

An autistic and socially anxious library administrator explains her recent diagnosis and how her discovery of NLISN has improved her confidence and pride in her neurodivergence.



Hi! My name is Abigail and I'm a 29-year-old library administrator and operations administrator at UWE Bristol. I have been working at the university since 2021, beginning as an Enquiries Assistant on the library front desks, and moving to my administrative role in 2023. I began my operations role only a month ago, working this role two days a week alongside my existing library hours. I have also just completed my PG Diploma in Library & Information Services Management with the University of Sheffield.

For many years, I had been questioning the possibility of being neurodivergent, always knowing that I was different somehow to others, in the way my mannerisms, habits, thoughts and general behaviour differ to those who might be classed as neurotypical. I knew a while ago I suffered from anxiety disorder, having this confirmed by an expert when I sought help to cope with panic attacks and episodes of depression in 2022. But I never thought I was on any other spectrum, and it wasn't until I met various people with autistic traits that I realised I clicked with these people *very* well, and that there may be a reason for that.

Long story short, I spoke to a practitioner only a few months ago, where an initial assessment confirmed I had very strong signs of having autism. I couldn't afford the cost of a full assessment, but this was fine, given the conversation I had with a professional and my self-diagnosis was enough for me to go on, and to confidently identify myself as an autistic person.

Discovering the Neurodivergent Library and Information Staff Network was an enlightening and eye-opening experience, especially after confirming my neurodivergent identity. I found the network through the JISC mailing list, where an

online event called 'Neurodivergence and Entry into the Library and Information Science Profession' was advertised. Having had my diagnosis and nearing completion of my Diploma at this time, I felt this event was extremely relevant to me, and in hindsight, I am so glad I chose to attend.

I learned that there were so many people like me in the LIS sector, all of whom were working successful roles, but having similar experiences and thoughts when it came to office environments, interpersonal relationships, sensory issues and thought processes. It made me feel included in a community, free of judgement, and validated the feelings I often have that I've always worried were 'wrong' or that I should get over them somehow.

Following this, I became a member of the network, kept continuous track of the content and events, and eventually, volunteered myself to be their website coordinator. Having a presence in the network and now the committee has not only impacted my confidence and knowledge of neurodivergence in the LIS sector, but makes me feel I am helping others too, even if it's in a small way. It is also keeping my mind and body occupied outside my paid work, given I can get bored and restless without creative projects to work on. Given my writing background, managing the web content and creating my own content for the website couldn't be more perfect.

I am so thankful for what NLISN have given me, and I hope to bring the benefits of our community, resources and content to other neurodivergent library staff who want to have their voices heard.