

Neurodiversity

A Guide and Resource
Directory for University
Careers Advisers



Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe



LIVERPOOL
JOHN MOORES
UNIVERSITY

Contents

Preface	3
About the editors	4
Acknowledgment	4
1. Introduction	5
1.1. What is neurodiversity?	7
1.2. How is neurodiversity relevant to careers service professionals?	14
2. Career aspirations and counselling	20
2.1. Get to know your students	26
2.2. Develop an individual profile highlighting the student's strengths and weaknesses	26
2.3. Use of clear and open communication	27
2.4. Have at least some goals that are tangible	28
2.5. Work on the basis of their strengths	30
2.6. Deal with the real	31
2.7. Use social stories	33
2.8. Don't avoid the difficult topics	34
3. Employability skills and CVs	36
4. Application forms and tests	43
5. Preparing for interviews	46
6. Persisting despite failure	50
7. Work experience and internships	51
8. Disclosure and workplace adjustments	52
9. Making neurodiversity part of your reflective practice	61
Resource directory	62
Sources and further reading	64
Employability skills questionnaire	65
Workplace challenges questionnaire	68
Biographies of famous people who identify as neurodivergent	69
Glossary	72



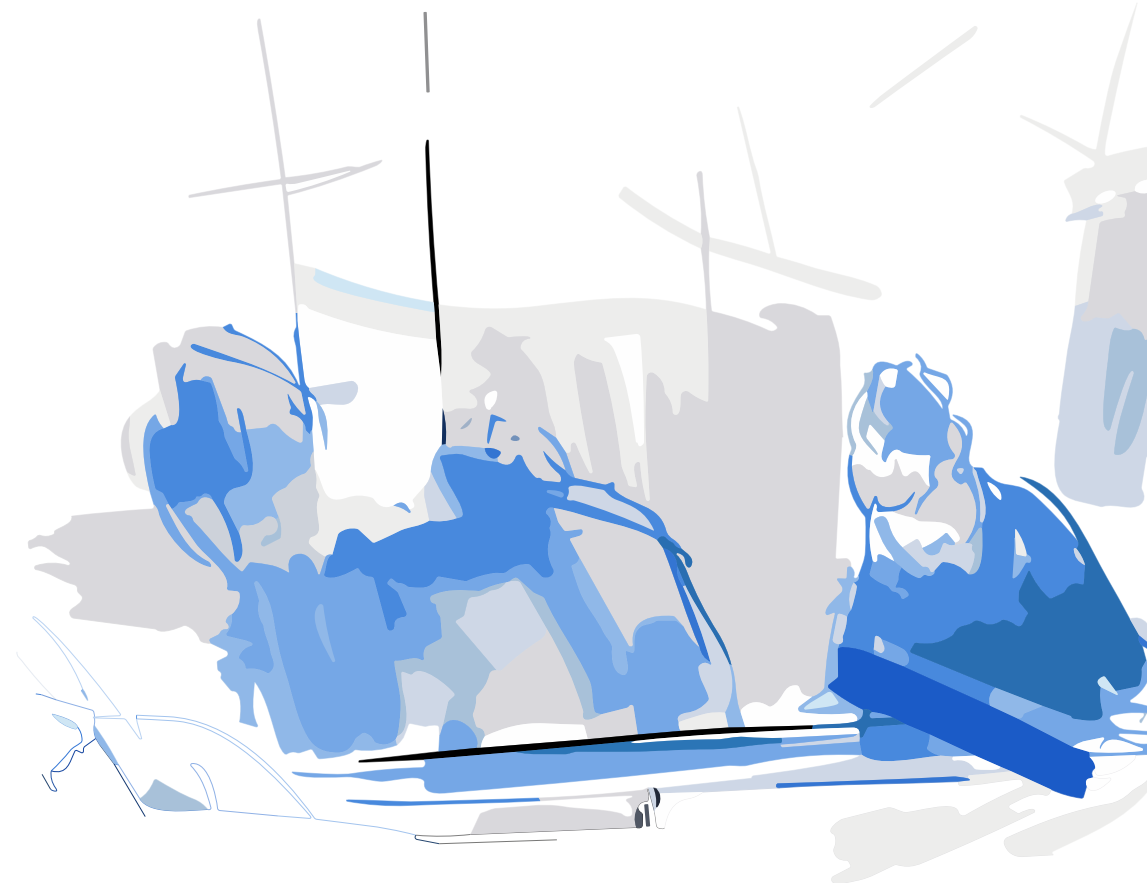
Preface

This guide is intended primarily for members of university staff, particularly careers advisers but also academics who serve as personal tutors, to help them to support neurodivergent students as they develop and pursue their career aspirations while they are at university.

In keeping with the philosophy popularised by autism advocacy groups that there should be “nothing about us without us”, neurodivergent university students and neurodiversity professionals have been actively involved throughout the development of this guide. This has involved not just consultation but research co-production at a number of levels, including focus groups and interviews with neurodivergent university students, interviews with careers advisers and student support team members, and feedback on earlier drafts from individuals representing a variety of stakeholder groups.

The project also had a steering committee to guide and advise on the project, which consisted of individuals from university-based disability services and careers teams. Primary research undertaken to help develop this guide included focus group interviews with neurodivergent university students. In total, 23 neurodivergent university students participated in five different focus groups. Some were also interviewed individually afterwards. Throughout this guide, readers will come across boxes containing quotes from these focus groups and interviews that showcase the real-life experiences of neurodivergent university students as they transition through life at university and attempt to find their place in the world of work. Some students are typical university students (18-21 years-old); others are mature students, one of whom had returned to university to train for his third career. As such, the focus groups and interviews included participants with wide and varied experiences.

Importantly, this guide is not intended to address all of the concerns and challenges of neurodivergent individuals. Every neurodivergent individual is different – no two are the same – though most will share certain similar traits with others. The purpose of this this guide is, therefore, to provide a broad overview for university staff members about the challenges neurodivergent students face when it comes to thinking about and acting upon their career aspiration. A resource directory is also provided to point readers towards further information, guidance, and training materials. This, we believe, will help careers professionals to support neurodivergent students as they prepare life beyond university.



About the editors

Prof. Brian Garrod (Swansea University):

Prof. Garrod is Professor of Marketing in the School of Management at Swansea University. He has written eight textbooks and more than 50 journal articles. He has worked with organisations such as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). His academic interests include tourism sustainability, which led him to become interested in inclusivity and accessibility. He believes that there can be no sustainability without inclusivity, and no inclusivity without accessibility. Prof. Garrod has a particular interest in neurodiversity because his grown-up son, now in his 20s and studying at university, is autistic.

Dr. Marcus Hansen (Liverpool John Moores University):

Dr. Hansen is a Senior Lecturer in Tourism and Events at Liverpool John Moores University. His research revolves around travelling with a disability. His current research interests are specifically around making destinations and communities accessible to people with disabilities. In the past, he has worked with organisations such as Guide Dogs. Dr. Hansen's stepson has autism, which influenced his decision to stray outside of tourism studies and focus more broadly on barriers to employment for neurodivergent individuals.

Acknowledgment

The editors would like to acknowledge the financial assistance of Swansea University's Swansea Employability Academy and Greatest Needs Fund in supporting this project.



1. Introduction

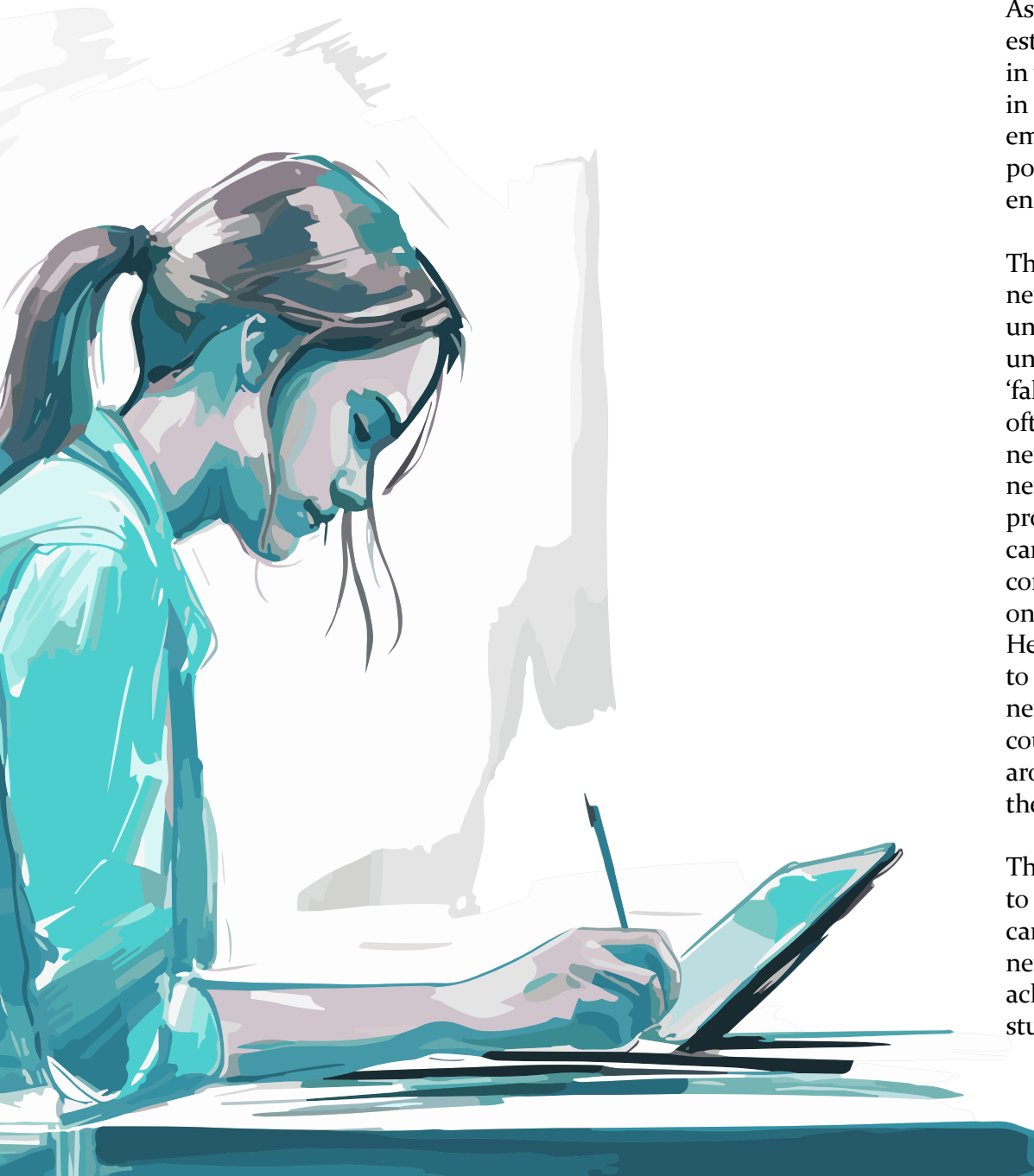
Around 15% of people living in the UK are neurodivergent, meaning they have been diagnosed with one or more the conditions currently recognised as such, which include autism, attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, and Tourette's syndrome. It is likely that the true number of people who have a neurodivergent condition is likely to be much higher in reality, as there are believed to be many people who currently remain undiagnosed. Indeed, while it was once the case that people with a neurodivergent condition tended to be diagnosed in their childhood years, many are now being diagnosed later in life.

Neurodiversity is seen as a social justice and civil rights issue because neurodivergent people are frequently marginalised by society. Those who are part of the movement point out that the world tends to have been designed by neurotypical people, for neurotypical people. This is especially true in the educational system and the world of work, where neurodivergent individuals routinely face significant barriers to them fulfilling their personal potential and playing a full role in society. Most neurodivergent people encounter such barriers in their daily lives and must endeavour to overcome them. This can have serious negative impacts on their wellbeing and quality of life.

The social barriers faced by neurodivergent people are particularly severe when it comes to finding and staying in paid employment. Figures from the Office of National Statistics indicate that neurodivergent people are the least likely group in the UK to be in employment, with only 2 out of 10 in any kind of paid employment. This compares to 5 out of 10 people with disabilities being in paid employment, and 8 out of 10 non-disabled people. What is more, the number of neurodivergent people in work includes many who are in part-time work but would prefer to work full time. Others are underemployed in that they are working in positions for which they are over-qualified. There is, therefore, a significant 'neurodiversity employment gap' in the UK. What is more, a similar gap exists in many other countries.

This gap matters because employment is considered to be an essential part of life; a human right, and a key part of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. A person's job makes a critical contribution to their overall wellbeing and quality of life. Losing a job and undertaking job search can be a source of great stress and anxiety, particularly when the individual finds acquiring a new job difficult. Being unemployed, meanwhile, is known to be strongly associated with mental health conditions, such as depression, which will also result in a lower overall quality of life for those affected. These impacts are as true of neurodivergent people as they are of neurotypicals, but as the figure above suggest, neurodivergent people are much more likely to be unemployed at any given point in their lives. The neurodiversity employment gap is both substantial and persistent, suggesting that there is a systematic bias against neurodivergent people in the world of work that has not yet been addressed.

It might be thought that neurodivergent people are often well positioned in the job market because so many of them go to university. Indeed. Obtaining a degree doesn't, however, seem to lessen the barriers to employment neurodivergent people face. If anything, it seems only to escalate and complicate them. Neurodivergent graduates must compete in the job market alongside an ever-widening pool of neurotypical graduates who are equally well-qualified for the jobs for which they are competing but seem to be better able to represent themselves at interview and are preferred by employers when it comes to making job offers. Many neurodivergent students indeed feel ill-prepared to enter the job market after graduation. This may be because they have not fully engaged with developing their employability skills while they have been at university or because they are less confident in putting them across to potential employers. At the same time, neurodivergent people seem also to be faced with a job market that discriminates against them at almost every stage, from job-seeking to landing a job, from settling in to completing their probation, and from earning bonuses to being promoted.



As a result of this, many neurodivergent students encounter trouble establishing their career after graduation. Faced with a job market in which they struggle to find success, some will choose to remain in academia and pursue higher degrees. Others will end up in employment that does not match with their career aspirations, often in positions for which they are over-qualified. Many will, unfortunately, end up being unemployed.

This situation can and must change. While there's much that neurodivergent students can do to help themselves, they will undoubtedly benefit from the support of those who work in the universities at which they study. Presently, however, they tend to 'fall down the cracks' in the system. University careers services often lack the resources and specialist expertise needed to support neurodivergent students in finding employment. In any case, neurodivergent students often do not feel well-served by their programmes and initiatives, so they do not make full use of the careers service at their university. University wellbeing services, also confronted with tight resource constraints, tend to focus their efforts on supporting neurodivergent students to succeed in their studies. Helping such students to develop their careers is not considered to be their most pressing concern. This is understandable when neurodivergent students are so much more likely to drop out of their courses than their neurotypical peers. Indeed, the figures suggests that around 60% of autistic university students in the UK drop out before they graduate.

This guide has been put together with the intention of helping to bridge this gap. It is intended to be useful both for university careers advisers and university wellbeing staff as they work with neurodivergent students to help them identify, shape, and ultimately achieve their career aspirations. Academics who have neurodivergent students as their personal tutees are also likely to find this guide useful.

1.1. What is neurodiversity?

The term ‘Neurodiversity’ was coined in the 1990s to refer to the natural variations found in a human population in terms of people’s brain functioning and cognition, such as those associated with attention, learning, sociability, and mood. Given that each brain consists of 100 billion cells, it’s hardly surprising that we are all neurologically different. Any random population of human beings will therefore be naturally neurodiverse. It will contain people who are ‘neurodivergent’ – meaning that they have neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism (which includes Asperger’s), attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder (ADHD), Tourette’s syndrome, dyspraxia, dyslexia, and dyscalculia – as well as people who are ‘neurotypical’, who don’t.

Neurodivergent conditions were previously known as neurodevelopmental disorders or syndromes. These terms are not popular among neurodivergent people because they suggest there’s something inherently wrong with the individual, often causing them to be stereotyped and stigmatised. Using the terms ‘neurodiversity’, ‘neurodivergent’, and ‘neurotypical’ can help combat the discrimination that people who have neurodivergent conditions face on a daily basis. In short, the concept of neurodiversity tries to convey the idea there is no right or wrong way of being human. We all think differently and do things differently. There is no good or bad, better, or worse, normal or abnormal – just different.

As one student said: *“I mean I describe it as kind of a wrong planet syndrome [...] In a sense that, you know, I’m the alien species. I’ve crashed landed here and I just don’t function the same way other people do.”*

The problem is that neurotypical people tend to assume that everyone else in the world is like them and overlook people who are not, because they are neurodivergent. The result is that neurodivergent people become ‘Othered’ – which leads to them experiencing a wide range of inequalities in life. They are discriminated against, and this can limit their chances in their education, their leisure time, their home life, and their working life. Being limited in these ways is bound to impact negatively on their wellbeing and quality of life.

Such discrimination is sometimes deliberate but most of the time it’s not. Sometimes it just because of the way we tend to think (and not to think) as human beings. The use of language is a good example (see Box 1).

The good news, however, is that we can do something about that. The best place to start is by challenging our established ways of thinking.

A person’s job makes a critical contribution to their overall wellbeing and quality of life.

BOX 1

A few words about the language we use

We've tried to be careful about the terms used in this guide. Our choice of terminology is based mainly on the discussions we have had with neurodivergent people and the organisations that represent their interests. We've tried to be consistent. In doing so, we recognise that some neurodivergent people prefer different terms to describe themselves. We accept that and ask for their tolerance. It's simply not possible to please everybody.

Another important point to recognise is that we fully expect the language used in this guidebook to become dated over time. This is because language is one of the major battlefronts in the ongoing fight to change the way that neurodivergent people are perceived and treated in society. Language is the vehicle for the many micro-aggressions neurodivergent people experience on a daily basis. If we use the wrong language, it can offend or upset people. It can make them feel discriminated against, stigmatised, and misunderstood. If we use the right language, they will feel accepted, supported, and understood. The organisations that promote neurodiversity and support neurodivergent groups spend a great deal of time trying to get everyone to adopt appropriate language. This can, in itself, raise awareness about neurodiversity and help educate people about it.

Our advice for you, as university service professionals and academics, is to use the terminology we've adopted in this guidebook unless or until the neurodivergent person you are speaking to uses different terms to describe themselves and others like them. If they use different terms, the best thing to do is to note the language they are using and to mirror it.

What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a term used to refer to the natural variations that exist in brain functioning and cognition across every human population. It is a portmanteau word formed from 'neurological' and 'diversity'. The term is intended to mirror the concept of biodiversity, which describes differences in the biological characteristics of species without placing a judgment upon which ones are 'better' and which are 'worse': they are all important for the integrity of the ecological system in which they live. Neurodiversity simply recognises that there are some people whose brains are 'wired-up differently'. This means that they experience the world in a different way to others – they have a 'different way of being'. They are different but no less whole, no less a full member of society, and to be no less valued as a person.



Some people like to think of being neurodivergent as like being on a spectrum, with the neurodivergent person at one and at the neurotypical person at the other. Other people prefer to think of it as being like the set of sliders on a sound mixing board: there are a number of neurological characteristics that for any individual will be set to high, low, or somewhere in between. Neurodivergent people are said to have 'spiky' profiles, meaning that they tend to have many of the sliders set at either very high or very low levels, with few in the middle range. Neurotypical people, in contrast, tend to have flatter profiles, with most of the sliders set nearer to the centre.

While it is very difficult to generalise, neurodivergent people tend to report being relatively good or relatively bad at things like attention to detail, keeping focused, using their working memory, thinking in innovative ways, empathising with others, and reading body language or tone of voice. Few neurodivergent people would be considered to be 'savants', in the sense that they have what might be considered 'superhuman powers', but most will be markedly above average in at least some personal abilities and markedly below average in others.

Neurodivergent people thus have strengths and weaknesses just like anyone else: they simply experience them over greater magnitudes. Figure 1 attempts to summarise the areas in which people with different neurodivergent conditions typically report having the greatest highs and lows. While this approach is useful in understanding the wide range of neurological differences a neurodivergent person might have, it must be borne in mind that there are no hard-and-fast rules. For example, while a lot of neurodivergent people have very good memories, many do not. In a similar way, someone who identifies as autistic may not display all of the strengths or areas of challenge that are often associated with autistic people in general. They may even have more in common with, say, people who have ADHD.

...they experience the world in a different way to others – they have a 'different way of being'. They are different but no less whole, no less a full member of society, and to be no less valued as a person.

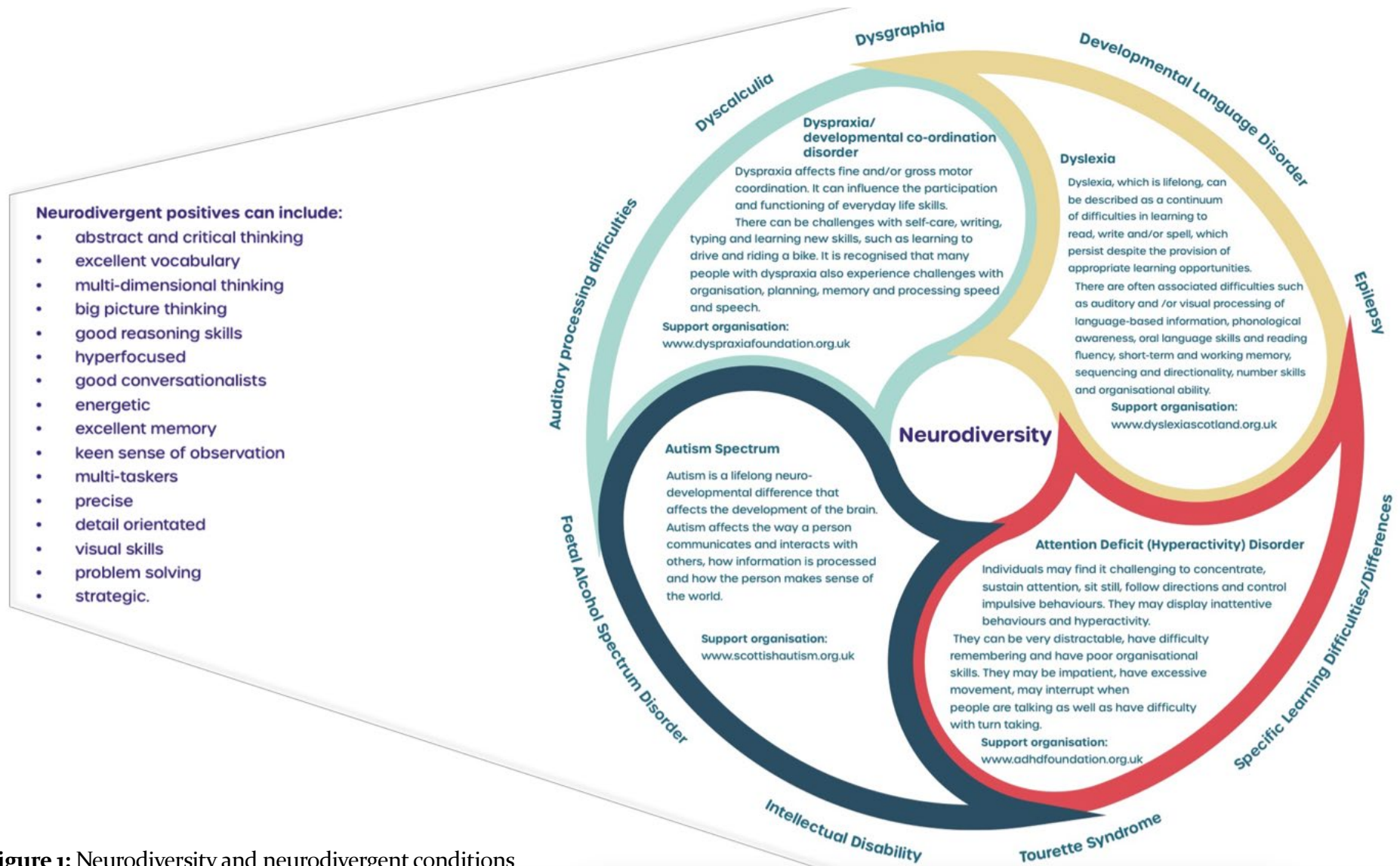


Figure 1: Neurodiversity and neurodivergent conditions
Source: Dyslexia Scotland (2022)

It is important to remember that neurodivergence is expressed in people in a wide diversity of ways, almost to the extent that each person experiences it in a unique way. A humorous saying that is often used to explain the differences among autistic people is that “when you’ve met one autistic person, you’ve met ... one autistic person”. Anyone who knows a neurodivergent person will feel that the pattern of personal characteristics shown the diagram describes them perfectly – yet at the same time, not really very well at all.

A further complication is that it’s quite possible for someone to have more than one neurodivergent condition at the same time, with research indicating the presence of multiple neurodivergent conditions ranging from 55 to 85%. One study has found, for example, that 50 to 70% of autistic people also have ADHD. As with all statistics about neurodiversity, there’s a substantial margin of error built into this figure.

Many neurodivergent people don’t have a formal diagnosis, often due to very long waiting lists, and this complicates the task of creating meaningful statistics. Some people have to for wait years for a diagnosis, while others don’t want a formal diagnosis because they don’t want to be labelled. Others again don’t recognise they have a neurodivergent condition. It’s usually best, therefore, to proceed on the basis that anyone who identifies as having a neurodivergent condition is neurodivergent, regardless of whether they have a diagnosis and can put a particular name to it.

Those statistics we do have suggest that neurodivergent people have a greater tendency than neurotypicals to report mental-health conditions such as anxiety or depression. These are known technically as ‘co-morbidities’. This is hardly surprising, given that neurodivergent people must live in a world that is designed by neurotypicals: a world that often does not acknowledge their existence, let alone recognise and meet their needs. In an attempt to combat this, neurodivergent people will often resort to what is referred to as ‘masking’ or ‘camouflaging’, in which they effectively hide who they really are in an effort to fit in. In other words, neurodivergent people will adopt the behaviour of those around them, in order to be more like them. This is referred to as “masking” and will often take place in public settings, such as school or the workplace. Though the neurodivergent person might appear to be OK or even excelling in the moment, masking can be particularly exhausting. The impact of masking usually comes to light once the neurodivergent person is back in a comfortable environment, usually at home, at which point the ‘mask’ comes off and may therefore impact their home-life as a result, whilst it can also have detrimental impacts on their mental health and wellbeing.

As a careers professional, you can encourage the neurodivergent student to be themselves as much as is comfortable and create a welcoming and accepting environment, in which behaviour such as ‘stimming’ and so on are accepted. It’s hoped that such an environment will encourage the student not to mask, or at least to have to do so to a lesser extent. Box 2 includes some quotes from students about masking.

Box 2

Masking and its consequences

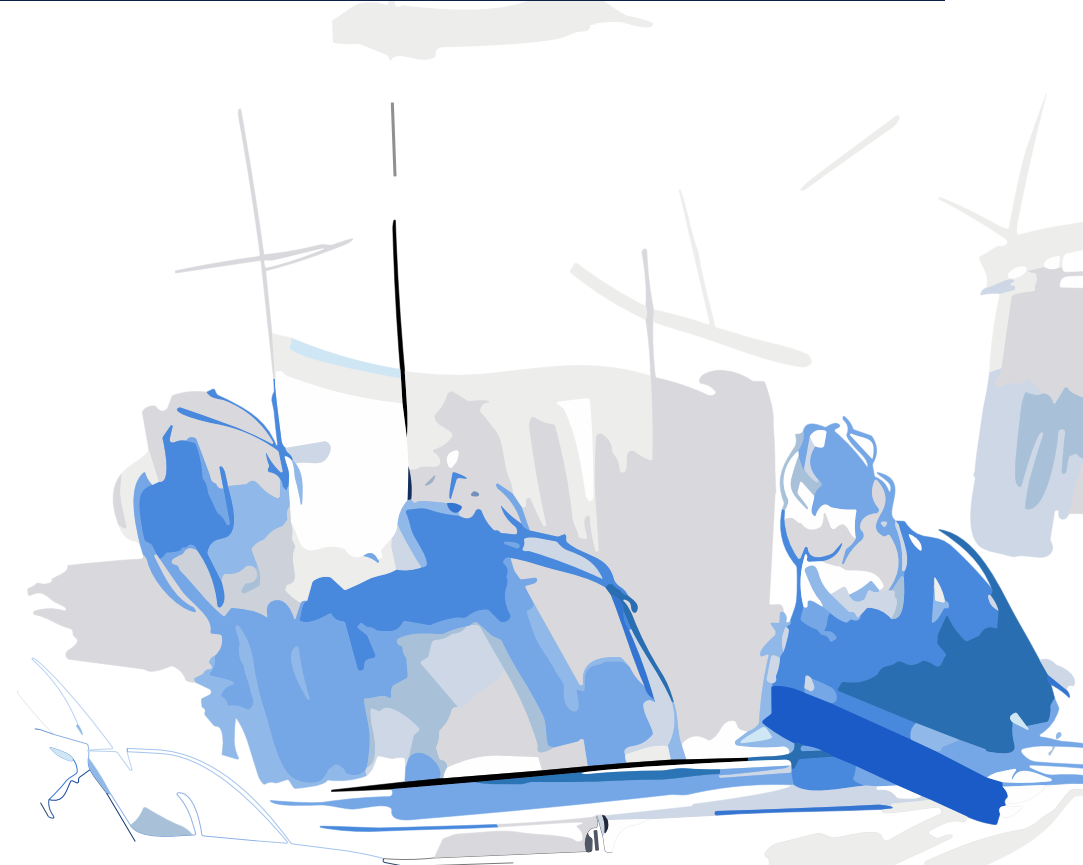
Masking and its impact on people's lives was a recurring theme during conversations with the neurodivergent students in the focus groups and interviews. Masking effectively involves neurodivergent people trying to blend in socially in a neurotypical world. This could involve forcing themselves to maintain eye-contact, despite it being unnatural and uncomfortable to them. It could also involve forcing smiles and other facial expressions, or suppressing certain behaviours frowned upon by society, such as stimming (e.g., jiggling their feet). It may even involve them putting themselves through situations that will make them unwell, such as attending busy events despite the crowding and loud noises. Research indicates that masking has a negative impact on neurodivergent individuals' health and wellbeing and is therefore unsustainable, often leading to illness, burnout, and job loss.

"It's really difficult because I have to play the imposter as well. There's the real me, which I try to keep away from work and there's the student/professional that kind of acts in a totally different way. Trying to play the balance and keep the balance is more exhausting than anything. That's what I find really difficult [...] Most days I'll go home, break down in tears, and sleep, and then get back up again and start again".

"Most of my masking and energy goes into my professional appearance. So, my home life is where I have no energy and nothing much get, you know, it's just completely different".

"When I'm nervous about a situation that's when a mask loads. So not with customers because it's just like pretty standard. I wouldn't class as masking it's just you know behaving more friendly. But in an interview or in like a new social setting or something".

"I feel like in an interview for a job, I would mask heavily. And I find that a lot of people can subconsciously pick up on that as like, almost being like, ungenune or [...] untrustworthy".

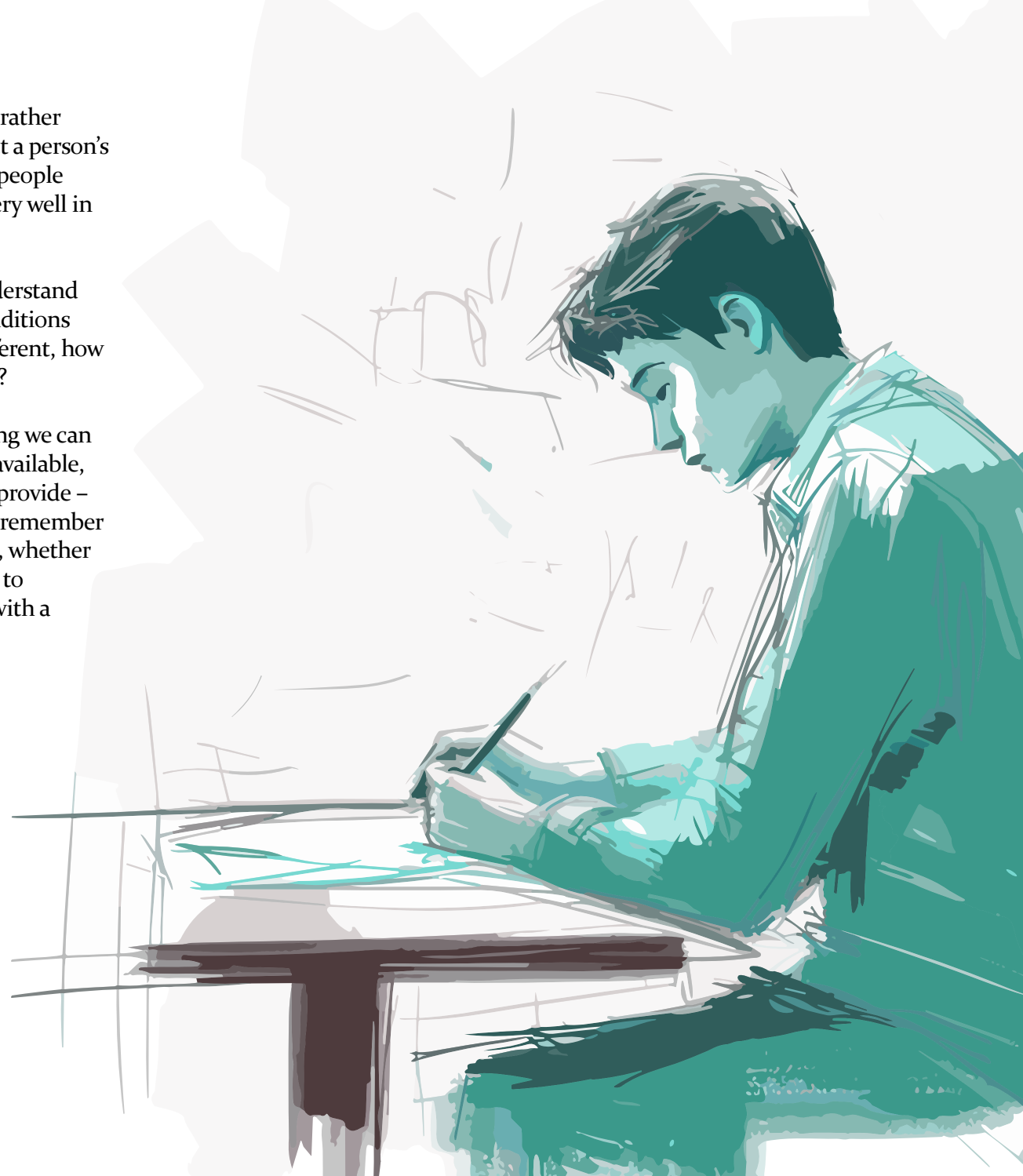


Neurodivergent conditions are classed as learning difficulties, rather than learning disabilities, because they do not negatively affect a person's intellect. It's important to be aware that most neurodivergent people who come to university are highly intelligent and have done very well in their education to date.

This may all sound very complicated. How is it possible to understand the needs and wants of a neurodivergent person when the conditions they have vary so much? If every neurodivergent person is different, how can we apply what we've learned about one person to the next?

The good news is that it's not so complicated that the only thing we can do is give up! There are some handy hints, tips, and guidance available, and this is what this guide and resource directory attempts to provide – at least enough to get you going. The most important thing to remember is that each person is an individual and that's true of everyone, whether they are neurodivergent or neurotypical. There's no substitute to getting to know your client. It may take more time and effort with a neurodivergent person, but it's certainly worth it.

As a careers professional, you can encourage the neurodivergent student to be themselves as much as is comfortable and create a welcoming and accepting environment, in which behaviour such as 'stimming' and so on are accepted.

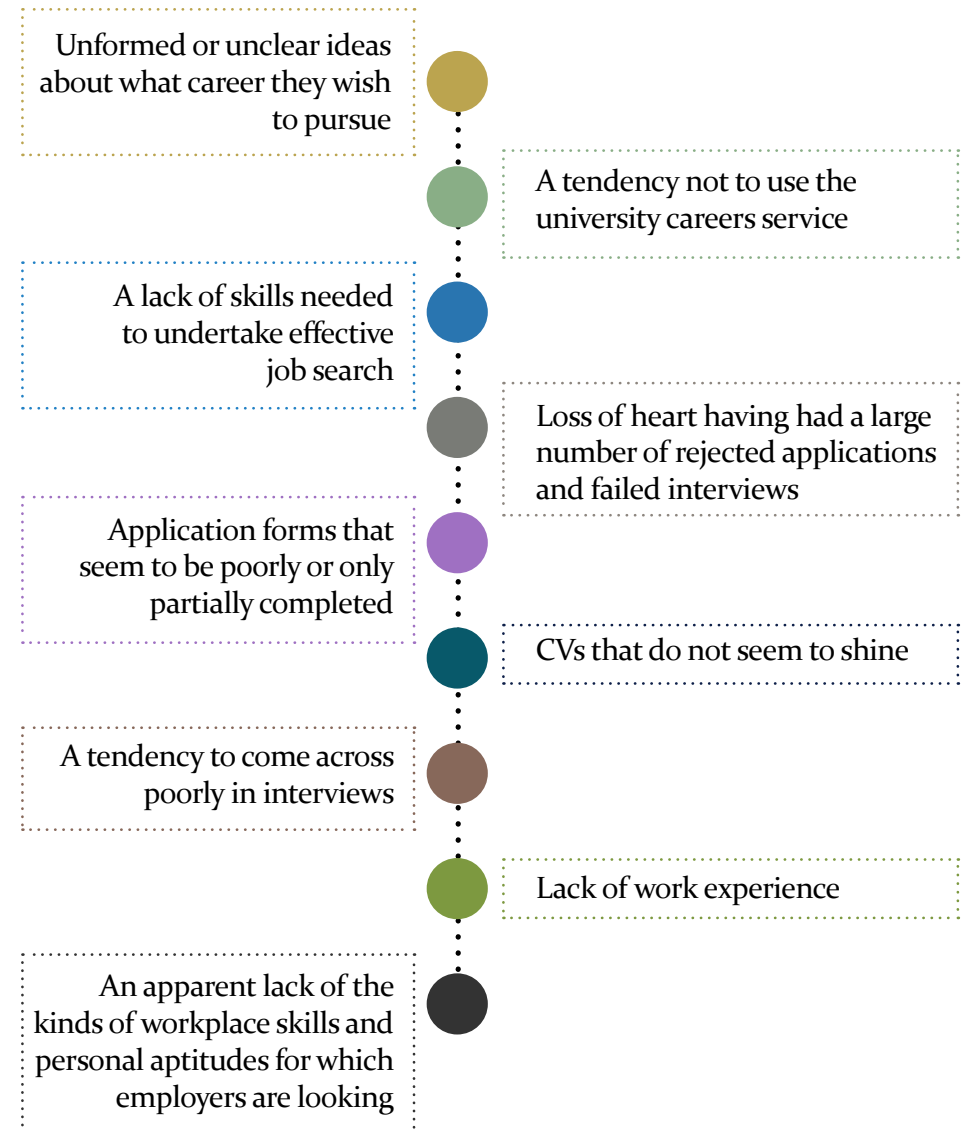


1.2. How is neurodiversity relevant to careers service professionals?

The simple answer is that neurodivergent people often have difficulty finding and holding down meaningful employment. As noted above, an estimated 15% of the UK population is neurodivergent, yet neurodivergent people are greatly under-represented in the workforce. In a recent survey, only a quarter of young autistic people felt they had proper access to work experience and only 19% felt they had been given good careers advice. The upshot is that the talents and enthusiasm of neurodivergent people are effectively being wasted. It also means that many neurodivergent people, who cannot find meaningful paid work, can't make the contribution to society they wish for, and have unfulfilled life ambitions. They have a lower standard of living because they do not earn a full-time wage and may have a lower quality of life because they are unable to find fulfilling work. They may also experience greater mental-health problems because they fail to find suitable work and remain unemployed. This is something that shouldn't be the case – but it is something we can act upon. The problem is not completely intractable.

The first step we can take is to try to understand why neurodivergent people tend to struggle in the jobs market. A wide range of possible explanations have been offered. With regard to finding a job, the reasons might seem to be related to the potential employee. The infographic opposite outlines some of the challenges to employment experienced by neurodivergent students:

Employment challenges



It's quite possible, of course, that the explanation may fall much more at the feet of employers, particularly in terms of what they're looking for in their employees, and the approaches they use to select them. These could relate to:

- The tendency for employers to be looking for people who will 'fit in' to the workplace culture.
- Emphasis on 'soft skills', even when these are not really needed to do the job effectively.
- A tendency for interviewers to choose people who they instantly warm to.
- A failure to appreciate the types of skills and aptitudes in which neurodivergent people tend to excel.
- The increasing use of psychometric testing and artificial intelligence systems to shortlist for jobs.
- Undue focus on the formal interview as a means of employee selection.

With regard to keeping a job, the reasons might again seem to be related to the neurodivergent employee:

- They find the transition from studying to the world of work too difficult.
- Their condition has an adverse impact on their performance, e.g., an autistic person who has difficulty with their sleep patterns may be dismissed due to poor timekeeping.
- They tend to have a higher incidence of mental health conditions, which may cause them to take a lot of sick leave.
- If their neurodivergent conditions worsen over time, they may be forced to quit their job because they are no longer up to doing it.

Then again, the employer also has a role to play in supporting its employees. Reasons for neurodivergent individuals leaving employment may be as a result of:

- The employer has failed to offer effective reasonable adjustments to the neurodivergent employee.
- This lack of support may result in increased masking by the neurodivergent employee, who in-turn run the risk of burnout, ill health and eventually job loss.
- Managers failing to fully understand or appreciate neurodivergent people's workplace needs or what they have to offer.
- The tendency to think of disability in terms of people with mobility (and perhaps sensory) conditions, failing to recognise neurodiversity as a workplace issue.

The result is that not only are neurodivergent students missing out on being in employment that fulfils them, makes use of their personal abilities and skills, and pays them a proper salary, but employers are also missing out on having a neurodiverse workforce.

Having a neurodiverse workforce can have a number of advantages: not least the ability to harness the strengths of their neurodivergent employees for the benefit of the organisation. It can also help the organisation to be more robust in the face of change: just like a biodiverse ecological system, a neurodiverse organisational system is likely to be more capable of weathering the storms that will inevitably come along. Box 3 summarises these.

Box 3

Potential benefits to companies of employing neurodivergent people

Neurodivergent employees can potentially bring the following:

- Cooperative and willing to please managers, co-workers, and customers.
- Loyalty to the organisation.
- Greater productivity and faster task completion.
- Determination and tenacity.
- Strong technical skills.
- Reliability and punctuality.
- Innovative/out-of-the-box thinking.
- Problem-solving abilities.
- Honesty.
- Attention to detail.

The results potentially being:

- Increased workplace productivity.
- Access to a wider talent pool.
- Reduced staff turnover.
- Improved return on investment in training.
- Decreased absenteeism.
- Strengthened value drivers such as reputation with key stakeholders.
- Access to an informal source of advice that may help the organisation to better serve its neurodivergent customers.

As well as helping to ensure that the organisation is:

- Meeting legal requirements.
- Meeting ethical responsibilities.
- Not missing out on the potential benefits of neurodiversity in the workplace.

The biggest challenge for neurodivergent students seems to be at the point of transition from study to work. This includes deciding what career to pursue; searching for jobs vacancies; selecting and applying for jobs; preparing for and doing interviews; starting employment; and settling into the workplace and work pattern. Yet many neurodivergent students feel that they are not fully supported in this (see Box 4).

Box 4

Support for neurodivergent students to plan beyond university

Many neurodivergent university students feel that the support they receive is aimed mainly at helping them complete their studies at university. This is not surprising, given how many autistic university students in the UK drop out before they graduate. Universities see helping them to complete their studies as a top priority.

While universities do have careers support services in place, this tends to be mainly geared toward neurotypical students. Supporting neurodivergent students tends to fall between two stools in this respect, being seen to be neither a priority of the disability/welfare support team on the one hand, nor the careers service on the other.

The upshot is that neurodivergent students often feel ill-prepared when it comes to establishing their careers after university.

“Not having that support, as you’re going through your career or life [...] really it just grinds you down by the end. [...] Until something happens whether it’s burnout, whether you get your diagnosis finally”.

“I think the careers services at university are better [than A-levels], but you have to go out of your way to find them. They don’t give it to you”.

“I’ve asked for help with careers, but they haven’t helped me”.

One of the autism support professionals we interviewed, meanwhile, said:

“We teach students a subject and a discipline [...] And then we throw them out into the world of work and we kind of expect them to be proficient in the skills of the, what I would describe as the soft skills, all the things you need to be, you’re assumed to be proficient at, in terms of how to negotiate with people, how to interact with them, how to function in a, a commercial world, that doesn’t really adapt to the needs of [someone who is autistic]”.

These are, of course, the very things that careers professionals are trained to help with. They are therefore in a unique position to assist neurodivergent people to find suitable work.

A good place to start is to consider what hinders careers advisers in supporting neurodivergent students more effectively. There are probably two main answers to this. The first is that career advisers may not know enough about neurodiversity and the career-support needs of neurodivergent people. We hope this guide will serve as a good introduction. There's a resource directory at the end of this guidebook for those who want to know more. The second is that neurodivergent people are often not well connected to the careers service in their university. This may be because:

- Neurodivergent students may feel uncomfortable attending large careers events.
- One-to-one meetings may be difficult for some neurodivergent students.
- Focusing so hard on their studies may mean that they miss out on invitations to careers events or are unaware of what the careers service can do for them.
- A preference to deal with the here and now, or to address one challenge at a time: learning takes precedence over career planning.
- Discouragement from career planning. With the odds stacked against them, is it even worth it?
- Realisation that their specialist interests have changed over time and may do again. Basing their career plans on their current interests may not therefore be a logical strategy.
- Many universities expect students to be self-directed in careers and, while encouraging students to engage in careers planning, do not make it compulsory.

- Neurodivergent students often respond well to the strategy of 'a little and often' but careers advice is often based on the alternative strategy of a few major interventions.
- Many personal tutors are unfamiliar with neurodiversity and do not give them the extra encouragement they need to engage with careers planning.
- Many universities don't have a community of practice in respect of neurodiversity, with each department of service tending to work independently from the others.
- There aren't enough careers resources where neurodivergent students and careers professionals can find advice, inspiration, good practice, case studies, etc.

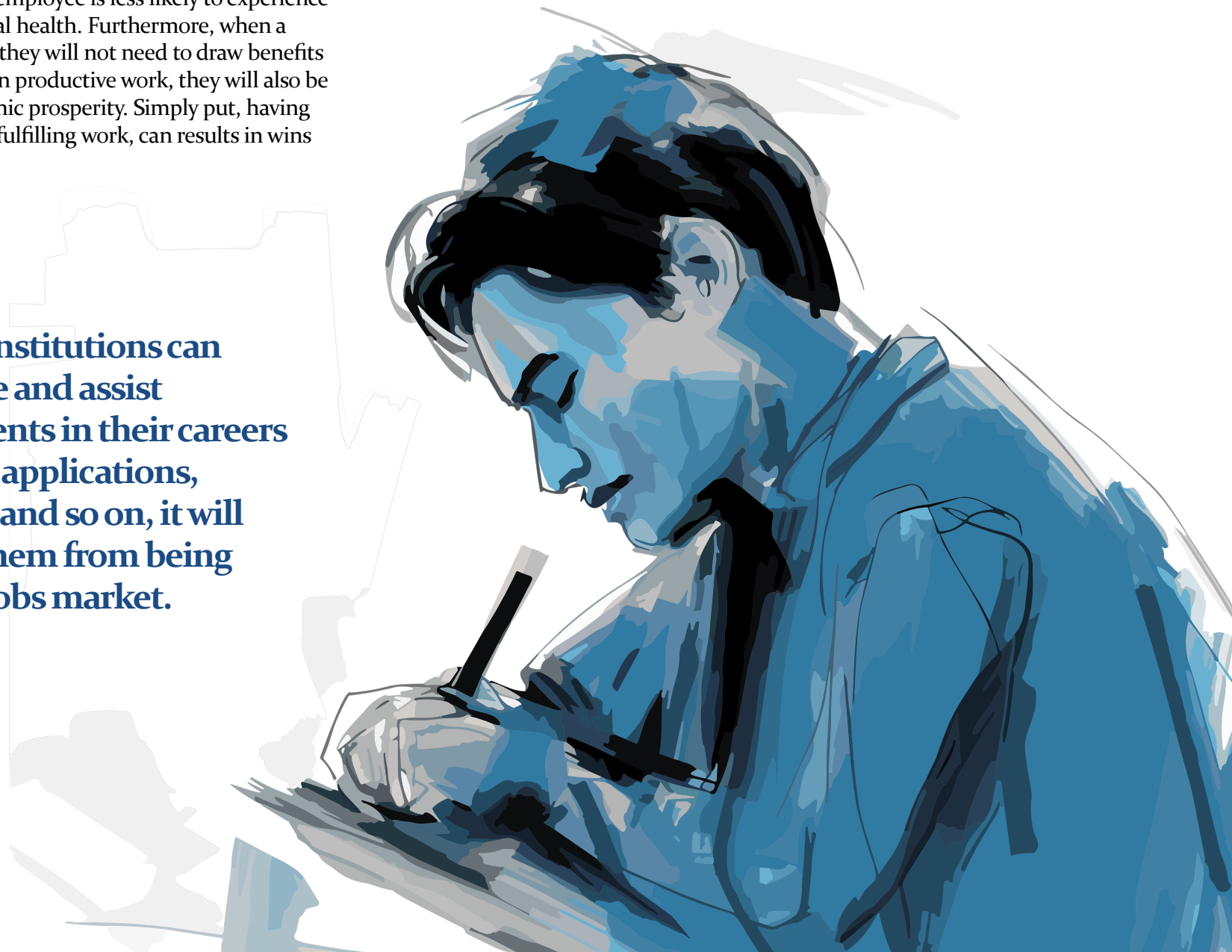
If higher-education institutions can do more to encourage and assist neurodivergent students in their careers planning, job search, applications, interview technique, and so on, it will surely help prevent them from being marginalised in the jobs market. They will be able to compete for jobs more effectively with their neurodivergent peers. It would also help address important employability targets set by universities.

Being in appropriate employment can also be expected to increase the wellbeing of the neurodivergent employee by:

- Providing them with a higher and more secure income.
- Helping them to further improve their knowledge, competencies, and employability skills.
- Allow them to develop life skills such as self-confidence and autonomy.
- Offering them dignity and a respected place in society.

Closing the neurodiversity employment gap will also benefit society as a whole. Employment can bring fulfilment and a sense of well-being, so that the neurodivergent employee is less likely to experience co-morbidities such as poor mental health. Furthermore, when a neurodivergent person is in work, they will not need to draw benefits from the public purse. If they are in productive work, they will also be contributing to our shared economic prosperity. Simply put, having neurodivergent people in gainful, fulfilling work, can result in wins all round.

If higher-education institutions can do more to encourage and assist neurodivergent students in their careers planning, job search, applications, interview technique, and so on, it will surely help prevent them from being marginalised in the jobs market.



2. Career aspirations and counselling

It's often assumed that neurodivergent students will arrive at university with a fairly clear idea of what career they want to enter when they graduate. There's certainly an element of truth in this, but it is by no means the whole truth of the matter. There are some students whose neurodivergent condition expresses itself in them being very strong in a particular academic subject, such as maths, and they will often have chosen their degree subject accordingly. Their intention is sometimes – but not always – to use this strength to get a good degree, which will then help them get a job they will be good at. For example, a student doing maths may have already decided that they want to work in the financial sector. Other students, however, will just want to study a degree subject because they are good at it and find it satisfying.

There's no real basis, however, in the common belief that neurodivergent students will generally be doing STEM subjects at university.

Neurodivergent students tend to be spread quite evenly across the full range of university subjects, including the social sciences, humanities, and arts. Not all neurodivergent students have strengths in particular academic subjects due to the ways their condition is expressed in them.

Other students may have a strong interest in a particular topic area, such as astronomy, a certain period in history, or creative writing. It is common for people with neurodivergent conditions, particularly autism, to be very focused on quite niche special interests, spending a lot of their leisure time reading up on them or undertaking activities associated with them. They often become highly expert in those subjects as a result.

Neurodivergent students with special interests may have chosen their degree subject to enable them to study it further but it's not always the case. Some students evidently prefer to keep a strict separation between their subject in their study time and their special interests in their leisure time. Box 5 presents some quotes from neurodivergent students about their motivations for studying a particular degree course.



Box 5

Motivations behind career choices and aspirations

Neurodivergent students often choose to study the university subjects where they felt they had the greatest strengths and achieved good grades at school. This, in turn, can shape their career aspirations. The opposite can often be true of mature students, who upon returning to university may prefer to study something they enjoy, as opposed to what they feel they are good at.

“I picked what I was good at in the end, I was good at biology. And I was thinking about maybe doing graduate medicine or something [...] Go down that path, whilst figure out.”

“I was like, yeah, I can do maths [...] Something I haven’t got to think about too much. I can just kind of do it”.

“I’ve never had a particular job in mind, I’ve always just done what interests me. I’ve always been interested in nature, the environment, the outdoors. That’s why I did my geography degree and now I’ve specialised a bit more into environmental biology”.

“I’m a bit reverse. I’ve been eighteen years in the NHS, working, I’ve changed career, to start the degree. [...] it was due to how I was supported, how I was treated [...] following my autism diagnosis, that gave me the push to go. I’m going to live my life how I, I’ve always wanted to”.

“I took the decision to undertake what, for me, is a second master’s degree, in this case [...] I worked as a software engineer and I basically [...] realised that it’s entirely to do with being autistic: both of those careers never worked out for me”.

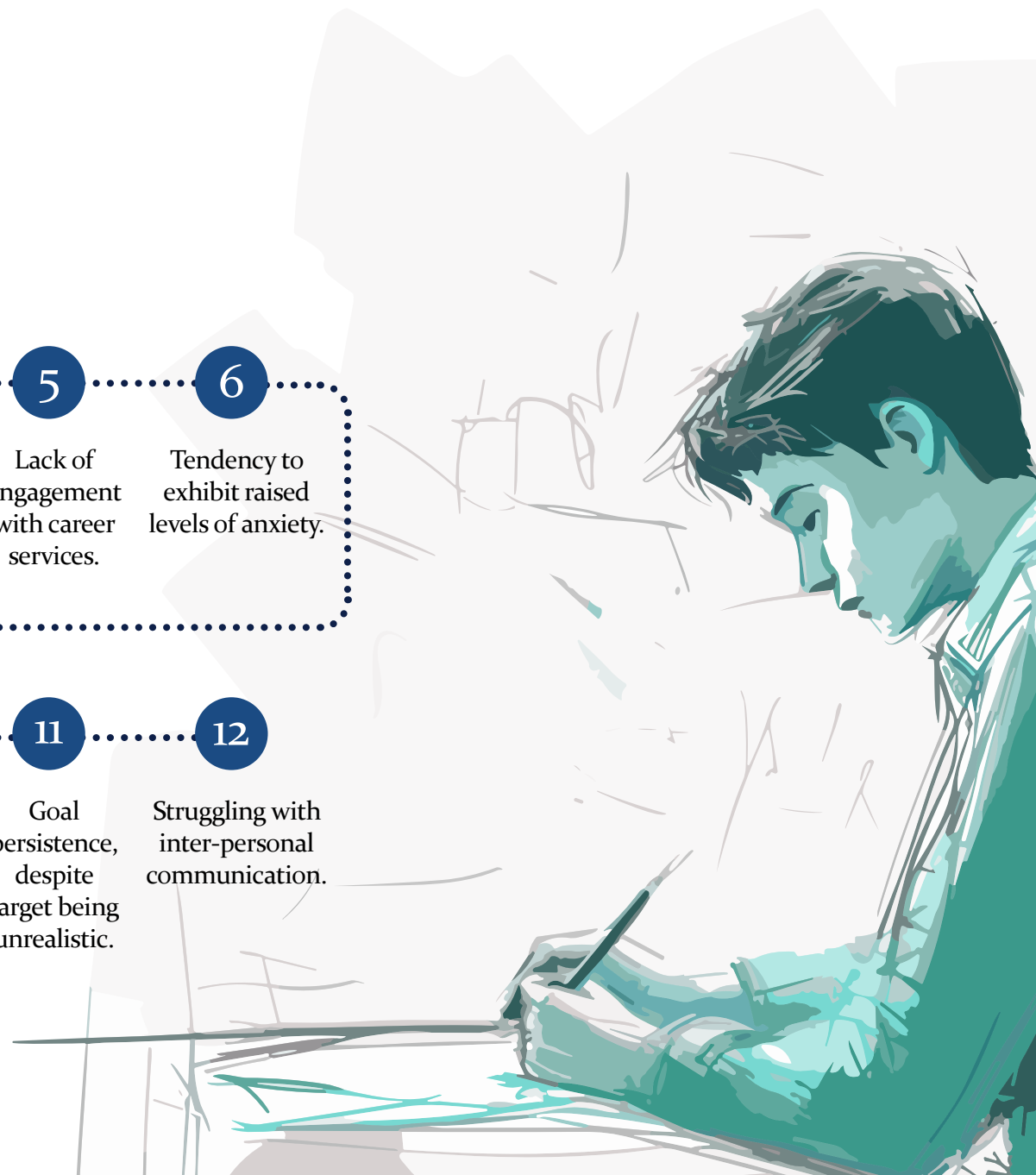
At the same time, however, many neurodivergent students will have little idea about what kind of career they want to pursue after graduation.

In this respect they are no different to neurotypical students. The only major difference is that neurodivergent students may have more

difficulty deciding what career they want to pursue, and they will almost certainly face greater challenges in securing and holding down jobs when they have.

The infographic below outlines some of these challenges briefly, but specifically include:

Challenges to securing and holding down jobs



- A non-typical job history, often with many short periods of employment in a variety of jobs interspersed with longer period of inactivity. Employers may think that the job candidate is immature and unable to settle down, is out of the habit of work, or tends to be dismissed from their previous jobs for a negative reason (such as absenteeism or incompetence).
 - Difficulties obtaining suitable work experience, including internships. Many neurodivergent students reported that they are simply unable to secure such opportunities. They are often not selected for reasons they suspect to be related to their neurodivergent condition.
 - Many of the work-experience opportunities that are available are not in areas where neurodivergent students feel they have strengths, e.g., people-facing jobs in the hospitality industry, so they do not do them – and do not have work experience under their belt.
 - Expectations of interviewers. Many neurodivergent people feel they lack inter-personal communication skills, such as unspoken communication or body language, especially when interviewers are looking for things such as enthusiastic tone of voice and sustained direct eye contact.
 - Many also feel they lack social communication skills in general, which can come to the fore during the interview. They may, for example, be expected to engage in small talk before the formal interview begins. It may also be a problem during the interview itself, due to its unnatural setting.
 - Lack of engagement with career services at school, and university.
 - A tendency to exhibit raised levels of anxiety, perhaps because they are uncomfortable with the formality of the interview, which can work against them in the selection process.
 - Lack of self-confidence and fear of rejection. This can result in them not knowing what jobs opportunities to apply for (in terms of positions they stand a good chance of getting), so they end up applying sporadically and randomly, without a clear strategy
 - Lack of confidence in terms of the inter-personal communication skills, especially with regard to unspoken communication, that are necessary in dealing with customers and team members in many kinds of work.
 - Application forms can be confusing and difficult. Neurodivergent students often struggle to know what the questions are really asking, how much detail they should provide, or what an acceptable answer would be.
 - Employers are increasingly using psychometric tests and artificial intelligence systems to shortlist candidates. This is particularly so for highly competitive roles, such as graduate schemes. These tests can discriminate against neurodivergent people, due to how they are presented and worded, and are essentially designed look for neurotypical traits.
 - Difficulty in focusing on career-related tasks and job-hunting during their key years at university. This is often left until after graduation, so that key skills and work experience are lacking when they are needed the most.
 - One expression of the individual's neurodivergent condition may stubbornness. This can result in the individual persisting with a career goal, even when they recognise that achieving it has become an unrealistic prospect.
- Neurodivergent students often feel they're weak in the communications skills needed to excel at an interview. Box 6 presents some student views on this.

Box 6

Communication skills during interviews

Communication and social skills are common challenges for neurodivergent people, who often struggle to communicate effectively during interviews. Some may be completely unable to speak due to overwhelming anxiety, while others may be overly hesitant, fearing they may say the wrong thing.

"I always worry about a social situation. I'm thinking oh, did I say the right thing? Do I need to apologise now?"

"I go into my interviews and I do say, "right, we'll do the basics" and I can guarantee you I will talk a million miles an hour".

"Just words, really [are a struggle during interviews]. And it's just like basic things that can come across as rude to some people. But yes, just getting the words across, sometimes. But I think if people take time to actually like, sit down and have like a nice conversation with you. They can see past that most of the time".

"I blank out as well. If I'm in an interview, there is nothing going on in this brain".

"I avoid them [interviews] as much as I can because I stumble over myself when I speak and I'd rather just show someone how I work rather than go on about it".

"Where I struggle is, is like the processing the information. I'm sitting there and I'm thinking, there's all this information coming down [questions]. Where I struggle is because I compartmentalise things so much in everything I do. So, you know, if you're asking me to prove myself and give examples, it's like, oh God, what box is that and I'm sitting there trying to work it out [...] I think it's learning and understanding that you can don't need to answer the question straightaway. You can take that [...] moment".

"When the, the interviewer sort of says, "so tell me about yourself" [...] "why would you make a good candidate for this job?" And my initial reaction is to say, "well because I can do it and I need a job", [...] it's not the answer the employer's looking for, you know. They're actually looking for a specific type of answer [...] it's about decoding it so that you can tailor your answer to meet those requirements".



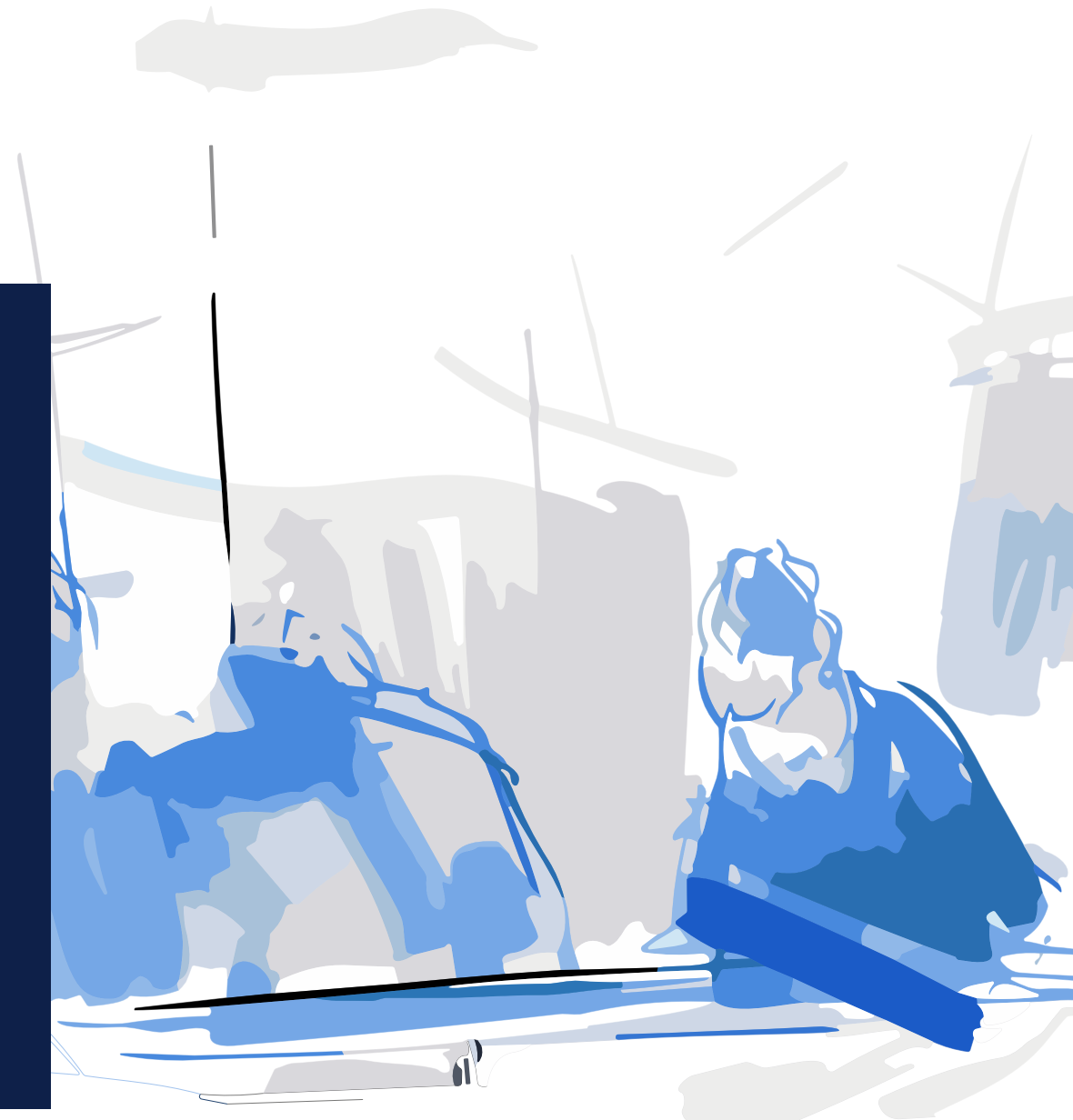
The role of the careers advisers is, of course, to help neurodivergent students to overcome these barriers. Ideally, those barriers should not be there, but the reality is that they are. How, then, should the careers adviser support neurodivergent students? Box 7 provides some suggestions.

Box 7

What neurodivergent students want from their careers advisers

1. Get to know your students.
2. Develop an individual profile highlighting the student's strengths and weaknesses.
3. Use clear and open communication.
4. Have at least some goals that are tangible.
5. Work on the basis of their strengths.
6. Deal with the real.
7. Use social stories.
8. Don't avoid the difficult topics.

Source: Based partly on the IMAGE project



2.1. Get to know your students

Establishing good rapport with neurodivergent students may be more difficult, especially as many of them will lack the social skills that make establishing rapport easy. They may, for example, prefer not to make prolonged or direct eye contact when they speak. This can be interpreted as the individual showing indifference, boredom, or even superiority. Others may adopt body language that makes them appear not to be listening to you, such as fiddling with objects in their pockets or whispering to themselves – known as ‘stimming’. It’s almost certainly not the case that they are not listening to you, so it’s worth recognising that these traits are common among neurodivergent people and are best overlooked as you establish and maintain rapport with them. It’s important not to take these behaviours personally, as they are not intended as such.

Another set of traits that is common among neurodivergent people is a tendency to treat plans as promises, even if they were only intended as possibilities. For example, you may say that you hope to have an answer to one of their queries by next week: many neurodivergent students will take this as a promise that you will not only have a definitive answer to their query but have it by the specified time. Neurodivergent people may feel upset or even mistreated when these things do not then happen as expected, even if this is not the fault of the person making them. When this happens, the student can lose trust in a person, especially when they are authority figures who appear to have the power to keep their promises. The best thing is not to propose arrangements that you may not be able to keep. If that is not possible, then it is best to warn the student that it may be, for reasons outside of your control, that what is arranged may not ultimately happen in the way or at the time you expect it will. If changes do need to be made, it is best to warn the student that this is the case as soon as practical. You can then make alternative arrangements, so they do not feel they have been left ‘in limbo’.

2.2. Develop an individual profile highlighting the student’s strengths and weaknesses

In order to do establish trust, you will also need to get to know the neurodivergent student. Get to know what they consider to be the highs and lows of their ‘spiky’ profile. One-to-one meetings will be essential for this. Each individual is impacted differently by being neurodivergent, and a one size fits all approach is inappropriate as a result. It is important to understand how the neurodivergent student understands and experiences the world. Try to understand what makes the student happy, what their strengths are, but also what triggers anxiety and stress. Their behaviour is essentially a form of communication, but it is really just the tip of the iceberg of how they are feeling. By validating their feelings and understanding their behaviour and what triggers it, you will be able to better understand how to support the student effectively, what coping strategies they already have in place and also which to put in place.

As a result, working in partnership with the neurodivergent student and the disability support team is important in an effort to building a positive and nurturing relationship. Here, mutual trust is key between all parties.

All of this may very well seem daunting and as such we would highly advise careers support team members undertaking appropriate neurodivergent training to better equip yourself with the right skills to support neurodivergent students. The National Autistic Society and other organisations provide such training, often for free. But we highly recommend that colleagues attend the same training to ensure mixed messages are avoided.

2.3. Use of clear and open communication

Neurodivergent people tend to have greater difficulty with social communication than most neurotypical people, meaning that they are not so good at things such as knowing how to pick their words diplomatically, read body language or facial expressions, fill in the unspoken or implied gaps in conversations, or follow a sequential string of verbal instructions. They may also tend to take things literally, such as metaphors and sarcasm.

When having a conversation with neurodivergent people, it is therefore a good idea to:

- Create a safe and friendly setting.
 - Be mindful that the avoidance of eye-contact is not negative.
 - Individual focus – no neurodivergent person is the same and has unique skills, needs and background.
 - Using their name frequently, so they know you are talking to them.
 - Speak in full sentences – always finish the point you are making.
 - Say less and speak a little more slowly than you usually would.
- Pause frequently to allow them a little more processing time than you would usually give.
 - As far as possible, avoid irony, sarcasm, innuendo, slang, euphemisms, metaphors, and figures of speech (see Box 8).
 - Try to be unambiguous and don't ramble.
 - Avoid asking complicated questions. Try to keep them short, simple, and closed-ended.
 - Avoid asking several questions at once.
 - Break sequential strings of instructions down into separate stages.
 - Check that they have fully understood what you would like them to do, when and how.
 - Communicate in more than one way, e.g., jot it down for them while saying it.
 - Remember they may prefer more personal space – or be unaware that they may be encroaching on yours.
 - Avoid talking down to them.
 - Talk positively about neurodiversity.

Box 8

The *literal* world of neurodivergent people

A common trait among neurodivergent people is their very literal understanding of situations. This was a reoccurring theme during the focus groups, where the students spoke of struggling to understand metaphors and other 'hidden' meaning in conversation. Instead, the students seemed to prefer explicit and clear instructions from their peers, be it at university or in work-settings. One of the students likened the challenge of communicating with neurotypicals to being from another planet and trying to understand people from Earth.

"The same sorts of issues have come up time and time again and they are a lot to do with communication, in terms of neurotypicals not being explicit about what it is they actually want [...] What it is they actually need? What it is they actually expect and [...] it comes back to this other planet syndrome notion. You know, there's an expectation because I don't appear to be any different from everybody else, that we speak a common language, that the subtle nuances, the sort of, the, the choreographed dance that you have to engage in."

"When I'm getting feedback, I need literal feedback, because [my mentor] is a very metaphor-heavy guy, so he relates everything to analogies, and I can't understand when he's serious or when he's joking or when he's ... That's when I've needed literal and very clear feedback from him so that I know what specifically I need to improve."

"I don't necessarily understand when they use metaphors and stuff. I don't necessarily understand. I prefer literal explanations."

2.4. Have at least some goals that are tangible

Neurodivergent students have similar aspirations and goals to non-neurodivergent students, but often need extra support in achieving these. As a career professional, you have the opportunity to support them setting and achieving meaningful goals. Notably, the student should find these goals meaningful and important to pursue in order to remain motivated. Neurodivergent people report a preference for having at least some goals that are tangible. That does not mean that they all have to be tangible, just enough of them to give the neurodivergent person something to aim for and to be sure they have achieved. You are also in a great position to support them and help them recover when things do not turn out as expected.

It's a good idea, therefore, to set your neurodivergent students at least some goals that are short term and tangible in nature. You might, for example, want to ask them to produce a revised version of their CV before your next scheduled meeting and bring it along with them. This could go alongside some more nebulous goals, such as asking them to think about what kind of employment would suit them best.

However, many neurodivergent students have more than one condition, meaning that goal-setting and the completion of these can be challenging. For example, a student might be autistic and have ADHD simultaneously, meaning they may prefer to have set goals (autism), but get easily distracted (ADHD). This can be both a frustration for the careers adviser and the student! It is then important how we respond to the student, with appropriate communication being of most importance. Again, understanding, providing appropriate support and encouragement is key.

The ability to be able to determine and set goals for oneself is an important aspect of life, whether neurodivergent or not. Research indicates that people with more self-determination are more happy in life, whilst young adults perform better in school and adults perform better at work. Indeed, learning self-determination skills is especially important during transition from childhood to adulthood, which includes those key years at university. Yet, this is a particular area of struggle for neurodivergent students.

It is important to bear in mind that many neurodivergent students may very well struggle articulating their aspirations and goals. Remember, communication can be a challenge for some neurodivergent people as a result of social anxiety and social challenges. Additionally, while person-centred approaches to career guidance for neurodivergent students are highly recommended, it is also important to consider that the student may also have a history of low expectations of self-determined behaviour. Here are some of the barriers people face when setting goals: These are, of course, by no means exclusive to neurodivergent individuals, but many may be weak in these areas.

Barriers to goal setting



2.5. Work on the basis of their strengths

Neurodivergent people tend to hear a lot about their weaknesses – or ‘areas of challenge’ as they are sometimes euphemistically called. The philosophy behind the notion of neurodiversity is that everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and that people with neurodivergent conditions do not have any more strengths or weaknesses than anyone else – they just experience greater highs and lows. It won’t therefore come as any surprise to neurodivergent people that they have weaknesses: that is what people keep telling them all the time.

Neurodivergent people do, however, have personal strengths in terms of their skills (both hard and soft), knowledge, and aptitudes. Many are simply above average, but some are exceptional. The problem is that they often do not recognise they have them, either because they are not strong in self-awareness and don’t see these strengths in themselves, or because they have gone through life only hearing about what is ‘wrong’ with them and have come to believe it.

Identifying Personal Strengths

Step 1

Encourage students to identify their strong areas.

Step 2

Use a timeline and/or social stories to help students achieve this.

Step 3

Do exercises based on matching these areas of strength to job profiles.

Step 4

Develop scenarios to practice using skills.

Careers advisers can be part of changing that by:

- Encouraging students to identify what they think are their strong areas in terms of:
 - Knowledge, such as about the technical specifications of cameras.
 - Soft skills, such as reading people's emotions.
 - Hard skills, such as use of information technology.
 - Aptitudes, such as punctuality.
- Use a timeline and/or social stories (see below) to help students to do this, e.g., by getting them to consider what skills they developed when they spent their summer on a volunteering holiday.
- Do exercises based on matching these areas of strength to job profiles, ideally based on real job advertisements.
- Help them to practice using their skills by developing scenarios with them. Try to avoid making these scenarios overly hypothetical (see below).

2.6. Deal with the real

Something that neurodivergent people often report they struggle with is working with hypothetical scenarios. These may well feature in discussions about career aspirations. You may, for example, want to ask the student what aspects of a particular job think they would find most satisfying. These are also very likely to come up in job applications and interviews: many of the interview questions that employers often ask are based on asking candidates 'what would you do if ...' confronted with a particular situation or dilemma. Neurodivergent students would typically have difficulty answering this type of questions because their condition makes it hard for them to project themselves into new situations or other people's shoes. They will either be unable to provide a response, or they will answer in a way that the questioner considers to be unrealistic or badly judged.

When it comes to your practice, a good approach might be to try to ensure that your discussions are as fully grounded in reality as they can be. Some suggestions for doing this include:

- Try to relate your discussions, exercises, and so on, to real people. These might be people you both know or just you know. The important thing is to make sure that the student recognises that these are not hypothetical situations but actually happened.
- Create a life timeline, to which you and your students can attach past events and future tasks. The former might include when they gained employability skills, while the latter might include important dates for attending careers fairs, undertaking job search, dates of planned work experience, university deadlines, and so on.

- Use famous people to illustrate your discussions or as the basis of an exercise. Try to use celebrities to whom younger people will easily relate. Over the past few years, a number of public figures have declared themselves to be neurodivergent, including:
 - Billie Eilish, singer, who identified as having Tourette's.
 - Simone Biles, gymnast, who identified as having ADHD.
 - Ryan Gosling, actor, who identified as having ADHD.
 - Greta Thunberg, climate activism, who identified as having Asperger's and OCD.
 - Albert Einstein, physicist, posthumously diagnosed with ADHD, autism and dyslexia.
 - Cara Delavigne, actress/model, diagnosed with ADHD.
 - Florence Welch, singer, who identified as having dyslexia and dyscalculia.
 - Bill Gates, entrepreneur, who identified as having dyslexia and ADHD.
 - Elon Musk, entrepreneur, who identified as being autistic.

Something that neurodivergent people often report they struggle with is working with hypothetical scenarios. These may well feature in discussions about career aspirations.

All these people have had successful careers and it is not 'despite' them being neurodivergent. Their success is at least partly due to the strengths that having a neurodivergent conditions brings them.

There are some short biographies of some famous people who identify as neurodivergent at the end of the guide, which you might like to use with your students.

- Provide examples of real CVs and employability skills audits (see Box 11, below) that neurodivergent student have developed with you or your colleagues. You can anonymise them to preserve confidentiality.
- Give your students plenty of opportunity to practice things like writing a CV, completing an employability skills audit, job-description-matching exercises, and so on. Neurodivergent people tend to perform a task better if they are given time to experiment.
- Students we spoke to in our research would like to be given more opportunity to practice their interview technique, particularly if they are provided with honest feedback and given the chance to give it another go.

2.7. Use social stories

People who work with neurodivergent students, for example in a health or wellbeing role, have developed a wide range of tools designed to facilitate effective communication. While it is probably not necessary to know about them all, some have become very popular because they are flexible enough to be applied in a wide range of contexts and seem to work well with neurodivergent students. They can be particularly helpful in helping a neurodivergent person know how they should respond to a problem or behave in a particular social situation. They are especially good at helping a neurodivergent person who struggles with working out the sequence in which an event should take place and 'whose turn' it is to speak or do something.

Social stories were first developed by Carol Gray in the early 1990s. They take the form of short narratives about a particular situation or event which help the neurodivergent person get a better understand about what to expect, why things are happening, and how to respond. They can comprise text, pictures, or both. They can be pre-prepared or developed in real time with the student: for example, a social story about what to expect from a job interview could involve a set narrative with the careers professional and/or the student drawing cartoons (perhaps taking the form of simple 'stick people') as they go along. Speech bubbles can be added if desired. Figure 2 provides an example. There are databases of social stories you can draw from if you want to (see Resource Directory), as well as simple web-based apps you can use to make your own.



Figure 2: An example of a social story

Source: <https://www.storyboardthat.com/storyboards/natashalupiani/job-interviews>

2.8. Don't avoid the difficult topics

While it is important to respect everyone's sensitivities, avoiding talking to neurodivergent people about difficult topics associated with their condition would almost certainly be a mistake. The infographic below outlines topics that should be discussed:

Difficult topics to discuss

- 1 Stereotypes about what neurodivergent people are like and what they are capable of achieving
 - 2 The discrimination, either direct or indirect, they may face in the jobs market
 - 3 Being prepared for disappointment when applying for jobs
 - 4 Fears over disclosing their condition to potential employers
 - 5 The importance of having good self-advocacy skills and confidently applying them
 - 6 How to be honest during job applications without putting off employers
 - 7 Talking about reasonable adjustments in the workplace
- See the guide for more information

One thing that neurodivergent people often say is that they don't want to be singled out for special treatment. This makes them feel uncomfortable and can potentially expose them to being stigmatised by work colleagues as being a person's 'favourite'. Many do not have a formal diagnosis in any case, so it is not always possible to tailor your practice to neurodivergent students on the one hand and neurotypical students on the other. Box 9 provides more discussion on this.

People who work with neurodivergent students, for example in a health or wellbeing role, have developed a wide range of tools designed to facilitate effective communication.

Box 9

Unwanted special treatment from others

While neurodivergent individuals are often desperate for support both at university and in work-settings, it was evident from the focus groups that the level of support did not meet their needs, with insufficient emphasis on maintaining independence, equity and dignity. When this did take place, it was not always seen as appropriate, with neurodivergent people feeling they were sometimes being infantilised.

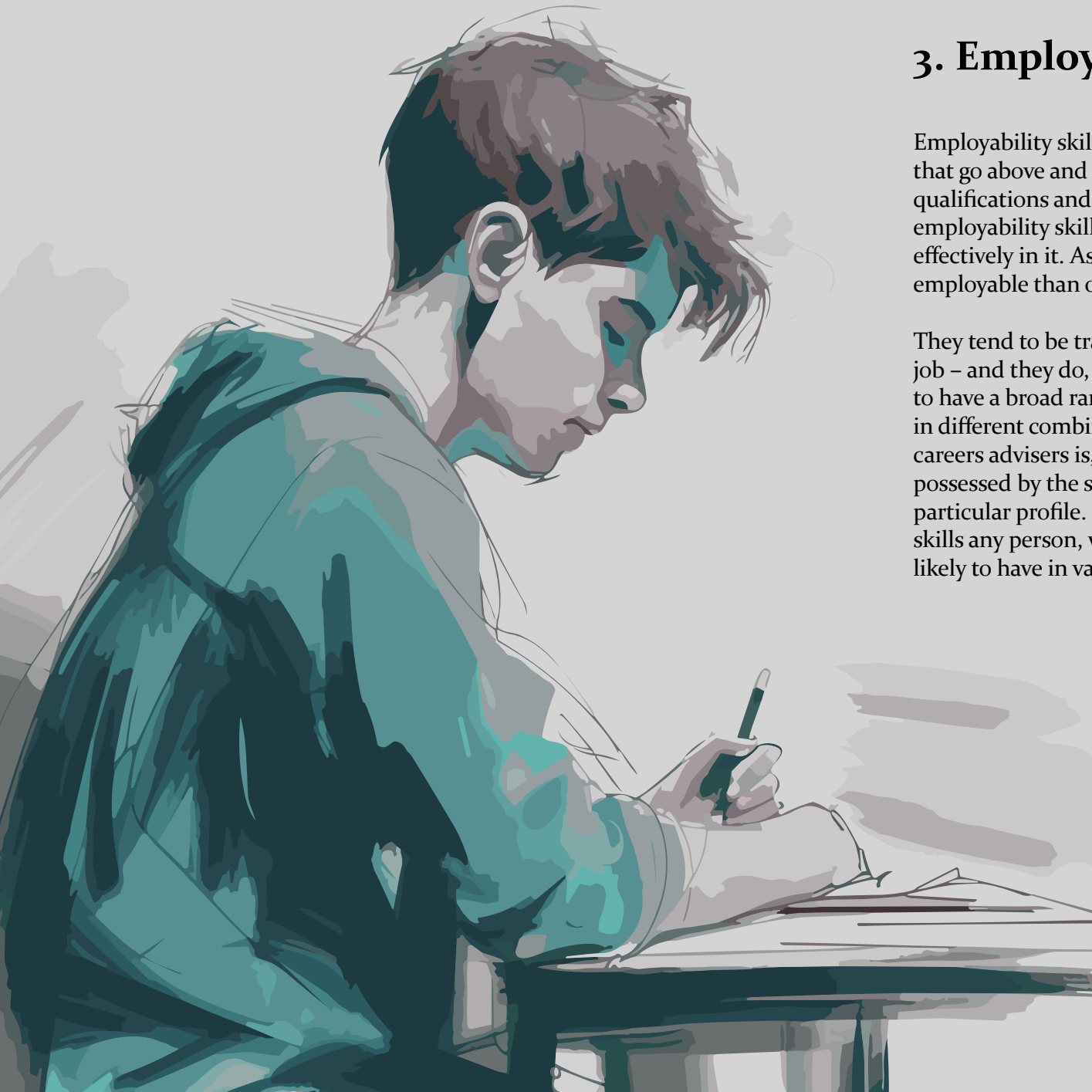
“If I tell them when I don’t know them too well, they kind of, they’re kind of very aware of how I’m acting [...] It’s like they kind of treat you as autistic, rather than just communicate with you”.

“Nowadays, there’s a risk of them hiring me because I’m autistic to check a box [...] I think that would almost be just as bad. I would feel like if I had not earned the position.”

“I also would add though not to infantilise us, because I feel like we are as neurodivergent people. As soon as you say autism, you’re instantly infantilised because people instantly think you’ve got a learning disability. [...] learning disability and learning difficulty are completely different things. So, I feel like there’s not a lot of awareness about that. [...] whenever I tell people, I’m autistic, I think they automatically think, “oh he’s autistic, let’s be easy on him”. [...] That’s not the reason why I’m telling you, I’m just telling you because I’ll be abrupt sometimes”.

Implementing the above recommendations would, however, potentially benefit every student who accesses a careers service – whether they are neurodivergent or neurotypical – and do no harm to those who do not need it. It’s therefore worth considering introducing some or all of these recommendation across the board and making them universal practice.

One thing that neurodivergent people often say is that they don’t want to be singled out for special treatment. This makes them feel uncomfortable and can potentially expose them to being stigmatised by work colleagues as being a person’s ‘favourite’.



3. Employability skills and CVs

Employability skills are the workplace-related abilities a person has that go above and beyond their qualifications and experience. While qualifications and experience may be the gateway to getting a job, employability skills are the abilities and aptitudes need to work effectively in it. As such, they are the skills that make a person more employable than others with the same qualifications and experience.

They tend to be transferable because they can be used in almost any job – and they do, indeed, tend to be. Most jobs require a person to have a broad range of employability skills, but they do come in different combinations in different job roles. The task of the careers advisers is, of course, to try to match the employability skills possessed by the student to the kinds of jobs which make use that particular profile. Box 10 illustrates the wide range of employability skills any person, whether they are neurodivergent or neurotypical, is likely to have in varying amounts.

Box 10

Employability skills

Practical and applied skills

- Creative thinking.
- Problem-solving and decision-making.
- Commercial awareness (business acumen).
- Computer programming and coding.
- Use of information technology.
- Project planning and management.
- Use of maths and statistics.
- Attention to detail.
- Applying a systematic approach.

Working with other people

- Communications skills, including speaking, listening, non-verbal communication, reading and writing.
- Languages.
- Empathy.
- Team working.

- Negotiation, persuasion, and influencing.
- Conflict resolution and mediation.
- Relationship building.
- Leadership.
- Networking.

Reliability and dependability

- Punctuality.
- Self-organisation.
- Independence.
- Time management.
- Conscientious.
- Trustworthiness.
- Task completion.

Adaptability

- Willingness to learn.
- Resilience.
- Loyalty.

Comparing these to the traits that are commonly associated with different neurodivergent conditions such as autism, ADHD, Tourette's, dyspraxia, and so on, we can see some patterns in the kinds of skills in which neurodivergent students are likely to be unusually strong or weak.

This is not to suggest, of course, that neurodivergent students are all strong and weak in the same skills, or that they have weak employability skills in general. As noted in the first section of this guide, neurodivergent people tend to have 'spikey profiles' in terms of their skills, abilities, and talents. There will be some areas in which they are distinctly above average and some in which they are markedly lower than average; and the pattern will be different for each individual person.

If neurodivergent students are to better harness their employability skills, they will first need to be able to identify them. The problem is that many do not recognise they have various employability skills, possibly because they have acquired them through other means, such as in the home, at school or university, through their leisure-time activities, during their volunteering or through their part-time work, so they do not associate them as being employability skills per se. Even if they recognise that they possess these skills, they may not have the confidence to display them, to put them in their CV or application form, or to talk about them – either in interviews or in careers meetings.

This is where the careers professionals can help. You may, for example, want to use a more 'guided/ employability skills audit form when working with neurodivergent students. Box 11 contains an example you might want to use (or adapt for use).

Box 11

Employability skills

Here are lists of the kinds of skills that tend to be used in the workplace. They have been put into four groups, which do overlap to some extent. Please choose two to three skills in each of the areas in which you feel you are confident or strong – or other people tell you that you are. Then try to identify where you have picked them up. Finally, try to develop some short examples of how you have demonstrated them.

The answers you put in this form will then be useful in writing your CV, filling in job application forms, and preparing for your job interview.



Practical and applied skills

These are skills you have acquired during your degree, and they may be quite specific to particular jobs

- Creative thinking – finding novel ways to do a task or solve a problem.
- Problem solving and decision making – choosing between alternative ways to solve a problem, doing so in a productive and pragmatic way.
- Commercial awareness (business acumen) – spotting and meeting gaps in the market.
- Computer programming and coding – using computers, including coding languages such as Python or C++.
- Use of information technology – using software such as Office, Adobe Illustrator, or business apps.
- Project planning and management – working out how to do a project and making it happen.
- Use of maths and statistics – using numeracy to solve problems, analyse data and present results.
- Attention to detail – the ability to spot important details, such as differences in quality.
- Applying a systematic approach – being able to do something in a logical, step-by-step manner.

Choose 2 to 4 skills	Where you picked it up, e.g., home, school, university, clubs and societies, holidays	An example of how you demonstrate it
e.g., computer programming and coding	I attended after school coding club for two years	e.g., I learned how to use Python to a high level
1.		
2.		
3.		

Working with other people

These relate to interacting with other employers, customers, managers, etc. They tend to be transferable into many different job contexts

- Communications skills – including speaking, listening, reading, and writing.
- Languages – the ability to communicate in a second language.
- Empathy – being able to work out how other people feel and respond accordingly.
- Team working – working on a shared task in a harmonious and productive manner.
- Negotiation, persuasion and influencing – being able to set out what you want and to encourage other people to appreciate your point of view, while still respecting theirs.
- Conflict resolution and mediation – solving disputes between people, often by seeking compromise.
- Relationship building – bringing people together so that they can get to know one another and work well together.
- Leadership – taking the lead in a team-based task and ensuring that it is fully achieved.
- Networking – building useful relationships with people outside of your immediate work role.

Choose 2 to 4 skills	Where you picked it up, e.g., home, school, university, clubs and societies, holidays	An example of how you demonstrate it
e.g., languages	I attended Welsh-medium school to the age of 18	I speak Welsh on a daily basis with my friends and family
1.		
2.		
3.		

Reliability and dependability

These relate to how you go about your work. They tend to be transferable into many different job contexts

- Punctuality – being on time to work, meetings, etc.
- Organisation – prioritising things, working efficiently and producing required results.
- Independence – working without any more supervision that is strictly needed.
- Time management – using your time effectively to complete the tasks set for you.
- Conscientious – using your time and other resources to their maximum.
- Trustworthiness – being responsible with the organisation’s assets, such as their equipment, materials, or public reputation.
- Task completion – completing the tasks that need to be done according to the deadlines set for you.

Choose 2 to 4 skills	Where you picked it up, e.g., home, school, university, clubs and societies, holidays	An example of how you demonstrate it
e.g., independence	I have planned and undertaken a number of trips around the UK to further my interest in portrait painting	Most recently, I went on a solo trip to London to visit the National Gallery
1.		
2.		
3.		

Adaptability

These relate to how easy you find change. They tend to be transferable into many different job contexts

- Willingness to learn – showing enthusiasm to increase your knowledge and/or skillset.
- Resilience – persistence even in the face of difficulty disappointment, or temporary failure.
- Loyalty – showing commitment to the people and principles you value.

Choose 2 to 4 skills	Where you picked it up, e.g., home, school, university, clubs and societies, holidays	An example of how you demonstrate it
e.g., willingness to learn	Home	My father has been teaching me how to do basic car maintenance ahead of me taking my driving test.
1.		
2.		
3.		

You might even want to use these forms with all your students – not just those who are neurodivergent but those who are neurotypical too. That way you won't be singling out the neurodivergent students for special attention. Indeed, some neurotypical students may find this form – with its layout and hints – more amenable than the one you already have.

Remember to give your students plenty of time to complete this. They may need your help, so be prepared to help them through it. They may also need several attempts at it before they are happy with it.

4. Application forms and tests

Recruitment processes by employers represent an initial, yet critical, barrier to access to employment for neurodivergent people. Perhaps not surprisingly, neurodivergent graduates are much less likely to find meaningful employment, or indeed any form of employment, in comparison to their non-disabled peers. And much of this stems from the initial task of finding and applying for suitable jobs.

Job adverts and the accompanying application forms tend to be fairly standardised, using similar templates across job adverts, despite the positions being different. The adverts are often quite lengthy and not written in plain English, employing a great deal of jargon and using complex designs, which in turn confuses neurodivergent people.

Concerningly, there is little emphasis on the need for the specific skills to thrive in the job. Existing vacancies tend to be repackaged, containing generic terms, and not necessarily essential, such as “teamworking skills” and “communication skills”, instead of focussing on the specialised skills that are relevant and in fact required. Bearing in mind that many neurodivergent individuals are very literal, they may not apply for the job as a result, being under the impression they are not suited for the job, as they do not meet all the criteria. As such, many neurodivergent people essentially exclude themselves from jobs, thinking they have to meet all criteria. Research also indicates that this is a unique predicament to neurodivergent people, with non-neurodivergent people likely to apply for jobs they only broadly suit.

Likewise, teamworking skills and communication skills are areas that many neurodivergent individuals may struggle with. Does that mean they are unable to do the job at hand? Most likely not. Yet, the individual is unlikely to apply as a result, meaning employers are essentially missing out on suitable and talented people.

Figurative language on job adverts can be appealing for some applicants but can confuse and cause anxiety for neurodivergent people. This is because many struggle to understand figurative phrases and their meanings. Terms such as “be flexible” or “team player” can be particularly difficult to understand. As such, there is a need for job adverts and the application forms to be clear and containing guidance that may clarify any potential misunderstandings. However, in the absence of this, there is also a place for career services here to help and support neurodivergent students understanding these terms.



There has been a gradual move away from CVs to the use of a range of application forms, which are often now completed online. Many are associated with exercises or tests, which may ask a student to complete a spreadsheet exercise or to answer hypothetical questions based on decisions they would need to make in the workplace. The latter are effectively psychometric tests, which aim to test the applicant's dispositions such as tact and diplomacy, flexibility, contextualisation, ability to compromise, as so forth.

Neurodivergent students are likely to fail such tests, or at least be unable to complete them to the best of their ability, even if they would be highly competent in the job and a positive addition to the organisation's workforce. Psychometric tests have, indeed, been widely criticised for testing candidates' social skills rather than their actual ability to do the job, thus effectively filtering out neurodivergent traits in the applications process. Often, neurodivergent applicants simply do not get through to the later stages of the process, where the hiring is done.

Artificial intelligence is even being used to assess candidates. Applicants are asked to send in a video of them answering a set of questions provided to them and these are analysed not only for context but also for things such as the amount of eye contact made and the length of hesitation before answering. A 2023 BBC documentary 'Computer Says No' explored automated and algorithm-based recruitment technology and argued that it can unfairly disadvantage candidates who don't fit the profile it's been programmed to accept – particularly those with neurodivergent conditions such as autism.

Artificial intelligence is now also increasingly used to sort through application forms, based on pre-set algorithms. The problem here is that these have usually been developed by and tested on neurotypical people. Given that their purpose is to identify ways of thinking, doing and being that are deemed positive for neurotypical people, they are unlikely to work well with neurodivergent people. This is because the use of artificial intelligence fails to take account of individual differences, particularly the differences that essentially provide neurodivergent people with strengths. Artificial intelligence also tends to focus on big data from the past, which essentially encourages negative stereotypes and biases as a result.

Neurodivergent individuals tend to find online tests a significant stumbling block to them getting a job interview (see Box 12). Many would rather have the opportunity to showcase their skills and abilities through practical recruitment methods, such as skills assessments or working interviews. Neurodivergent applicants can, of course, ask for reasonable adjustments, such as having a reader, being allowed extra time, or changing the format of the test. Many either do not realise this is an option or simply choose not to do the tests due to their inherent complexities and/or heightened anxiety (see Section 8).

Box 12

Online tests

Neurodivergent students face challenges even getting to the interview stage when applying for jobs. There may, for example, be psychometric tests, which can effectively discriminate against neurodivergent applicants. Such developments in applicant screening make an already difficult situation seem even worse of applicants with neurodivergent conditions. Even with help, many will still struggle to get the scores needed for them to be invited to the interview.

“[The] few times I’ve tried to apply for jobs, they always have that questionnaire that’s like a list of like social scenarios, like customer [...] Even with my mum, over my shoulder, trying to help me answer the questions [...] almost immediately got the thing being like, no, sorry, you didn’t pass the, you didn’t pass the social test.”

“[If it’s done] in person, I’ll know how to respond, based on how the customer would be responded [...] But online it can be any scenario, you can picture it anywhere in your head and if you picture it that wrong way...”

“Algorithms, which is, you know, increasingly what employers are using are so appallingly flawed and they actually, in many ways, make the challenge for autistics even harder [...] In terms of finding employment.”



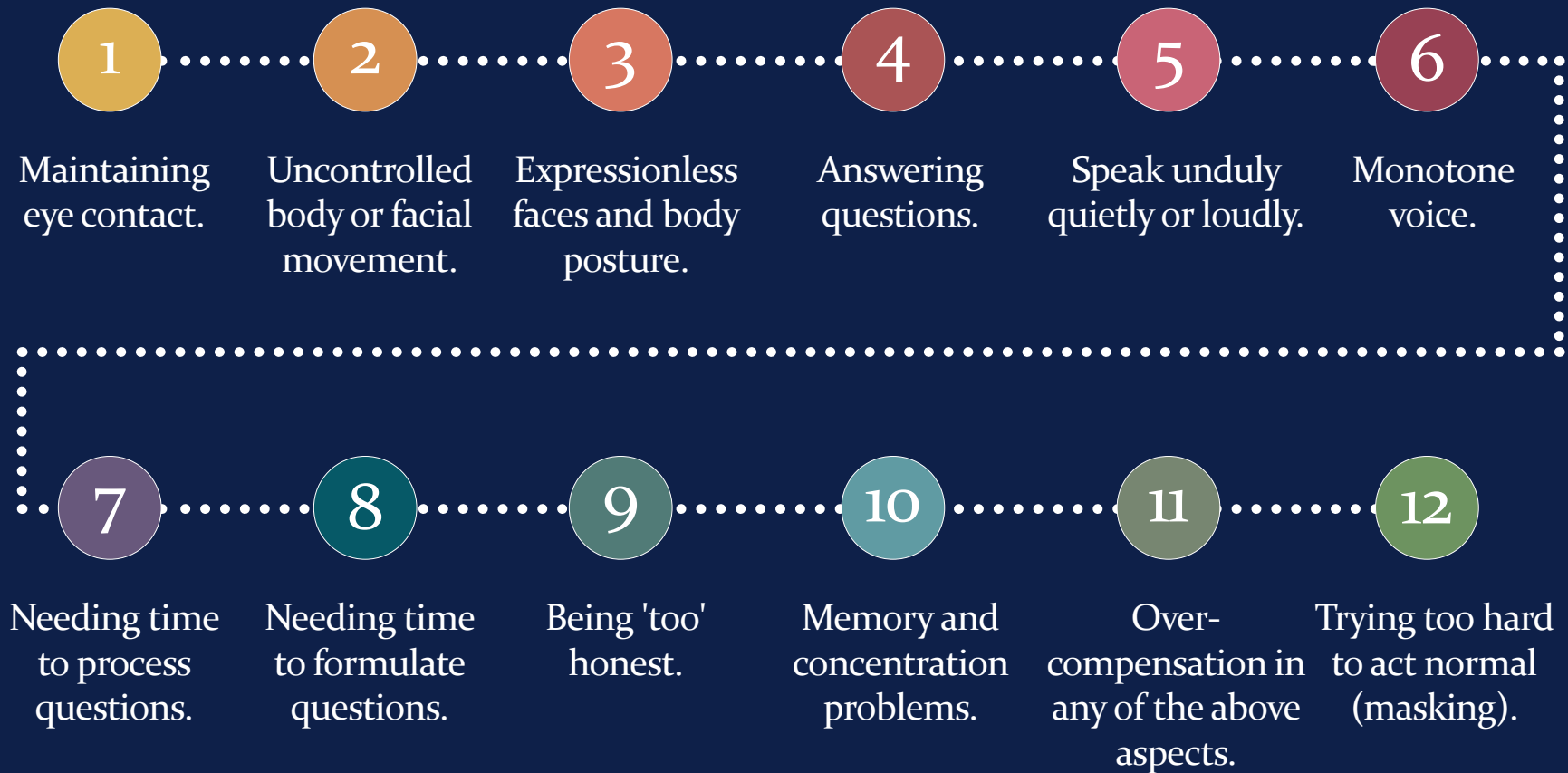
5. Preparing for interviews

If a neurodivergent student wins through and gets shortlisted, their next hurdle will be the interview. Most employers traditionally use a formal interview as the means of choosing between shortlisted applicants, but these can seriously disadvantage neurodivergent candidates.

The infographic on the next page outlines some of these challenges for neurodivergent candidates:



Interview challenges



If an interview candidate is being observed in social situations, this may disadvantage neurodivergent candidates, who may find it hard to negotiate informal situations, such as coffee or lunch breaks, or interactions with other candidates.

There is also an increasing use of groups interviews. These can involve asking the group to discuss a particular topic or to solve a problem collaboratively. These can be difficult for neurodivergent candidates, who may:

- Find it hard to understand what they are supposed to do when faced with a task or exercise.
- Need more time to think things through, making them appear slow or to lack intelligence.
- Struggle to think in abstract ways and hypothetical scenarios, preferring instead to deal with facts due to their literal understanding.
- Find it difficult to establish rapport quickly with other candidates in the group.
- Not take the lead in the group situation in deference to those who are more forward.

A key challenge for many neurodivergent people is the whole environment surrounding the interview. As many neurodivergent individuals have sensory sensitivities the interview environment can, perhaps unsurprisingly, be overwhelming for them. They may have a mini-meltdown or resort to 'stimming' behaviour. Neurodivergent candidates are often judged unfavourably for this by interviewers, whether or not they are doing it intentionally. This may be particularly likely if the candidate has not disclosed being neurodivergent. Disclosure is, in itself, a double-edged sword.

The disclosure would provide an explanation to the "different" social behaviour. However, it also runs the risk of stigmatisation and discrimination. For more guidance on disclosure, see Section 8 of this guide.

As job interviews have become more competitive, job applicants have adapted by anticipating the kinds of questions that are usually asked and prepared 'ideal' answers to them. These answers might not accurately represent the applicant's skills, knowledge, or character: they have been identified as being the answers that are most likely to impress the interview panel and give them what they are looking for. It has been argued, however, that the preparation of 'ideal' answers to common interview questions is not an especially helpful way of distinguishing between candidates because they tend to result in the selection of candidates who are good at preparing for interviews, rather than those who will be best at doing the job. Yet this is often the way in which neurodivergent students are coached to tackle interview questions. In order to avoid the possibility of the student not appreciating what the question is really asking them and answering the question badly, or not at all, careers professionals often work up some appropriate answers for their neurodivergent students to learn (perhaps by heart) and use in the interview.

Many students receive no interview training and appear to avoid them, sometimes at all costs, as a result. This may be a result of the aforementioned gap between careers and disability services, meaning that the focus had mainly been on supporting the students through their time at university, with little to no emphasis on their life after university. The result, however, is a large group of ill prepared neurodivergent students with increasing interview anxiety, having failed a number of interviews, who either end up in a job for which they are overqualified, choose to remain in academia (seeing it as a comfort zone) or simply end up unemployed and forgotten by the system.

Box 13

Interview preparation

Anxiety over interviews is common but neurodivergent students often have more negative stories to tell than positive ones. Most would greatly prefer to be given the chance to show what they can do, for example by being given a trials work period, as opposed to the traditional interview format.

“[Some upcoming interview training] I think will be really useful for me because I've never really done a proper interview, so I don't know what to expect until I start doing it. I think that will be really helpful”.

“Any job that I know that uses an interview, I tend to run a mile. [...] They just scare the hell out of me and then I end up talking myself into it all going wrong and then it does go wrong, and then that's it. I then go in this loop where it's like, “Well, I know it's going to go wrong. It went wrong last time. It's going to go wrong this time,” and it always goes wrong”.

“I avoid them [interviews] as much as I can because I stumble over myself when I speak, and I'd rather just show someone how I work rather than go on about it. I kind of become a different person in the interview [...] I prefer if it's a group interview, I can at least watch two people and see what they do and do the same thing”.

“I will talk fast in an interview but let me show you what I can do”.

“I went in for a personal interview and [...] I really wanted to go there, so I think I was really overthinking it and I just got really nervous. [...] And then in the end, I literally walked out of the interview, I was like I'm really sorry, I've got to go. I stopped the interview [...] it's because I was overthinking it so much. [...] I was really, really upset for like a few days, it was just crying really”.

“The biggest single obstacles [interviews] because you can find an autistic person who could probably do the job standing on his head, you know, but it's [the interview] like a choreographed dance [...] You've got an hour in which to basically sell yourself [...] that is something that is, not impossible but incredibly difficult, for, for autistic people to achieve”.

Many employers are now recognising that formal interviews are not the best way to select new employees and have been introducing alternative processes to select shortlisted candidates: whether, indeed, they are neurodivergent or neurotypical. The danger for neurodivergent applicants, however, is that they will supplement the existing, traditional interview with additions such as AI application sifting and group interviews. This serves only to compound the difficulties neurodivergent applicants face. Most would be best served by a move entirely away from traditional interviews, making more use instead of work experience placements and internships (see Section 7).

6. Persisting despite failure

Many neurodivergent students will already have had negative experiences in applying for jobs and, if they have been successful in securing a job, in the workplace. They may have had part-time or holiday jobs, or they may have participated in a work experience scheme or undertaken an internship. Some may have worked before they entered university and others may be working as part their university course. Some may have already put a great deal of time and effort into getting a job and have been unsuccessful.

Some neurodivergent people may have a disposition to react more emotionally to adversity than neurotypicals. Yet, it is only natural that they will be discouraged by such experiences, and the nature of their neurodivergent condition may exacerbate this effect.

Indeed, neurodivergent people may feel that:

- The wording of the job advert implies that the employer is not looking for a neurodivergent employee.
- Their neurodivergent condition prevents them from meeting some or all of the necessary or desirable personal criteria for a particular position.
- They will not fit into the workplace, perhaps because their managers and peers will not understand them or take the time to get to know them properly.
- Employers will pick only on the perceived negatives of their condition and ignore their strengths.
- They will not be shortlisted because they have not understood what the employer wanted them to talk about in their application form and/or interview.

- Their atypical employment record, often made up of many short periods of employment followed by longer periods of unemployment, will count against them.
- Their relative lack of work experience will mean that other applicants will be preferred.
- They are effectively unemployable because of their neurodivergent condition.

Finally, it is worth remembering that the barriers to getting a job are similar to those encountered in getting into a university, but all of your students will have done that successfully. It may have been harder for some than others, but they have all achieved it. This can be a source of encouragement for them.

Careers advisers therefore have an important role to play in encouraging and supporting neurodivergent students to persist despite failure. Anxiety and a lack of confidence and self-efficacy among neurodivergent students is very common. Self-confidence relates to one's own ability to succeed in interview settings. Studies suggest that it is highly correlated with engagement and experience. As such, careers advisers are well placed to providing opportunities to gain confidence in preparing for employment. Self-efficacy might for example be improved by gradually exposing neurodivergent students to interview settings, through the use of mock-interviews. Research indicates that mock interviews do have positive impacts on interview preparation for neurodivergent students.

By creating a profile of their students, highlighting their individual strengths and weaknesses, careers advisers are also able to better support the student through difficult times – such as, for example, in the aftermath of a series of rejections. Students can be encouraged to develop self-insight and, through this, greater resilience. The career adviser can also help by switching the focus to the student's successes, which can still be recognised and celebrated despite recent setbacks.

7. Work experience and internships

Work placements have a significant value to both neurodivergent job applicants and companies. Work experience is increasingly recognised as being critical for anyone who wishes to gain meaningful experience and confidence in the world of work. Neurodivergent students often report that one of the biggest barriers to them getting a job is not having the work experience or internships under their belt that other candidates do. Companies, meanwhile, get to see their prospective employee under work conditions in a low-risk situation (they do not have to employ the intern afterwards if they turn out not to be suitable).

The benefits to students include opportunities to:

Find out what career they might want to pursue after graduation.

Build up their CV and stand a better chance of being shortlisted.

Gain an understanding of the world of work.

Talk about something tangible they have done during interviews.

Learn employability skills, such as how to advocate for themselves.

Learn more about themselves, especially their neurodivergent condition.

Build confidence.

Develop a professional network.

The benefits to employers, meanwhile, include the opportunity to:

Get to know the neurodivergent person and learn their true strengths.

Learn about neurodivergent conditions and how to support neurodivergent employees.

Explore benefits of having diverse workforce.

8. Disclosure and workplace adjustments

Disclosure is a personal and sensitive issue, and one that tends to be quite complex. There is no one approach that will be right for everyone, so this is an issue that careers professionals have great potential to help with.

Employers in many countries are prohibited from asking questions about a person's health status and/or disabilities in the recruitment process. This is the case in the UK under the 2010 Equality Act. There are some exceptions to this, for example if the doing work requires manual tasks such as lifting heavy objects, or if they are trying to take 'positive action' which will prefer employing a disabled person. Under the same Act, employers are also required to ask someone who is being interviewed whether they have any special needs relating to the interview itself. Employers are obliged to meet these requirements if they are requested. They are also required to collect data on various protected characteristics of job applicants – such as disability status, ethnicity, religion, and so on – but these should not be used as part of the selection process.

Applicants do have the option to raise the matter if they wish, however, and this seems to be logical, as sharing the information will help both sides to decide whether there is a good match: the applicant to the position and the position to the applicant.

Rather than to ask during the recruitment process, employers are expected instead to wait until they have made a job offer and it has been accepted before asking whether their new employee would like any workplace adjustments to be made. If they do not, the employee again has the option of raising the matter. Employers are obliged under law to ensure that appropriate workplace adjustments are made for all their employees, and this specifically includes those who are neurodivergent. These include equipment (such as computer software), alternative processes and practices, and physical adaptations to the workplace to accommodate the employee's needs. A 'reasonable' adjustment is one that ensures that the disabled person is not put at a disadvantage with a non-disabled person in doing the job.

In either case, neurodivergent job applicants often worry about when to 'disclose' that they are neurodivergent and/or what kind of workplace adjustments they should ask for. This is not surprising. Given the discrimination neurodivergent people will almost certainly have experienced in the job market, many will not want to risk not being offered the position because the employer may start to doubt that they can do the job properly after all – or is simply unwilling to make the necessary workplace adjustments the potential employee is asking for, which they may feel will be costly either in terms of new equipment or lost productivity. Equally, they may feel that it is dishonest not to be fully transparent in their dealings with their employers. Some say that they would rather not have a job than to be employed under what they see as false pretences.

Box 14

Concerns over disclosing

The decision about whether to disclose or not can be something like a double-edged sword. On the one side there is the benefit of the support an applicant can get from disclosure, e.g., adjustments to the interview process. On the other side, however, is the fear the applicant will have that they will automatically be rejected if they disclose their condition. This could be due to stigma, lack of awareness, or simple discrimination.

“I don't know whether to disclose on my job applications [...] when they see that I'm autistic, what are they going to think? I know they can't discriminate against me. However, there's always going to be someone who is going to discriminate and think this is what this person is going to be like, because of the stereotypical mindset.”
“I feel really scared. I want to tell people, but I feel too scared to tell them and I feel too shy. I'm scared about how they'll react, how they'll respond. In jobs that I've had in the past, I haven't told them. I mean, I got away with it because I still managed to cope but when you start to struggle in your job, then it's really important that you tell them and I don't know if I'd have the courage to do that.”

“Even, on paper, it [disability legislation] requires employers to treat the autistic community in a manner that is no different for anybody else. You cannot, as a job applicant, determine, right at the outset, how revealing that information is going to be perceived. You cannot guarantee whether it's going to actually jeopardise your chances of being employed. So basically, it seems to me, as a candidate, you have no choice but to not to reveal it at the point when you first apply, go through the probation period and then reveal it”.

“During that like online application process, like do you want to disclose that you're autistic and obviously the gamble then is, either I completely fail the social test and don't get the job, or I tell them that I'm autistic and I don't get the job because I've disclosed”. – Female undergraduate student.

“The way they treat you after you said it makes you think, ‘I don't even want this job anymore. There's no point applying for it in the first place’ [...] I've mentioned it [in the past] so she could support me more, but it's gone the other way. Now, as much as I love my job, the way I'm treated at my job because I've said something isn't the best place anymore. [...] as soon as you tell them, the door shuts in your face. It's more like, ‘Oh, well we have to do all this extra stuff for you,’ and it's made to seem like a chore for them”.

“One thing I did learn is on my application forms, just don't put everything down because there's a number of medical conditions I've got that are chronic as well as mental health and whatever. The minute the whole lot went down, it was like, ‘Yeah, bye’”.

Some employers are, however, being proactive when it comes to workplace adjustments for disabled employees. This is generally to be welcomed. Some employers have signed up to the Two Ticks scheme, for example. This involves the use of a logo on job adverts and application forms to show that they are positive about employing people with disabilities. Whether they have an awareness of neurodiversity is, of course, another matter – many may be anticipating that their dealing will be with those with mobility or sensory disabilities. Those employers who are members of the Two Ticks scheme are, however, obliged to give people with disabilities and interview as long as they meet minimum requirements, so this may be a good way for the neurodivergent student of ensuring they at least get an interview.



There are also other schemes that employers may be signed up to. The Disability Confident Employer scheme, for example, encourages employers to make the most of the talents that disabled people can offer the organisation by committing to a range of disability friendly employment policies and practices (their website is listed in the further resources section of this guide). This scheme is not, however, specific to neurodiversity, and it may well be that an employer who has signed up to this scheme, and uses its logo, has little awareness of neurodiversity as a specific form of disability.

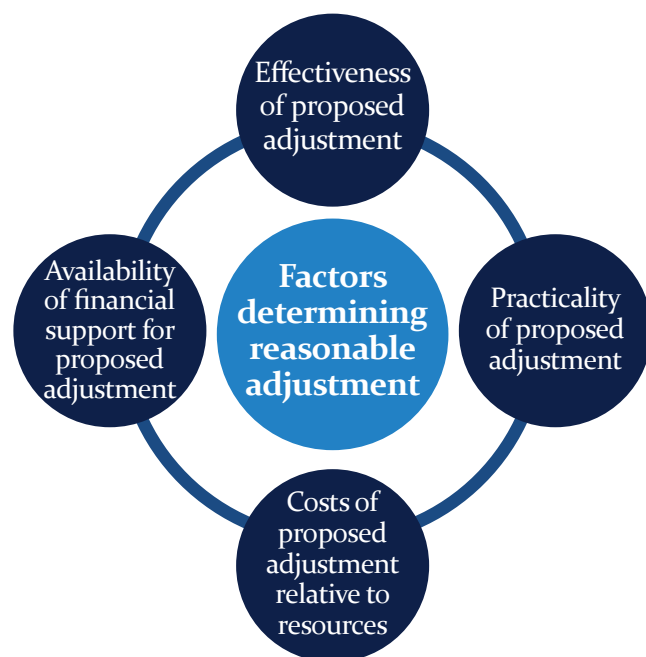
The Autism Aware scheme, in contrast, operates only in Wales and is specific to applicants and employees with autism (see the further resource section towards the end of this guide). As its name suggests, the scheme is concerned mainly with raising awareness and understanding about autism in the workplace. Employers who view a short training video and correctly answer a set of questions based on it can then use the logo to demonstrate their positive attitude to autism.



Ymwybyddiaeth am Awtistiaeth
Autism Aware

While employers may be concerned about the costs of making reasonable adjustment, most adjustments are not very costly at all: for example, allowing a neurodivergent person to sit at the same desk every day need not cost anything. Furthermore, grants to cover most adjustments can be obtained through the Access to Work Scheme. Meanwhile, the benefits of having a neurodiverse workforce – as discussed earlier in this guide – can easily outweigh any costs.

Factors determining whether an adjustment is considered reasonable include:



It should be remembered that the UK's 2010 Equality Act is trying to strike a balance. It is intended to protect the disabled person from discrimination by having to disclose their disability but also to provide them with assistance they may need in the recruitment process if they do choose to disclose. As such, the decision whether or not to disclose is always likely to be a difficult one for graduates as they begin to apply for jobs. It may be helpful to think about the positives of disclosure, which may be seen as an opportunity for both parties, allowing them both to deal with the challenges the neurodivergent employee may encounter in the workplace and allow them to focus on the strengths they bring instead.

A further difficulty is that if the applicant doesn't have a formal diagnosis, they will need medical evidence to show that their neurodivergent condition has a substantial and long-term adverse impact on their ability to do day-to-day activities. In some cases, therefore, the student will not be

able to ask for reasonable adjustments, even though they identify as being neurodivergent.

An alternative to disclosure that is sometimes suggested to overcome these difficulties is for the applicant or employee to ask for workplace adjustments in an indirect way, so they do not need to tell the employer that they have a neurodivergent condition. They might, for example, ask the employer whether it would be possible for them to be allocated workspace in a quiet place of the office or flexible hours because they want to work to their best level and a quiet desk will help them do so.

Careers professionals might also find this indirect method of discussing possible workplace issues they may have. If they have not disclosed their diagnosis with you, or they do not (yet) have one, you can ask about what they think they would need from the employers so that they can work to the best of their ability.

This is a conversation you could rehearse with your neurodivergent student. Many neurodivergent students could find it useful to practice difficult conversations about disclosure before they do it for real. Box 16 provides some guidance on the kinds of workplace adjustments that could be requested.

Another good idea is to have a selection of case studies, which had positive outcomes, for you to work through with your neurodivergent students. If these are real, albeit anonymised, that would make them more appealing to many students, who prefer to learn from real cases rather than hypothetical situations.

Students might not know what adjustments to ask for because they have not worked in a particular workplace environment before. It might help to ask them to think about what adjustments they may have had at school and/or university, during work placements or as part of a part-time job they may have done. You may also wish to use the template on 'workplace challenges' provided in this guide (Box 15).

It is also important for careers professionals to be aware of the law that applies in their country, so that they can advise their students accordingly. You can find some helpful resources at the end of this guide.

Finally, it has been argued that the language needs to change in respect of neurodivergent people ‘disclosing’ their conditions and making adjustment ‘requests’. ‘Disclosure’ makes it sound as though the neurodivergent person is hiding or holding a secret back from the employers, which is not the case. Furthermore, the neurodivergent employee should not be ‘requesting’ reasonable adjustments, as they are entitled to them in law. The term ‘declaration’ might be more appropriate.

Box 15

Workplace challenges template

Below is a list of challenges you might expect to find in the workplace. Tick the ones you think apply the most to you. Then, for those challenges you think do apply to you, try to identify how you know this to be the case. Try to be as honest with yourself as you can.

Your answers will help you in deciding what kinds of job you would be well suited for, as well as which would be a significant challenge to you.

Possible workplace challenges	Applies to me?	How do I know?
Working with people		
e.g., working as part of a team	✓	I have found this difficult when doing groupwork at university. It is not always easy to understand what other team members expected of me
Working as part of a team		
Supervising other people		
Giving and receiving feedback on work performance		
Having direct contact with customers		
Talking to people in person (or on the phone)		
Expected to speak at meetings		

Possible workplace challenges	Applies to me?	How do I know?
Doing the work		
e.g., working as part of a team	✓	I have found this difficult when doing groupwork at university. It is not always easy to understand what other team members expected of me
Shifting deadlines (having to keep changing priority)		
Coping with interruptions to doing a task		
Having to multitask (doing more than one task at a time)		
Staying on task, even if gets boring		
Following verbal instructions		
Managing time pressures		
Coping with unexpected events		
Being punctual to work and work meetings		
Getting things done, e.g., avoiding perfectionism		
Needing the occasional time out		

Possible workplace challenges	Applies to me?	How do I know?
The place of work		
e.g., working as part of a team	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I have found this difficult when doing groupwork at university. It is not always easy to understand what other team members expected of me
Lack of a private workspace		
Working in a noisy place		
Working in bright/dim light		
Presence of strong smells		
Workplace social demands, e.g., small talk, banter		
Needing the occasional time out		

Thinking about the challenges you could face in your job should help you to decide what kind of workplace adjustments you might ask for.

Box 16

Possible workplace adjustments

Workload:

- Manageable workload.
- Regular discussions with line manager about workload.
- Additional time to complete tasks.
- The option not to complete a task straight away but to put it aside for a while and come back to it later.
- Advance warning of when task assignments are to be changed.
- Extra time to adapt fully to changes in task assignments or work pattern.
- Regular breaks.
- Avoiding long shifts.

Working practices:

- Opportunities to work independently on at least some tasks.
- Permission to use own methods of completing a task.
- Reallocation of tasks within the team, e.g., ensure a dyslexic person has a role that requires a minimum of reading and writing.
- Fixed hours of work rather than variable rotas.

- Flexibility in when to be in the workplace, e.g., arrival, leaving, lunch times, medical appointments.
- Possibility to sometimes work at home.
- A clear routine or work schedule.

Computer use:

- Computer software to help with organising their work, e.g., mind-mapping.
- Access to specialist fonts for dyslexic people.
- Computer adaptation to avoid screen glare.
- Permission to print documents if desired.
- Allow frequent breaks from computer use.
- Permission to alternate computer work with other tasks.

Policies and procedures:

- Flexibility over targets to be attained, at what level and/or over what timescale.
- Help to get organised when starting the job and/or a new role.
- Relaxation of triggers for disciplinary action, e.g., sickness absence.
- Reasonable adjustments to be applied to any disciplinary meetings.

- Exemptions from (some aspects of) dress code – some neurodivergent people find certain fabrics or clothing styles unbearably uncomfortable.
- Confidential support when discussing their condition.

Workplace support:

- A workplace mentor with whom you can speak confidentially.
- Regular meetings with line manager, especially at early stages, on adjustments.
- A relatively quiet space to work.
- Greater privacy, e.g., a screen between adjacent workstations.
- Permission to use noise-cancelling headphones.
- Own desk rather than hot-desking.
- Somewhere to work that has plenty of natural light.
- Controllable light at workstation.
- Somewhere quiet to take breaks.
- A space for, and acceptance of, stimming.
- A reserved parking space.
- A map of the workplace.

Communication:

- Permission to audio record meetings, training session, etc.
- Supervisors are requested to ensure their expectation of you are mutually clear.
- Written instructions and/or flow charts for core tasks.
- Printed material to be in dyslexia-friendly fonts and layout.
- Communication in different media, e.g., written instead of verbal.
- Ensure communication is clear by checking understanding.

It should be remembered that the UK's 2010 Equality Act is trying to strike a balance. It is intended to protect the disabled person from discrimination by having to disclose their disability but also to provide them with assistance they may need in the recruitment process if they do choose to disclose.

9. Making neurodiversity part of your reflective practice

The ideal way to conclude this guide would be to leave you with some simple points to take away and use when you are advising students who identify as neurodivergent. Perhaps a simple infographic you could print off and pin to your noticeboard.

Sadly, that is not possible. Neurodiversity is far too a complicated subject for that to be a realistic proposition. There are very few broad lessons to be learned. Essentially, each neurodivergent person is an individual and needs personally tailored treatment.

This is, of course, a 'tough ask' for careers professionals who are already stretched in terms of being able to spend quality time with students. Time is needed to get to know neurodivergent students, to establish trust, to establish what often start as very vague and unformed goals, and to work progressively towards those goals. This is time that many, perhaps most careers professionals do not have.

The good news, however, is that there is good evidence that your efforts will not only be highly appreciated by the neurodivergent students with whom you work but also that they will pay off in terms of those students securing and staying in appropriate, gainful, fulfilling work once they graduate. They will then be able to achieve their potential both in the workplace and in wider society.

The best advice we can give, therefore, is to try to build an understanding of neurodiversity into your reflective practice and to collect some tools to help you put it to good effect. This guide is intended to help you in making a good start.

How, then, can the careers professional build neurodiversity into their reflective practice? The infographic below briefly outlines some of ideas to help support this:

Making neurodiversity part of your reflective practice



Continue to build understanding

Continue to develop your understanding of neurodiversity, the various neurodivergent conditions that are currently recognised, and the relevance of neurodiversity in the workplace.



Stay up-to-date with terminology

Make sure you use the most up-to-date terminology when speaking about neurodiversity. Remember that society is neurodiverse, meaning that it contains a majority who are neurotypical and a minority who are neurodivergent.



Nothing about us without us

Remember to involve your neurodivergent students as you continue to deepen and expand your practice.



Be an advocate

Pass on the message within your professional network. Share your experiences and your resources. The more widely these are applied, the quicker and more fully we will close the neurodiversity employment gap.

Resource directory

Supporting neurodivergent students

Personal Profile Builder: supporting neurodivergent students individually. Available at: <https://toolkit.imageautism.com/>

Progression Framework for Careers Advisers Supporting Neurodivergent Students: The Autism Education Trust. Available at: <https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/resources/progression-framework>

Communicating with Neurodivergent Students: Using Social Stories. National Autistic Society. Available at: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/communication-tools/social-stories-and-comic-strip-conversations>

Storyboard - That is an online storyboarding tool that makes it easy to create storyboards. Available at: <https://www.storyboardthat.com/storyboard-creator>

Tips for speaking to autistic people can be found at: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/tips> and <https://www.healthline.com/health/autism/dear-neurotypical-guide-to-autism#5.-Instruct-us-but-nicely>

Neurodiversity in the Workplace Guide: University and College Union (UCU) https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12406/Neurodiversity-Guidance/pdf/Neurodiversity_A4_guide_January_22.pdf

Texthelp: Neurodiversity in the Workplace: A Guide for HR and DEI Managers. Available at: <https://www.texthelp.com/resources/neurodiversity/>

Ambitious About Autism. Transition to Employment Toolkit. Available at: <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/what-we-do/employment/toolkits/transition-to-employment-toolkit>

Disclosing diagnosis

Should neurodivergent people disclose their diagnosis or not? The National Autistic Society. Available at: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/diagnosis/disclosing-your-autism/autistic-adults>

A Guide for Disclosing Disability: University and College Union (UCU). Available at: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/5445/Disclosing-a-disability-UCU-guidance/pdf/Disclosing_a_disability.pdf

Engaging with employers

Ambitious About Autism's 'Employ Autism', a scheme for autistic people aged 16-25 that provides opportunities to access paid work experience with leading organisations and companies. Available at: <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/information-about-autism/preparing-for-adulthood/work-experience-and-employment>

Government scheme: Disability Confident Scheme. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign>

Welsh Government Autism Aware certificate. Available at:
<https://autismwales.org/en/education/autism-aware-certification/>

The National Autism Society's Accreditation Programme is the UK's only autism-specific quality assurance programme of support and development for autistic people. Available at:
<https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/autism-training-and-best-practice/autism-accreditation/autism-friendly-award>

ADHD Foundation: The Neurodiversity Charity. Neurodiversity in the Workplace: An Information Guide for Employers. Available at: https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/ADHD-F-Neurodiversity-at-work-and-Training-Guide_Business.pdf

Reasonable adjustments – Making adjustments work: passport and model policy: University and College Union (UCU). Available at: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10225/Reasonable-adjustmentpassport/pdf/ucu_adjustment_passport_apr19.pdf

Guidelines for Supporting Autistic Employees in the Workplace: University and College Union (UCU). Available at: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/employment/support-at-work/autistic-adults>

Sources and further reading

Austin, R. D., & Pisano, G. P. (2017). Neurodiversity as a competitive advantage. *Harvard Business Review*, 95(3), 96-103.

Autistica (2023). Autistica Employment Plan. How to double the employment rate for autistic people by 2030. Available at: https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/autistica/downloads/images/article/Employment-Plan-2022_digital.pdf

Barry, A., Syurina, E., & Waltz, M. (2023). Support priorities of autistic university students and careers advisors: Understanding differences, building on strengths. *Disabilities*, 3(2), 235-254.

Bury, S. M., Hedley, D., Uljarević, M., & Gal, E. (2020). The autism advantage at work: A critical and systematic review of current evidence. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 105, 103750.

Dyslexia Scotland (2023). Neurodiversity. Available at: <https://dyslexiascotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Neurodiversity.pdf>

Honeybourne, V. (2020). *The neurodiverse workplace: An employer's guide to managing and working with neurodivergent employees, clients and customers*. Jessica Kingsley: London.

Gal, E., Ben Meir, A., & Katz, N. (2013). Development and reliability of the autism work skills questionnaire (AWSQ). *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 67(1), e1-e5.

Gröschl, S. (2007). An exploration of HR policies and practices affecting the integration of persons with disabilities in the hotel industry in major Canadian tourism destinations. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 26(3), 666-686.

Hayward, S. M., McVilly, K. R., & Stokes, M. A. (2019). Autism and employment: What works. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 60, 48-58.

IMAGE Conference (2023). IMAGE Conference: Reducing the employment gap for autistic graduates. Available at: <https://imageautism.com/image-conference-reducing-the-employment-gap-for-autistic-graduates/>

IMAGE Project (2023). Resources to improve the employability of autistic graduates. Available at: <https://imageautism.com/>

Office of National Statistics (2021). "Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2020". Office of National Statistics. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/outcomesfordisabledpeopleintheuk/2020#employment>

Smith, T. & Kirby, A. (2021). *Neurodiversity at work: Drive innovation, performance and productivity with a neurodiverse workforce*. Kogan Page: London.

Waisman-Nitzan, M., Gal, E., & Schreuer, N. (2021). "It's like a ramp for a person in a wheelchair": Workplace accessibility for employees with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 114, 103959.

Employability skills questionnaire

Here are lists of the kinds of skills that tend to be used in the workplace. They have been put into four groups, which do overlap to some extent. Please choose two to three skills in each of the areas in which you feel you are confident or strong – or other people tell you that you are.

Then try to identify where you have picked them up. Finally, try to develop some short examples of how you have demonstrated them.

The answers you put in this form will then be useful in writing your CV, filling in job application forms, and preparing for your job interview.

Practical and applied skills

These are skills you have acquired during your degree, and they may be quite specific to particular jobs

- Creative thinking – finding novel ways to do a task or solve a problem.
- Problem solving and decision making – choosing between alternative ways to solve a problem, doing so in a productive and pragmatic way.
- Commercial awareness (business acumen) – spotting and meeting gaps in the market.
- Computer programming and coding – using computers, including coding languages such as Python or C++.
- Use of information technology – using software such as Office, Adobe Illustrator, or business apps.
- Project planning and management – working out how to do a project and making it happen.
- Use of maths and statistics – using numeracy to solve problems, analyse data and present results.
- Attention to detail – the ability to spot important details, such as differences in quality.
- Applying a systematic approach – being able to do something in a logical, step-by-step manner.

Choose 2 to 4 skills	Where you picked it up, e.g., home, school, university, clubs and societies, holidays	An example of how you demonstrate it
e.g., computer programming and coding	I attended after school coding club for two years	e.g., I learned how to use Python to a high level
1.		
2.		
3.		

Working with other people

These relate to interacting with other employers, customers, managers, etc. They tend to be transferable into many different job contexts

- Communications skills – including speaking, listening, reading, and writing.
- Languages – the ability to communicate in a second language.
- Empathy – being able to work out how other people feel and respond accordingly.
- Team working – working on a shared task in a harmonious and productive manner.
- Negotiation, persuasion and influencing – being able to set out what you want and to encourage other people to appreciate your point of view, while still respecting theirs.
- Conflict resolution and mediation – solving disputes between people, often by seeking compromise.
- Relationship building – bringing people together so that they can get to know one another and work well together.
- Leadership – taking the lead in a team-based task and ensuring that it is fully achieved.
- Networking – building useful relationships with people outside of your immediate work role.

Choose 2 to 4 skills	Where you picked it up, e.g., home, school, university, clubs and societies, holidays	An example of how you demonstrate it
e.g., languages	I attended Welsh-medium school to the age of 18	I speak Welsh on a daily basis with my friends and family
1.		
2.		
3.		

Reliability and dependability

These relate to how you go about your work. They tend to be transferable into many different job contexts

- Punctuality – being on time to work, meetings, etc.
- Organisation – prioritising things, working efficiently and producing required results.
- Independence – working without any more supervision that is strictly needed.
- Time management – using your time effectively to complete the tasks set for you.
- Conscientious – using your time and other resources to their maximum.
- Trustworthiness – being responsible with the organisation's assets, such as their equipment, materials, or public reputation.
- Task completion – completing the tasks that need to be done according to the deadlines set for you.

Choose 2 to 4 skills e.g, independence	Where you picked it up, e.g., home, school, university, clubs and societies, holidays	An example of how you demonstrate it
1.	I have planned and undertaken a number of trips around the UK to further my interest in portrait painting	Most recently, I went on a solo trip to London to visit the National Gallery
2.		
3.		

Adaptability

These relate to how easy you find change. They tend to be transferable into many different job contexts

- Willingness to learn – showing enthusiasm to increase your knowledge and/or skillset.
- Resilience – persistence even in the face of difficulty disappointment, or temporary failure.
- Loyalty – showing commitment to the people and principles you value.

Choose 2 to 4 skills e.g., willingness to learn	Where you picked it up, e.g., home, school, university, clubs and societies, holidays	An example of how you demonstrate it
	Home	My father has been teaching me how to do basic car maintenance ahead of me taking my driving test.
1.		
2.		
3.		

Workplace challenges questionnaire

Then, for those challenges you think do apply to you, try to identify how you know this to be the case. Try to be as honest with yourself as you can.

Below is a list of challenges you might expect to find in the workplace. Tick the ones you think apply the most to you.

Your answers will help you in deciding what kinds of job you would be well suited for, as well as which would be a significant challenge to you.

Possible workplace challenges	Applies to me?	How do I know?
Working with people e.g., working as part of a team	✓	I have found this difficult when doing groupwork at university. It is not always easy to understand what other team members expected of me
Working as part of a team		
Supervising other people		
Giving and receiving feedback on work performance		
Having direct contact with customers		
Talking to people in person (or on the phone)		
Expected to speak at meetings		

Possible workplace challenges	Applies to me?	How do I know?
Doing the work e.g., working as part of a team	✓	I have found this difficult when doing groupwork at university. It is not always easy to understand what other team members expected of me
Shifting deadlines (having to keep changing priority)		
Coping with interruptions to doing a task		
Having to multitask (doing more than one task at a time)		
Staying on task, even if gets boring		
Following verbal instructions		
Managing time pressures		
Coping with unexpected events		
Being punctual to work and work meetings		
Getting things done, e.g., avoiding perfectionism		
Needing the occasional time out		

Possible workplace challenges	Applies to me?	How do I know?
The place of work e.g., working as part of a team	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I have found this difficult when doing groupwork at university. It is not always easy to understand what other team members expected of me
Lack of a private workspace		
Working in a noisy place		
Working in bright/dim light		
Presence of strong smells		
Workplace social demands, e.g., small talk, banter		
Needing the occasional time out		

Biographies of famous people who identify as neurodivergent

Florence Welch - Dyslexia and Dyspraxia

Florence Welch, the singer of Florence & The Machine, identifies and has been diagnosed with dyslexia and dyspraxia. Diagnosed at a young age, Florence struggled in school due to her neurodivergence, often speaking about getting trouble for singing and being mentally absent from the lesson. However, she now attributes her success to her dyspraxia. She has mentioned on multiple occasions how her neurodivergence allows her to be more creative and therefore succeed in her musical career. Florence has stated often that She is proud of her dyspraxia. The unique thought patterns that exist within dyspraxia enable individuals to come up with creative ideas, allowing them to have strong problem solving and creative thinking abilities.

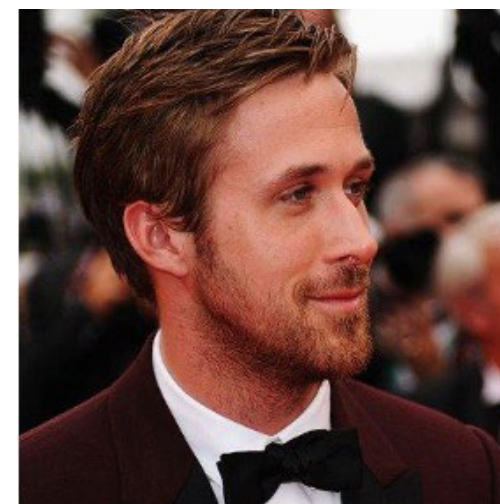
["File:Florence Welch 2018 - Florence and the Machine \(High as Hope Tour\).jpg"](#) by [David Lee from Redmond, WA, USA](#) is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).



Ryan Gosling - ADHD

Ryan Gosling is an actor who acts in both independent and studio films, starring in films such as La La Land, Barbie and Blade Runner. Ryan struggled with ADHD in school, and reportedly 'hated' school due to not having friends and being bullied for his ADHD. Ryan was excluded in secondary school, unable to read at the time. From here his mother homeschooled him until he left in order to focus on acting at age 17. His passion for films started young and drove Gosling to focus on acting.

["Ryan Gosling au festival de Cannes 2011"](#) by [Lifelemon](#) is licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).



Greta Thunberg - ASD

Greta Thunberg is a Swedish environmental activist, who often speaks about how her autism allows her to be so passionate and knowledgeable about the climate crisis. Greta's blunt and forward manner has allowed her to not only gain a following, but also to openly and clearly express to political figures the urgency of the situation. Greta views autism as her superpower, despite it having limited her in the past. The high levels of concentration and reliability that Greta illustrates through her climate activism has been inspiring to many young autistic people, showing how their passion and knowledge is a power that can allow them to achieve what they wish. However, the experience of autistic individuals in the interview process is often a negative one - as they are expected to mask and fit-in in order to get a job, which overlooks their suitability to the job.

"[Greta Thunberg spricht beim Klimastreik vor dem Reichstag](#)" by [Stefan-Mueller-climate](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).



Billie Eilish - Tourette's

Billie Eilish revealed her diagnosis of Tourette's Syndrome on her Instagram account in 2018. She has stated multiple times how exhausting having Tourette's has been for her, having to suppress them whilst in interviews and in public. Billie has also spoken about how suppressing her tics makes them worse later for her, however, singing allows Eilish to have a break from tics during the songs. Billie is the youngest artist to win a Grammy for the album of the year. Billie didn't have traditional schooling and instead was encouraged to focus on music.

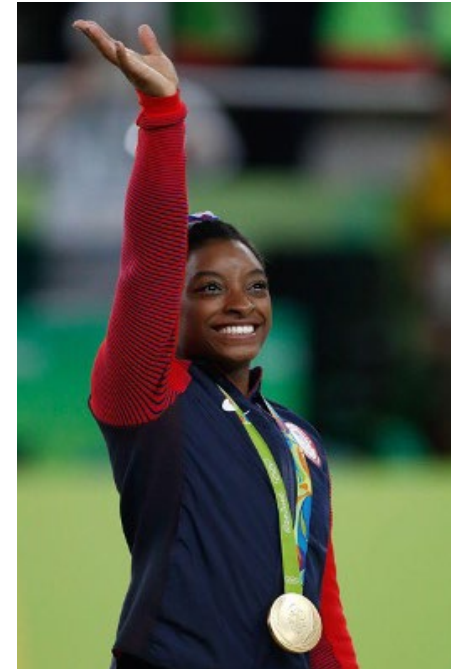
"[Billie Eilish 08 10 2017 -23 \(36528997844\)](#)" by [Justin Higuchi](#) from Los Angeles, CA, USA is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)



Simone Biles - ADHD

Simone Biles is an Olympic gold medallist, having won seven Olympic medals in total, she also has ADHD. In 2016 after hackers leaked Biles medical results showing the medication Ritalin, which is commonly used to treat ADHD symptoms, Simone used the opportunity to stand up to stigma around taking ADHD medication stating that having ADHD and being on medication is nothing to be ashamed of and something which she is not afraid to let people know. In fact, Biles argues that her experiences with ADHD have given her determination and fortitude, therefore allowing her to become an internationally recognised gymnast. Biles also describes how her gymnastics practice at a young age helped her manage her ADHD symptoms, using the sport as a way to focus her energy and as a remedy to an inability to sleep. The passion and energy that Biles, and many others with ADHD, experience often creates challenges for focus, for example, staying engaged in a conversation for the full duration. The same energy that creates an inattentive nature also creates drive and determination for those with ADHD, this means that individuals can complete work much faster and with more focus than others.

["Simone Biles at the 2016 Olympics all-around gold medal podium \(28262782114\).jpg"](#) by [Agência Brasil Fotografias](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).



Sir Richard Branson - Dyslexia

Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, has been very outspoken about his experiences of Dyslexia and cites his dyslexic creativity and imagination as a large part of his success. Branson dropped out of school at 15 as he struggled with the traditional schooling system due to his neurodivergence, as well as citing that he would be considered a failure in academic circles. Now, Branson describes how his dyslexia helps him to see the bigger picture, thus allowing him to be successful in business.

["ETalk2008-Sir Richard Branson"](#) by [Freelance photographer Richard Burdett \(Website\)](#) is licensed under [CC BY 3.0](#).



Glossary

Adjustments. Changes, often small and simple, that can be made to an individual's environment or tasks to reduce or even remove the barriers that disable them. See also disability.

Anxiety disorder. A group of mental-health conditions associated with an individual remaining anxious, worried, or in a state of fear or panic, often associated with being in a particular place or situation.

Asperger's syndrome. A neurodivergent condition, often considered to be part of autism, that is characterised by repetitive forms of behaviour (often as a means, of self-stimulation, or 'stimming'), difficulties socialising with others, and a preoccupation with restrictive or specialist interests, without there being any intellectual impairment or significant lack of communication ability. It is often known simply as "Asperger's" to avoid reference to the word 'syndrome', which suggest that medical intervention is the most appropriate approach to addressing disability.

Attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder (ADHD). A neurodivergent condition that affects people's behaviour, making them seem restless, unable to concentrate and often act quickly upon impulse. It is considered to be a neurodivergent condition, in that those who have ADHD do not usually have an intellectual impairment. It also tends to become less pronounced with age. ADHD may or may not include an element of hyperactivity. It is often known simply as 'ADHD' to soften the emphasis on 'deficit' and 'disorder', which may be taken to indicate that the disability that is experienced is best addressed through medical intervention.

Autism. A neurodivergent condition, sometimes referred to as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), characterised by an individual having challenges with social communication and interaction, repetitive behaviour (known as self-stimulation, or 'stimming'),

higher than average sensitivity to stimuli such as sound, taste and touch, highly focused interests, and a tendency to experience shutdowns or 'meltdowns'. It is often known simply as 'autism' as it tends not to be helpful to think of the conditions as either a disorder or occurring on some kind of spectrum.

Burnout. Mental, emotional and/or physical exhaustion, which can be caused by excessive prolonged stress. Often a co-morbidity associated with having a neurodivergent condition.

Co-morbidity. The simultaneous presence of two or more medical conditions. Often the presence of one condition predisposes the individual to developing the other(s). For example, many individuals with neurodivergent conditions also have poor mental health due to the stresses they tend to experience.

Disability. The lack of ability to do certain things. According to the social model of disability, people are disabled not by impairments to their bodies or minds but by the barriers presented in society which prevent them from participating in activities on an equal basis to everyone else.

Disclosure. Sharing information with others about one's disability, neurodiverse condition and/or state of health. Sometimes the word 'declaration' is preferred, as it does not suggest that the individual has been hiding something.

Dyscalculia. A neurodivergent condition which affects an individual's ability to understand and use mathematical concepts, which are not associated with an intellectual impairment.

Dyslexia. A neurodivergent condition characterised by difficulties with word recognition, fluent reading, poor spelling and decoding abilities, which are not associated with an intellectual impairment.

Dyspraxia. A neurodivergent condition which affects an individual's co-ordination, making their movements appear awkward or lack smoothness. Those with dyspraxia may also lack spatial awareness, causing them to bump into things or knock things over more often than other people. Also known as developmental dis-co-ordination disorder (DDD).

Employability. The abilities, skills, knowledge and aptitudes that make an individual able to obtain and keep a job.

Learning difficulty. A condition in which an individual's ability to acquire knowledge and skills is significantly lower than typical. Such skills may include speech, reading, writing, mathematics, or remembering things. Unlike a learning disability, it does not affect a person's overall intellect.

Learning disability. A condition that affects an individual's intellect and learning ability across all areas of life. It is a lifelong condition that cannot be 'cured'. Neurodivergent conditions are classed as learning difficulties, rather than learning disabilities, because they do not negatively affect a person's intellect.

Masking. Behaviours people use to hide the fact that they have one or more neurodivergent conditions. This typically involves suppressing the signature characteristics of their condition and/or mimicking the behaviours of neurotypical people in similar situations.

Meltdown. A response to an overwhelming situation in which the sensory inputs an individual receives are so great that they lose control of their behaviour. The loss of control could be verbal (e.g., shouting) or physical (e.g., kicking or lashing out).

Neurodivergent. A condition, or a person who has such a condition, characterised by the individual's neurological functioning and cognition taking a profile that falls outside of that typically found in a given population. This profile may be 'spikey', in that in some respects the individual's neurological functioning and cognition is considerably above average while in other respects it is significantly below.

Neurodiversity. The range of neurological functioning and cognition characteristics found in human populations. Such characteristics tend to be particularly associated with attention, learning, sociability, and mood.

Neurotypical. A condition, or a person who has such a condition, characterised by the individual's neurological functioning and cognition taking a profile that falls within that typically found in a given population.

Self-stimulation ('stimming'). Repetitive body movements, noises, or words, with the aim(s) of gaining or restricting sensory inputs, to deal with stress or anxiety, and/or simply for enjoyment. Examples including rocking forwards and backwards in a seat, finger clicking, and arranging objects in particular patterns. Also known as stereotypy.

Sensitivity. Neurodivergent people may have a higher-than-average response to negative environmental stimuli, including noises, smells, tastes, textures, and movements. An individual with high sensitivity may be more prone to stress and meltdowns. While often associated with neurodivergent conditions such as autism, it may also be considered a neurodivergent condition in itself.

Sensory processing. The mechanism by which sensory inputs are processed and integrated. It is often associated with neurodiverse conditions, such as autism and ADHD, but may also be considered to be a neurodivergent condition in its own right. Sensory processing disorder (SPD) is a neurodivergent condition in which an individual's ability to process environmental stimuli (such as sounds, smells and tastes) is insufficient.

Social communication. The verbal and non-verbal means by which individuals relate as they undertake social interactions with one another. Individuals who lack social communication skills may have difficulty communicating in ways that are contextually appropriate, understanding what is implicit, taking things literally that were not intended to be, making inferences, and following the conventions of discourse and storytelling. While associated with a range of neurodivergent conditions such as autism, social communication disorder (SCD) is sometimes recognised as a neurodivergent condition in its own right.

Social interaction. Sequences of actions between individuals or groups. These are often reciprocal, requiring individuals to interact with one another to achieve some kind of purpose. Examples include teaching and learning, buying and selling, and requesting and granting, etc.

Social story. A social learning tool that can be used to support meaningful communication with autistic people of all ages. They provide scripts that can be discussed and followed in situations where the autistic person lacks social skills.

Special interest. A common characteristic of neurodivergent conditions, particularly autism, whereby the individual develops an atypically strong interest in a what can often be a niche subject. Examples of such subjects include cars, trains, animals, space travel, history, numbers, maps, and comic books.

Tourette's syndrome. A neurodivergent condition characterised by people having persistent sudden twitches or 'tics', which they find hard to control. Such tics may be motor or vocal in character. Motor tics may take the form of constant blinking, while vocal tics may take the form of grunts or the utterance of a particular word or phrase. The condition is often known simply as "Tourette's" to avoid reference to the word 'syndrome', which suggest that medical intervention is the most appropriate approach to addressing disability.



Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe



LIVERPOOL
JOHN MOORES
UNIVERSITY

**If you have any questions or comments on
this guide, please contact the authors:**

Brian Garrod: brian.garrod@swansea.ac.uk
or Marcus Hansen: email address here

ISBN: ISBN 978-1-911503-10-1
Swansea University (e-book)

Copyright: The Authors, Prof Brian Garrod
and Dr Marcus Hansen.

Welsh text version is available on request from:
brian.garrod@swansea.ac.uk