University of Aberdeen

Neurodivergent Equality Policy – Staff and Students

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1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 The University of Aberdeen celebrates and values the diversity of its community. In line with its strategic plan, Aberdeen 2040, the University is committed to treating all staff, students, University Court members, visitors, and partners with dignity and respect. The University seeks to provide a positive working and learning environment free from discrimination, harassment, or victimisation. In accordance with its Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy, the University of Aberdeen will not discriminate against, nor tolerate discrimination or prejudice towards staff or students who are neurodiverse.
- 1.2 The University aims to raise awareness of neurodiversity and challenge negative stereotypes and ensure that its teaching, learning, research, and employment practices are accessible to people who are neurodiverse. The University recognises that discrimination, negative perceptions or judgements may discourage individuals from sharing how neurodiversity affects them in the University.
- 1.3 The University endeavours to create an environment where individuals feel comfortable sharing their neurodivergence. This can lead to enhanced wellbeing and opportunities to discuss and implement reasonable adjustments to work or learning environments, supporting staff and students to fulfil their full potential.
- 1.4 The University values its diverse workforce and student population and recognises how the range of perspectives this brings enriches University life and contributes to its success.

2. What is Neurodiversity?

- 2.1 Within this policy, neurodiversity refers to the variation in cognitive functioning that can lead to differences in thinking, attention, and memory. Most forms of neurodivergence are experienced along a spectrum with each having a range of associated characteristics that can vary from individual to individual. Most people are neurotypical which means that the brain functions and processes information in the way society expects. An estimated 1 in 7 people in the UK are neurodivergent.
- 2.2 Neurodivergence includes (but is not limited to):
 - ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders)
 - Autism
 - Dyscalculia
 - Dysgraphia
 - Dyslexia

- Dyspraxia
- Tic Disorders

More information on these neurodivergent conditions can be found in Appendix D.

3. Scope

3.1 This Neurodiversity Equality Policy is applicable to all staff and students.

4. Legal Background

- 4.1 Neurodivergence may be regarded as a disability under the Equality Act 2010. Disability is defined in the Act as a "physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day to day activities". However, some neurodiverse individuals do not consider themselves to have a disability.
- 4.2 Employers and education providers have a duty to take reasonable steps to reduce disadvantages in employment and education which may arise because of disability. This means that reasonable adjustments should be implemented, and the University will put these in place where appropriate to support staff and students to maximise their wellbeing, their contribution to the University, and achieve their learning goals.

5. Principles

- 5.1 As a Disability Confident Committed University, a supportive environment will be provided for neurodivergent staff and students who wish to share that they are neurodivergent. However, it is the right of the individual to choose whether they wish to do so. Appropriate support can be provided if the University is made aware that an individual is neurodivergent.
- 5.2 Job candidates will be offered opportunities throughout the recruitment and selection process to share that they are neurodivergent and to request reasonable adjustments. Appendix B shows this process. Prospective students will have the option to share that they are neurodivergent and seek reasonable adjustments in advance of commencing their studies, or in the case of research degrees a recruitment process, and throughout their studies. The process can be seen in Appendix C. Detailed guidance is provided on this in the Disabled Student Pathway: Disability Pathway Final Version.pdf (abdn.ac.uk).
- 5.3 Staff, students, and University Court members will be treated fairly and with respect if they choose to share that they are neurodivergent.

- 5.4 Neurodivergent staff, students and University Court members will be included in discussions about their condition and in the decision-making processes regarding reasonable adjustments and wider University policy discussions on neurodiversity.
- 5.5 We will ensure confidentiality for all neurodiverse staff and students in line with the Data Protection Act 2018. This legislation requires the University to ensure that all information is used fairly, lawfully, transparently and for specified and explicit purposes. Information will not be retained for longer than necessary and will be handled securely and sensitively. Information about an individual's neurodivergence will not be disclosed without their prior explicit agreement, unless in exceptional circumstances for example, in an emergency or for reasons of health and safety.
- 5.6 All reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that policies, practices, and culture are inclusive of neurodivergent staff, students and University Court members and do not directly or indirectly create barriers to participation in University life.
- 5.7 It is recognised that each staff member and student is unique and that there can be an overlap between neurodivergent conditions.
- 5.8 It is understood that neurodivergent conditions may intersect with other protected characteristics, leading to additional barriers to employment or learning.
- 5.9 The University recognises that many people who are neurodivergent may not have had a formal diagnosis. This is more likely to be the case for older people, women, and those from ethnic minorities. The University understands that waiting times for an NHS assessment are lengthy and that private assessments incur a cost. Therefore, staff who self-identify as neurodivergent are encouraged to seek necessary workplace adjustments whilst awaiting a formal diagnosis by discussing this with their line manager. The Student Advice and Support Team can provide a Specific Learning Differences (SpLD) screening for students who believe they may have dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, and/or dyscalculia. Where indicators of SpLD are identified, students may be offered the opportunity of a referral to an Educational Psychologist for a formal SpLD assessment. The Educational Psychologist can also offer a psychological assessment for Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC), ADD and ADHD. Postgraduate research students are encouraged to seek necessary workplace adjustments through the Student Advise and Support Team and research supervisors.

- 5.10 The University understands that there can be a link between neurodiversity and mental ill-health and reduced wellbeing. Individuals who are neurodivergent are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.
- 5.11 It is understood that many people who are neurodiverse do not share that they are neurodivergent due to social stigma and the fear of discrimination. A diversity of cognitive approaches from both staff, students and University Court members is viewed as a source of strength and value to the University.

6. Confidentiality

- 6.1 The university endeavours to create an environment that encourages safe sharing of neurodivergence. All disability disclosure information is treated sensitively and in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy.
- 6.2 The University has obligations to monitor staff and student equality data.

 Anonymity will be maintained in reporting and the University will not report on information that poses a risk of identifying individuals.

7. Responsibilities

- 7.1 Managers will be responsible for:
 - Supporting staff/PGR students who share a neurodivergent condition and encouraging an open discussion on the support which can be offered.
 - Referring staff to Occupational Health where appropriate to gain further information on the adjustments which may be helpful for the staff member.
 - Implementing reasonable adjustments timeously and reviewing those on a regular basis.
 - Providing a supportive and respectful environment for neurodivergent members of staff.
- 7.2 Staff with Neurodivergent conditions will be encouraged to:
 - Raise with their manager at the earliest opportunity that they are neurodivergent.
 - Provide suggestions regarding reasonable adjustments.
 - Co-operate with the process of identifying and implementing reasonable adjustments.
 - Take steps to develop strategies to support themselves in their role, e.g., planning work activities, setting up their workstation, and computer settings as appropriate. Line managers or HR Partners can be contacted for support with this.

Ask for support from their line manager when required.

7.3 The University will be responsible for:

- Supporting students who share a neurodivergent condition and encouraging an open discussion on the support which can be offered.
- Arranging for reasonable adjustments timeously with the opportunity for review on a regular basis.
- Providing a supportive and respectful environment for neurodivergent students.

7.4 Students with neurodivergent conditions will be encouraged to:

- Raise with the Disability Team at the earliest opportunity their neurodivergent condition.
- · Provide suggestions of reasonable adjustments.
- Co-operate with the process of identifying and implementing reasonable adjustments.
- Take steps to develop strategies to support themselves in their role, e.g. access lecture slides in advance and seeking extensions to deadlines for coursework assignments when needed or specific workplace adjustments for students undertaking research.
- Ask for support when needed.

8. Supporting Neurodiverse Staff and Students

8.1 Staff recruitment and development

The University will ensure that person specifications for vacant roles are clear, focus on objective requirements, are inclusive, and do not disadvantage applicants who are neurodivergent.

Candidates will be asked prior to their interview if they require any reasonable adjustments to participate fully in the recruitment and selection process. Then appropriate arrangements will be made as necessary.

The University offers a variety of flexible working arrangements to assist staff to remain in employment when circumstances might otherwise prevent them from doing so. These include part time work, job sharing, flexible working hours, career breaks and homeworking.

All neurodivergent staff will have equal access to training and development opportunities. Reasonable adjustments can be requested to facilitate full participation.

8.2 Student applications

Information on support provisions that are available for neurodiverse students can be accessed on the University of Aberdeen's Student Support and Advice web page.

All applications for study at the University are assessed on the basis of academic suitability for the course in question. Students should be reassured that discussions about student support requirements are separate from that consideration.

8.3 Learning and teaching

The University will endeavour to ensure that the requirements of neurodiverse students, undergraduate or postgraduate, are considered and will encourage inclusive and accessible programme design and research environments.

The University ensures, where reasonably practicable, that all learning and teaching materials are accessible.

Where practically feasible, the University will ensure that neurodiverse students have equal opportunities to access academic and vocational placements, including field trips and study abroad opportunities.

Examination practices should provide neurodiverse students with the same opportunities as their peers to demonstrate the achievement of a learning outcome and/or research outcome. Exam adjustments may be required to compensate for any disadvantage created by the exam. Such exam adjustments will not affect the validity of an exam.

9. Confidential Support and Advice

- 9.1 Confidential support and advice for students:
 - Counselling Service <u>Counselling | Students | The University of</u> Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)
 - The Disabled Students Forum <u>Disabled Students' Forum</u> (ausa.org.uk)
 - The Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Multi-Faith Chaplaincy | About | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)
 - Personal tutor
 - PGR Director
 - PGR School <u>Postgraduate Research School | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>
 - School Disability Coordinators <u>Disability Services | Students | The</u> <u>University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>

 The Student Advice and Support Team <u>Student Advice & Support</u> Team | Students | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)

9.2 Confidential support and advice for staff:

- Campus Trade Unions <u>Unions | StaffNet | The University of Aberdeen</u> (abdn.ac.uk)
- The Counselling Service <u>Counselling | Students | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>
- The University's Employee Assistance Programme (Care First) who are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week <u>Support Services</u> <u>StaffNet | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>
- Human Resources Advisers and Partners <u>Contact HR | StaffNet | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>
- The Multi-Faith Chaplaincy <u>Multi-Faith Chaplaincy | About | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>
- The Staff Disability Network <u>Contact HR | StaffNet | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>
- Workplace Dignity Network <u>Workplace Wellbeing | StaffNet | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>

9.3 Other helpful websites include:

- Access to Work <u>Access to Work: get support if you have a disability</u> or health condition: What Access to Work is - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- The Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service (ADDISS) <u>ADDISS</u>
- Autism and Uni The Autism&Uni project (autism-uni.org)
- The British Dyslexia Association <u>British Dyslexia Association</u> (<u>bdadyslexia.org.uk</u>)
- Dyslexia Scotland <u>Dyslexia ScotlandDyslexia Scotland Empowering</u> people with <u>dyslexia to reach their full potential</u>
- The Dyspraxia Foundation Home (dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)
- The National Autistic Society National Autistic Society (autism.org.uk)
- The Scottish ADHD Coalition <u>Scottish ADHD Coalition The Scottish</u> ADHD Coalition
- Tourettes Action Tourettes Action (tourettes-action.org.uk)

10. Related Policies

- Accessibility Statement <u>Accessibility Statement for the University of Aberdeen Website | About | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>
- Data Protection, Policy on Data Protection policy.pdf (abdn.ac.uk)
- Disciplinary Procedure <u>Disciplinary Procedure.pdf</u> (abdn.ac.uk)
- Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace, Staffing Policy Against <u>Staffing-Policy-against-Discrimination(Revised-</u> July2017-due-to-College-restructure).pdf (abdn.ac.uk)
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
 Equality Diversity Inclusion Policy.pdf (abdn.ac.uk)
- Ethical Framework on the Boundaries of Confidentiality
 Ethical Framework on Boundaries of Confidentiality Copy.pdf
 (abdn.ac.uk)
- Flexible Working Procedures, Statement of Flexible Working Procedure.pdf (abdn.ac.uk)
- Homeworking Policy homeworking.policy.pdf (abdn.ac.uk)
- Health, Wellbeing and Safety Policy <u>HSW_POLICY_FINAL.pdf</u> (abdn.ac.uk)
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy <u>Mental-Health-Policy-2.0-</u> September-2021.pdf (abdn.ac.uk)
- Record Management Policy <u>Records Management policy.pdf</u> (abdn.ac.uk)
- Recruitment and Selection of Staff, Policy on <u>RecruitmentAndSelectionOfStaff.pdf (abdn.ac.uk)</u>
- Stress, Policy on the Management of Work-Related Stress Student Complaints Procedure <u>Policy-on-the-Management-of-Work-Related-Stress-2.0-September-2021.pdf</u> (abdn.ac.uk)

Appendix A: examples of reasonable adjustments for staff and students

The University aims to create an environment which encourages and supports staff, students and University Court members to request reasonable adjustments if required. Most adjustments are low cost and easy to implement. Implementing changes can help neurodiverse staff and students thrive. The needs and preferred adjustments will vary from person to person.

Creating an inclusive environment where all staff, students, and University Court members feel able to participate and achieve their potential is a key theme of the University's strategic plan, Aberdeen 2040. Inclusive practices benefit everyone as they contribute to good staff and student wellbeing and engagement. An inclusive environment is one in which everyone feels valued and respected, and where their contributions are recognised.

The Human Resources Partnership team will support staff throughout the process of seeking and implementing reasonable adjustments. Support for students can be sought from the Student Advice and Support Team.

The lists below are designed to support staff in their discussions with staff or students in relation to reasonable adjustments. They are suggestions, are not exhaustive and provide initial guidance on what may support a member of staff or a student who is neurodiverse.

A collaborative approach will be taken when agreeing reasonable adjustments. The views of staff members or students will be considered, as well as recommendations from Occupational Health. For staff members seeking reasonable adjustments, this process will involve collaboration between the staff member, their line manager and their HR Partner. For students, this will involve a partnership between the individual and the Student Advice and Support Team

Most reasonable adjustments are low cost and require minimum change to current practice. The University will provide guidance on what is reasonable and in making this recommendation will take capacity, time, and cost into account, as well as any impact on other staff.

Preparation for students may include:

- Providing lecture outlines and PowerPoint slides in advance and in an accessible format. Guidance on accessibility can be found on the Accessibility for Authors/Creators webpage: Accessibility for Authors/Creators | Digital Skills | Toolkit | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)
- Providing students with prioritised reading lists.
- Arranging agreed extensions to deadlines for coursework assignments.

- Extra time in exams.
- Having a reader or scribe in exams
- For PGR students, the adjustments outlined below for staff may be appropriate.

Best practice for the recruitment of staff may include:

- Using an accessibility checker on job adverts. Guidance on accessibility
 can be found on the Accessibility for Authors/Creators webpage:
 <u>Accessibility for Authors/Creators | Digital Skills | Toolkit | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>
- Ensuring all skills listed in person specifications are necessary and justified.
- Include a diversity and inclusion statement in the job description that encourages applicants to seek reasonable adjustments if necessary.
- Communicate clearly with neurodiverse candidates about how to access and find the interview venue where this information is requested (preferably with visual clues) and what to expect in the interview. This could include who they will meet, the length and format of the interview.
- Choose a quiet interview space free from distractions.

Adjustments for individuals with ADHD could include:

- Using a flowchart to describe the steps involved in a complicated task.
- Dividing large assignments into several small tasks.
- Minimizing noise in the work environment.
- Prior to meetings, detail the topics to be discussed.
- Discuss preferences for work hours and offer a modified work schedule where possible.
- Offer to supply trays and filing cabinets to aid with organisation.
- Encourage taking breaks when needed.

Adjustments for individuals with autism could include:

- Application forms, onboarding materials and instructions could be offered in multiple formats. For example, documents could be provided online.
- When delegating tasks, check that they are clear and specific.
- Create a structured work pattern.
- When possible, give clear feedback.
- Refrain from using jargon and metaphors.
- Divide large assignments into several small tasks.
- Provide a noise-cancelling headset.
- Minimize noise in the work environment.
- Create private and quiet areas for work.
- Reduce harsh and fluorescent lighting.

- Avoid using strong and powerful smells where possible.
- Seek preferences for work hours. Offer a modified work schedule where possible.
- When making changes, provide notice in advance.
- Prior to meetings, detail the topics to be discussed.
- Encourage taking breaks when needed.
- Encourage alternative forms of communication when needed.

Adjustments for individuals with dyscalculia could include:

- Seeking preferences for work hours. Offer a modified work schedule where possible.
- Encourage taking breaks when needed.
- Assistive software.
- If possible, provide two screens.

Adjustments for individuals with dysgraphia could include:

- Seeking preferences for work hours. Offer a modified work schedule where possible.
- Encourage taking breaks when needed.
- Assistive software.
- A Dictaphone.

Adjustments for individuals with dyslexia could include:

- Application forms, onboarding materials and instructions could be offered in multiple formats. For example, provide information online as well as in a large font and on thick, coloured paper.
- Develop written or pictorial reminders, checklists, and schedules.
- Use a flowchart to describe the steps involved in a complicated task.
- Use sans-serif fonts such as Arial, Comic Sans, Helvetica, or Verdana.
 Avoid using italics and underlining. Guidance on accessibility can be found on the Accessibility for Authors/Creators webpage: <u>Accessibility for Authors/Creators | Digital Skills | Toolkit | The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>
- Assistive software.
- When delegating tasks, check that they are clear and specific.
- Create a structured work pattern.
- Large assignments could be divided into several small tasks.
- Develop step-by-step instructions around how to accomplish a given task.
- Assign priority to assignments.
- Timelines for completion of a task could be provided.
- Project deadlines could be inputted on a calendar.
- Reduce harsh and fluorescent lighting.

- Prior to meetings, detail the topics to be discussed.
- Offer to supply trays and filing cabinets to aid with organisation.
- Encourage taking breaks when needed.
- Allow for increased processing time.
- Allow for alternative forms of communication.
- Allow for a written or verbal response.
- Do not penalise for poor spelling or grammar.

Adjustments for individuals with dyspraxia could include:

- Providing information such as application forms, onboarding materials, or instructions in multiple formats. For example, provide information online.
- Develop written or pictorial reminders, checklists, and schedules.
- Create visible instructions for photocopiers and printers.
- Assistive software.
- When delegating tasks, check that they are clear and specific.
- Create a structured work pattern.
- Provide step-by-step instructions around how to accomplish a given task.
- Assign priority to assignments.
- When delegating a task, include timelines for completion.
- Add project deadlines to calendars.
- Provide a noise-cancelling headset.
- Minimise noise in the work environment.
- Where possible, create private and guiet areas for work.
- Reduce harsh and fluorescent lighting.
- Prior to meetings, detail the topics to be discussed.
- Seek preferences for work hours. Offer a modified work schedule where possible.
- Offer to supply trays and filing cabinets to aid with organisation.
- Encourage taking breaks when needed.

Adjustments for individuals with tic disorders could include:

- Minimising noise and tic triggers in the work environment.
- Create private and guiet areas for work.
- Where possible, allow employees to partially work from home. Guidance on this can be found on the Homeworking webpage: <u>Homeworking | StaffNet |</u> <u>The University of Aberdeen (abdn.ac.uk)</u>
- Seek preferences for work hours. Offer a modified work schedule where possible. Encourage taking breaks when needed.

Appendix B: Support Process for Neurodivergent Staff

for you.

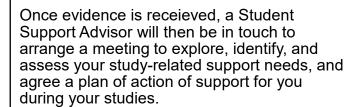
As a job candidate, you can share during the recruitment and selection process that you are neurodivergent. Current employees can tell their line manager. If you are not comfortable with this, you may wish to initially approach your HR Partner or Advisor.

In some cases, you, your HR Partner, and line manager can discuss the most suitable options to implement. Following this, the measures likely to provide maximum support will be implemented.

In other cases, you will be referred to Occupational Health. An external assessor may be sought to assess you and examine your workstation. Following this, they will recommend the measures likely to provide maximum support

Appendix C: Support Process for Neurodivergent Students

As a prospective student, you can share that you are neurodivergent on your UCAS application prior to commencing your studies. If you are attending an interview for a PhD position you can share that you are neurodivergent during the recruitment process. Current students can contact the Disability Team. A specific Learning Differences screening or referral to an Educational Psychologist can be arranged for those who are not diagnosed.



The agreed provisions will be communicated to the relevant members of teaching and support staff.

Appendix D: Definitions

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

ADHD is a lifelong condition that affects an individual's behaviour. There are different subtypes of ADHD (inattentive, hyperactive, and combined type), and every individual ADHDer is unique and experiences the world in their own way. It affects a person's ability to control impulses, attention, and concentration, and can cause hyperactivity and impulsiveness. ADHD traits can also include an ability to focus for extended periods, effective multitasking, and creative thinking.

Autism

Autism is a lifelong condition that impacts how a person perceives the world and interacts with others. It can cause challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviours, speech and non-verbal communication. Autistic people are known for strengths such as problem solving, analytical thinking, retaining highly detailed information and being able to focus for long periods of time. It is a spectrum condition, and all autistic people share certain differences and difficulties but being autistic will affect autistic people in different ways. There is often a significant gender difference in terms of characteristics and behaviours.

Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is a lifelong condition that affects the ability to acquire arithmetical skills. It can cause challenges in understanding simple number concepts, problems with learning number facts and procedures, and a lack of an intuitive grasp of numbers.

Dysgraphia

Individuals with the lifelong condition, dysgraphia can have difficulties with aspects of writing such as writing very slowly, having confused writing, and copying information accurately.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a lifelong learning difficulty that affects the development of literacy and language-related skills, characterised by challenges in phonological processing, working memory, rapid naming, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities. Dyslexic traits can also include creativity and inventiveness. Dyslexic people are also known for excelling at pattern-spotting and powerful qualitative reasoning. At least one in ten people are thought to be dyslexic.

Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is a lifelong and complex neurological condition which affects muscle coordination and perception. Perception includes hearing, vision, proprioception, and the awareness of where your limbs are in space. Dyspraxic people tend to be

good at bold 'big picture' thinking, pattern-spotting and inferential reasoning. They are often resourceful and determined problem-solvers. At least 1 in 17 people are thought to have dyspraxia.

Reasonable adjustments

A reasonable adjustment for staff and students involves any adjustment or modification to the selection process, tasks, environment, or the way things are usually done that allows an individual to perform the core competencies of their studies or in their job role.

Tic disorders

Tic disorders are a lifelong inherited neurological condition. The key features are tics, which are involuntary and uncontrollable movements and sounds. Tics can either be physical or vocal.

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