



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

# BUILDING BRIDGES

EDUCATING AND SUPPORTING  
NEURODIVERSE PGRS IN HIGHER EDUCATION



REPORT OF THE PGR DIVERSITY STEERING  
COMMITTEE (2023-24), UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

# BUILDING BRIDGES

## EDUCATING AND SUPPORTING NEURODIVERSE PGRS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

This is report based on the project conceptualise and undertaken by the PGR Diversity Steering Committee (2023–24) at University of Leeds under the supervision of Sherry Iqbal.

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**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

**‘Building Bridges: Educating and Supporting Neurodiverse PGRs in Higher Education’,**  
*A report conducted by the Postgraduate Research Diversity Steering Committee detailing a  
comprehensive approach to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment for  
neurodiverse postgraduate researchers, emphasizing community building and resource  
enhancement.*

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### **Abbreviations key**

<b><u>Acronym</u></b>	<b><u>Stands for</u></b>
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AFAB	Assigned female at birth
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
LUU	Leeds University Union
OD&PL	Organizational Development & Professional Learning
PGRs	Postgraduate Researchers
PGRDSC	Postgraduate Research Diversity Steering Committee
PGT	Postgraduate taught student
SpLD	Specific Learning Difficulties

## **Background**

Neurodiversity encompasses a wide range of neurological differences, including specific learning difficulties (SPLD) like dyslexia and dyspraxia, as well as social and behavioural differences such as autism and Attentive Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). It is becoming an increasingly important topic on university campuses, with a growing number of individuals over 18 seeking diagnoses for conditions like autism and ADHD in recent years. For postgraduate researchers (PGRs), the issue of neurodiversity may be particularly relevant due to the decreasing number of individuals disclosing disabilities as they progress through higher education and given that the expectations of PGR study are largely geared towards those with neurotypical brains.

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) results, released by AdvanceHE (Neves, 2023), revealed that PGRs with disclosed disabilities report a 12% lower satisfaction with their student experience compared to those without disabilities. These differences were particularly evident in questions related to feeling valued and listened to by their institution, sense of belonging and community at the institution, as well as health and wellbeing support. PGRs with disclosed disabilities reported between 12-17% lower agreement for these aspects than those without disclosed disabilities.

Although disability types are not collected in the PRES, we can ascertain that neurodivergent PGRs are among those reporting lower satisfaction. There may also be valid concerns that when all disabilities are combined, the specific issues faced by neurodivergent PGRs could be minimized. According to Kelly and Mutebi (2023), 20% of disclosed disabilities in working-age adults are learning or social/behavioural related, indicating a potential estimate of 1 in 5 disabled PGRs being neurodiverse. Individuals with "invisible disabilities" often struggle to access relevant support services or have their differences taken seriously, which likely contributes to lower reported satisfaction across categories highlighted in the PRES.

At other UK institutions, proactive support is provided for neurodivergent students. For instance, universities such as Bradford and Leeds Beckett offer students the opportunity to

undergo screening for Specific Learning Differences upon arrival, enabling referral to support services when necessary. Similarly, Canterbury Christ Church University in Kent provides a 'Neurodiversity at university' module that allows both diagnosed and undiagnosed neurodivergent students to learn techniques for enhancing their learning experience with their neurological differences. This also serves to educate neurotypical students about neurodiversity. Particularly beneficial are these initiatives for undiagnosed or self-diagnosed students who may face long waiting lists for adult ADHD assessments through the NHS. (NHS England, 2024). Moreover, it is likely that neurodivergent postgraduate researchers are hesitant to disclose their condition or seek support due to concerns about being seen as less academically capable or fear of stigmatization (Kelly and Mutebi, 2023; Swanke, 2020). This underscores the need for discreet access points to support at higher education levels while emphasizing the importance of educating individuals on neurotypical people on understanding and accepting neurodiversity.

The nature of PGR study can be particularly challenging for individuals with neurological differences. For example, adults with ADHD may struggle with planning, time management and task focus, while those with autism may have difficulty managing their relationships with their supervisory team. PGRs with dyslexia are likely to face challenges in reading large quantities of literature within the expected timeframes set by their supervisors. Academia is known for its structured and rigid framework which can potentially create barriers for neurodiverse thinkers. As students' progress through higher education and academia, neurodiversity becomes increasingly marginalized compared to neurotypical individuals as well as those with other disabilities (Kelly and Mutebi, 2023). This underrepresentation could lead to feelings of isolation among neurodiverse students, amplifying their sense of lacking a supportive community.

It is becoming increasingly clear that we should pay more attention to neurodiversity among postgraduate researchers. To ensure that all PGRs at Leeds have an equitable experience, supervisors and fellow students need to be more aware of the various learning styles of neurodivergent PGRs. Neurodivergent PGRs should feel supported and welcomed by their

community, leading to higher satisfaction with their research degree experience for all students.

Our primary mission as the PGRDSC is to recognize and address the challenges faced by neurodiverse postgraduate researchers. Building upon the university's firm commitment to diversity and inclusivity, this project seeks to improve the educational environment and sense of belonging for neurodiverse PGRs. Our aim is to actively advocate for and integrate neurodiversity into our academic community, to foster an inclusive environment.

### **Objectives**

Our committee undertook the project of creating an inclusive environment for postgraduate neurodiverse students. To achieve this, we set out three key objectives, aiming to revolutionize the academic and social experiences of neurodiverse PGRs.

These objectives were designed to address specific challenges and leverage opportunities within the university setting to enhance support and inclusivity for all individuals with neurodiversity.

#### **1. Enhancing inclusivity and a sense of belonging**

The network aims to promote a sense of belonging and acceptance for neurodiverse PGRs by actively sharing knowledge and appreciation of neurodiversity throughout the university community. This includes implementing strategies such as:

- A. Developing workshops and seminars to educate students and staff on the importance of inclusivity and the benefits of neurodiversity in academic settings.
- B. Organizing social and academic events tailored to the needs and preferences of neurodiverse students, fostering a sense of community and mutual support among members.

## **2. Increasing support resources and services**

A primary goal of the network is to ensure that all neurodiverse PGRs have access to adequate and effective support resources. This will be achieved through:

- A. Conducting thorough assessments of existing university resources to identify any gaps in support for neurodiverse students.
- B. Collaborating with university disability services, counselling, and well-being services to develop and implement resource guides and support systems addressing both academic and emotional needs.
- C. Establishing a mentorship program pairing neurodiverse students with trained mentors who can offer guidance, academic support, and career advice.

## **3. Educating Faculty and Staff on Diversity and Inclusion**

To enhance the dynamics between neurodiverse PGRs and their supervisors, the network aims to improve faculty and staff understanding and capabilities by:

- A. Organizing targeted training sessions to equip supervisors with the skills needed to effectively support and communicate with neurodiverse students.
- B. Developing best practices guidelines for inclusive teaching and supervision that can be integrated into the university's pedagogical framework.
- C. Encouraging ongoing communication and feedback between neurodiverse students and their academic supervisors to cultivate a more inclusive and supportive supervisory relationship.

## **Methodology**

To better grasp how we could achieve our objectives, a survey was prepared and conducted to gather insights from neurodivergent postgraduate students at the University of Leeds regarding the available support and services. The survey comprised 15 questions specifically tailored for neurodivergent students, such as those with SpLD/ADHD. Key topics covered in the survey included technical, pastoral, and general support, diagnosis, accessible spaces, opportunities among others. This study was conducted online at the University of Leeds across various faculties including social sciences, environment and biological sciences.

Data collection took place in April 2024. An invitation email explained the purpose of the study while ensuring participants that their data would be handled confidentially and anonymously. Additionally, a prize draw offering 5 vouchers valued at £10 each was included as an incentive for all participants.

A total of 99 responses were collected. After concluding data collection, it was decided to categorize survey responses into two groups: support services and community services for further analysis. Analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods including descriptive statistics as well as word analysis using MS Excel and Word software tools.

## Findings

### Respondents

The survey received 99 responses. Twenty-eight respondents reported no neurological differences, while seven preferred not to disclose and were subsequently removed from the survey.

*Table 1: Distribution of neurological differences disclosed by survey respondents, n = 64*

Do you have a neurological difference?		
	n	%
Yes; AuDHD	43	67.2
Yes; SpLD	13	20.3
Yes; both	1	1.6
Yes; other	7	10.9

Responses of Other are as follows: Aspergers; Dyspraxia, Aspergers, ADD; OCD, suspected ADHD; OCD and ADD; Dyslexia, Autism and ADHD; “I suspect I have”; “Believe to have ADHD/Aspergers but yet diagnosed”.

21 respondents answered the questions directed to postgraduate researchers with specific learning difficulties, while 52 respondents responded to the questions based around Autism and ADHD.

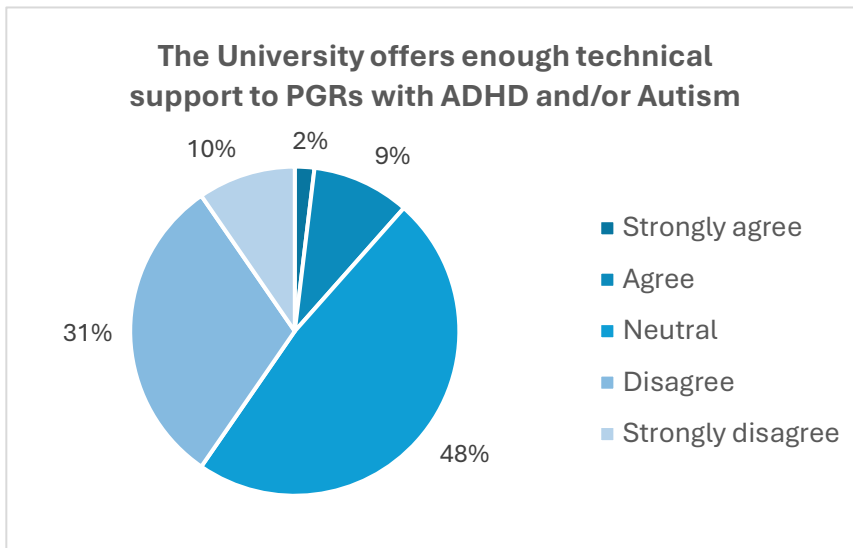
The findings are divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the technical support services offered to students, while the second section explores how we can provide a better community space for the students.

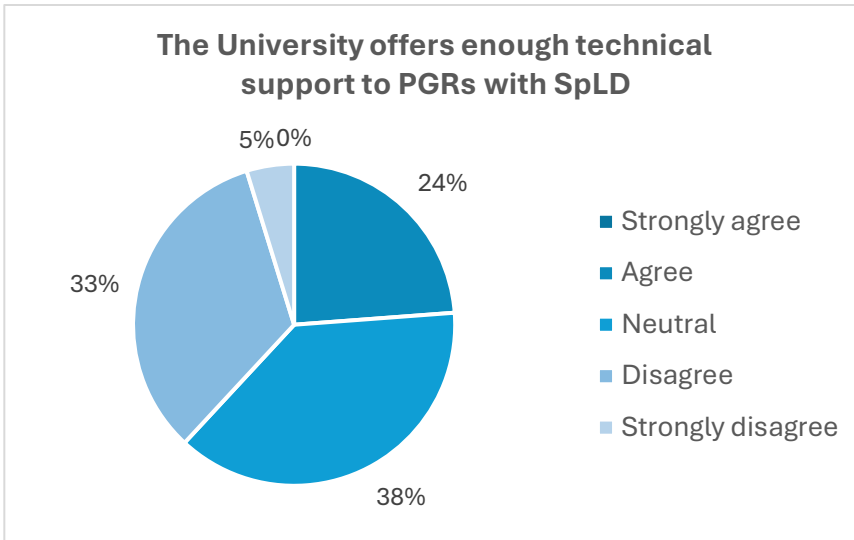
## **Section 1: Support Services**

### **Question 1: Does the university offer enough support to neurodivergent PGRs?**

#### **A. Technical support**

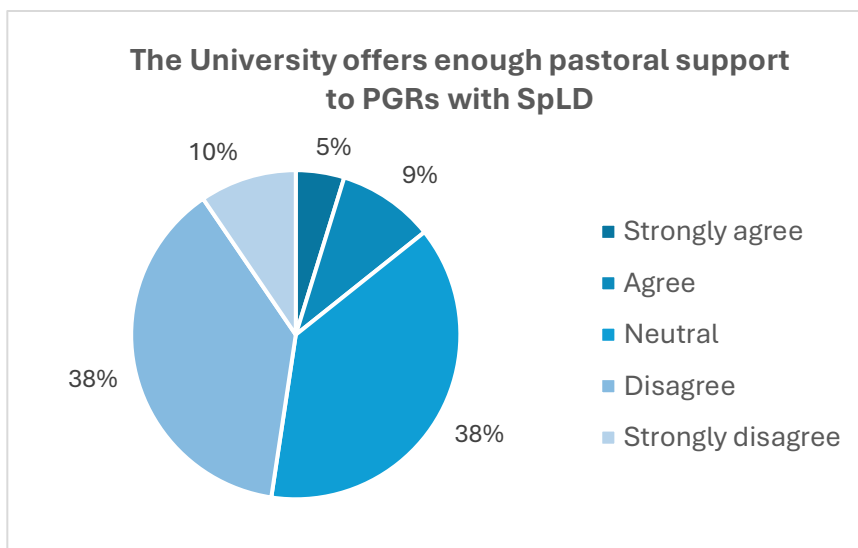
31% of SpLD respondents and 13% of ADHD respondents agreed that the university offers enough technical support to PGRs (see left). Notably, nearly half (47%) of the ADHD group's respondents chose to remain neutral in response to this question, possibly indicating a reluctance to seek technical support in managing their neurodivergence. As a result, when asked about external resources used for learning assistance, SpLD respondents mentioned more technical services and assistive technologies such as Speechify and Claro compared to ADHD respondents.





**B. Pastoral support**

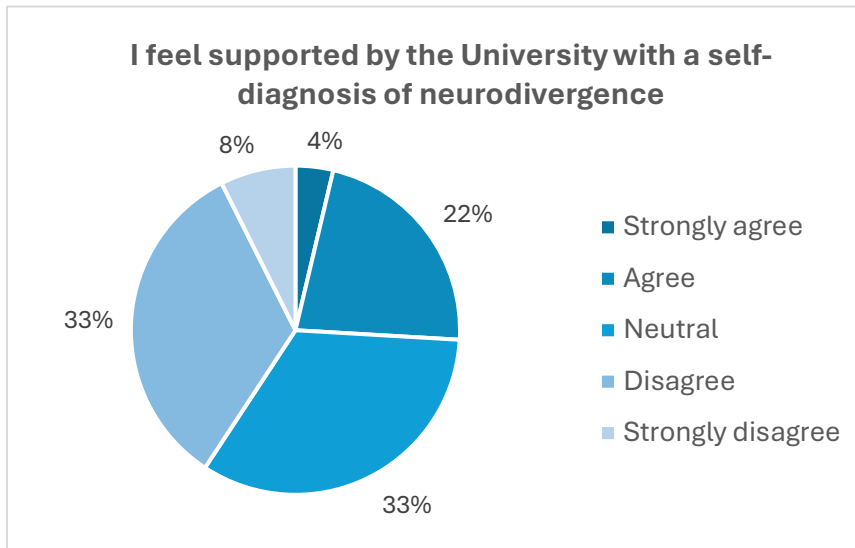
Both groups of neurodivergent PGRs appeared relatively indifferent towards the university’s pastoral support offerings, with 49% and 50% of students with ADHD and SpLD respectively disagreeing that there is enough support available. Additionally, both groups also responded neutrally at a high rate (see left). It is worth noting that both SpLD and ADHD respondents mentioned external therapy as a management strategy; however, it is unclear whether these



students had utilized the Wellbeing and Counselling Service in Leeds before seeking external therapy providers.

**C. Self-diagnosis of neurodivergence**

When asked if they felt supported by the university with a self-diagnosis of neurodivergence (where applicable), out of 27 respondents who participated in this question, 12 (44%) expressing disagreement or strong disagreement.



**Question 2: What resources do neurodivergent PGRs use to assist their learning?**

Respondents with SpLD mentioned the following resources to assist their learning:

University of Leeds	External
Disability strategy tutor	Speechify
Transcription service	Perlego
Research software engineers	Assistive technology from DSA
Library	Lucid
DPGRS/supervisor support	Scholarly
	Cosmic People
	Flown

Zotero  
Talon  
Claro  
Therapy

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The following resources were listed by respondents with Autism/ADHD:

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University of Leeds	External
Specialist mentor	PubMed
Study coach	EndNote
Careers advisor	BioRender
Library	GraphPad
Counselling Service	DSA support
GRAD	Social media communities
School disability link	Autism Aim
LinkedIn Learning	Specialist mentoring
	ClearLinks mentoring
	Audemic
	Time management techniques
	Specialised therapy

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Overall, most respondents either do not have access to resources or are unaware of where to find them, both internally and externally. There were numerous suggestions for resources that could potentially be shared with neurodivergent PGRs. In response to both questions, individuals with SPLD more frequently reported having no resources, whereas those with ADHD/Autism listed many external resources that they use.

### **Question 3: What does the university currently offer to neurodivergent PGRs?**

Following discussions with the Student Support team of the Disability Services, it was clarified that all PGRs are welcome to register themselves if they have a formal diagnosis of neurodivergence or are on the referral list for assessment. However, those who are self-diagnosed are not entitled to support from Disability Services unless they are on the waiting list for assessment.

PGRs can apply for the Disabled Students Allowance if their funding does not cover disability adjustments such as IT equipment. This allowance is also available to international students and distance learners. Nonetheless, some respondents mentioned issues with usability of DSA-covered software and non-cooperation from Disability Services during the diagnosis process.

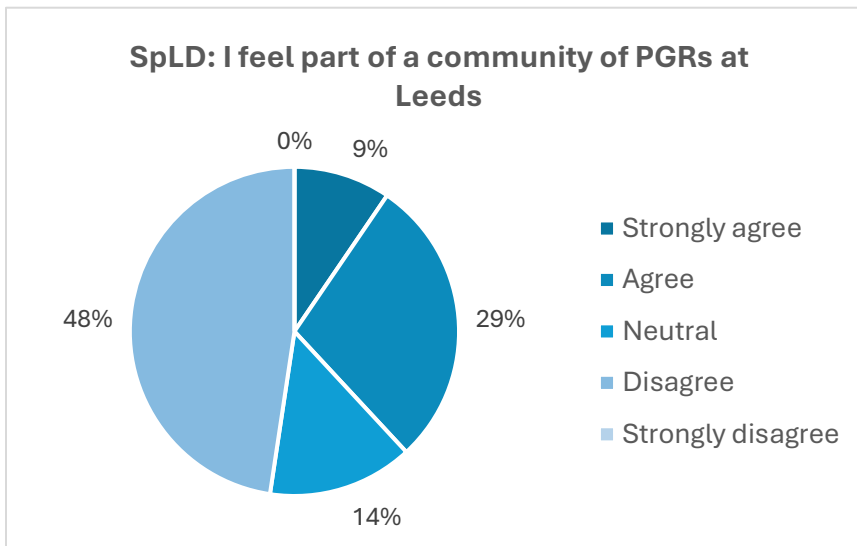
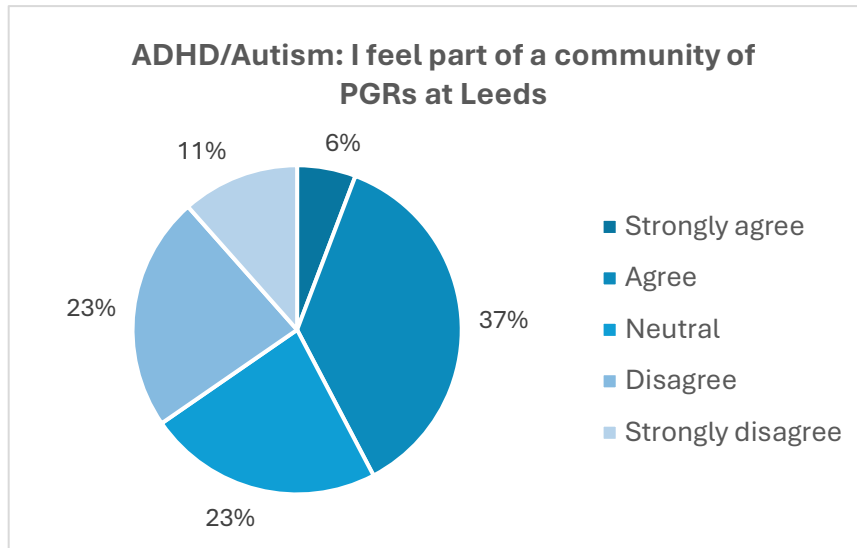
Disability Services also provide assistance in organizing reasonable adjustments for the Viva process and offering dictation services for supervisions. It should be noted that a survey respondent highlighted concerns about staff considering adjustments as optional after providing their adjustment sheet to their supervisor. Further details of this must be explored to fully understand the process for including adjustments.

## **Section 2: Community Building**

### **Question 1: Do neurodivergent PGRs feel part of a community at the University of Leeds?**

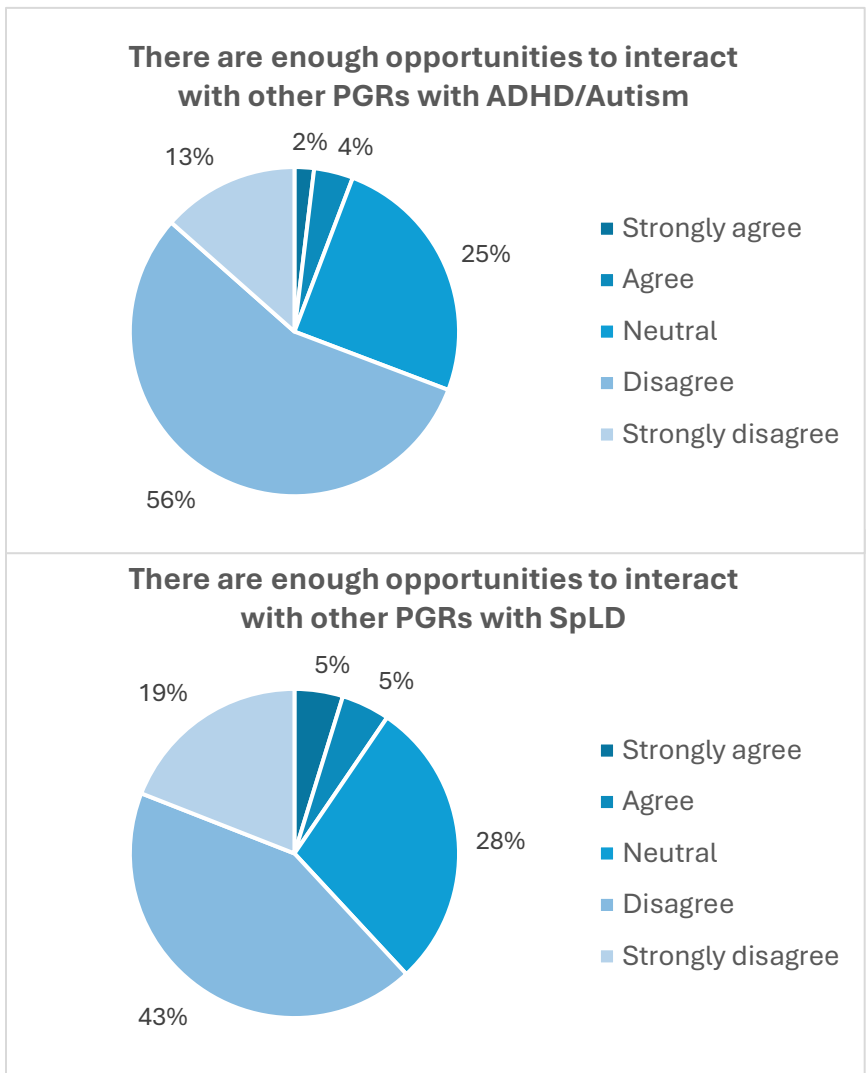
Nearly 50% of students with specific learning differences do not feel a sense of community, compared to only 34% of respondents with Autism and ADHD (see above figures). This disparity highlights a significant issue in community-building activities that often overlook the inclusion of students with SPLDs. Such oversight may contribute to their feelings of isolation and exclusion as students with disabilities.

A striking example is provided by a mature female postgraduate researcher who has ASD and ADHD. She shared her profound sense of isolation and lack of connection with other students on campus. Her experience underscores the urgent need for creating more inclusive and supportive social environments tailored to the needs of all neurodiverse individuals.



**Question 2: Do PGRs think that there are enough opportunities to interact with other PGRs with neurodiversity?**

Survey results show that over 60% of postgraduate researchers with specific learning differences (SPLDs) feel they lack opportunities to meet and connect with like-minded peers facing similar challenges. (see left). Additionally, 70% of students with autism or ADHD report having no chance to meet other PGRs dealing with similar issues through university channels. Approximately 30% of respondents expressed uncertainty about how to meet new people.

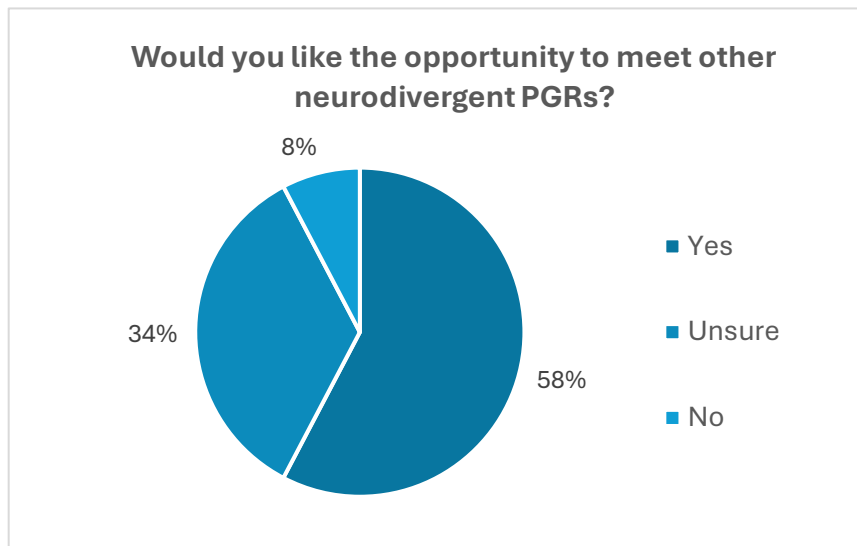


These findings indicate a significant demand for more information on opportunities for involvement, such as joining the steering committee, highlighting a need for improved communication regarding available resources and opportunities within the academic community. This ensures all students, particularly those with neurodiverse conditions, can engage and find support.

One respondent shared a unique perspective that underscores the fulfilment experienced individuals in the neurodiverse community find in mentoring others without specialized support. It suggests that support initiatives should not only focus on direct assistance but also on fostering opportunities for experienced individuals to contribute to the development of others.

**Question 3: Would PGRs like more opportunities to meet other neurodivergent PGRs?**

More than half of the respondents would like to meet other PGRs with neurodivergence and build their network, while about a quarter are unsure but could potentially be engaged to seek help and support from the community if resources are provided.



#### **Question 4: What kind of events would neurodivergent PGRs be interested in?**

PGRs chose from a list of options. The most popular options were neurodivergent cafes (a chance to sit and chat with like-minded people), study time (focusing on finishing a short project with other PGRs), and mixer socials (ice-breaker games and getting to know others).

#### **Question 5: What does University currently offer for neurodivergent PGRs with regards to community building?**

The University of Leeds provides various support mechanisms for neurodivergent postgraduate students to build a close-knit community, with continuous efforts to enhance these initiatives. Rimsha Khan (LUU International and PG Officer) has reported she is actively working on establishing a PGR Reps Link network, to facilitate communication and support among postgraduate researchers. Future plans include participating in or setting up awareness stalls throughout the academic year, with particular focus during Welcome/Freshers' Week specifically for neurodiverse students to increase visibility and engagement.

Contacts at the LUU and the Graduate student office will be instrumental in advertising surveys, which can also be distributed through the Doctoral College communications channels to reach wider audiences. Additionally, promoting the project at upcoming events, such as the collaborative speed friendship event, held by the PGR Diversity Team, in April, will help increase awareness and engagement within the neurodiverse community. These combined efforts aim to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for neurodivergent PGRs at the University of Leeds.

However, there are some challenges involved; obtaining disability survey results from the university has been difficult due to data sharing agreements. Collaborating with the neurodivergent society is underway to reach out to neurodivergent PGRs and organize

tailored events. Despite this effort, contingency events are being discussed should collaboration with society fail to gather an audience.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

### **Section 1: Key takeaways**

The survey results reveal a widespread dissatisfaction with the support and culture at the university. Many respondents have resorted to external resources such as counselling and therapy to ensure accessibility for their PhD pursuits. The invisible labour that disabled individuals often perform is crucial for creating an accessible and inclusive world. (Emens, 2021) With full-time PGRs expected to work 40 hours per week, or 20 hours part-time, while also managing teaching or other paid duties in the midst of rising living costs, neurodivergent PGRs face additional challenges due to the extensive administrative tasks indicated by the survey. These responsibilities include searching for and testing software, advocating for accommodations from supervisors and staff members, as well as engaging with medical professionals in pursuit of diagnosis.

It is evident from the survey findings that much more needs to be done not only in providing support for neurodiverse PGRs but also in educating staff and supervisors about neurodiversity. Subsequent section details specific recommendations put forth by participants of the survey.

### **Section 2: Limitations**

The research and survey conducted has successfully opened important conversations on the experiences of PGRs with neurodivergence, but it has faced challenges, discussed below.

#### **1. Limited access to accurate data on students with neurodiversity affected survey targeting**

The team faced challenges in accessing the number of neurodiverse PGRs from the University, making it difficult to project the target population for the survey. Knowing the

target population is crucial for determining an appropriate sample size for generalization in surveys like this one. The lack of available data at the University also complicates matters related to self-diagnoses and support channels that PGRs with neurodivergence can utilize to report their needs and seek support from the University.

## **2. Resource limitation**

Initially, the PGRDSC team met once a month. However, due to this project, the group had to meet several times with various stakeholders. This incurred both time and financial costs for PGRDT. The in-person availability of stakeholders such as disability services and the project timelines posed a challenge. Consequently, the team divided responsibilities into silos to reduce the burden on finance and time resources. Additionally, some meetings with certain stakeholders had to be conducted online and via email communications rather than in person, limiting opportunities for synchronous conversation and interaction and building rapport with services.

## **3. Response rate**

In relation to point one, projecting the response rate of the study was challenging due to the absence of baseline data on PGRs with neurodivergence. This study functioned as an exploratory survey, making it difficult to measure response rates for generalizing survey results. However, distributing the survey across all faculties of the University helped address this gap, and we'd like to thank colleagues for their efforts here.

## **Section 3: Future actions**

Despite the numerous challenges the survey faced, it promises to be a major steppingstone for capturing students' experiences and voices in guiding the University's efforts to provide appropriate and supportive services that enhance the experiences of PRGs with

neurodivergence. Below are some future actions we can focus on that emerged from the survey.

## **1. Community building and support**

In the survey results, a significant number of responses revealed that PGRs with neurodivergence do not feel belonging in the University nor among the colleagues. This requires a system of community building where neurodivergent PGRs can meet at various levels to share their experience and support themselves while collectively demanding appropriate support from the University. Additionally, the various stakeholders such as disability services and LUU could lead actions that support community building for PGRs who are neurodiverse.

## **2. Networking and engagement**

Creating a community of postgraduate researchers with neurodivergence is vital to success of their studies, through creating and fostering a sense of belonging and community. We must offer the opportunity for internal and external networking within and outside the University. For example, establishing network connections within Yorkshire Universities can open up various opportunities such as sharing experiences, receiving support, and navigating academic studies beyond the University. In alignment with the Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education (YCEDE), a group of Universities in Yorkshire including University of Leeds, York, Sheffield- offering mentorship and networking to PGRs aligning with their objectives; similarly, PGRs with neurodivergence can establish networks based on common needs both within and beyond the University.

### **3. Financial support**

PGRs with neurodivergence may require additional time to meet important deadlines, such as transfer and submission deadlines. This could result in prolonged studies and increased financial strain. Therefore, the Disability Service and other stakeholders should work together with the University to generate ideas on how to provide PGRs with neurodivergence access to necessary financial assistance for their studies.

### **4. OD & PL**

To enhance staff skills in supporting PGRs with neurodiversity, the university should incorporate Neurodivergence training into the Organizational Development and Professional Learning (OD&PL) program. This initiative will involve offering comprehensive training for university staff to raise awareness about neurodivergence and provide appropriate support. By doing so, we aim to ensure that staff are well-equipped to assist and guide neurodiverse postgraduate researchers effectively. This training should be undertaken by all staff, particularly those supervising and supporting neurodiverse PGRs. Collaborative working with OD&PL would be welcomed by the PGRDSC to create training of this kind.

### **5. Pastoral services**

The University should provide religious and (or) non-religious pastoral care for PGRs with neurodivergence to help alleviate emotional, spiritual, and social anxieties associated with postgraduate studies.

## **6. Clear University Policy on support for Neurodivergent PGRs**

The University should clearly establish its policy on neurodivergence and take action to improve the experience of students with neurodivergent conditions. This could involve areas such as organizational development, professional learning, pastoral care, and more.

## **7. Intermittent evaluation of University's activities/actions on Neurodiversity**

The University should regularly review its actions and activities related to neurodiversity. This is essential to ensure that the University continues to provide relevant services for postgraduate researchers with neurodivergence. Additionally, timely updates on OD & PL activities concerning neurodivergence are crucial to ensure that staff deliver appropriate services for students and PGRs with neurodivergence. It is important that students and PGRs with neurodivergence actively participate in these evaluation activities.

## **Section 4: Recommendations**

The survey yielded a range of responses about the enhancements that neurodivergent PGRs believed would improve their studies and well-being during their time at Leeds and beyond. These have been distributed among the relevant teams according to their duties and objectives. Based on the upcoming actions outlined above, we have focused on categorising the tasks each group should undertake to ensure that activity groups and support services are accessible for everyone, including mature students, parents, and those who juggle work alongside their studies. Addressing commuting and scheduling challenges will be central when considering these groups.

### **1. Recommendations for the University of Leeds**

The PhD is often seen as a degree that requires a high level of independent research, which can present challenges for neurodiverse students. To address this, the University of Leeds could consider incorporating additional support measures into the structure and handbooks of the PhD program.

- For instance, survey respondents highlighted the need for a more structured meeting schedule, such as having set days and times for meetings rather than organizing them individually. Additionally, some suggested allowing flexibility with unofficial deadlines set between PGRs and their supervisors. Encouraging supervisors to be more flexible with these informal deadlines could be beneficial.
- Supervisors and teaching staff should receive education and training to better understand and support neurodivergent people. The OD&PL team offers sessions on neurodiversity, that are mandatory for staff supporting neurodivergent PGRs, and optional for those interested in supporting neurodivergent PGRs.
- Pedagogical teacher training needs to be revisited and, if necessary, updated to align with current understandings of the complexities and impacts of neurodiversity. Instead of being implemented only when needed, neurodiversity-friendly teaching should form

the foundation of the teaching culture at Leeds in order to enhance the experience for everyone, including those who may be undiagnosed or unrecognized as neurodivergent.

- PGRs who disclose that they identify as neurodivergent should receive reasonable adjustments and accommodations when being assigned teaching, including scheduling.
- Survey respondents expressed a need for specific financial support, such as bursaries, funding opportunities, or money-management workshops. They also highlighted the challenges of extensions and writing up years due to long waiting lists and the cost of seeking private diagnosis, affecting both their PhD progress and personal lives. The University of Leeds should address the clarity around pre-diagnosis support for postgraduate researchers based on survey results.
- Communications with neurodiverse PGRs should be conducted through Email and Microsoft Teams, to cater to individuals' preferences and needs. It is important to consider that some PGRs may not frequently utilize the Doctoral College Teams channel, particularly those in disciplines where Teams usage is less common. This approach benefits all PGRs, regardless of their neurodiversity status.
- In libraries and other study spaces, it is important to enforce silent study more strictly. Excess noise can be overstimulating for those who are neurodiverse, potentially leading to shutdowns and making it difficult for them to use the library or study space as intended. To address this issue, study areas could incorporate variations of ambient sound such as white noise and green noise. Maintaining a constant level of ambient sound would help minimize distractions caused by other students, like music from headphones, eating noises, and whispering—especially beneficial for neurodiverse individuals.

## 2. Recommendations for Leeds University Union

- LUU focuses on providing advice, representation, societies, and social activities. Therefore, our recommendations for LUU should encompass the social and community aspects of the survey and be carried out in conjunction with university initiatives. Additionally, it falls within the remit of LUU to offer pre-diagnosis support and advice to individuals who suspect they may be neurodivergent.
- LUU has recently opened a PGR lounge where the PGR Diversity Team have hosted events. This presents an opportunity for potential collaboration. Survey respondents expressed interest in having more quiet or solitary work areas, as well as designated spaces for taking breaks. Designating a room within the PGR lounge specifically for silent study and ensuring its enforcement would provide neurodivergent PGRs with a comfortable space to work. Additionally, creating neurodivergent hours to work in this space would support inclusivity, increasing a sense of belonging.
- Conducting focus groups for neurodivergent PGRs would allow them to contribute further to shaping PGR spaces at LUU according to their specific needs, aligning with LUU's 'student-led' approach.
- LUU should further create and support inclusive social environments to help combat feelings of isolation among neurodiverse PGRs. For example, the 'postgraduate cafe' is a weekly casual gathering that provides an unstructured space for postgraduates to meet others. However, it also includes PGTs, whose time at Leeds is typically limited to 1 year and most are taught students (those who undertake research masters, an MRes, are considered PGRs). The PGR lounge could host similar events exclusively for PGRs and find success by promoting them across the Doctoral College teams channel and the PGR Diversity mailing list.
- LUU is well-positioned to assist in establishing support groups or online communities. It is home to the Neurodivergent Society, which primarily comprises undergraduate students (though it may face closure at the end of 2023/24, of which need to be investigated). These initiatives would need little moderation initially, but they could greatly benefit from support and marketing during their early stages.

### **3. Recommendations for PGR Diversity team**

- Further research on the impact of neurodiversity on the PGR experience would be beneficial. A comprehensive approach, considering intersecting factors such as age, race, gender, and location (on-campus, distance learning, commuter) would provide greater insights into the complexities of neurodiversity and allow for more tailored support and advocacy for individual students.
- One notable example is the need for further research into the experiences of women and AFAB individuals in relation to autism and ADHD. Societal understanding of these conditions often characterizes them as predominantly affecting men, resulting in later diagnoses for women compared to men (Russell et al., 2022). It has been observed that AFAB individuals with autism and ADHD tend to develop more coping strategies, engage in "masking" behaviours at higher rates than men (a term used to describe concealing typical neurodivergent traits and aligning behaviour with societal norms), and experience increased comorbidities with mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. (Quinn and Madhoo, 2014).
- The PGR Diversity team can support the Doctoral College communicate about resources and opportunities available for neurodivergent PGRs, with a focus on better targeting neurodivergent individuals rather than the general audience assumed in most current communications. Some survey participants have also shown interest in a social media group or Microsoft Teams channel. The PGR Diversity team is well-equipped to organize and create resource banks as well as information points for these channels concurrently with the communications efforts.
- The PGR Diversity team has been using the new PGR lounge at Leeds University Union to host introductory events. Survey participants have suggested providing quiet study spaces in the lounge, which would start the process of creating and regulating neurodivergent-friendly study areas while also focusing on the PGR community.

## **Final remarks**

We, the Postgraduate Diversity Steering Committee, are pleased to present this report. Our dedicated team, Andrea Cereceres, Danqi Wu, Eshita Sengupta, Jingyi Li, Lais dos Santos, Lizzie Wright, Roshni Marath Jairaj, Vivian Nsiah, and Zhané Murrell-Smith, has invested significant time and effort into gathering data, identifying key issues, and formulating actionable recommendations. We would also like to thank the PGR Diversity Team (George Gisborne, Liam Carson, Sally Osei-Appiah, and Sherry Iqbal) for their invaluable guidance, resources, and support, which made this report possible. We believe this report serves as a vital resource for both the university and the union in their ongoing efforts to enhance diversity and inclusion across campus.

The findings and recommendations outlined herein are designed to foster a more inclusive, supportive, and equitable environment for all postgraduate students. It is our sincere hope that the university administration and union leadership will carefully consider and implement the proposed action points. The success of our collective endeavour depends on the commitment to translating these recommendations into tangible improvements.

Each member of our committee has worked diligently to ensure that this report addresses a wide range of aspects related to diversity and inclusion. We have strived to capture the diverse perspectives and needs of our postgraduate community, ensuring that no voice is left unheard.

We are confident that, with the active support and engagement of all stakeholders, the insights and recommendations presented in this report will lead to meaningful and lasting change. We look forward to seeing the positive impact of our work reflected in the university's policies, practices, and culture.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we appreciate your continued commitment to fostering a more inclusive university environment.

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