executive functioning differences, communication preferences, confidence barriers, and the impact of masking and burnout.

Offer multiple engagement routes

Not every founder learns best through networking events or group workshops. Providers should offer written, visual, verbal and self-paced routes so entrepreneurs can engage in ways that work best for them.

Build in follow-up support

Many founders benefit from time to process advice after sessions. Structured follow-up, light-touch check-ins and accountability support can improve confidence and increase implementation.

Recommendations for Financial Services

Improve accessibility of business guidance and relationship support

Banks and lenders should ensure frontline teams understand different communication needs and how these can affect confidence during applications, lending conversations and ongoing business support.

Provide clearer and more structured communication

This should include written summaries after meetings, transparent timelines, structured templates, explicit criteria for decisions and clear next steps, helping founders navigate processes with greater confidence.

Review business support programmes through an accessibility lens

Any accelerator, mentoring or educational offer delivered by financial institutions should reflect inclusive design principles, with flexible formats and accessible communication built in from the outset.

Recommendation 2

Reform Access to Work for Self-Employed and Entrepreneurial Founders

Access to Work (AtW) can be transformative. When functioning effectively, it enables Disabled people to remain economically active by funding practical workplace support such as specialist coaching, assistive technology and communication adjustments. For neurodivergent founders in particular, it can provide the executive function support, structured accountability and practical scaffolding that enables sustainable business growth.

However feedback from small business owners shows Access to Work is currently inconsistent and does not fit with the realities of running a business. Short-term awards, unrealistic support rates and repeated reassessment cycles undermine the stability that entrepreneurship requires.

Founders described challenges including:

- lengthy waiting times for decisions
- short-term awards that create uncertainty
- repeated reassessment for lifelong conditions
- lack of clarity for self-employed applicants
- funding levels that may not reflect specialist support costs
- interruption of support during renewals

“My Access to Work grant gives me a support worker, they basically are my brain because I have the retention of a goldfish. If that support is not renewed in February then I have to find £36k of my own cash to fund it.” - Stephanie Ward, *The Spicy Brain Collective*

For neurodivergent entrepreneurs, support needs to be continuous, not episodic. For a founder, losing support can mean delayed growth or even business closure.

“Self-employed people are now waiting over a year to hear back on Access to Work applications, it’s less than that if you’re an employee. It’s a ridiculous amount of time, my business could have gone under by then. I feel like I’m drowning.” - Focus Group participant

Why reform is necessary

Instability undermines entrepreneurial viability.

Access to Work awards are typically time-limited and subject to reassessment. While periodic review may be appropriate for fluctuating conditions, neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia are lifelong.

The Department for Work and Pensions’ own published guidance confirms that awards are discretionary and reviewed periodically. In practice, founders told us this can result in:

- awards lasting 12 months or less
- delays between renewal and payment
- reassessment of lifelong conditions
- interruptions in coaching or specialist support

For entrepreneurs, this uncertainty can be particularly damaging. Entrepreneurial income is rarely linear and cash flow can fluctuate significantly. When support is interrupted, productivity and business stability can fall quickly, particularly where support relates to executive functioning, planning, prioritisation and strategic decision-making.

Research consistently shows that reliable workplace support plays an important role in helping Disabled people remain economically active.⁸ Short-term or stop-start support is less effective, particularly for people with lifelong conditions.

Unreliable support can intensify existing business pressures

This matters because many neurodivergent founders are already managing significant pressures while growing a business.

Our survey found that:

- 79% said managing workload or burnout was a challenge in growing their business
- 61% had avoided starting or scaling a business idea because of systemic or personal barriers related to being neurodivergent

Where effective support is interrupted, these pressures can increase further, making growth more difficult and undermining long-term sustainability.

Unreasonable funding rates for specialist support

Access to Work sets caps and hourly rates for support workers. However, specialist executive function coaching, ADHD coaching and autism-informed business support often exceed standard support worker rates.

Evidence from professional bodies such as the Association for Coaching and ADHD UK suggests that specialist ADHD coaching rates commonly range between £75–£150 per hour in the UK private market.

Where funding does not reflect realistic market costs, founders may face:

- reduced access to appropriately qualified specialists
- pressure to use lower-cost, non-specialist provision
- financial shortfalls personally absorbed by early-stage founders

Underfunding specialist provision can dilute the intended impact of the scheme.

Administrative complexity within Access to Work

Disability Rights UK and the National Audit Office have both noted administrative delays and backlog pressures within Access to Work delivery in recent years. The National Audit Office's review of support for Disabled people into work also highlighted wider capacity pressures within relevant programmes.

For founders, delays can have immediate commercial consequences. Unlike employees, there is no employer salary continuity while support is being assessed.

This can mean:

⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2010 onwards), *Sickness, Disability and Work*

- lost time and productivity
- delayed growth decisions
- increased stress and uncertainty
- reduced capacity to manage day-to-day operations

For some early-stage businesses, prolonged delays may place viability at risk.

“Access to Work is a lifeline for Disabled people and neurodivergent entrepreneurs, but too many have been waiting far too long for the support they need. That’s why we’re recruiting nearly 500 new staff, eliminating payment delays and clearing the backlog to get people the help they deserve faster. Our wider package of employment support backed by £3.5 billion of investment reflects our determination to move from a welfare state to a working state, and to ensure the system works for everyone.” - Sir Stephen Timms, Minister of State for Social Security and Disability

Recommendations for Government

Introduce longer-term awards for lifelong conditions

For stable lifelong neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia, move towards multi-year awards with light-touch reviews rather than repeated full reassessment.

Recognise entrepreneurship as a valid employment pathway

Guidance should clearly state that self-employment and entrepreneurship are legitimate long-term forms of work, with clearer rules for applicants with variable income and different business structures.

Review funding rates for specialist support

Ensure funding reflects realistic market costs for executive function coaching, ADHD coaching and other specialist support.

Reduce waiting times

Delays can have direct commercial consequences for founders. Faster decisions and clearer service standards should be prioritised.

Recommendation 3

Reduce Administrative Complexity Across Systems

Administrative overload is not a personal failing. It is often a design failing. When systems rely on complex forms, ambiguous eligibility criteria, fragmented guidance and rigid digital processes, they create structural barriers. For many entrepreneurs this is frustrating. For many neurodivergent founders, it can be business-limiting.

Our survey found that 61% of entrepreneurs said they had avoided starting or scaling a business idea because of systemic or personal barriers related to being neurodivergent.

Research in cognitive load theory shows that unnecessary complexity reduces performance, increases error rates and heightens stress for all individuals.⁹ When complexity is embedded into public systems, it acts as an exclusion mechanism. For neurodivergent founders, this can result in:

- delayed access to funding and support
- avoidance of growth opportunities due to administrative burden
- increased reliance on costly intermediaries
- higher stress and burnout
- slower business scaling

The OECD has consistently found that simplifying administrative processes is one of the most effective ways to improve small business productivity and participation. Countries that have invested in simplification measures, such as single digital portals, pre-filled forms, clear-language redesign, and reduced reporting duplication, have demonstrated measurable increases in business formation, compliance rates and user satisfaction.

Estonia: Integrated digital government systems

Estonia is widely recognised for its highly integrated digital government system. Through a national digital identity and connected public databases, businesses can complete most interactions with government online, including company registration, tax filing and regulatory reporting. Information submitted once can be reused across government systems, meaning entrepreneurs do not need to repeatedly provide the same documentation. This significantly reduces administrative burden and allows businesses to spend less time on compliance and more time on running their operations. Simpler systems like this make it easier for neurodivergent entrepreneurs to navigate government processes.

Denmark and the “once-only” principle

⁹ John Sweller, Paul Ayres & Slava Kalyuga (2011), Cognitive Load Theory.

Denmark has implemented the “once-only” principle in its digital public services, meaning businesses are not required to submit the same information multiple times to different government departments. Once information has been provided, it can be reused across relevant public systems. This approach reduces duplication, simplifies regulatory processes and makes it easier for businesses to navigate government requirements. Reducing repetitive paperwork can also make these systems easier for neurodivergent founders to manage.

UK behavioural insights and form design

The UK has also demonstrated that relatively small changes to administrative systems can significantly improve outcomes. Research from the Behavioural Insights Team has shown that simplifying form language, reducing unnecessary steps and structuring processes more clearly can increase completion rates and reduce errors.¹⁰ These insights highlight how better system design can make regulatory processes easier for businesses to understand and navigate. Clearer, simpler processes are particularly helpful for neurodivergent entrepreneurs when dealing with complex forms and applications.

What needs to change

Systems that assume unlimited time, attention and confidence place an unfair burden on all entrepreneurs. Simplifying them is a productivity reform with wide economic benefit.

This means moving:

- From duplication to joined-up processes
- From long forms to modular applications
- From jargon to plain English
- From hidden criteria to transparent rules
- From rigid platforms to flexible user journeys

“Just the basics of running a business are overwhelming; sole trader or limited company, Companies House, data protection, accountants, funding, there’s so much. It can feel like a swamp trying to swallow you. It’s easier for me to mask and fit in than it is to explain what would be better.” - Jennifer Smith, *Jennifer G. Smith Consulting*

These reforms are not about lowering standards or reducing accountability. They are about designing systems that work with how people actually process information.

Simplification is one of the fastest and most impactful structural changes that can be made. Unlike cultural change, which requires sustained long-term shifts, administrative redesign can produce measurable improvements within short policy cycles.

¹⁰

Behavioural Insights Team (2012), Applying Behavioural Insights to Reduce Fraud, Error and Debt

It reduces friction, increases access, and unlocks productivity that is currently held back by avoidable complexity.

Recommendations for Government

Apply universal design principles to business-facing systems

All major government-facing business processes should be reviewed through an accessibility and usability lens. This should include plain English drafting, clearer criteria, modular forms, save-and-return functions and visible progress indicators.

Introduce a cognitive load test for new systems

Alongside equality impact assessments, new business-facing processes should consider the practical burden placed on users, including number of steps, complexity of language and time required for completion.

Implement the once-only principle where possible

Businesses should not repeatedly provide the same information to multiple public bodies where data can be safely shared across systems.

Consolidate overlapping schemes

Where multiple grants, schemes or reporting requirements exist, pathways should be simplified and duplication reduced.

Recommendations for Business Support Organisations

Provide assisted navigation for complex processes

Offer practical help for high-friction areas such as grant applications, procurement registration and regulatory requirements.

Use clearer guidance and simpler resources

Replace jargon-heavy materials with step-by-step guides, checklists and visual process maps.

Recognise admin burden as a genuine barrier to growth

Support programmes should treat administrative overload as a real business challenge rather than assuming founders simply need to be more organised.

Recommendations for Financial Services

Simplify application and onboarding processes

Lenders and financial providers should review forms, portals and evidence requests to remove unnecessary friction.

Improve transparency

Provide clearer eligibility criteria, realistic timelines and straightforward explanations of decisions.

Offer flexible communication routes

Customers should be able to engage through written, verbal and digital channels depending on what works best for them.

Reduce duplication across customer journeys

Where possible, avoid asking customers to repeatedly provide information already held elsewhere in the process.

Recommendation 4

Create Neurodivergent-Accessible Finance Pathways Across the Full System

Access to finance is one of the most important drivers of business growth. Yet for many neurodivergent entrepreneurs, the challenge is not only whether finance is available, but whether the system can be navigated clearly and confidently.

Finance is rarely a single pathway. Depending on the stage of their business, growth ambitions and appetite for risk, founders may seek funding through credit cards, overdrafts, bank lending, equity investment, grants or government-backed schemes such as Start Up Loans and Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs). Whatever route is taken, finance journeys often involve complex forms, unclear criteria, unfamiliar terminology, time pressure and communication formats that may unintentionally disadvantage applicants whose strengths are not best demonstrated through traditional processes.

Our research data shows:

- 59% struggled to access funding at start-up
- 51% are facing growth-stage finance challenges

Start-up and early stage funding

For most small businesses, access to finance does not begin with large loans or investment rounds. More commonly, it involves smaller-scale, day-to-day forms of finance such as credit cards, overdrafts and short-term lending to manage cash flow. These remain the most widely used forms of external finance among smaller businesses, often used to support working capital rather than long-term investment.¹¹

Even where finance is relatively small in scale, accessing it still involves application processes and, in many cases, interaction with a lender or advisor. Founders may be required to explain how funds will be used, demonstrate financial understanding or respond to questions about their business.

For many neurodivergent entrepreneurs, this can feel less like a straightforward application and more like an assessment. Founders describe needing to interpret unclear questions, respond in real time and justify decisions without always understanding what is being evaluated.

Where expectations are not clearly explained, or where there is limited opportunity to prepare or ask clarifying questions, this can create unnecessary pressure and make it harder to present a business case effectively.

When organisations ask founders questions, it would help to know why. Are you interested in revenue as a benchmarking metric, or just for broader context? Without that, it's easy to overthink the answer. A bit of rationale goes a long way" - Ryan Hoare, *TryMosaic*

Growth funding

The challenges continue when founders seek growth finance; over half (51%) of business owners surveyed shared that they faced challenges accessing finance at the growth stage.

Equity investment, including angel and venture capital funding, is typically more narrative-driven and often involves pitching, whether in person, via video or through written materials such as pitch decks.

Pitching processes place significant weight on how founders communicate their ideas, including confidence, delivery style and storytelling. While these factors can play a role in investment decisions, they are not direct measures of business viability.

For an autistic founder for example, if their brain is being forced to use huge amounts of brain power on just remembering to look the investor in the eye, they will have less energy in that moment to recall specific figures or detailed information.

This is important because growth finance plays a key role in enabling businesses to scale. With neurodivergent founders likely to face barriers at this stage, this can create a cap on growth, limiting the ability of otherwise viable businesses to expand. This fits with wider evidence that decisions by investors and lenders can be influenced by how information is presented, not just by the underlying strength of the business. Research on entrepreneurial pitches shows that visible cues such as confidence, body language and perceived passion can shape judgments, sometimes more strongly than the actual content of the proposal.

Traditional lending, grant applications and investment processes often reward:

- narrative fluency in written and spoken communication

¹¹

British Business Bank (2025), Small Business Finance Markets Report.

- polished delivery and presentation
- rapid verbal processing
- social confidence

These traits can be advantages in high-pressure evaluation settings, but they are not the same as business viability. Where processes overweight these signals, neurodivergent founders can be disadvantaged regardless of the quality of the proposition. If the system consistently misses good businesses for reasons such as the founder not making the right eye contact, this represents a missed opportunity not only for individual founders, but for lenders, investors and the wider UK economy.

Navigation barriers to finance

Many founders are unsure what type of finance is most appropriate for their stage of business, whether grants, overdrafts, start-up loans, asset finance, revenue-based lending, angel investment or equity finance. Without clear signposting and guided routes, founders may disengage early, delay seeking support or pursue unsuitable options. For neurodivergent entrepreneurs in particular, where complex systems or unclear pathways can create additional friction, clearer navigation can make a significant difference to confidence and engagement.

International proof this is achievable

More accessible finance systems are already being developed internationally, demonstrating that inclusive design is both practical and commercially viable.

In Australia, Commonwealth Bank (CommBank) has launched a dedicated neuroinclusive banking experience co-designed with neurodivergent customers. This includes practical digital guides with setup time estimates, tips for using features such as transaction notifications and recurring payments, and branch-based support using Customer Preference Cards and the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower programme.

CommBank also offers quieter offices, plain language communication and more direct service interactions. The bank describes this approach as “dignity by design” — creating products and services that provide equitable access as standard. Serving millions of customers, this demonstrates that neuroinclusive financial services can be delivered at scale.

Recommendations for Government

Improve accessibility within publicly backed finance schemes

Government should work with delivery partners to ensure publicly supported finance programmes, including Start Up Loans, British Business Bank-backed schemes and regional growth funds, are designed to be accessible to neurodivergent founders. This should include plain English guidance, clear eligibility criteria, transparent timelines and alternative communication routes.

Create clearer finance pathways for small businesses

Government should support simpler signposting across grants, loans, equity, CDFIs and specialist schemes so founders can navigate options more confidently.

Recommendations for Financial Services

Redesign finance journeys through an accessibility lens

Banks, lenders and investors should review application processes to remove unnecessary friction. This includes simplifying forms, reducing jargon, explaining why information is requested and offering clear next steps throughout the process.

Offer multiple ways for founders to present their case

Lenders and investors should allow written submissions, recorded responses, structured Q&A or follow-up materials where appropriate, ensuring decisions focus on business viability rather than presentation style alone.

Train frontline and investment teams

Relationship managers, underwriters, credit teams and investors should receive practical training on neurodivergence, communication differences and how bias can unintentionally shape decisions.

Develop neuroinclusive customer experiences

Institutions should test practical adjustments such as plain language communications, quieter meeting spaces, digital guidance tools and customer preference systems.

Recommendations for Business Support Organisations

Strengthen finance readiness support

Business support providers should help neurodivergent founders understand the full range of finance options available at different business stages, from working capital and overdrafts to equity and growth finance.

Recommendation 5

Invest in Neurodivergent-Led Peer Communities as Core Infrastructure

Entrepreneurship can be isolating for any founder. For neurodivergent entrepreneurs, that isolation can be intensified by inaccessible environments and the pressure to mask or constantly explain different ways of thinking and working.

For many founders, peer communities provide something mainstream business environments often cannot: psychological safety, shared understanding and practical support without the need to justify or translate their needs.

These networks should not be seen as informal extras or optional wellbeing initiatives. They are a key form of entrepreneurial infrastructure.

Why this matters

Our survey found that 59% of respondents said access to mentors and networks had been missing or inadequate when they started out, while 79% said it was important that business support comes from someone with lived experience of neurodivergence.

These findings highlight a clear gap in the current support landscape. Many founders are looking not only for technical advice, but for spaces where they feel understood and able to engage authentically. This matters because entrepreneurship often depends on confidence, persistence and access to trusted networks. Where those foundations are weak, business growth can be harder to sustain.

Peer-led communities can offer forms of support that are difficult to replicate elsewhere.

This includes:

- shared lived experience and practical insight
- reduced stigma and greater confidence
- opportunities to learn from others facing similar challenges
- accountability and encouragement
- referrals, collaboration and commercial opportunities
- spaces where masking is less necessary

Wider research shows that peer support can improve confidence, wellbeing and a sense of connection.

As an entrepreneur shared during a focus group: “Peer-to-peer support as a founder can be really helpful as often you can be on your own, talking to yourself in a circle of one, trying to figure things out.”

Isolation and burnout are structural risks for founders

Entrepreneurship is already associated with elevated stress. Research published in Small Business Economics shows that entrepreneurs experience higher levels of stress and mental health strain compared to employees, even while reporting higher autonomy. In fact, 80% of businesses surveyed in this research reported that managing workload or burnout was a key challenge they are currently facing in their business.

For neurodivergent founders, this stress is compounded by:

- masking in professional settings
- executive overload
- sensory demands of networking environments
- repeated need to explain cognitive differences

What needs to change

The UK should move from treating neurodivergent founder communities as peripheral towards embedding them within the formal business support ecosystem.

This means moving from:

- Short-term pilots
- Volunteer-run sustainability models
- Fragile funding cycles

To:

- Recognised, stable and resourced networks
- Strategic partnerships
- Long-term ecosystem integration

When founders feel understood, supported and able to show up as themselves, they are far better placed to build and sustain successful businesses.

Recommendations for Government

Fund neurodivergent-led peer networks as part of the business support ecosystem

National and local business support funding should recognise peer communities as legitimate infrastructure that contributes to enterprise growth and founder sustainability.

Support multi-year funding models

Longer-term funding would allow networks to build capacity, improve governance and reach more founders.

Include peer networks in referral pathways

Growth hubs, local authorities and publicly funded support providers should be able to refer founders into trusted neurodivergent-led communities.

Recommendations for Business Support Organisations

Partner with neurodivergent-led groups

Rather than designing support in isolation, organisations should work with existing communities to co-design programmes and improve relevance.

Build community pathways into support offers

Training, mentoring and accelerator programmes should connect founders into ongoing peer networks after formal support ends.

Value lived experience expertise

Where neurodivergent founders contribute as mentors, facilitators or advisers, this expertise should be recognised and remunerated appropriately.

Recommendations for Financial Services and Corporates

Sponsor and support trusted peer networks

Banks, corporates and ecosystem partners should consider funding or partnering with neurodivergent-led founder communities as part of inclusive enterprise strategies.

Use communities as listening channels

Peer networks can provide valuable insight into customer barriers, unmet needs and service improvements.

Create routes into wider opportunity

Communities should be linked to procurement, mentoring, investment readiness and growth opportunities.

Recommendation 6

Recognise and Fund AI and Digital Tools as Reasonable Adjustments

Technology is already transforming how many entrepreneurs start and run businesses. For neurodivergent founders in particular, AI and digital productivity tools can provide practical support that helps reduce friction and manage the everyday demands of running a business.

Many founders already use tools such as AI assistants, transcription software, task management platforms, scheduling tools, dictation technology and workflow automation to work in ways that better suit their strengths and needs.

These tools can function as genuine workplace adjustments. In a modern economy, reasonable adjustments should include software as well as hardware, and digital support as well as human support.

“Chat GPT is the overwhelming thing that we use, to help with coding, to take ideas from one place and put them in another. I can brain dump and use the memory function to come back to something later. It also helps me to rewrite things, check how things look - it’s the single best tool I use, and has been a total gamechanger. I can also use the audio function to speak to it and have the notes generated, the same for in meetings.” - Ryan Hoare, *TryMosaic*

Why this matters

Entrepreneurship requires founders to manage a wide range of responsibilities, often simultaneously. For neurodivergent entrepreneurs, digital tools can help bridge gaps created by systems that were not designed with different ways of thinking, processing information or communicating in mind.

This may include support with:

- organising tasks and priorities
- drafting emails or documents
- summarising complex information

- note-taking during meetings
- structuring ideas into action plans
- managing calendars and reminders
- reducing repetitive administrative tasks
- improving written clarity and confidence

For some founders, these tools are not optional extras. They are part of how work becomes sustainable.

“As AI continues to shape the future of work and entrepreneurship, it is essential that neurodivergent needs are considered from the very beginning of how these technologies are designed and deployed. Responsible AI cannot be something organisations attempt to retrofit later; inclusivity must be embedded from the outset. For neurodivergent entrepreneurs in particular, AI has the potential to be a powerful tool, helping to remove barriers, streamline tasks, and support different ways of thinking and working. Where communication can be a barrier, such as navigating written processes, responding to emails or completing complex forms and applications, AI tools can help simplify and structure these tasks. If administrative processes create stress or friction, AI also has the potential to streamline them, allowing entrepreneurs to focus more of their time and energy on building their businesses. But this potential will only be realised if Government, technology companies and businesses, including eBay, work together to ensure these tools are designed with diverse users in mind. By putting neurodivergent perspectives at the centre of conversations about AI, we have an opportunity to create technologies that support entrepreneurship and enable more people to build and grow businesses in ways that work for them” - Neeti Awashti, Director, Business Sellers, *eBay UK*

Why policy now needs to catch up

Support systems have traditionally focused on physical equipment or human assistance. Both remain important. However, many modern workplace adjustments are now digital.

Software subscriptions, AI tools and productivity platforms can provide ongoing, low-cost support that may significantly improve independence and effectiveness. Yet these tools are not always recognised within formal support pathways, including schemes such as Access to Work. This creates a gap between how entrepreneurs actually work and how support is currently structured.

Digital inclusion must accompany digital funding

Not every founder will be confident selecting or using new technology. Access alone is not enough.

To ensure benefit is widely shared, founders may also need support to:

- understand which tools are useful for different needs
- use tools safely and effectively
- build confidence with AI and automation
- understand privacy, security and data risks
- integrate tools into everyday workflows

Digital literacy should therefore sit alongside digital access.

“The growing use of AI by neurodivergent founders also highlights a wider economic opportunity. As businesses increasingly adopt these technologies to improve productivity and efficiency, there is a strong commercial case for ensuring that tools are designed to work for diverse users.” - Ed James, Product Manager, *Lloyds*

As well as being a social responsibility issue, inclusive AI is a commercial opportunity. Tools designed to work for a wider range of users are likely to be more effective, more widely adopted and better able to support neurodivergent entrepreneurs scale their businesses.

“As an autistic, AI has helped me marshal and structure my thought processes in order to be able to shape the questions I really want to ask. It also gives me the ability to be able to have a conversation with something that has infinite patience. So when I struggle to understand something and need an in depth explanation it is able to give me one without judgement and without any fear on my part in continuing to ask it question after question. This has allowed me to conduct in depth studies of my business in a way that I couldn't do via a human as they'd have run out of understanding long before.”
- Andrew Nolan, *Money Mental UK*

Recommendations for Government

Recognise AI and digital tools as modern reasonable adjustments

Government should update disability employment and enterprise policy guidance to reflect that workplace adjustments increasingly include software, subscriptions and digital productivity tools, alongside traditional equipment and human support.

Promote inclusive AI standards

Government should work with industry to encourage responsible AI development that considers neurodivergent users from the outset.

Recommendations for Business Support Organisations

Provide clear guidance on useful and eligible tools

Founders should be able to understand which digital tools may be supported through public schemes, and which tools may help with different business needs such as organisation, communication or administration.

Build AI literacy into enterprise support

Business support programmes should help founders understand how AI can improve productivity, reduce friction and support day-to-day operations.

Keep support offers up to date

Programmes and guidance should evolve as technology changes, ensuring founders are introduced to relevant and practical tools rather than outdated approaches.

Promote blended support models

Many founders benefit from a combination of coaching, mentoring and digital tools. Support offers should reflect this rather than treating technology and human support as separate choices.

Recommendations for Financial Services and Coporates

Design products with neurodivergent users in mind

Banks, fintechs and technology providers should involve neurodivergent users in the design and testing of digital products, platforms and AI tools.

Recommendation 7

Specify neurodivergent-friendly procurement and trading standards

Many neurodivergent founders report that trading with larger organisations can create additional barriers. Communication expectations, contract language and meeting environments are often

designed around narrow assumptions about how people process information and interact professionally.

- 60% face communication or social interaction challenges when trading
- Only 7% say other businesses often or always understand their needs

Many founders continue to navigate commercial relationships while masking or withholding information about their needs.

“Having ADHD leads to so many complexities around contracts, and there’s no leniency. It would be great if companies could be more considerate, maybe by adding a tick box for those who are neurodivergent.” - Celia Gaze, *The Wellbeing Farm*

The Disability Trading Framework, launched in 2025, sets out guidance for organisations on how to build more inclusive trading relationships with Disabled entrepreneurs covering areas such as procurement practices, supplier engagement, communication and accessibility.

However, the framework currently focuses primarily on disability inclusion more broadly. There is an opportunity to strengthen it by specifying how procurement and supplier relationships can work more effectively for neurodivergent founders.

What this would mean

Carving out specific guidance and reporting within the Disability Trading Framework, administered by the Business Disability Forum, covering:

- Plain English contracts
- Flexible meeting formats (written follow-ups, async options)
- Sensory-considerate environments
- Clear communication expectations
- Transparency in feedback and decisions

This would not only shift part of the responsibility for inclusion onto buyers, rather than expecting founders alone to adapt, but it would also help larger organisations access a wider and more diverse pool of entrepreneurial talent.

Recommendations for Government

Promote the framework across public procurement and major suppliers

Departments, local authorities and publicly funded bodies should be encouraged to adopt the framework when reviewing supplier standards and commissioning practices.

Use procurement as a lever for inclusive growth

Government should recognise that opening supply chains to Disabled and neurodivergent-owned businesses is an economic opportunity as well as an inclusion priority.

Recommendation 8

Establish a National Neurodivergent Entrepreneurship Evidence Programme

This report draws on insights from more than 600 neurodivergent founders, providing one of the most detailed snapshots of neurodivergent entrepreneurship in the UK to date. However, this area remains significantly under-researched at a national level.

Without consistent data, policymakers, business support organisations and financial institutions lack the evidence needed to track progress, identify barriers and design effective interventions. To ensure policy and support systems evolve effectively, understanding neurodivergent entrepreneurship must move beyond one-off reports and become part of the UK's ongoing business research.

A national evidence programme would provide a clearer picture of how neurodivergent founders start, grow and sustain businesses over time, and where systems continue to create barriers.

What this would mean

Annual national tracking survey of neurodivergent entrepreneurs, delivered by the LILAC Centre, to monitor trends in business creation, growth, barriers and support needs.

Inclusion of neurodivergence indicators within mainstream small business surveys and datasets, ensuring neurodivergent founders are visible within national entrepreneurship data.

Longitudinal research tracking business outcomes, including growth, sustainability, access to finance and wellbeing.

Regular publication of findings, helping government, financial services and business support organisations adapt policy and practice based on evidence.

This would create a stronger evidence base for future policy development and help ensure that reforms across business support, finance and procurement are informed by real-world experience.

Recommendations for Government

Improve representation in existing datasets

Where appropriate, major entrepreneurship, SME surveys should include voluntary measures that help identify neurodivergent founders, improving visibility within national data.

Use evidence to guide future policy

Findings should inform future decisions across enterprise, employment, skills, finance and regional growth policy, with periodic public reporting on progress.

Recommendations for Business Support Organisations and Research Bodies

Expand practical research in this area

Research organisations should increase dedicated study of neurodivergent entrepreneurship, with a focus on applied solutions, founder outcomes and the economic contribution of neurodivergent-led businesses.

Build cross-sector partnerships

Universities, think tanks, business groups and disability organisations should collaborate to strengthen the evidence base and avoid fragmented research efforts.

Conclusion

Neurodivergent entrepreneurs already make an important contribution to the UK economy and society; Across many sectors they are building businesses, developing new ideas and creating employment, often while navigating systems that were not designed with their needs in mind. With better designed systems they could do far more.

The findings of this report show that the barriers neurodivergent founders face are not about ability or ambition. They arise from how systems are structured: administrative processes that are unnecessarily complex, communication norms that assume a single way of thinking and working, and support that arrives too late or in the wrong form.

The recommendations in this report focus on improving how these systems operate. They show how relatively practical changes to business support, finance, procurement, public programmes and administrative design could significantly improve access and outcomes for neurodivergent founders.

Supporting neurodivergent entrepreneurs is therefore not simply about inclusion. It is also about ensuring that people with the skills and ideas to build businesses are able to do so. When systems

are designed in ways that recognise different ways of thinking and communicating, more founders are able to start and grow businesses.

Creating or amplifying those conditions will benefit neurodivergent entrepreneurs directly, while also improving the wider environment in which all small businesses operate.