

A smooth, transformative end point assessment partnership

# Affirming Neurodivergent Apprentices:

## Best Practices for Effective Reasonable Adjustments in End Point Assessments

# A Guide to Reasonable Adjustments in End Point Assessment using the Affirmation Mode

Incorporating **affirmation model thinking** into End Point Assessment reasonable adjustments is about moving beyond the traditional medical model of disability, which focuses on the deficits or impairments and embracing a more inclusive, empowering approach. This approach recognises that disability is not simply a condition that needs to be 'fixed,' but rather a result of social, environmental, and attitudinal barriers that limit participation. Drawing on the insights from **John Swain and Sally French's 'Disability on Equal Terms'**, Elevate's Guide to Reasonable Adjustments using the Affirmation Model, explores how organisations can design reasonable adjustments that not only accommodate but actively affirm neurodivergent apprentices. Here are our top five suggestions:

## 1. Start with an open dialogue: Affirming individual needs

To ensure assessments are inclusive, it's crucial to engage directly with apprentices and training providers, to identify both their barriers and strengths. Rather than assuming what might help, an open dialogue enables apprentices to share their experiences and needs.

### What this might look like in practice:

**Affirmation through collaboration:** Encourage apprentices to participate in the process by asking open-ended questions such as; What adjustments would help you to show your knowledge in this assessment? Or, What has worked for you in previous assessment situations?

**Affirming autonomy and choice:** Enable apprentices to take an active role in selecting the types of adjustments that will work best for them, based on their understanding of their needs and strengths.

## 2. Tailor adjustments to individual strengths: Affirming personalisation

It's important to understand that disability should be seen within the context of societal structures and practices that fail to accommodate diverse abilities. Reasonable adjustments should focus on creating environments that affirm and empower apprentices, recognising each apprentice's unique strengths and challenges.

### What this might look like in practice:

**Affirmation through customised support:** Recognise that neurodivergent apprentices have different needs and there is no one size fits all. For example, some apprentices may benefit from extended time for their Professional Conversation, while others might perform better with a structured environment or the ability to take breaks.

**Affirming personal learning styles:** Design adjustments that focus on what apprentices can do with the right support. For example, an apprentice who struggles with reading might perform better if provided with audio-based support materials, such as an audio and visual recording to accompany information and guidance handbooks or perhaps the incorporation of some interactive elements. Providing these options affirms apprentices' strengths and enables them to showcase their knowledge, skills and behaviours.

The goal is to create an assessment environment that works with the apprentices natural strengths rather than forcing them to adapt to something that doesn't account for their way of processing and interacting with the world.

### 3. Educate Assessors: Affirming knowledge and facilitating inclusive professional conversations

Creating a truly inclusive environment begins with equipping assessors with the knowledge and skills to be able to apply neuro-affirmative approaches. This ensures assessors can recognise apprentices strengths and facilitate assessments that enable apprentices, including neurodiverse apprentices, to excel.

#### What this might look like in practice:

**Affirmation through training:** Deliver regular training for assessors focused on neurodiversity, inclusive assessment practices, and communication strategies for the Professional Conversation. This training should emphasise the importance of open-ended questions, active listening, and flexibility in approach.

**Affirming the role of the assessor:** Encourage assessors to approach the Professional Conversation as facilitators rather than gatekeepers. This means prioritising a supportive and adaptive environment, asking apprentices how they prefer to be supported, and focusing on enabling them to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and behaviours effectively.

For example, assessors might use a strengths-based approach in the Professional Conversation by beginning with questions that allow apprentices to share their areas of confidence, then gradually addressing more challenging topics. They might also ask apprentices about their preferred pace or if breaks would help them perform at their best.

When assessors view neurodiversity as an asset and adopt flexible facilitation strategies, they create an inclusive environment where apprentices feel valued and able to showcase their full potential.

### 4. Trial and Evaluate Adjustments: Affirming Thoughtful Implementation

Adjustments should be treated as an ongoing and dynamic process that is embedded in the overall lifecycle of the award, including assessment design. It's important to trial adjustments before full implementation and gather feedback to make sure they are truly benefiting apprentices.

## What this might look like in practice:

**Affirmation through evaluation:** After assessments, follow up with apprentices and their training providers to gather feedback on how the adjustments impacted their overall experience of assessment. You might ask questions like; Did these adjustments help you to demonstrate your abilities better? Or, Were there any challenges with the adjustments that we could address for next time? These can really help in terms of your review process.

**Affirming a feedback loop:** Regularly review adjustments to ensure they continue to meet the needs of neurodivergent apprentices. Just as apprentices' needs may evolve, so should the adjustments to them. Adjustments should evolve based on ongoing dialogue between apprentices, training providers and assessors.

This continuous and evolving approach helps ensure adjustments are regularly refined and tailored to provide the best possible outcome for each individual apprentice.

## 5. Commit to Continuous Reflection: Affirming Growth and Development

The process of inclusion is an ongoing journey. The affirmative model requires that both the system and its participants (apprentices and assessors) commit to continuous growth, learning, and improvement.

## What this might look like in practice:

**Affirmation through reflection:** After each assessment cycle, reflect on the success of the adjustments and explore areas for further improvement. This can include formal debriefs with assessors and informal conversations with apprentices and training providers.

**Affirming a culture of improvement:** Encourage a culture where feedback is welcomed and valued, this increases the chance of both apprentices and assessors feeling heard and supported in their efforts to improve inclusion. Perhaps most significantly, this reflection should focus not only on specific adjustments but also on the broader organisational commitment to neurodiversity and inclusion.

## A final word...

Embedding an Affirmation Model into End Point Assessment reasonable adjustments enables organisations to shift the focus from merely accommodating challenges to affirming the strengths and potential of neurodivergent apprentices. This approach is not just about removing barriers but creating an environment where apprentices can thrive. By adopting a strength-based approach, organisations ensure End Point Assessments reflect each apprentice's capabilities, and neurodiversity is celebrated, not just accommodated.