

## NLISN Conference 2026 Programme (subject to change)

### Thursday

Start	End	Function Room	Conservatory Room	
10:00	10:30	Registration / Refreshments		
10:30	11:25	<b>Initial Workshop</b> What works, or doesn't work for you at conferences?		
11:30	12:25	<b>Keynote:</b>  <b>Charlie Hart 'Ausome Charlie'</b> <a href="#">The 'Double Rainbow' Intersection: Neurodivergent and LGBTQIA+</a>		"
12:30	13:25	Buffet Lunch		
13:30	14:25	<b>Sarah Howley, Gemma Sosnowsky</b> Workshop <a href="#">Mislabelled &amp; Misunderstood? Exploring assumptions around neurodivergence</a>	<b>Charlie Worthington</b> Workshop <a href="#">Finding your place in liaison librarianship</a>	
14:30	14:55	<b>Ruth Le Duc</b> Short talk <a href="#">Building Inclusive Spaces and Creating Psychological Safety</a>	<b>Melanie Strong</b> Short talk <a href="#">Late diagnosis, self advocacy and the importance of community</a>	
15:00	15:20	Tea Break		
15:20	16:15	<b>Emma Finney</b>  <a href="#">Bouncing back from burnout</a>	<b>Rebecca Humphreys</b> Short talk  <a href="#">Mind, Body and Shelf. Exploring Wellbeing Collections in Academic Libraries</a>  <b>Sara Erskine</b> Short talk  <a href="#">Seeking patterns: Creating Accessible Resource Design</a>	
16:20	16:30	Closing session – sum up		

		the day, point out potential activities for the evening.		
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## Friday

Start	End	Function Room	Conservatory Room	
10:00	10:30	Registration / Refreshments		
10:30	11:25	<b>Amelia Haire</b> Long talk  <a href="#">Scripts, Stages and Subtexts: Understanding Autistic Masking as Workplace Information Literacy</a>	<b>Charlie Parkinson</b> Long talk  <a href="#">Bradford College's Untold Stories Project</a>	
11:30	12:25	<b>Neil Currant &amp; Hannah Breslin</b> Long talk  <a href="#">What if removing "neurodiversity" from HE policy was actually the key to better supporting neurodivergent learners?</a>	<b>Library tours - details to be confirmed.</b>	
12:30	13:25	<b>Buffet Lunch</b>		
13:30	14:25	<b>Catherine Shipley</b> Long talk  <a href="#">Creation of a Sensory Map at Pilkington Library</a>	<b>Andrew Sztehlo</b> Long talk  <a href="#">Navigating Neurodivergence and Management in Educational Libraries in Three Sectors</a>	
14:30	14:55	<b>Abi Ward</b> Short talk  <a href="#">Divergent Voices: Capturing the lived experience of Neurodivergent UWE staff</a>	<b>George Perkins</b> Short talk  <a href="#">Opening Up Library Spaces: Interactive Maps and 360 Experiences for Enhanced Wayfinding and Neurodiversity Support</a>	
15:00	15:20	Tea Break		
15:20	16:20	Final Workshop – summing up the event / reflection / looking forward		
16:20	16:30	Close		

## Keynote

### **The 'Double Rainbow' Intersection: Neurodivergent and LGBTQIA+**

**Charlie Hart 'Ausome Charlie'**

**Ausome Charlie Ltd Neurodiversity Inclusion Speaker**

"Understand the link between Neurodivergence and LGBTQIA+ identities.  
Explore minority stress, and the impact of intersecting marginalised identities.  
Learn practical inclusion and allyship strategies.  
Gain insights into creating psychologically safe, neuro-inclusive environments.

Drawing on her lived experience as a late-diagnosed Autistic, ADHD, bi/pan, and gender non-conforming woman, Charlie speaks candidly about identity, minority stress, and community power. Her work helps organisations move beyond tokenism, to meaningful inclusion.

Many neurodivergent people are also LGBTQIA+ yet workplace inclusion often addresses these identities separately. This session explores this 'Double Rainbow' intersection — combining research, lived experience, and practical inclusion strategies.

Participants will:

Understand the link between neurodivergence and LGBTQIA+ identities.  
Explore minority stress, and the impact of intersecting marginalised identities.  
Learn practical inclusion and allyship strategies.  
Gain insights into creating psychologically safe, neuro-inclusive environments.

*Expectations for attendees:* Hands up style interaction, hopefully laughing at my jokes, some nods of recognition, and questions at the end.

## Talks and workshops

### **Bouncing back from burnout**

**Emma Finney**

**Sheffield Hallam University**

**Learning & Teaching Librarian**

This session will look at the signs of burnout, think about how we put the brakes on the process and move away from the burnout zone.

We will look at routine planning and focussing on getting the balance of routine, fun and necessary into each day. We will look at how to build in compassion to the working day and adjustments that can work for all to help avoid burnout.

We hope by the end of the session, you will understand your drivers; what motivates you, how to recognise your stressors and how to put holes in your stress bucket.

I developed this session from the writing I did to help understand how I was feeling, why I was feeling as I did and the help I received during an extended period of burnout caused by the workplace.

The main content is contextualising how challenging HE is for staff due to the financial instability of the sector.

Save money. Cut resources and staff. Work smarter. Maintain student experience.

This has been the mantra of higher education for multiple years as financial sustainability becomes harder to achieve.

It will reference what organisations do to off set this. It will highlight that some of these measures are not always tailored to the needs of all e.g. neurodivergent people.

We will look at the pressures that financial instability has placed upon all staff and highlight the existing pressures that can already be impacting neurodivergent staff and the compounding impact of even more pressure

Work smarter can mean less staff with the same volume of work but dressed up in a new process. With less staff to complete tasks, the requirements and pressure on remaining staff increases. The impact of constant change, upheaval, instability and rising workloads can cause stress, anxiety, sickness and burnout. The risk of burnout is high and a real workplace occupational hazard.

I will then look at my own complexities of being neurodivergent in the workplace and how they can work for and against me during pressured times.

- Hyperfocus can help power through a to-do list.
- But hyperfocus can lead to ignoring the need to eat or take a break.

We will then look at fending off burnout, playing to strengths and celebrating the use of the word no (for self preservation) to ensure workplace boundaries are in place despite increased workload.

*Expectations for attendees:* There will be a mix of activities: listening, individual activities and discussion. I will be using some of the resources that I found useful - planners, stress curve diagrams.

*I wrote this from my perspective as having experienced burnout as a subject librarian. I am not a health professional and am using the approaches that worked for me.*

## **Navigating Neurodivergence and Management in Educational Libraries in Three Sectors**

**Andrew Sztchlo**

**York St John University Academic Liaison Librarian**

**Long (45 minutes plus questions)**

Attendees will take away ideas from my own experiences of ways to advocate for themselves and methods of communication that can help create healthier work relationships with management.

Attendees will take away ideas from my approach toward supporting my mental health, counteracting imposter syndrome, boosting well-being and a sense of belonging and success in their workplace.

Attendees will take away from my experience examples of what good managers can do, both from my own managerial style but also from my experience working for neurodivergent and neurotypical managers, and the importance of empathy in these relationships.

The session will be structured as a chronological portrait of my experience as a neurodivergent librarian (ADHD) across three different UK education sectors – high school, college, and university, exploring the effects of these sectors on my neurodivergence, both positive and negative, and my changing relationship with my wellbeing and understanding of neurodivergence.

In the high school (11-16), I experienced high levels of environmental mismatch and mismanagement, leading to a period of extended sick leave during which I first began to research ADHD and consider neurodivergence as a core issue in my life. On my return to work, I rehabilitated my relationships with management and brought clarity to ensure a mutual understanding of ADHD, working from there to create a productive working relationship. I will discuss the communication techniques that ensured this.

In the college (16-18+), I entered a management role in the library structure, working with numerous neurodivergent individuals in a compact environment. I will discuss my management style, foregrounded by the importance of empathy in fostering belonging and wellbeing within the team, as well as how I navigated a management role as a neurodivergent individual. I will also discuss how diagnosis and medication changed my relationship with work during this period, leading to a healthier work-life balance.

Finally, I will explore the practices put in place by my management in my new position at York St John University (18+) that have allowed me greater wellbeing and comfort at my workplace while also continuing to encourage my development.

*Expectations for attendees:* The audience will be expected to listen and, during a 5-minute brainstorm session at the end, reflect on ways that they can advocate for themselves in their roles that they may not be doing.

I will be supporting my experience with research into the experience of neurodivergent librarians, showing a wider context, with the following references:

Blyberg, C.T. and Hollich, S. (2025) 'Neurodivergent People in the Library Workplace: Perspectives from a Couple of Autistic Library and Technology Nerds', *Information Technology and Libraries*, 44(4). doi:10.5860/ital.v44i4.17588.

Doyle, N. (ed) (2025) *Learning from Neurodivergent Leaders: How to Start, Survive, and Thrive in Leadership*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

McBrayer, L.W. (2025) 'What we need now: leadership skills, strategies, and competencies in today's academic libraries', *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 51(4). doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2025.103068.

Swick-Jemison, J. (2023) 'ADHD and the Early Career Teaching Librarian: An Autoethnography', *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship / Revue Canadienne De Bibliothéconomie Universitaire*, 9, pp. 1–16. doi:10.33137/cjal-rcbu.v9.40953.

Waddington, K. (2018) 'Developing Compassionate Academic Leadership: The Practice of Kindness', *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 6(3), pp. 87–89.

[doi:10.14297/jpaap.v6i3.375](https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v6i3.375).

# Creation of a Sensory Map at Pilkington Library

**Catherine Shipley, Kat Halliday, Emma Hibbert**  
**Loughborough University**

Long (45 minutes plus questions)

The process of creating a Sensory Map for users of Pilkington Library and how a Sensory Map benefits neurodivergent students and staff study habits and sense of belonging in the University Community.

Summary of the research conducted to inform the creation of our Sensory Map; Demonstration of current version of Sensory Map; Feedback and questions from participants. Listening to and looking at a Powerpoint presentation. Voluntary feedback from the demonstration of current map. Paper copies of the Sensory Map will be available in addition to electronic demonstration.

This session outlines the development of the Library Sensory Map, created in response to user and staff feedback highlighting the need for sensory guidance around the library to mitigate anxieties and potential access barriers. To guide our approach, we reviewed sensory mapping initiatives at other universities and institutions, which helped identify effective design elements and accessibility considerations. Using these insights, we produced several prototype maps and a visual story and gathered feedback from students, staff, and support services. Their comments shaped improvements in clarity, layout, and usability. The final sensory map reflects this collaborative process with staff, library users and Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity team (SWAI), and is designed to help users, especially those with sensory considerations, navigate the library with greater confidence and comfort.

## References

- Historic England (2024). How Do We Produce a Sensory Map for Potential Visitors? [Online] Available at: How Do We Produce a Sensory Map for Potential Visitors? | Historic England (Accessed 20 October 2025)
- Nottingham Trent University. (2025). Student Hub [Online] Available at: <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/studenthub/news/2025/10/find-the-perfect-spot-to-study-with-our-new-sensory-maps-and-virtual-tours-for-ntu-libraries> (Accessed 17 December 2025)
- Peterson, M. (2023). Libraries as felt spaces: Atmospheres, public space and feeling of dis/comfort. *Emotion space and society*, 49 (November) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2023.100986>
- Svaler, T. B. (2023). On making libraries and museums more accessible for autistic people. *IFLA Journal*, 50(1), 42-52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03400352231202516> (Original work published 2024)
- University of Worcester (2025) Plan your visit [Online] Available at: <https://thehiveworcester.org/plan-your-visit.html> (Accessed 17 December 2025)
- Wiltshire Archaeology and Natural History Society (2025) Creating a sensory map for the museum [Online] Available at: <https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/news-articles/creating-a-sensory-map-for-the-museum/> (Accessed 17 December 2025)

## **Bradford College's Untold Stories Project**

**Charlie Parkinson**

Bradford College Library Library Learning Facilitator  
Long (45 minutes plus questions)

The audience will learn about the Untold Stories project. This is a cross-curricular, creative initiative led and funded by Bradford College Library.

I will cover how the project came into being, examine our methods, and prompt the audience to get involved. I aim to inspire others to lead similar initiatives across the country to promote E.D.I., foster empathy, and encourage creativity.

This project is an example of what can be achieved when neurodivergent L.I.S. professionals are supported to follow a strong sense of justice, stand up for their values, and invest time in an area of interest.

Bradford College Library's Untold Stories project is an initiative that I've led since 2024. The project was born out of a desire to celebrate diversity, amplify student voice, and reinforce community cohesion. Students and staff were invited to share their lived experience with the aim of capturing underrepresented voices from across the district.

I will discuss the origins of the project, some organisational challenges, its outcome to date, and our plans for the future. I will give advice regarding how to set up such a project and I hope to inspire NLISN members to take part in our own version.

My talk will begin with the history and aims of the project. What prompted this initiative, how did it evolve, who was involved, and how were we supported to succeed?

Next, I will illustrate the methods we used to maximise accessibility, including the format of submissions, ESOL, SEND and safeguarding considerations.

After that, I'll delve into the organisational challenges of the project, focusing on collecting and collating submissions, GDPR considerations, promotion, and the editing process.

I will present the outcomes of the project and examine its impact.

Finally, I will outline our plans for the future.

Audience members will be given the opportunity to suggest questions and prompts that could form the basis of an NLISN edition of Untold Stories.

*Expectations for attendees:* 30 minutes: listening. 10 minutes: sharing ideas for questions and prompts (either post-it notes or a digital platform, such as Padlet). 5 minutes: questions from the audience.

## **What if removing "neurodiversity" from HE policy was actually the key to better supporting neurodivergent learners?**

**Neil Carrant & Hannah Breslin**

University of Bedfordshire Educational Developer, Learning, Teaching and Libraries Long (45 minutes plus questions)

- How neurodiversity is framed in key policy documents; specifically the QAA Subject benchmark statements (SBS).
- How a performative discourse around neurodiversity risks marginalising neurodivergent learners.
- That by removing "neurodiversity" and taking a holistic framing of disability, focusing on shared experience, can result in policy and practice that better supports neurodivergent students and staff.
- Examples of policy and practice in a library and learning resources context giving a fresh way of thinking of inclusion in your own contexts.

This presentation is based on an analysis of all new subject benchmark statements (SBS) created from 2022 to 2025, including the Librarianship, Information, Knowledge, Records and Archives Management statement. The statements were analysed in relation to neurodiversity, disability and other aspects of diversity. Four themes are highlighted in how neurodiversity is framed and misunderstood: Terminology, lack of consistency in applying a medical or social model of disability, articulation of neurodiversity with disability, and articulation with other aspects of diversity.

The inconsistent and performative approaches in how neurodiversity is framed in this policy context demonstrates a legacy of ableism and a lack of understanding of the neurodiversity paradigm. It risks perpetuating unhelpful notions such as accommodations being a burden on staff and offer little insight to those supporting neurodivergent students in their studies.

Instead, we propose a consistent and holistic approach to disability and difference in policy that focuses on shared experience. The social model of disability was (Oliver 2013) originally intended as a tool to support the collective removal of barriers and not focus on individual impairment. A shared experience lens, reduces the focus on diagnostic labels and staff get a better practical guide on how to support students.

We finish by offering examples of our approach in practice within a library and learning resources context and discuss with participants the implications for practice. For example, how this might impact reading list policies and practices and how it can shape learning support guidance for staff and students.

A discussion of the proposition for removing performative mention of neurodiversity and consideration of a holistic approach.

Breslin, H. & Carrant, N. (2024, July 19) Higher education needs to get to grips with the language of neurodiversity. Wonkhe.

<https://wonkhe.com/blogs/higher-education-needs-to-get-to-grips-with-the-language-of-neurodiversity/>

Oliver, M. (2013) The social model of disability: thirty years on, *Disability & Society*, 28(7). 1024-1026,

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2025) Subject Benchmark Statement: Librarianship, Information, Knowledge, Records and Archives Management, QAA. <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>.

Walker, N. (2014). Neurodiversity: Some basic terms & definitions. Neuroqueer Heresies. <https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions/>

## **Building Inclusive Spaces and Creating Psychological Safety**

**Ruth Le Duc**

University of Law Student Learning Development Manager - Neurodiversity  
Short (20 mins plus questions)

Building Inclusive spaces and psychological safety is a shared responsibility and can be seen on 3 levels; individual, team and institutional. There are challenges for neurodivergent people (students, customers, and also colleagues) and we need to look beyond 'adjustments' and deficit models to things like creating belonging, including neurodivergent voices, shame-sensitive practice and co-creation. This talk will offer thoughts on what we mean by an inclusive space and psychological safety in both higher-education settings and the workplace and discuss some of the challenges for neurodivergent people. It will briefly outline some examples from practice - that have been successful in building inclusion, belonging and safety and discuss the benefits for all. Finally it will invite participants to reflect on an individual, team and institutional level on their own spaces / practice and how they might adapt or transfer some of these ideas according to their role and setting. It will emphasise the importance of neurodivergent voices, shared responsibility, allyship and inclusive design.

*Expectations for attendees:* Participants won't be asked to speak or discuss anything just listen as they feel comfortable. There will be a chance to ask questions or share thoughts verbally at the end or submit a question in writing (on a post-it for example) if that is preferred.

## **Divergent Voices: Capturing the lived experience of Neurodivergent UWE staff**

**Abi Ward**

UWE Bristol Senior Learning Development Librarian  
Short (20 mins plus questions)

How to creatively capture the lived experience of neurodivergent staff and why this is an effective form of advocacy.

I created the Neurodivergent Staff Project at my workplace as the staff members felt they were not being heard or understood. This presentation will cover my reasons for the project, the various forms it took including blogs, podcast episodes, videos and zines, and the impact of the project.

*Expectations for attendees:* Listen, and ask questions. Hopefully take away some ideas to implement in their own workplace.

The project website is here: <https://new.express.adobe.com/webpage/pRGlof3lvja1W>  
Please do contact me if you have any questions or need more background to the project. I will have a short powerpoint and then use the webpage as the landing point.

# Opening Up Library Spaces: Interactive Maps and 360 Experiences for Enhanced Wayfinding and Neurodiversity Support

**George Perkins**

University of Sheffield      Library Information Services Coordinator

Short (20 mins plus questions)

The main takeaway is that interactive maps transform intimidating library spaces into welcoming, accessible environments, especially for neurodivergent students.

By providing intuitive wayfinding, 360-degree room views, and real-time desk availability, libraries can eliminate ""entry anxiety"" before a student even arrives. Ultimately, this technology empowers users to independently choose study spaces that fit their unique sensory and learning needs. Furthermore, using user-friendly tools allows library staff to collaboratively maintain and evolve these maps based on ongoing student feedback, ensuring the library remains a space where everyone can comfortably thrive.

This presentation explores how the University of Sheffield Library uses interactive maps to demystify complex spaces and alleviate anxiety, particularly for neurodivergent students. Key elements of the presentation include:

**The Solution:** Built on Springshare's LibCal, the library created interactive floorplans with hotspots and booking integration, allowing students to easily view the real-time availability of study spaces.

**360-Degree Walkarounds:** To proactively eliminate ""entry anxiety,"" the library has developed comprehensive 360-degree virtual tours. These allow students to preview spaces and locate help points before ever stepping foot inside.

**Collaborative Maintenance:** Using accessible tools like Canva and clear training documentation allows various library teams—from capacity management to Special Collections—to take ownership of updating the maps, fostering institutional buy-in.

**Skill Development:** The project helped staff develop practical technical skills, including HTML, CSS, photography, and networking.

**Future Developments:** Driven by ongoing student feedback and UX research. Develop 360-degree tours of Western Bank Library.

Ultimately, the talk demonstrates how thoughtful, accessible technology transforms libraries into welcoming environments that champion user choice and independence.

*Expectations for attendees:* I would like the audience to listen to the presentation, but also have a chance to use the maps and view the 360 Experience.

## **Late diagnosis, self advocacy and the importance of community**

### **Melanie Strong**

Guildhall library      Senior Librarian (Collections Advice)  
Short (20 mins plus questions)

Positives and negatives of official diagnosis.  
Ways to navigate company's disability policy  
Who can you turn to for assistance when needed.  
Ways to incorporate changes into your workplace

This past summer I was diagnosed with both ASD and ADHD at 52. For the past decade or so I had suspected I had ADHD but despite family members and friends being autistic I never considered it for myself. The diagnosis made everything make much more sense to me and have enabled me a much better understanding of my needs and responses to things.

Diagnosis led me to navigate our work's HR procedures for disability support and reasonable adjustments. I have found myself in multiple situations dealing with HR and management where I've had to self-advocate and educate at a level that I was not expecting. I will cover some of what these challenges were, and what successes and failures I've had. Luckily, we have a great disability staff network, who have a specific ND group within. This support network has shown how much of a wide range of responses within our company there is.

Before I became a librarian I worked with LD adults, and advocacy was something I was quite familiar with. My own struggles have made me look at how I can effect change for other employees, as well as our library patrons. And what work we still need to do to make our library as accessible for ND people as for NT ones. The last section will cover what work I think our library still needs to do and what the challenges for those are.

*Expectations for attendees:* Listen, questions and comments at the end

## **Mind, Body and Shelf. Exploring Wellbeing Collections in Academic Libraries**

### **Rebecca Humphreys**

University of Northampton Information Assistant  
Short (20 mins plus questions)

UK academic libraries are transitioning into "third spaces" that prioritise student well-being over simple book storage. Key takeaways include:  
Holistic Support: Collections now include non-traditional items like games, crafts, and yoga mats to support diverse emotional needs.  
Inclusive Curation: Ethical, decolonized, and neuro-inclusive curation (e.g., quiet "snugs") fosters a vital sense of belonging.  
Design Tension: Balancing high-traffic visibility with "shielded" layouts is essential for student privacy and reducing stigma.  
Evaluation Shift: Success requires moving beyond circulation numbers toward qualitative, user-experience-driven metrics.

The session would present findings from a 2025 qualitative study investigating how UK academic libraries transition from passive repositories into "third spaces" that actively support student well-being. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with six library

professionals across Russell Group and non-Russell Group institutions, the research explores the conceptualisation, development, and evaluation of well-being collections. Key areas of exploration include:

**Strategic Evolution:** How collections are moving beyond traditional curriculum-based materials to include "non-traditional" resources like games, craft supplies, and yoga mats.

**Design & Privacy:** The tension between placing collections in high-traffic areas for visibility and creating "shielded" or "protected" layouts to reduce student stigma.

**Inclusive Curation:** The ethical responsibility of librarians to confront personal bias and use decolonisation as a tool for fostering a sense of belonging.

**The Evaluation Gap:** The critical need to move beyond misleading circulation metrics toward a framework that prioritises qualitative user experience.

The session will feature direct professional insights, such as the value of "health professional-led" curation and the role of dedicated "snug" spaces for neurodivergent and stressed students. Finally, I will discuss a roadmap for future practice, emphasising institutional ownership to ensure the sustainability of these vital services."

*Expectations for attendees:* Listening

## **Seeking patterns: Creating Accessible Resource Design**

**Sara Erskine**

Norwich University of the Arts      Study Skills Manager

Short (20 mins plus questions)

This session focuses on an autism toolkit created during an action research project. One key learning point is that resource design is more effective when co-created, working with rather than for students. It will also emphasise the importance of clear visual design to enhance information and aid comprehension. Consistent colour palettes, grouped information, white space and infographics are all essential tools. Overall, the pattern seeking abilities and attention to detail of those involved helped synthesise information and create cohesive designs.

This presentation will outline the development of a 20-page workbook to support assessment, life and study skills. It was designed for internal and external audiences: those who identify as autistic, friends, family, or educators wanting to understand more. Originating from shared interests in neurodivergence, this was a collaboration between a Study Skills Manager and a Specialist Study Skills Tutor at a creative arts university. Following an iterative design process, the session will showcase how the resource has evolved since 2024. The importance of student feedback will be discussed, drawn from four focus groups involving seven autistic students from a range of backgrounds and life stages. For instance, our students valued elements such as the use of visuals to represent content and consistency in design; they disliked 'busy' pages and 'vague' activities. Challenges will also be highlighted such as navigating ethical approval and creating accessible design. Throughout the talk, the presenter's personal journey towards self-identification will be interwoven in relation to the design process. To conclude, the main outcomes of the resource will be outlined: utilisation in staff training, presentation in an internal research series, and contribution to a new autism research group.

*Expectations for attendees:* For most of the session, audience members will listen about the creation of the toolkit. Towards the end, the presenter will also invite participants to explore the toolkit and provide optional feedback through a short survey.

The session has been informed by sources on inclusive design. In particular, the Universal Design for Learning guidelines (CAST, 2026) have been beneficial due to their focus on personalised engagement and representation of information through a range of mediums. Additionally, Fallin et al.'s (2018; 2023) work on designing for diverse learners was useful in terms of both content and the approach to creating a visual resource. Wider literature on autism has helped to reinforce that pattern-seeking and attention to detail can support innovation and creation (Baron-Cohen, 2020).

#### Reference List:

Cañete, R., Martín-Mariscal, A., and Peralta, M. E. (2023) 'Visual design for autism: Exploring stimulation and perception of products for hyper-and hyposensitivity', *The International Journal of Visual Design*, 17(2), pp. 19-34.

Careri, W. (2022) 'Designing for neurodivergent audiences', *Nightingale*, February. Available at: <https://nightingaledvs.com/designing-for-neurodivergent-audiences/> (Accessed: 27 March 2026).

CAST (2026) The UDL guidelines. Available at: <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/> (Accessed: 27 March 2026).

Baron-Cohen, S. (2020) *The pattern seekers*. New York: Basic Books.

Fallin, L. et al. (2018) *Designing for diverse learners*. Available at: <https://designingfordiverselearners.info/resources/> (Accessed: 27 March 2026).

Fallin, L. (2023) 'Supporting accessible learning resource design with designing for diverse learners', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 26. Available at: <https://knowledge.lancashire.ac.uk/id/eprint/50970/1/924.pdf> (Accessed: 27 March 2026).

Merry, K. (2023) *Delivering inclusive and impactful instruction: universal design for learning in higher education*. Massachusetts: CAST Professional Publishing.

## **Mislabelled & Misunderstood? Exploring assumptions around neurodivergence**

**Sarah Howley, Gemma Sosnowsky**

University of Manchester, University of Lancaster  
Workshop (55 minutes)

Sarah Howley, University of Manchester Learning Developer

Gemma Sosnowsky, Lancaster University      Faculty Librarian

Workshop (55 minutes)

Being neurodivergent often involves feeling misunderstood, including by those closest to us. These misunderstandings can lead to inaccurate or limiting labels.

In this workshop, we will explore common labels associated with neurodivergence and reflect on how they can shape self-perception and interactions with others. We will also

consider how developing a clearer understanding of your own neurodivergent experience can support more confident self-expression and communication.

The core of the workshop is a creative, reflective activity. Using prompts and a range of craft materials, you will create a response to the question:

“What do you wish \_\_\_\_\_ understood about you?”

This activity is designed to help you reflect on who you are, what you need, and what you bring. Towards the end of the session, you will be invited (but not required) to share your work with others.

#### Expectations for attendees

- Engage with a short introduction to key concepts.
- Respond to a small number of anonymous survey questions.
- Take part in a guided creative reflection activity (writing, drawing, or making).
- Share and discuss your reflections, if you feel comfortable.

#### Resources

Inside Our Autistic Minds - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0bbnjvx>

This documentary series shows autistic people co-creating expressive films that communicate how they think, feel, and perceive the world. It centres misunderstood experiences, challenges limiting labels, and demonstrates how reflective, creative activities can help neurodivergent people articulate needs, identity, and strengths in ways that foster greater understanding.

Cutting our own keys: New possibilities of neurodivergent storytelling in research - <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13623613221132107>

This open access article argues that neurodivergent people should shape and share their own narratives rather than be defined by neurotypical frameworks. It explores ‘neurodivergent storytelling’ as a way to better understand identity and lived experience through reflection and personal expression. Mutual understanding can cultivate respect across neurotypes, and create more inclusive, equitable environments where neurodivergent voices are genuinely heard.

## **Finding your place in liaison librarianship**

### **Charlie Worthington**

King's College London Collections Liaison Librarian  
Workshop (55 minutes)

Neurodivergent people can be successful in library roles where liaison and relationship management is a key element.

There is no right way to be a liaison librarian.

This session is about surfacing our strengths, our fears, and problem solving together. I will talk about my experiences and give tangible examples of approaches that have worked for me (and some that haven't worked so well). The bulk of the session will be

dedicated to workshopping the barriers and crowdsourcing solutions. The aim is to give newer professionals confidence to apply for roles, and more established professionals ideas for approaches they could try.

*Expectations for attendees:* Listen (a little bit). Participate in a brainstorming activity on Padlet to surface the problems and fears people have around liaison librarianship. Participate in problem solution mapping via Padlet.

# Scripts, Stages and Subtexts: Understanding Autistic Masking as Workplace Information Literacy

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QA Higher Education

Participants will understand autistic masking as a form of workplace information literacy, building on the presenter's earlier research on "what it means to be information literate for an autistic person in the academic library workplace" (2025). The session highlights masking as skilled and effortful labour rather than a deficit, and uses Erving Goffman's concepts of presentation of self, stigma, and front stage/backstage behaviour to explain how autistic workers manage visibility, risk, and belonging. Attendees will develop greater awareness of the hidden information work involved in appearing "professional" in neurotypical workplaces.

This session presents a work in progress grounded in a critical literature review that brings together research on autistic masking and workplace information literacy. It outlines masking as a strategy used by some autistic people, consciously or unconsciously, to navigate professional environments shaped by neurotypical norms. Rather than framing masking as a personal deficit, the session positions it as skilled but costly interpretive labour.

Drawing on Erving Goffman's theories of Presentation of Self, stigma, and the distinction between front stage and backstage behaviour, the session explores how workplace communication can be understood as performance. These concepts are used as an interpretive lens to foreground how autistic workers constantly manage impressions, expectations, and uncertainty.

The presentation uses examples from existing literature and illustrative participant quotations to examine everyday information practices, such as deciding how and when to communicate with colleagues. These moments reveal how information literacy for autistic people is often an active, conscious process involving constant microdecisions. The session concludes by identifying gaps in the literature and outlining how this review will inform future empirical research, rather than presenting finished findings.

*Expectations for attendees:* The audience will be invited to listen, reflect, and engage with ideas presented as provisional and exploratory. There will be opportunities for discussion, but no personal disclosure is expected. Contributions that help shape future research questions and directions are welcomed.

## References

Goffman, E. (1990). *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Penguin Books Limited

Goffman, E. (1990). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Penguin Books Limited

Haire, Amelia. "What Does It Mean to Be Information Literate for an Autistic Librarian in the Academic Library Workplace?" *Journal of Information Literacy*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2025, pp. 27–47, <https://doi.org/10.11645/19.1.723>.

Lloyd, Anne-Maree. "Information Literacy and Literacies of Information: A Mid-Range Theory and Model." *Journal of Information Literacy*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2017, pp. 91–105, <http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/11.1.2185>.

Pearson, A., and Rose, K. (2021) "A Conceptual Analysis of Autistic Masking: Understanding the Narrative of Stigma and the Illusion of Choice". In *Autism in Adulthood*. 3 (1) DOI: 10.1089/aut.2020.0043