Australian Government
Department of Finance

Inclusive design considerations – Guidance

In consultation with

autism queensland

Lighting, noise and office navigation were the three most common features of the physical environment that create barriers for neurodivergent employees identified in the sample of tenancies across the APS in February 2025.

Some everyday sensory inputs and experiences can become property barriers that cause significant discomfort, stress, or distraction to neurodivergent staff. To learn more about neurodivergence and experiences in the workplace, see *Understanding Neurodivergence*[1].

Below are key inclusive design considerations for lighting, noise and office navigation. These design considerations are intended as a starting point for creating more inclusive workplaces. While not exhaustive, these considerations reflect best practice in inclusive design. The Property Accessibility Assessment Tool (PAAT)[2] references these foundational design elements, adding space-specific considerations where relevant. These considerations focus on the experiences of neurodivergent staff and visitors, while taking an inclusive design approach to ensure positive outcomes for everyone.

Lighting

Lighting plays a significant role in creating a safe, comfortable, productive and welcoming workplace.

> "Good lighting is crucial in allowing people with sensory/neurological processing differences to use buildings conveniently and safely. Lighting can improve visibility in a space and highlight obstacles to prevent trips and falls. It can also create calm, therapeutic or stimulating environments and affect the quality of sleep. […] People who experience sensory overload often have significantly heightened sensitivity to light (photophobia). They can be adversely affected by the lighting flicker, illumination, level, colour and positioning and number of light sources, all of which can impact on comfort levels and glare" (PAS6463:2022, p.58)

[1] Understanding Neurodivergence
[2] Property Accessibility Assessment Tool

Inclusive lighting

Consider the following foundational design elements for inclusive lighting throughout the premises:

- ensure illumination of approximately **2,700-4,000 Kelvins** (lower range for any quieter, rest or retreat spaces)
- ensure there is **no flicker or buzzing** emitted from light sources
- use of **warm to natural colour** temperature
- **avoid fluorescent** lights
- use of recessed or otherwise balanced light sources to **reduce glare and shadows**
- consider **zoned lighting** to accommodate different tasks and preferences
- incorporate individual **adjustable lighting** where possible
- incorporate **natural daylight** throughout premises with flexibility to control brightness and **minimise glare** (consider blinds, curtains, frosting)
- ensure any sensor or automatic lighting **gradually increases** illumination
- **transitional lighting** provided between any spaces where there are significant variations in illumination levels.

Noise and acoustics

Noise can create significant barriers in the workplace for many people, including neurodivergent employees, impacting wellbeing and productivity.

> "The types of noise people are sensitive to are different for different people. It might be a continuous noise, intermittent noise, unexpected noise, high volume noise, or specific frequencies of noise. Although high noise levels often prove challenging for many people, sound does not have to be loud to have an impact." (PAS6463:2022, p.51)

Inclusive acoustics

Key foundational considerations for inclusive acoustics:

- use of **acoustic zoning** throughout premises for different spaces and activities and to allow for gradual transitions between spaces
- **minimise internal background noise** (consider low noise fans or acoustically insulated ductwork in air-conditioning systems)
- consider and **minimise external background noise**, such as traffic or nearby construction, that impacts on the internal environment
- use of acoustic treatments throughout premises to absorb sound and **minimise echo and reverberation**
- incorporation of soft furnishings and furniture for additional **sound absorption**
- **access to quieter spaces** available throughout the premises (note: quiet spaces should have less than 30 A-weighted decibels (dBA) unoccupied sound level).

Navigating the office

Navigating the office (wayfinding) refers to how people orientate themselves to a space or place and how they navigate throughout that space. Effective wayfinding systems reduce stress and cognitive load, improve visitor experiences, and contribute to efficient navigation and safe use. Wayfinding is supported by infrastructure and physical design, landscaping, graphic design, maps, and signage.

Signage

Effective signage supports people in navigation, identifying key facilities, and understanding use, safety considerations and expectations. Signage may include text, symbols, pictures, Braille, and/or audio descriptions and typically falls into 4 categories:

1. Identification
2. Information
3. Directional
4. Safety/Advisory

> "Signs form part of an integrated communication scheme that gives clear directions, information, and instructions for the use of a building, supporting a wayfinding strategy that takes into account a wide variety of user needs, and the complexity of the building layout." (PAS6463:2022, p. 29)

Inclusive signage

Key considerations for implementing clear, concise, easy to understand signage:

- use of a **Sans serif fonts** such as Calibri or Aptos (typefaces without serifs). Serifs are the addition of decorative strokes or lines at the end of letters, such as Times New Roman
- use of **Title Case** (combination of uppercase and lowercase) to support interpretation and understanding
- install signs at a **consistent height** between 1,200 and 1,600mm
- ensure **placement of signs** away from other notices or pictures
- use of **international symbols** to support interpretation and understanding
- consider the hierarchy of signage (directional, confirmatory, identification) and ensure **consistency throughout the premises** to assist with wayfinding to key spaces and facilities throughout the premises
- inclusion of Braille and **tactile** markings
- ensure **positioning** of signs for good sightlines from all entrances, corridors, key spaces, and accessways
- use of a **consistent colour scheme** for different types/categories of signs throughout the premises
- use of **consistent symbols, colours and shapes** on signage
- ensure adequate lighting and **luminance contrast** for all signs

- ensure **minimum contrast between the font colour and the background colour of the sign between sign itself and the background environment** (refer to Australian Standards AS 1428.1 and AS 1319 for further details on minimum compliance requirements)
- ensure signage is **not affected by glare** or reduce glare wherever possible.