

A Guide for Neurodivergent Students Transitioning into the Workplace

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The challenges of transitioning

Leaving university and entering the workplace can be a challenging transition for everyone, and there are three steps that can make the process a little less daunting for neurodivergent students.

As life progresses, society expects us to become used to less and less structure, with the very last of that structure disappearing upon graduation from university or college. Because of this, the experience of being neurodivergent can become more difficult as time goes on.

The transition from primary school to secondary school often leaves autistic children feeling overwhelmed with the sensory input of different classrooms. The transition from school to college can leave ADHDers feeling overwhelmed with the increased independence and organisation required. These experiences can be even more intense when moving to university because it involves a significant change in environment, routine, and social expectations. But structure

still exists. There are deadlines to follow, support systems in place (although the effectiveness of these can vary), and a fresh start during each of the three plus years of a course.

Transitioning into employment presents a new way of living as well as new challenges to overcome and on top of that, the lesser-known area of what support might be available. Oftentimes, it can be hard to find clarity on what accommodations are available for neurodivergent employees, and advocating for these can be a full-time job in itself. Too often it is expected that neurodivergent employees are experts in their own disabilities and comfortable advocating for themselves in order to receive the support they both need and are legally entitled to. That's why sharing advice on how to navigate the workplace transition is important for students.

Here are three pieces of advice for accessing neurodivergent support needed to thrive in a working role:

1. Reject neuronormativity

Neuronormativity = society prioritising neurotypical expectations and social norms.

Neuronormativity means that neurodivergent individuals should be expected to cope with ideologies that do not accommodate their neurotype.

Neurotype = A type of brain, in terms of how a person interprets and responds to social cues.

Expecting us to utilise neurotypical ways can be damaging to our nervous systems, which can negatively impact our physical and emotional well-being. You can reject neuronormativity by allowing yourself to use strategies and processes that work with your brain type. For example, a candidate may only know the interview questions as soon as the interview takes place. They may not be given the option to read the questions in advance for processing time. However, you can ask for accommodations such as the agenda of the interview and what kinds of questions will come up. This will enable you to feel self-assured that being neurodivergent is an asset in the workplace and following through with accommodations can benefit your role.

Other examples include setting boundaries with working hours, how your training is tailored and how you execute your role. All of these can help you to express the importance of being part of a neurodiverse workforce.

2. Explore effective accommodations that are readily available without the need for diagnostic disclosure.

Since the Covid pandemic, people have increased awareness of their neurodivergence. However, the medical industry lacks the resources to provide suitable waiting times and resources for individuals to access a formal diagnosis. Current waiting times via the NHS can be up to three years, and private routes can cost up to £2,000, which may be inaccessible for many neurodivergent individuals and their families. The majority of the accommodations that neurodivergent individuals need access to do not require financial input.

Examples of low / zero cost accommodations



Setting clear expectations



Time to process information



Using multiple forms of communication



Sensory tools / toys

These accommodations can be accessible regardless of a diagnosis and can especially be helpful for those who may not be comfortable disclosing their neurodivergence.

3. Access Government funded schemes that can also support education for your colleagues.

The Access to Work (ATW) scheme is a government funded grant that aims to provide support for individuals with disabilities and/or long term mental health difficulties. This support can include physical workplace adjustments, assistive technology software and neurodiversity workplace coaching that mentors the individual to make their role more accessible.

The ATW scheme also funds disability awareness training for colleagues to increase their understanding of disability and how they can practice inclusivity. You can find out more about the Access to Work scheme at:

 <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>


Some extra tips to remember:



- Asking for workplace adjustments is a legal right under the Equality Act.
- Workplace accommodations are a necessity, not an unfair advantage.
- You are not responsible for educating others about your disability, nor responsible for justifying your needs.
- Neurodivergent people have the right to thrive in the workplace.
- Find a process within your role that works for your neurotype rather than against it.

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