

# Three key issues

## Transforming Unions to Represent the Neurodivergent workforce (TURN)

CAT MORGAN JUL 13, 2022 09:45AM

### What do unions need to build and widen capacity around neurodiversity?

Awareness training but which foregrounds the voices of neurodivergent workers and TU Reps – ANONYMOUS

Deeper understanding of the social model of disability -- there has been some medical model language used by the speakers and we really do need to work in co-production with disabled people's movement on this. – ANONYMOUS

Let's go beyond awareness and fight for workplace change! – ANONYMOUS

Workplaces that are accessible for ND workers will benefit all workers. – ANONYMOUS

Guidance to encourage employers to develop more flexible working practices as standard that can accommodate the needs of ND workers and minimise the need to request RAs. – ANONYMOUS

It has to first start with raising awareness of ND and should be from an intersectional perspective in order to ensure that all communities are included – ANONYMOUS

Actual practical examples of working practices that benefit ND workers (and others) and how employers can work coproductively with ND/disabled staff to identify what changes are needed and how to implement them. – ANONYMOUS

Lobby for systemic change. Make what is beneficial for neurodivergent workers business as usual rather than the individual responsibility of the employee, manager, or HR representative. – ANONYMOUS

Lots to learn from work being done in the legal sector, that has built on the Legally Disabled research project which was coproduced with disabled legal professionals. The evidence base and recommendations were followed up by 'easy wins' tips and then more comprehensive guidance on RAs plus examples of good practice. It has created a huge shift in attitudes of employers. As a result of the research, networks have been set up by disabled ppl including an ND podcast and other ND in law organisations. [www.legallydisabled.com](http://www.legallydisabled.com) – ANONYMOUS

A whole trade union joint campaign to lobby employers and govt for change – ANONYMOUS

Promote, and work for reform of, the Access to Work scheme. – ANONYMOUS

If we don't do it, the employer certainly won't! – ANONYMOUS

I feel Neurodiversity needs to stop being a Taboo or something people are nervous to speak about. Unions needs to encourage confidence. Confidence in members to be open and honest about their needs and differences and how best they can be supported. That confidence and openness will lead to greater support and in essence a better workplace – ANONYMOUS

Union organising models would be helpful . – ANONYMOUS

Examples of good contract language to bargain for would be helpful. – ANONYMOUS

TUs need to improve their own practices to develop ND activists - many meetings are conducted in a way that is not accessible which excludes voices. – ANONYMOUS

It would be really helpful to have support within UCU. I cannot be open at work as I imagine students would probably refuse to be taught or assessed by me. That in turn means that I can't ask for certain 'reasonable adjustments' in the workplace or i would be outing myself. – ANONYMOUS

Need a campaign looking at the emotional cost to neurodivergent people of non-acceptance in the workplace, as well as the financial cost to society of neurodivergent people being underemployed or unemployed. – ANONYMOUS

Stereotyping of people particularly at the start of their education stays with them always. We need to look at how we inform and train our colleague sin Early Years and Nursery education – ANONYMOUS

The staff and unions in University lack in supporting International ND students. They mostly give excuse that you are not illegible for disability student allowance. All they ask for adjustment to put in place and signpost them to right direction, nobody ask for allowance. Everyone talk about Equality Act but it is not a duty of international student to learn about it, rather staff need to be trained about it. Also it should be mandatory for tutors to have ND training. – ANONYMOUS

ND friendly recruitment, standard interview process with expectations on eye contact etc can be exhausting and stressful. JP Morgan do this very well – ANONYMOUS

ASLEF has just begun to organise specifically for our members with disabilities, we are coming from a baseline of having done nothing in this arena and it's quite daunting as to where to start and what to do. I believe anecdotally that we could many members who are neurodivergent but are reluctant to be open about this either with their employer or within the union – ANONYMOUS

it is too bad these comments are all set to anonymous making it hard to connect with people – ANONYMOUS

Re: UCU member- As educators, we're expected to consider how best to support our learners, yet so often management fail to extend that understanding to staff. What a shame your organisation creates an environment where you don't feel comfortable sharing your experiences, as it would undoubtedly help your learners and propable your colleagues, too. Hopefully a good union rep will help change things. – ANONYMOUS

As Trade Unions we have to be honest right at the start when we assess our understanding of neurodiversity and our members. We need to get the best training for reps, officers and lay officials before we try to take steps with employers. – ANONYMOUS

would like to see affinity groups tackle the direct issue of career progression - why its hard and provide practical learning for identifying own diverse strengths, irrespective of gender. – ANONYMOUS

unions need to lead change by addressing their own imbalances - more woman in key rolls , more nero-divergent people in key rolls , more non white 40 year old males in key roles. more nuro divergent friendly conferences etc – ANONYMOUS

young people are really leading the charge of acceptance - more representation of young people in unions would definitely help facilitate change – ANONYMOUS

in terms of ND language to be more understood we should suggest workplace and organizations (being external customers) where disclosure is need to be more ND friendly. The forms or applications should be redirected to ND specialist qualify to understand those forms and the person's concerns. – ANONYMOUS

There must be a cultural change along with a zero tolerance approach to ableism – ANONYMOUS

Greater support for developing younger activists is needed – ANONYMOUS

Unions must do more to support new recruits in their training/onboarding period, where the necessity of quick learning and information retention are likely to disadvantage ND people. This often mean they don't progress as fast as their peers, or are seen as less capable by management. – ANONYMOUS

I think there are many ways things can be improved with the right, sometimes individual, approach but this will take time. For example it is a known fact many ND persons get sensory overload so employers recognising this and taking this into consideration would be a huge move forward. Encouraging persons with ND to share experience will help as much as academic study – ANONYMOUS

## What do power and voice look like for the neurodivergent workforce?

Since the world of work is based on neurotypical views, the ND workforce is frequently marganalised and silenced – ANONYMOUS

We need to see neurodivergent workers in positions of authority, in some sectors they are invisible and non -disclosure is viewed as an act of self preservation, this needs to shift – ANONYMOUS

There needs to be wider understanding of how to attract neurodivergent people to the workforce and also how to amend recruitment practices to be neurodivergent friendly. – ANONYMOUS

Limited voice in many sectors and lots of 'othering' – ANONYMOUS

Too often I have seen ND employees being judged for 'poor performance issues' which are usually just a lack of understanding on the part of line managers and other colleagues. In recent cases, increased awareness around neurodiversity have shifted the energy of the issue from being the employee's problem, to being a shared company issue requiring action and support from all parties. – ANONYMOUS

id like to hear about Adele's play - did it increase ND voice and if so how? Anne Cockayne – ANONYMOUS

The workplace is a site of conflict between employers and workers, battling over the balance of power. – ANONYMOUS

Yes and no power means no voice! – ANONYMOUS

The voices of ND people should be first and foremost. Networks that feed into the development of policies etc as well as a space for ND to gain support raise issues etc – ANONYMOUS

Do ND employees need separate polices so voices are highlighted or would this marginalised further? – ANONYMOUS

We have had lot of conversation around appropriate language and correct terms. Discussion around this is great. However, this also creates a barrier and loss of a power and voice. Getting hung up on the correct terminology in such a minute detail can lead to a barrier in having the power to speak up. Something I would like to see is a greater understanding of Ableism and it should be recognised in communication. – ANONYMOUS

social and physical environments where they can flourish, more needed on sensory issues – ANONYMOUS

I agree with the comments about language, this has really silenced me! – ANONYMOUS

Disclosure is a difficult thing some employers want "proof" when i was diagnosed with ADHD my supervisor wanted to see the report - however I have CPTSD which was detailed in my report, this was something i wasn't willing to share which made everything very hard. – ANONYMOUS

Employers who roll out their star ND employee as an example of being a fabulous employer of disabled/ND people, whilst sidelining anyone who requires more support - this lack of substance behind the self promotion needs challenging. – ANONYMOUS

Picking up the 'poor performance point above', neurodivergent people should be able to tailor their jobs to stop being bullied and punished for underperforming tasks difficult or impossible for them to do, and instead focus their jobs on what they excel at. – ANONYMOUS

The impact of discrimination/getting by without enough or any support and constantly having to adapt to fit in has a huge impact on mental health which further disempowers and marginalises ND workers/activists – ANONYMOUS

Management need training- re, what's regarded as poor performance. Is it their poor performance in understanding differences? Is the employee performing poorly, or have they been directed poorly? Raising issues or asking clarifying questions doesn't equal challenging hierarchy. – ANONYMOUS

Similarly, social expectations of the workplace can have a significant impact on ND people: being viewed as 'not a team player' by management or the butt of 'banter' by colleagues which is thinly disguised bullying, rather than accepting and respecting people's differences. – ANONYMOUS

Co-production, with and by ND people, not imposed upon us by people who think they know what is best – ANONYMOUS

Sick and tired of not being involved in innovation stages of workplace improvements, new training, building improvements, design restructure, etc... and to end up on the receiving end yet again of some new and improved initiative that excludes me – ANONYMOUS

Address use of AI/agencies in recruitment processes that are sifting out disabled/ND employees and demand that employers specifically put measures in place to ensure that disabled candidates aren't excluded. Recruitment agencies should be given a clause in their contracts that makes clear that employers specifically want to see diverse applicants. Otherwise many agencies will assume that nobody wants to employ disabled/ND people – ANONYMOUS

ditto with providing opportunities for career progression that meet individual needs and aspirations – ANONYMOUS

## **How should gender be reflected in power and voice at work, and in the work of unions on neurodiversity?**

It would be helpful if more trades unionists were supported to be open about being divergent. Visibility within trades unions would be so helpful. – ANONYMOUS

Greater understanding of the negative impact of lack of diagnosis or late diagnosis can have for women workers. Too much of ND research has been focused on male traits. – ANONYMOUS

Improved understanding in menopause campaigns and resources of how perimenopause can greatly exacerbate challenges with cognitive functioning and how to ensure adequate support. – ANONYMOUS

Step away from lazy stereotypes based on typical male attributes. Teaching intersectionality is important. Female (neurodiverse) role models, inclusive policies – ANONYMOUS

Male voices and male role models talking confidently about neurodiversity is so desperately needed. Talking about differences and vulnerability's are inertly not something "Men" do. This NEEDS to change and the union movement can change this. – ANONYMOUS

lack of understanding on how masking can look very different in men and women - women are much more likely to fly under the radar with their needs not being met or even noticed – ANONYMOUS

Not demonstrating expected 'traits' and qualities/behaviours associated with our ascribed gender and not being taken seriously or given opportunities for career progression as a result. – ANONYMOUS

Intersectionality means we experience multiple forms of discrimination but also as activists who want to create change, we wear ourselves out getting involved in loads of committees, campaigns etc – ANONYMOUS

Older AFAB folk have grown up with/been trained on outdated and limited models of what ND traits look like, expected to mask to fit in and many may not even realise they are neurodivergent. Fighting for recognition - even from a GP - to gain RAs can be an uphill battle. Union reps can have a role in raising awareness (as opposed to raising stereotypes) of traits, paths to diagnosis and support. – ANONYMOUS

woman's voices are often drowned out - this is made even worse when they are also disabled – ANONYMOUS

Neurodivergent people need to take the lead on this. We don't need things curating by a 'helpful' neurotypical person. Really essential that neurodivergent views reflect women, men, trans etc and not typical white male autistic person rolled out to wave the flag. – ANONYMOUS

There is also a role for trades unions to help international trades unions on this issue. There is a dearth of information in many other countries about autism in particular, and they often have very backward looking employment or social policies regarding neurodiversity. We need to level up across the world on this issue. – ANONYMOUS

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