

'Asking us what we want and how best we learn would be appreciated.'
Participant Q

Surviving not Thriving: The lived experiences of neurodiverse learners at the University of Northampton



Aim 1: To understand the preferences, strategies and methods that neurodiverse learners suggest as helpful for their learning journey.

Introduction

This poster summarises the findings of an URB@N study that explores the learning experiences of neurodiverse learners at the University of Northampton. The notion of neurodiversity is increasingly better understood; however, it is also a term that covers a wide range of experiences. **Neurodiversity is a catch-all term for learning needs, mental health needs, health needs and many more.** The University of Northampton welcomes a wide range of learners who are increasingly exhibiting complex neurodiverse needs. By understanding their experiences, we can hope to use their experiences and suggested strategies to inform our practice.

Aims

- To understand the preferences, strategies and methods that neurodiverse learners suggest as helpful for their learning journey.
- To explore the experiences of neurodiverse learners during their time of study at the University of Northampton.
- To produce a set of recommendations for staff at the University to support neurodiverse learners on their programmes.

Method

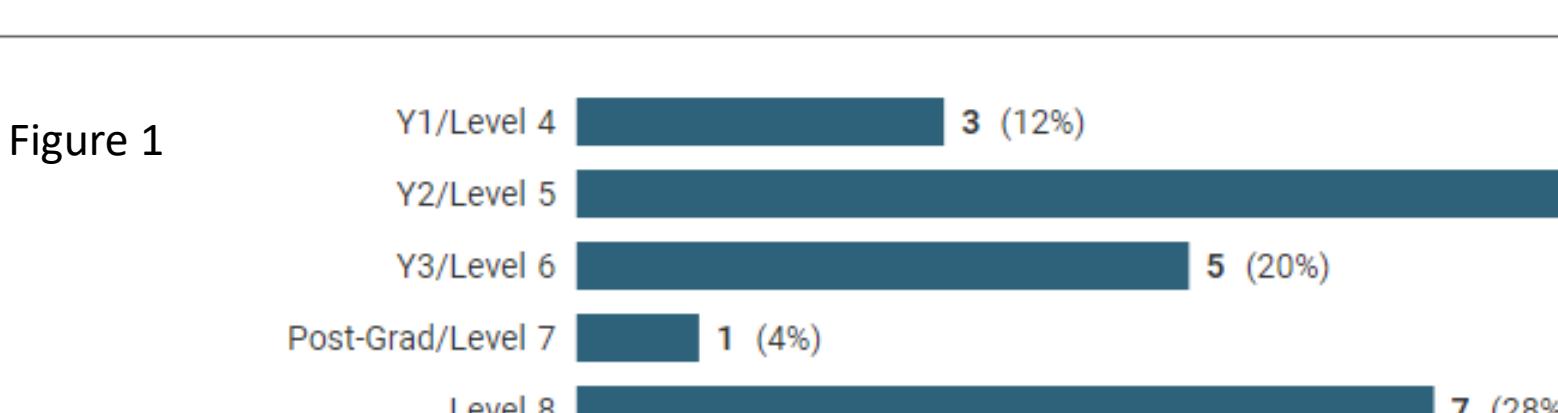
Method: Online JISC Survey

Sample: The sample populations used in this study are defined as 'purposive sampling' as defined in Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), the sample was drawn from the student body at UON- all phases, all subjects.

Inclusion Criteria: Current students studying between Levels 3 and 8 at the University of Northampton that consider themselves to fall into the range of categories for neurodiversity. The final sample included 25 students (Figure 1) from Levels 4-8. 20 identified as female, 4 males and 1 none binary (Figure 2). Their age range was between 19 and 70, with the average age being 31 years old.

They described their neurodiversity as having a range of conditions including Dyslexia, ADHD, Autism and having a 'super skill' or 'a brain that works differently'.

What year are you currently studying in at University?



Participants divided their experiences into two distinct categories. We deemed these to be the **Physical environment** (visual and sensory) and the **Emotional environment** (feelings and identity of self). They were asked 'What helps you to learn?' and 'What stops you from learning?'.

Physical things that help me to learn.

- Visual cues and diagrams
- Quiet with frequent breaks
- Practical activities
- Demonstrations and being guided
- Face to face interactions

Emotional things that help me to learn.

- Reassurance and support (from peers and lecturers)
- Being able to ask questions
- Interesting content
- Staff having time for me

Physical things that stop me from learning.

- Noise and loud open spaces
- Big groups
- Overstimulation (multiple tasks or messy slides)
- Fatigue
- My phone

Emotional things that stop me from learning.

- Big groups
- None direct instructions with abstract interpretations
- Expectations of socialisation
- Feeling stressed and anxious.



Sam Judge
Sport Dev and PE



Helen Tiplady
Senior Lecturer (ITT)



Dr Emma Whewell
Ass. Prof (L&T)

What is your preferred identified gender?

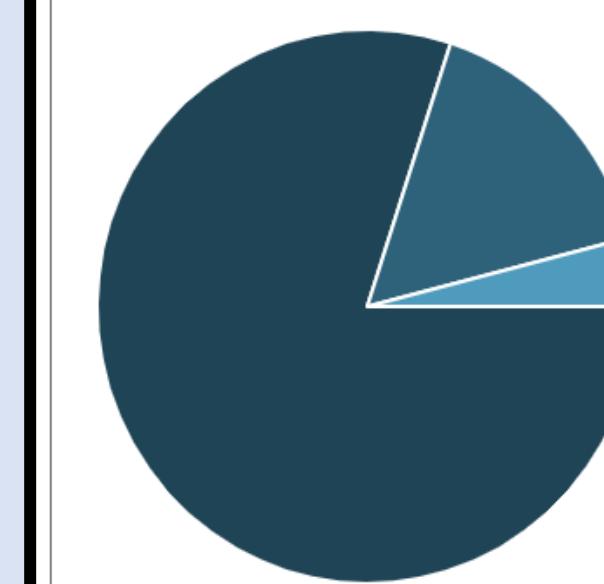


Figure 2



'Neurodiversity may be different in relation to social preference, ways of learning, ways of communicating and perceiving the environment'
Participant J

Aim 2: Explore the experiences of neurodiverse learners during their time of study at the University of Northampton.

We asked our participants about their experiences at UON.

This is what they told us...

'I find breakout groups and discussions with strangers very difficult.'

'Would be nice to have some more support as a level 8 learner.'

'Asking us what we want, how best we learn would be appreciated.'

'There is still a lot of stigma about this that we are "lazy"'

'Not making assumptions about what I know.'

'I think lecturers are very supportive and there is support available to help with your work and studies.'

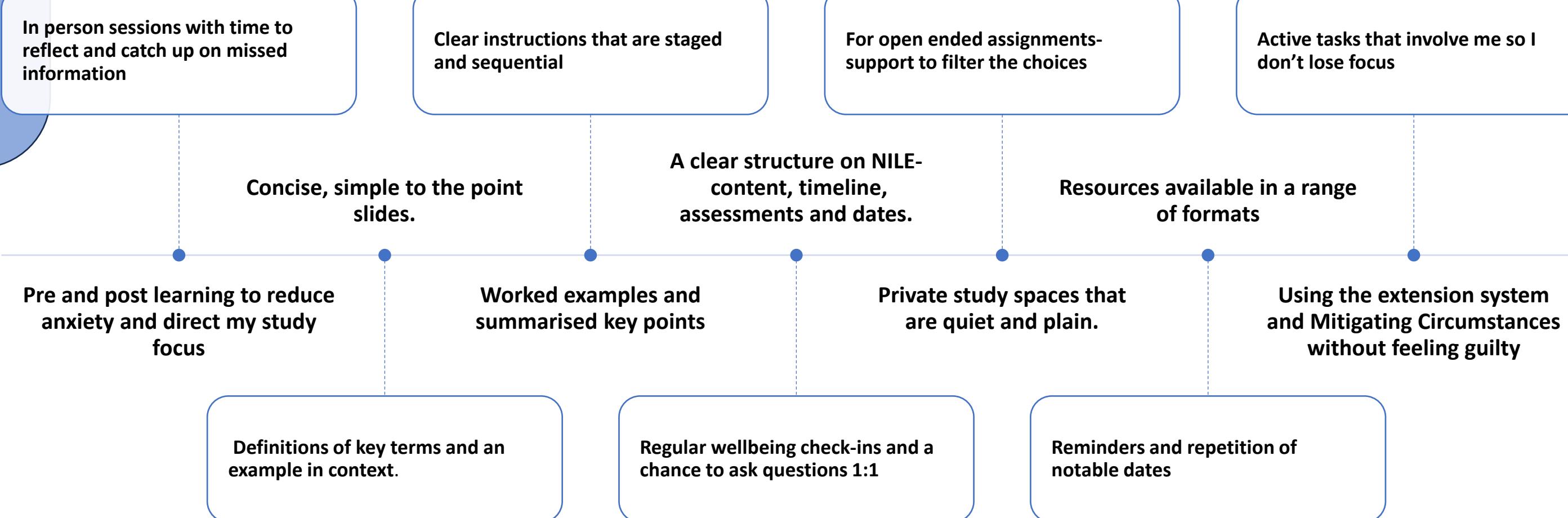
'I have no friends. I find campus a very lonely place. I find the spaces very overwhelming and loud with nowhere else I know of that I can go and sit.'

'Table/chair placements mean I've either got my back/side to fellow students or the lecturers, although I understand round tables make it easier for group work/collaboration.'

'I don't do well absorbing and understanding teaching where assumptions need to be made, or if the information/fact isn't absolutely clear...it leaves too many possible interpretations.'

Participant W

Aim 3: To produce a set of recommendations for staff



Selected References

- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022) *Thematic analysis : a practical guide*. London: SAGE.
- Creswell, J.W and Plano Clark, V.L. (2011) *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. SAGE, London.
- Douglas, G., Travers, J., McLinden, M., Robertson, C., Smith, E., Macnab, N., Lacey, P. (2012). Measuring educational engagement, progress and outcomes for children with special educational needs: A review. *Trimb: National Council for Special Education (NCSE)*. Retrieved from <http://ncse.ie/research-reports>
- Haeghele, J., Hodges, S., Barbosa Gutierrez Filho P., and Goncalves de Rezende, A. (2018). 'Brazilian Physical Education Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion Before and After Participation in A Professional Development Workshop', *European Physical Education Review*, 24 (1), 21–38.
- Hayes, S. and Stidder, G. (2012) *Equity and inclusion in physical education and sport*. 2nd ed. [Online]. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge.
- McLeod, S. (2018) *Questionnaire: Definition, Examples, Design and Types - Simply Psychology*. Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/questionnaires.html> (Accessed: February 22, 2023).
- Vickerman, P. (2007) *Teaching physical education to children with special educational needs*. London: Routledge.
- Vickerman, P. and Maher, A. (2018) *Teaching Physical Education to Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities*. Second edition. Boca Raton, FL: Routledge.
- Vickerman, P., Hayes, S. and Wetherley, A. (2003) 'Special Educational Needs and national curriculum Physical Education', in Hayes, S. and Stridder, G (eds), *equity in physical education*, Routledge, London