

Neurodivergence and Entry into the Profession Programme

Please find below the structure of the day, subject to change, with a mix of 30 min presentations and 10 min lightning talks, followed by speaker bios and session summaries. Some of the sessions will be pre-recorded and all will include time for questions. You will only need the single Teams link for the whole day and whilst we have built breaks in around the sessions if you need to take breaks or step out at other times please do so as needed.

10:30-10:45 - Welcome

10:45 -11:30 – Darren Flynn & Alison Hicks (*Expectations vs. Reality: Higher Study in LIS*)

11:30 -12:15 – Charlie Parkinson (*My Experience of Entering the Library Profession*)

12:15 - 12:45 - Joanne Fitzpatrick (*Librarianship as a Second Career: How I Failed Completely at my First*)

12:45 - 13:15 - 3 x Lightning Talks - Elsa Emanuel (*Neurodivergent Networking*); Andrew Walsh (Bonuses and drawbacks of neurodivergent freelancing); Claire Laybats (*Your Next Chapter: Library and Archive Apprenticeships*)

Session Summaries and Speaker Bios

Session 1 - 10:45 -11:30 - Expectations vs. Reality: Higher Study in LIS

Speakers

Darren Flynn, Lecturer in Library and Information Studies; Alison Hicks, Associate Professor in Library and Information Studies, University College London

Bio

Darren Flynn is a lecturer on the MA Library and Information Studies programme at UCL. He teaches on a range of core and optional modules including Using Technology, Supporting Information Users, Information Literacy and Information for Healthcare. He acts as a personal academic tutor, dissertation supervisor, academic skills development lead and an admissions interviewer.

Dr Alison Hicks is an associate professor in Library and Information Studies at UCL. On the MA programme she teaches on Supporting Information Users and Information Literacy modules. She is the current admissions tutor for the MA Library and Information Studies course.

Summary

Completion of a postgraduate qualification in LIS remains the most common entry-route into professional librarianship. However, as educators we are aware that prior experience of study, the presence (or absence) of awareness and/or support for neurodivergent students

and the persistence of systemic barriers to education can mean that neurodivergent potential students might be disinclined to undertake higher study.

This session is not intended to present a 'pat on the back' for work done at UCL or to 'sell' the course to potential applicants. Rather, we hope to offer an honest account of what changes, services and options are available on the LIS programme we teach on. By doing so, we hope to address potential preconceptions attendees might have about MA-level study and answer questions about the course, application process and learner experience. With this we hope attendees will have greater information to make an informed decision on whether the programme might meet their needs.

Indicative content will include:

- The application process and experience.
- Assessment and reasonable academic adjustments for neurodivergent students.
- Topic coverage on the LIS programme.
- The realities of study on the programme.

Session 2 - 11:30 -12:15 - My Experience of Entering the Library Profession

Speaker

Charlie Parkinson, Library Learning Facilitator, Bradford College

Bio

I have a dual role at Bradford College as a Library Learning Facilitator and an English Lecturer. I completed my PGCE Secondary English in 2006. I have an MA in Creative and Critical Writing and an MA in Museum and Gallery Studies. For the last twenty years, I have also worked as a high school English Teacher, in various roles in Museum and Gallery Education, and I am a GCSE Examiner for WJEC. I began my role in the library in January 2024. I wanted to gain experience in libraries – with the ambition of ultimately transitioning into a Librarian role.

Summary

I will speak about the joys and challenges I have faced as a late-diagnosed, middle-aged autistic woman entering the LIS profession mid-career – with a particular focus on the role of library staff in FE colleges. My talk will explore barriers to wellbeing and success – such as sensory sensitivities and the library environment, tricky transitions, and communication conundrums – before highlighting ways that neurodivergent brains are well-suited to particular tasks and ways of working. The size of the organisation, the architecture of spaces, and the demographic of users are all factors that may contribute to sensory overload for anyone experiencing sensory processing differences in the library. I'll examine some key issues that we've encountered at Bradford College, and detail our journey towards solutions. Are rotas helpful for neurodivergent library staff? I'll reflect on my own experiences – exploring how hourly turnarounds can impact productivity and mental health – and contemplate ways of managing last-minute changes. Communication and social interaction differences can pose problems for everyone in a neurodiverse workplace. I'll reflect on my observations and pose questions for consideration. Next, I will focus on the theory of Monotropism, the awesomeness of autodidacticism, and the advantages of pattern recognition to illustrate how some neurodivergent brains may be superbly suited to LIS roles. Finally, I'll introduce three initiatives that I've been working on recently in order to enhance

neuroinclusion in Bradford College Library: the sensory audit tool, the personal user manual, and our wellbeing space.

Session 3 - 12:15 - 12:45 - Joanne Fitzpatrick (*Librarianship as a Second Career: How I Failed Completely at my First*)

Speaker

Joanne Fitzpatrick, Lancaster University

Bio

Joanne Fitzpatrick works on the open research team at Lancaster University library, and is one of the co-chairs of NLISN.

Summary

In this short talk I will share my story of changing careers into librarianship as an autistic person. Diagnosed as an adult, I thrived in education, but the point I entered the workforce was the point it was clear I had difficulties. My first career as a music teacher ended after 3 years and a significant breakdown, however, teaching musicians with learning difficulties and neurodivergencies lead to the discovery that I needed this support too. I will give details of how I slowly recovered, rebuilt my reputation and career and became a multi award winning and incredibly happy librarian.

Session 4 - 12:45 - 13:15 - 3 x Lightning Talks

#1 - Neurodivergent Networking (pre-recorded)

Speaker

Elsa Emanuel, Student, University of Sheffield

Bio

Elsa is an LIS student at the University of Sheffield with an undergraduate degree in sociology from Leiden University. They are personally focused on diversity in public services, especially disability access, as well as queer representation and inclusion. Elsa is autistic and physically disabled and works to include these perspectives in discussions about LIS practice.

Summary

Networking can be a challenge for everyone, but especially for those who struggle with social cues or with a low social drive. This talk would introduce people to networking strategies that are more accessible to asocial people, including connections outside professional contexts and building visibility through individual work. The aim is to support neurodivergent, especially autistic and mentally ill, LIS students and new professionals for whom traditional networking methods are inaccessible. Creating relationships within the LIS industry does not have to be based only in professional conferences that not everyone is able to participate in. Many neurodivergent people do not have the same ability or drive to socialize with people in a professional setting, but they can still create the relationships needed to build a career through other means. I want to provide people with alternative

approaches to building a personal professional brand and gaining visibility within the field to advance their careers.

#2

Speaker

Andrew Walsh

Bio

Summary

Andrew will give a brief introduction to how he ended up freelancing as a neurodivergent library professional, the challenges it brings, but also the benefits compared to more traditional library work. We'll talk about the ADHD tax, the horrors of invoicing, and the joy of needing minimal amounts of masking.

#3

Speaker

Claire Laybats

Bio

Summary

Apprenticeships have enjoyed a reform in recent years that has seen them repositioned as highly rigorous, deeply technical programmes that are directly linked to roles, employers and sector needs through their very design, and they are due to be refined yet further in the coming years. They are a cost effective option for entry into professions that enable organisations to directly invest in the skills they need in staff. The Level 3 Library Information and Archives Services Assistant is a broad standard offered by many employers, and not only that, there are several other related standards. This short talk will give an overview of where to find apprenticeships, what employers are looking for and an overview of the skills developed on the programme.