

# NEURODIVERSE POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHER COMMUNITY FESTIVAL 2026

## Report

By

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Made possible by



and



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\*While ‘titles’ have been assigned to core team members, in reality, these roles were fluid and collaborative across the project in the spirit of neuroinclusive practice. This approach ensured psychological safety for each team member and seamlessly evolved as the team developed.



Image 1 - The image shows the closing remarks with the full organising committee and ND PGR volunteers. From left to right: Beth Taylor, Mingcan Rong, Mariko North, Sharon Martin, Alexander Markovits, Cal Bloodworth, Alana Jones.

# Organisational support

## Inclusive Change

Part of the funding was allocated to engaging Inclusive Change, an external consultant, to support the planning and delivery of the event. Inclusive Change brought valuable experience and expertise in event planning and inclusive practice to the project, with their involvement giving the committee a wealth of event planning and delivery experience to draw upon, particularly given the committee’s acknowledged limited event-specific experience. Their attendance at the event itself also offered strong moral support to the planning committee on the day, along with validation before and after the event.



Image 2 - Inclusive Change’s founder Lucy Smith seated in the centre with the microphone in front of a word cloud displaying what inclusion means to the attendees.

## GW4

We would like to extend our thanks to GW4 for their generous financial support, without which this event would not have been possible.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed in various capacities to the planning and execution of this event. Their support and dedication made a significant difference and ensured the event ran smoothly on the day.

In particular, we would like to acknowledge the ND PGRs who played a key role in organising the event: Sharon Martin; Patty Miranda; Mariko North; Suzanne Eade Roberts.

We are also grateful to our speakers, panellists and advisors for sharing their time, expertise, and insights: Professor Brian Garrod; Dr. Pia Leete; Dr. Franklin Ginn; Asha Sahni; Lucy Smith; Holly Smith; Dr Sabrina Fairchild.

In addition, we thank the venue staff, caterers, and everyone else who contributed behind the scenes to ensure the event was a success.

Finally, we would like to thank all attendees for coming on the day. The event was attended by a combination of neurodivergent PGRs, neurotypical PGRs and academic staff. The staff who attended were either neurodivergent themselves, or had a vested interest in neurodivergence, and their attendance offered an opportunity for supervisors and students to share their perspectives on supervision and academic practices more broadly. Through engagement from neurotypical attendees, the event helped bridge the divide between neurodivergent and neurotypical research cultures. The diversity of neurodivergent profiles, experiences and accessibility needs within the planning committee facilitated this process, and the event included panels featuring a mixture of neurodivergent PGRs, and both neurodivergent and neurotypical supervisors, which attendees found particularly helpful and relevant.



Image 3 - Attendees and volunteers from various organisations and institutions

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## Introduction

This report forms the final compulsory component of the GW4 grant awarded to support the delivery of a neurodivergent Postgraduate researcher (ND PGR) community festival. It follows the successful ND PGR event held in February 2026, organised by and for neurodivergent postgraduate researchers.

The report outlines how the funding was used, reflects on the process of planning and delivering an event as a neurodivergent-led group, and summarises key insights from the day, particularly in relation to accessibility and broader discussions within academia. It also provides recommendations for future practice, with the aim of informing meaningful improvements and fostering more neurodivergent-friendly environments in academic settings.

The conference took place on Monday, 23 February 2026 at St Michael's Centre, North Road, Stoke Gifford, BS34 8PD, United Kingdom. It was designed as a community festival, fostering celebration and neuroinclusive networking among attendees (See Appendix 4 for the event programme).

This event and the resulting report are particularly timely in light of the recent Disabled Students UK 2025 Access report, which highlights that while awareness of accessibility has improved, this has not consistently translated into meaningful action. In response, this report aims to provide practical, actionable recommendations to improve accessibility in both collaborative working environments and academic conferences.

The purpose of this event was to provide a space for neurodivergent PGR students to develop a sense of community and support that was previously lacking. This was also one of the first events of its kind, being developed by neurodivergent PGRs, for our own community in a way that was accessible and inclusive, as currently many events in this space are not designed with this in mind.

The event demonstrated that when small changes to the design of the day are made with inclusion in mind (for example providing attendees with a photo tour of the venue prior, and clear directions to the venue), spaces feel more psychologically safe and accessible for the neurodivergent PGR community. Students shared how important events like this are to their PGR experience, and how many of them finally felt validated and comfortable in a conference style event. It was evident that by the closing of the festival, students felt part of the neurodivergent PGR community (indicated in Fig. 7), and everyone shared the importance of continuing to develop this sense of community going forward (Fig. 9).

We hope that the insights from this event will help inform more inclusive practices and contribute to the creation of neurodivergent-friendly spaces within academia. The organisers also hope this work will inspire future events and initiatives, and that they may remain involved in supporting this progress, creating a lasting legacy beyond their time as PGR students.

## Allocation of Funds

The majority of the funds were allocated to the full-day hire and support from the venue, which included:

- A dietary-inclusive and adaptable menu
- IT support
- Three main conference rooms
- Facilities

The venue was St Michael's Centre, North Road, Stoke Gifford, BS34 8PD, United Kingdom. This venue was selected for a variety of reasons to improve the accessibility of the event, including the venue's:

- Prior experience of hosting other inclusive events.
- Modern interior, which allowed for flexibility and tailored lighting, sound etc. to meet the needs of neurodivergent attendees.
- Location making it convenient for those travelling using public transport, both from within Bristol and beyond e.g. 10 minute walk from train station.

In addition to this, funds were allocated to neuroinclusive equipment, support on the day, and reimbursements, more specifically:

- A portion of the funds were allocated to additional equipment to maximise the day's inclusivity, including fidget toys, notepads, pens etc.
- Funds were also allocated for travel reimbursement for attendees, making the event more accessible and affordable. Similarly, accommodation for speakers travelling from further afield was reimbursed.
- A significant portion of the funds was reserved to secure the services of Inclusive Change, who were instrumental in helping keep the project on-track with planning, as well as providing support on the day.
- Finally, funds were used for printing name tags, programmes, posters for easy identification and signposting on the day.

Appendix 1 has the full breakdown of costs.

## Outputs - Key Deliverables

In line with the grant's requirements, we achieved the following:

- Successful delivery of a hybrid event designed and delivered by neurodivergent PGRs, for neurodivergent PGRs.
- Conference-style research sharing through poster presentations and oral discussions.
- Pre-event and post-event survey data collected from attendees, allowing measurement of impact across multiple platforms (see Appendix 2).
- Engagement from both neurodivergent and neurotypical academic staff and postgraduate researchers (see breakdown of attendees in Appendix 3).
- Creating a resource bank on Google Drive containing relevant information, slides and QR-coded content which was accessible to all attendees before, during and after the event.
- Demonstrating a replicable model of neuroinclusive event planning and delivery, developed through the committee's successful working practices.
- A comprehensive set of recommendations for universities and students regarding neuroinclusive academic practice (see page 17).

## Outcomes - Key Findings

Through conversations on the day both in person, on Teams, and using Mentimeter responses, combined with pre- and post-event survey data, we can demonstrate both qualitative and quantitative measures of the day's positive impact, the need for future events like this, and key accessibility choices that made the most difference. Figure 10 in Appendix 3 shows the breakdown of attendees' academic roles.

### Quantitative (Appendix 2a)

For quantitative data collection pre- and post-event surveys invited attendees to first rate their level of agreement from 1-10 (where 10 was the highest level of agreement) with several statements. Each statement is directly related to either one of the workshops of the day, or the experience of the day itself. Importantly, the results showed that:

- Every pre- and post-event survey demonstrated a marked improvement in ratings across the majority of domains (Fig. 1-7).
- The overall rating of how the day went was very positive, with all ratings at 7 out of ten and above (Fig. 8)
- One of the most significant increases between the pre- and post-survey data related to the statement "I feel part of a neurodivergent PGR community", in which pre-event ratings were spread from 2-10 with the modal answer being 5, increasing up to a span of 6-10 with the modal answer being 9 post-event (Fig. 7).
- 100% of respondents said they wanted to see more events of this nature across both "*more on neurodiversity in academia*" (75% of responses) and "*more wellbeing/support-focused events*" (25% of responses; Fig. 9).

### Qualitative (Appendix 2b; 3)

For qualitative data, our pre- and post-surveys contained multiple open-text response questions to allow attendees to provide more detailed and personal feedback (Appendix 2b). We also received verbal feedback throughout the day, and received open-text responses to the workshop topics on Mentimeter (Appendix 3). References to specific quotes from the appendix are given in brackets.

These responses relayed a few recurrent themes:

- Community and Belonging: Attendees reported feeling "*warmly accepted*" (Q1) and valued "*meeting other ND PGRs*" (Q2) and the "*community feeling*" (Q1) evoked by the event, giving people the confidence that they can use their "*neurodiversity to my – and others' – benefit*" (Q30). One attendee directly expressed their feeling of inclusion by stating "*Thank you so much for making us feel seen and heard*" (Q17).

- Normalisation and Authenticity: One attendee verbally noted that it was “*the first time he didn’t feel special*” with the explanation that ‘special’ related to the negative connotations of the word. This was a testament to the inclusive atmosphere generated by the event, even for people who might usually find in-person academic events a barrier because they stand out or are “*different*”. Similarly another attendee expressed how they had “*honestly felt really alone in academia*” yet “*the event solidified that I’m not alone*” (Q30).
- Organisational Quality and Adaptability: Multiple attendees commented on the “*thought and effort*” (Q33) invested in the event’s organisation, and noted that the organisers “*adapted phenomenally to change in plan*” (Q1), who combined workshops to accommodate fewer attendees than the initial number of signups. Additionally, attendees directly praised our neuroinclusive considerations such as “*hybrid sessions so [they] could join online and in the chat*” (Q8) along with “*Multiple options to interact and ask questions*” (Q7) which accommodated multiple communication types.
- Advocacy and Self-Confidence: One attendee commented that they have learnt the importance of promoting their “*ADHD superpowers*”(Q31) to their supervisory team, even when their culture prescribes them to conceal their “*merits and positive aspects*” (Q31), demonstrating how the event has empowered attendees to embrace and celebrate their neurodivergence in ways they have not previously.
- Gratitude for the event: Many attendees expressed gratitude for organising this “*fabulous*” (Q30) and “*amazing event*” (Q33) (Table 5).

Furthermore, post-event responses related to what generally worked well on the day (Table 1), what could be improved (Table 2), whether any access barriers remained (Table 3), and which accessibility points from the day should be carried forward to other events (Table 4) provided directly useful recommendations:

- Attendees indicated which of the accessible steps we had taken were most effective and should be prioritised for future events, thereby providing direct guidance for future event organisers (Table 4). These included the following:
  - “*Clear structure and expectations,*
  - *Flexible participation (e.g. chat, speaking, silence, movement),*
  - *Breaks and pacing,*
  - *Sensory considerations (noise, lighting, quiet space),*
  - *Multiple ways of engaging with content (talking, writing, visuals, activities),*
  - *Lived-experience perspectives,*
  - *Clear access information beforehand*”
- It is important to note that while most responses to whether there remained any barriers to full participation were “*No*” (Q17-19; Q21), two responses provided useful feedback for improving the accessibility of future events (Table 3):
  - For example, one recommended, “*some conversation prompts on tables or a couple of icebreakers*” (Q16), which would be easy to incorporate into future events.
  - While the second recommended “*a wider variety*” suggesting potentially “*a crafts based session*” or “*a viewing of a short film that a student has produced related*”

to *ND perhaps(?)*” (Q20). This is something which could be considered at larger scale events, to provide attendees options of what types of workshops are most relevant to them.

- One particularly positive point of feedback when asked about general improvements regards how many more people would benefit from events like this. Specifically, when asked about more general improvements (Table 2), one attendee recommended “*More visibility for this event because [they are] sure some of [their] cohort would benefitted truly from such ND-focused events.*” (Q10)
- Alongside this the other responses in Table 2 include readily actionable advice for future events such as having a “*[p]rint out of Menti QR codes on tables*” (Q14). It is advised that the full table of responses are read for the full recommendations.
- Overall, from the points highlighted by attendees, we recommend offering multiple communications options (such as mentimeter, verbal, written in the teams chat, remote, in person, etc.) as this was really beneficial for improving the neuroinclusivity of the space and allowing for greater discussions on the day.
- Finally, we recommend physical or spatial accommodations such as asking about and altering the temperature of the room and “*[h]aving the lights dimmed*” (Q3) which attendees directly referenced as being helpful both on the day and in the feedback survey.



Image 4 - Example setup for one of the workshops (Embracing and Expressing Neurodivergence In Your Research) with a panel of ND PGRs and Supervisors.

From the Mentimeter on the day we were also able to learn more about the broader ND PGR experience which could also inform important areas for future funding to help address (Appendix 3):

- When attendees were asked about universities' current practices, the most common answers were variations of *"mixed"* and *"inconsistent"* (Fig. 11), and there was a lot of variability in experiences (Fig.15). In response to a question regarding accessibility of support for neurodivergent PGR students, while some noted that *'support staff are great,'* others shared that their experience was *'difficult'*, *'variable'* and *'dehumanising'* (Fig.14). This suggests that, while some individuals report positive experiences, these are not consistent across institutions (or even within the same institution). It underscores the importance of events like this, which provide ND PGRs with opportunities to share their experiences and can help raise awareness among the wider University community about the need for more consistent best practices.
- Attendees were also asked about the stereotypes they have encountered in academia, and their responses highlight the continued prevalence of misconceptions surrounding neurodiversity in academia (Fig. 12). The results suggest that deeply harmful terms such as *"laziness"*, *"careless"*, *"foolish"*, and *"disorganised"* remain widespread, as well as beliefs that ND PGRs are *"just wanting attention"*, or are *"wanting to be different"*, or even that neurodiversity is *"not real"*.
- Fig.13 shows attendee responses to the question 'what does inclusion mean to you?' Here the most common theme was *'safety'*. This indicates that if institutions don't adopt accessible inclusive practices, the environment may not be safe for neurodivergent students.
- In contrast to the broader academic environment described by attendees, this event was characterised as *"groundbreaking"*, *"encouraging"*, *"excellent!"*, *"refreshing"*, and *"personal - in a good way"*, alongside calls to *"replicate this"* (Fig. 16). These responses demonstrate that academic spaces can be made inclusive for ND individuals and highlight the importance of events like this in supporting the ND community and fostering a more inclusive academic culture overall.

## Research Culture Aims Achieved

Based on the data from the previous section, we can evidence our success in one of the key aims of the funding grant: creating a neurodivergent-friendly event designed and delivered by neurodivergent people. We achieved this aim in many ways:

- The event helped to reimagine research culture in a way that is more neuroinclusive. It did this by setting a precedent for built-in accommodations and prioritising psychological safety in academic spaces. As flexibility and adaptability were ingrained in the planning committee’s culture and approach, it was demonstrated that these principles can be operationalised with appropriate funding and collaboration with the ND community.
- Furthermore, the event helped to illuminate potential shortcomings of normative research cultures, even when compared with espoused neuroinclusive academic spaces. The gap between institutional understanding and action, as seen in other academic settings (Disabled Students UK, 2025), was made visible by accounts of attendees’ typical experiences of academia (See Appendix 3). Through engagement from neurotypical attendees, the event helped bridge the divide between neurodivergent and neurotypical research cultures. This was facilitated by the diversity of neurodivergent profiles, experiences and accessibility needs from within the planning committee
- This, in turn, may help bridge the awareness-action gap regarding neurodiversity in academia, providing a concrete, funded example of good practice. From this, some recommendations may translate to broader trends across UK industries, in which “*awareness is no longer the main issue*”, but “*consistency and delivery*” are now “*the biggest gap*” with regards to neuroinclusivity (Kirby, 2026).
- Conversations, planning and openness around neurodivergent people’s needs promoted discussion of other people’s needs beyond neurodivergence, such as co-occurring health conditions, which has scope to be reflected in other academic communities.
- This openness was exemplified by the normalisation and acceptance of transparency around fluctuations in capacities within the committee, rather than being seen as “*weaknesses*” or “*shortcomings*”, strengthening team dynamics and improving overall team productivity.
- As such, the construction of psychologically safe spaces for neurodivergence may help shape inclusive environments across academia.
- Therefore, the principles of inclusive teamwork and event organisation established and illustrated through this funded project are likely transferable to wider research culture.

# Personal Development

## Development of the Event Committee

The event committee, all ND PGRs themselves, thought it would be important to note their own development throughout this project in order to demonstrate not only the benefits of funding such a project for the wider community, but also for those directly involved. These developments include:

- Increased confidence in being involved in a substantial long-term project, including enthusiasm for regularly attending throughout.
- The experience demonstrated how invaluable it is to build a team grounded in people's strengths within a supportive environment, whereby we harnessed others' strengths, rather than imposing expectations on others. One committee member noted the team's lack of strict hierarchy, denoting that no one wanted to "*steal the spotlight*" or "*tear others down*" at any point in the planning process.
- The committee members provided accommodations for each other throughout the planning process, demonstrating that this is achievable without disrupting the functioning of the project, which is a powerful learning experience for both the committee and other organisations observing the project's success.
- Sustaining teamwork throughout the event felt very straightforward, as over the planning process, the group learnt to recognise and embrace each other's working and processing styles, fostering psychological safety, and allowing collective decisions at all times, even when unforeseen events occurred, such as when fewer people attended the event than expected.
- The team were able to openly discuss sensitive topics with each other at all times, without any fear of judgement.
- The experience helped members of the planning committee rebuild confidence after setbacks in their PhD studies, restoring their faith in academic spaces, which some had expressed could feel hostile to those who are different at times.
- The committee normalised people having agency over how they engaged, with no obligations imposed for people to attend a specific number of meetings in order to still have a voice in the running of the event. This natural self-regulation was embedded in the project's culture, even when it might be unconventional in other academic settings.
- Committee members were honest and transparent with each other at all times, including communicating moments of frustration in a way that was productive. They noted that this was not always achieved constructively in other academic settings.
- Even when committee members felt discomfort (such as anxiety) surrounding the event, they were happy to express this because of their passion for the cause and their trust and respect for one another.

## Development of Attendees

Ultimately, the event was both a demonstration of inclusivity and an informative day of workshops. These workshops (listed in Appendix 4) are all related to various aspects of embracing and navigating your neurodiversity in academia. As such, the event was not only accessible but also helped the development of attendees as detailed below:

- Post-event survey scores were higher than pre-event scores across all measured criteria, indicating developments in confidence, knowledge, self-advocacy and sense of belonging as a direct result of attending the event. Importantly these ratings were directly relevant to the workshops hosted on the day (Fig. 1-7).
  - For example, the event improved awareness and understanding of “*unwritten rules in academia*”, which is particularly relevant for ND PGRs to be aware of when navigating academic spaces (Fig. 5)
- One attendee reported that the event empowered them to schedule an “*ADHD-focused*” supervisory meeting, showing how the event has promoted actionable changes amongst attendees' approaches to being an ND PGR (Q31).
- Another attendee reported that “*it was nice to talk to other students in a less overwhelming environment*” (Q32), highlighting that the event has increased their confidence in networking and collaborating with other neurodivergent PGRs.



Image 5- image of attendees sat at their tables in discussion.

# Future Scope

## Recommendations

From the experience of creating this event as a ND PGR group, combined with the discussions on the day, we have devised a categorised set of recommendations:

1. Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces
  - a. There is a need for safe spaces for neurodivergent students.
  - b. Based on the constructive dialogue on the day between ND PGRs and academic staff panel members, we recommend that similar conversations be facilitated in other inclusive settings. This would empower neurodivergent students to engage with senior academics about challenges with supervision and barriers in a psychologically safe environment.
  - c. Based on the day's success, we recommend continued and increased funding for neurodivergent-led spaces and events to enable individuals to be more open about their needs, potentially reducing isolation or burnout and improving retention in doctoral programmes.
2. The need for more institutional collaboration in the support of students and staff.
  - a. Currently, there is a divide between institutional intention and delivered support. Increased systemic accountability is needed to ensure the burden does not solely land on the student or their supervisors.
  - b. Support recommendations (i.e. Disability support plans, accommodations etc.) are often curated for undergraduate students, and not always relevant for PGRs, requiring a lot of self-advocacy, which acts as a barrier to accessing correct support. PGR students express the need for accommodations that are more specific to doctoral experiences.
  - c. Improved interdepartmental collaboration is needed within the support structure. Currently, the onus mostly falls on students to express needs effectively (even in situations of crisis or distress), and to manage many different arms of the University alone, which acts as a further burden and barrier. Collaboration is therefore necessary to ensure that responsibility for support does not fall solely on PGRs, supervisors, or other university departments, but instead is an ongoing combined effort.
  - d. This collaboration could include a meeting between disability services, supervisors and the student in which disability services can advocate and provide recommendations for both student and supervisors, which should be ongoing throughout the student's time at the university.
3. Training and Support for Staff and Supervisors
  - a. To provide more ND-inclusive spaces, we recommend targeted training or educational opportunities for staff to better understand neurodivergent experiences. This ensures engagement is not limited to those with prior interest

or lived experience. In the spirit of collaboration (as noted above), this training could be attended by both staff and students together.

- b. Furthermore, we recommend comprehensive training specifically for supervisors, including pastoral care. This should include guidance on timely feedback, delivering feedback in ways that minimise triggering Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD), and supporting constructive development.
4. Structural and Institutional Improvements
  - a. Greater flexibility in academic structures, including clearer expectations, improved communication, and regular supervisory meetings.
  - b. Greater enforcement capabilities for disability services to ensure support agreed is support delivered, which would streamline many of the existing processes. Students would then be less likely to 'fall through the cracks', if the burden of accessing support becomes too hard- particularly in times of crisis. Therefore, we feel this would lead to increased student retention, as well as less time required for stress-related leave.
5. Accessibility and Modes of Engagement
  - a. Improved recognition that in-person attendance is not always accessible, with provision of alternative engagement options such as hybrid or online participation.
6. Event Design and Delivery
  - a. Accessibility factors we achieved on the day which should be prioritised in other events include: Clear structure and expectations, Flexible participation (e.g. chat, speaking, silence, movement), Breaks and pacing, Sensory considerations (noise, lighting, quiet space), Multiple ways of engaging with content (talking, writing, visuals, activities), Sharing materials in advance, Lived-experience perspectives, Clear access information beforehand.
  - b. Accessibility points recommended beyond this include: *"perhaps some structure, such as some conversation prompts on tables or a couple of icebreakers, would have been good."* (Q16) and *"ideally in future events there could be a wider variety in the workshops - a crafts based session allowing for expression other than spoken or written words, a viewing of a short film that a student has produced related to ND perhaps(?)"* (Q20).
  - c. An innovative feature of this event was the 'traffic light system' for research sharing engagement (Image 6). During our research sharing portion of the day, attendees were provided with traffic light coloured indicators that provided a visible display of capacity for questions/conversation- reducing the need for potentially awkward or triggering conversations. While presenting their research/ posters, if participants felt they had the capacity for lots of conversation/questions from the audience they displayed a green card. An orange card being displayed indicated that they felt comfortable answering a few questions, while a red card meant they were asking the audience to limit questions. This allowed attendees a safe space to practice discussing their research, without having to go beyond

their comfort window and reduce masking. We felt that this could be extended to the whole event or other situations in academic spaces.

- d. Designing and delivering a “*groundbreaking*” event such as this positively impacts a community that often faces barriers to equal participation. Nevertheless, many of the accommodations built in by the committee were more focused on social and organisational adaptations (i.e. lighting changes on the day, sharing fidget toys, multiple communication engagement at the event, traffic light system etc.). As such, this makes them very financially feasible for future events, and other academic spaces.



Image 6 - Photo of the academic posters on the stage with the traffic light cards.

## Committee reflections

Upon the completion of this project, the committee has been reflecting on potential refinements for future iterations of similar events, drawing on the experience and knowledge gained.

The committee recognised the value of Inclusive Change’s funded contribution and expertise, and hopes to build on this experience to work with greater confidence and reduced external input in future, while still engaging external support where most impactful.

A key consideration for future events will be how to engage a broader cross-section of departments and roles, particularly individuals who may be less familiar with neurodivergence but are open to developing their understanding. Additionally, future events should aim to expand the scope of understanding by addressing the intersectionality of neurodivergent PGR students with multiple protected characteristics. It could be beneficial to explore further topics such as caring responsibilities, co-occurring disabilities and health conditions, mature student experience in regards to their impact on neurodivergent PGRs.

As a committee, we feel privileged to have had this opportunity to demonstrate the importance, effectiveness, and ease of designing such an event. We have relished the experience of working in such an inclusive, understanding, and psychologically safe team. It has felt incredibly significant to work *with* our neurodiversities, having all grown both as individuals and academics throughout this experience. We feel that this report underscores how in the right environment, not only can neurodivergent PGR students succeed, but we can also thrive, and become a high-performing team. The committee hopes that similar initiatives will continue to be supported in the future and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to their development and delivery.

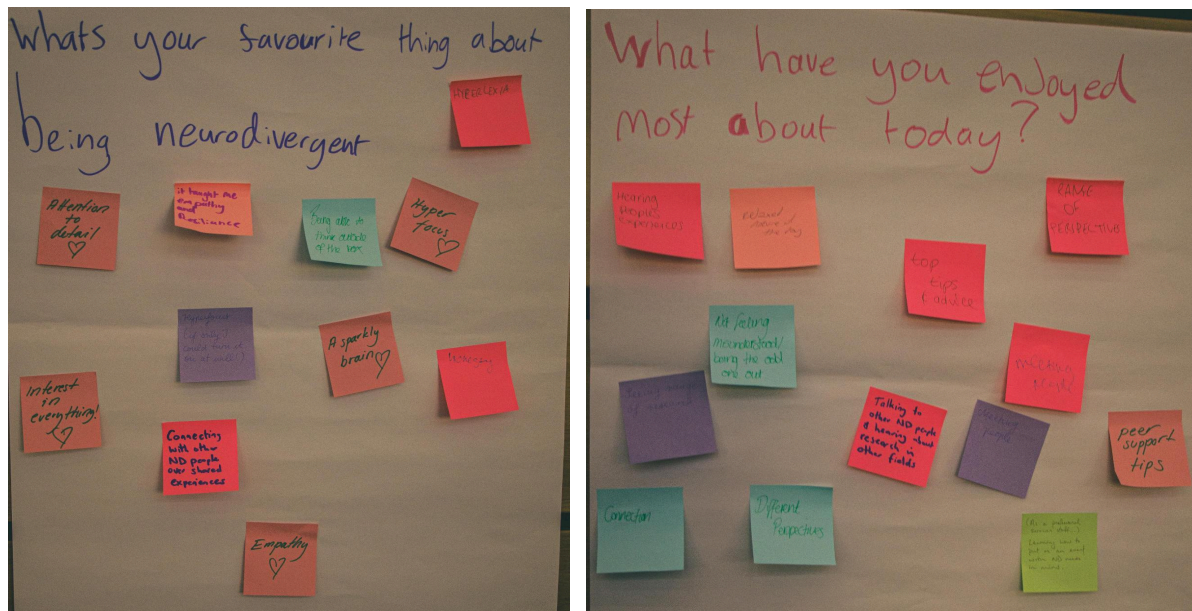


Image 7- Displays of post-it notes that were an alternative communication engagement activity.

## Conclusion

This GW4 funded PGR event has successfully achieved its aims through helping to establish a neurodivergent-led planning committee whose collaborative working practices embodied flexibility, autonomy and psychological safety, which were then reflected in the “groundbreaking” event itself. The event delivered measurable positive outcomes across the majority of survey domains, which was coupled with rich qualitative evidence demonstrating its impact on factors including community and belonging, normalisation and authenticity, organisational quality and adaptability, and advocacy and self-confidence.

The committee unanimously felt that planning and delivering this event was no more challenging, or if anything, less challenging, than other academic events the committee members have been involved with. The overarching finding is that neuroinclusive design is manageable, achievable, and financially viable, and does not place unreasonable demands on institutions, funders, or event organisers. In fact, intention, lived experience and open-mindedness are the main ingredients required. Therefore, this funded project has provided an evidence-based and replicable model to justify future events of a similar nature.



Image 8 - Photo of the audience engagement

## References

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## Appendix 1: Breakdown of Costs

Item	Item description	Net (ex. VAT) (£)	VAT	Total (inc. VAT) (£)
Inclusive Change support	Up to 21 hours of support, £750 plus VAT	750	150	900
Venue hire	Auditorium, roundtable style, whole day	1028	494	2964
	Upper room, whole day	173		
	Meeting room 1, whole day	144		
	Tech support, £35/hour * 3 hours	105		
	Refreshment, £5.5/head * 60	330		
	Lunch, 2b (40 heads), 2c (20 heads), £11.5/head * 60	690		
Print services	Name badges, £1.2 * 85	102	0	102
	Programmes (2 pages), uncoated/coated 80-160gsm, A4 double sided, 35p/page * 70 + £10 set up fee	22.68	0	22.68
	A3 poster colour *2	5	0	5
Material	Fidget toys			72.09
Event contributor and attendee expense	Non-Bristol based organisers, speakers, attendees travel reimbursement			358.28
	Bristol based organisers, speakers, and attendees travel reimbursement			39.04
<b>Total</b>		<b>4463.09</b>		

## Appendix 2: Pre- and Post-Event Survey Data

From our survey data, 25% of attendees were from the University of Exeter, 25% from Cardiff University, and 50% from the University of Bristol.

### Appendix 2a. Quantitative Results (Levels of Agreement)

Attendees were invited to complete an anonymous survey at both the beginning and end of the event. The survey asked participants to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements on a scale from 1 to 10 (where 10 indicates strong agreement). Each statement was designed to align directly with one of the workshops delivered during the event.

The survey aimed both to capture participants' existing experiences within the community and to assess the impact of the event itself. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no questions were mandatory; as a result, the number of responses varies slightly between questions.

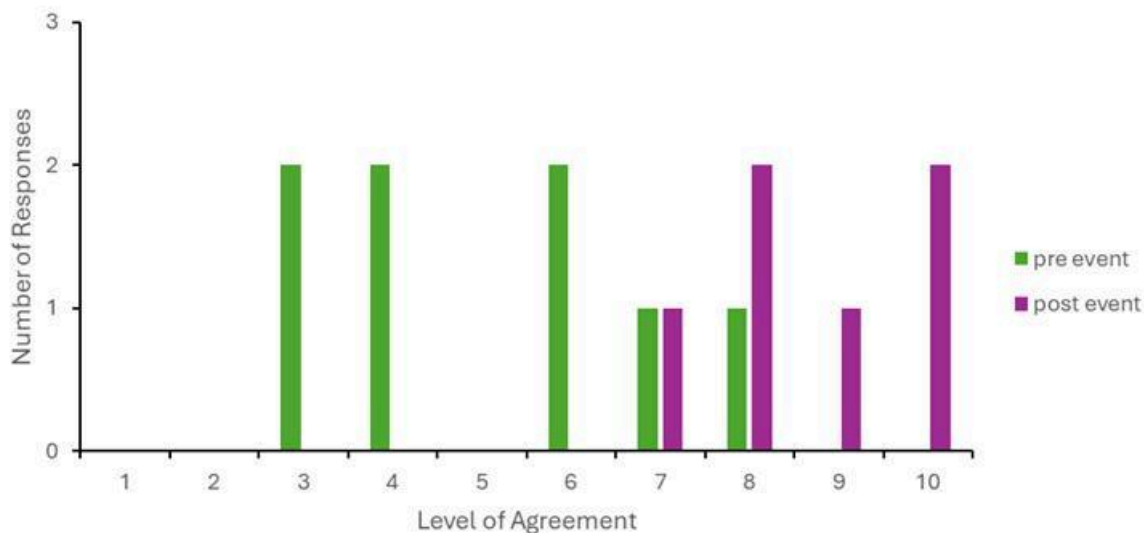


Fig. 1 – Agreement scores (out of 10) before and after the event for the statement: “I have a good understanding of how to embrace neurodiversity in my research”.

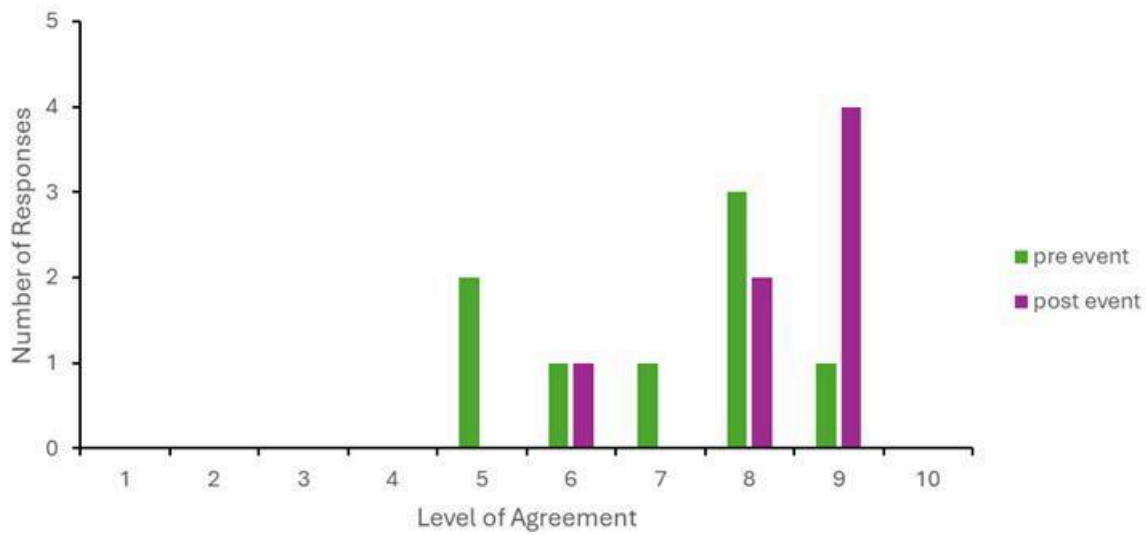


Fig. 2 – Agreement scores (out of 10) before and after the event for the statement: “I feel able to communicate my needs to my supervisors”.

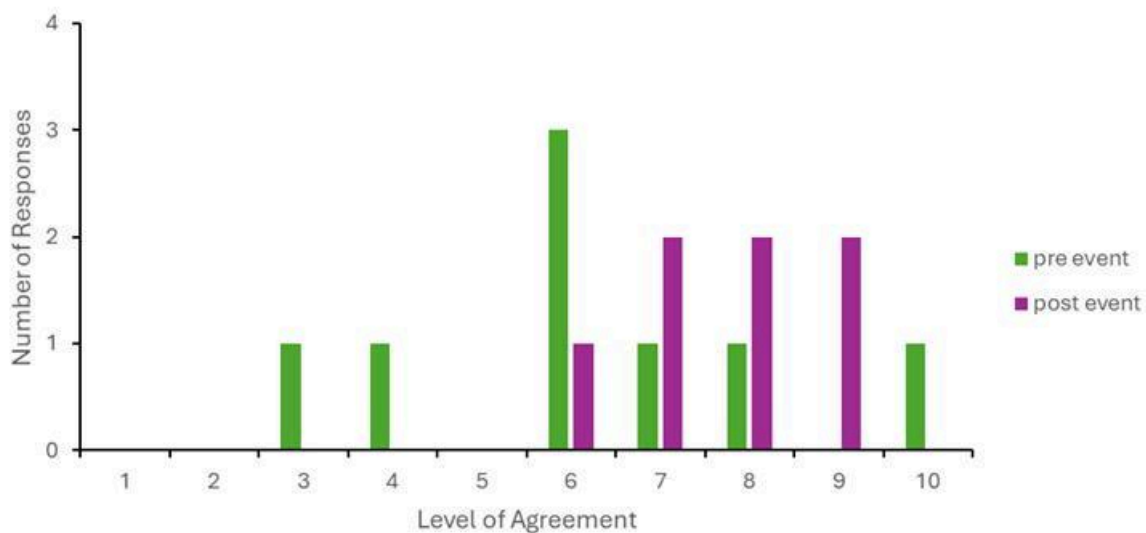


Fig. 3 – Agreement scores (out of 10) before and after the event for the statement: “I know what reasonable adjustments are available and how to ask for them”.

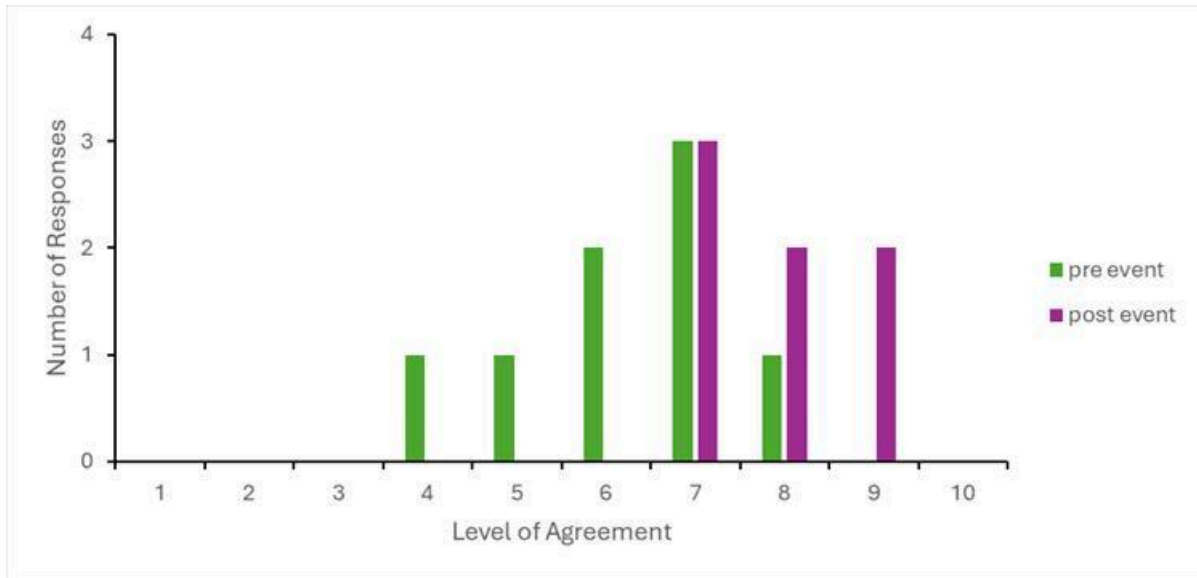


Fig. 4 – Agreement scores (out of 10) before and after the event for the statement: “I feel able to advocate for my needs within my university”.

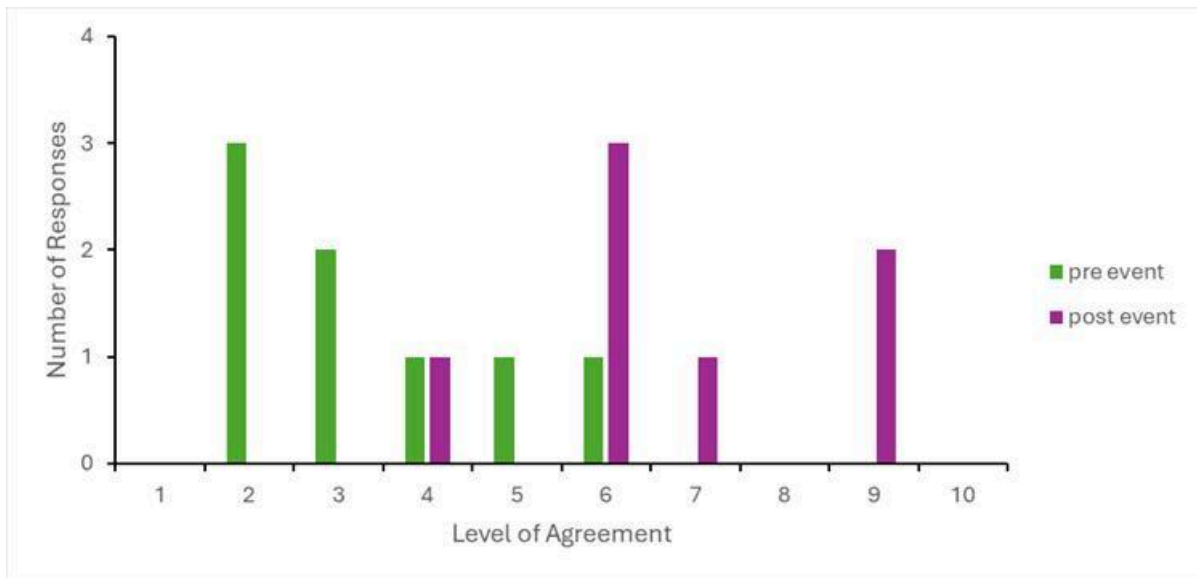


Fig. 5 – Agreement scores (out of 10) before and after the event for the statement: “I understand the unwritten rules in academia well enough to navigate them”.

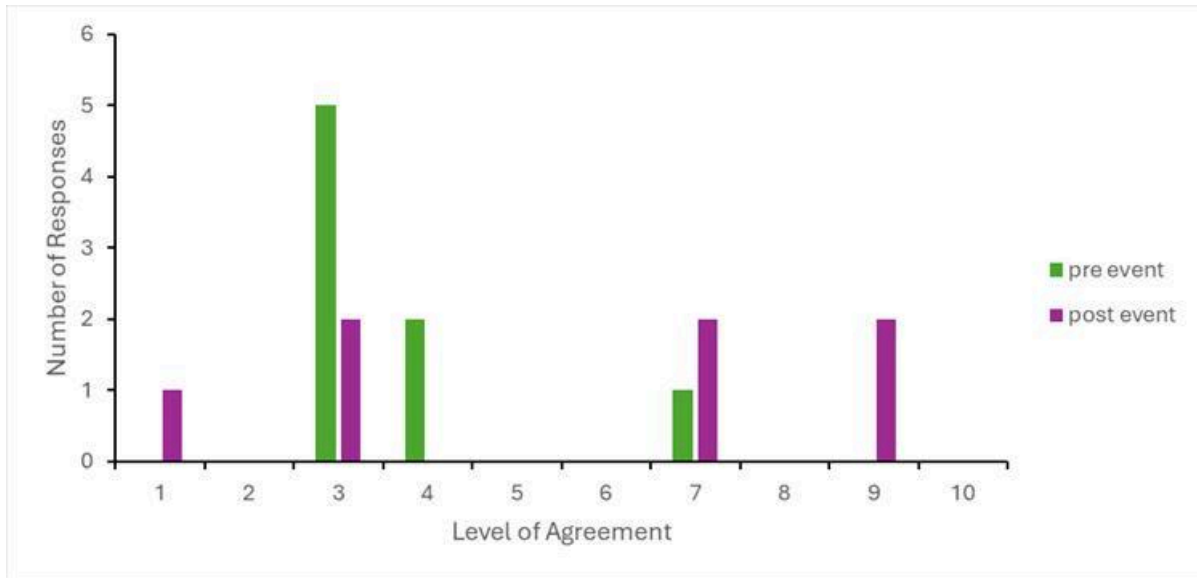


Fig. 6 – Agreement scores (out of 10) before and after the event for the statement: “I feel confident using or experimenting with creative or alternative approaches to research”.

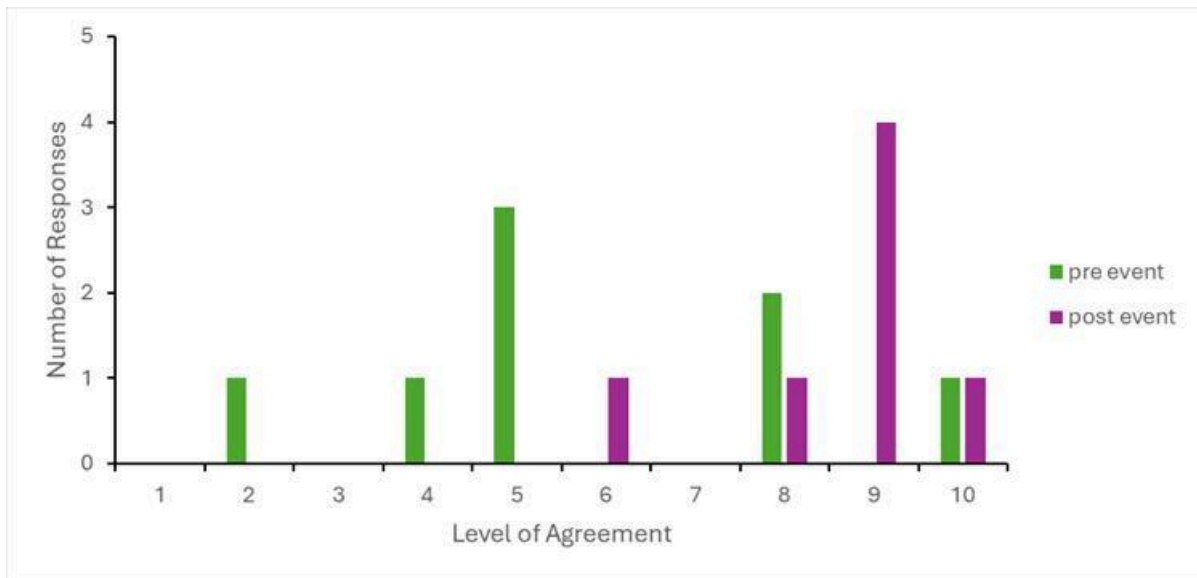


Fig. 7 – Agreement scores (out of 10) before and after the event for the statement: “I feel part of a neurodivergent PGR community”.

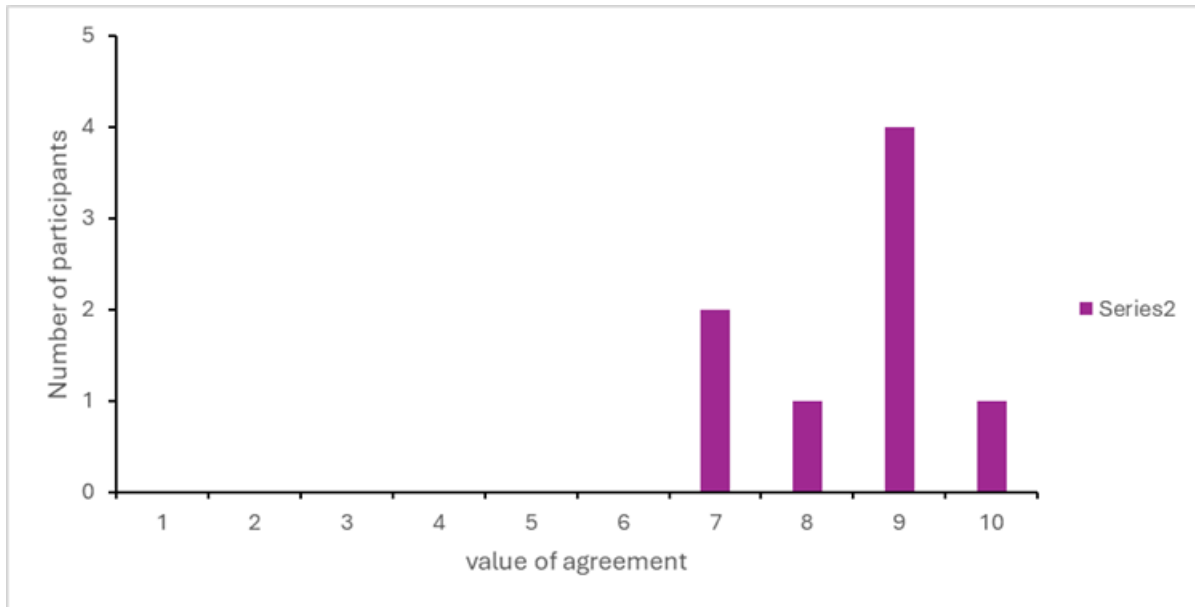


Fig. 8 – Overall post-event ratings of how the day went (out of 10).

### Would you like to see more events like this in the future?

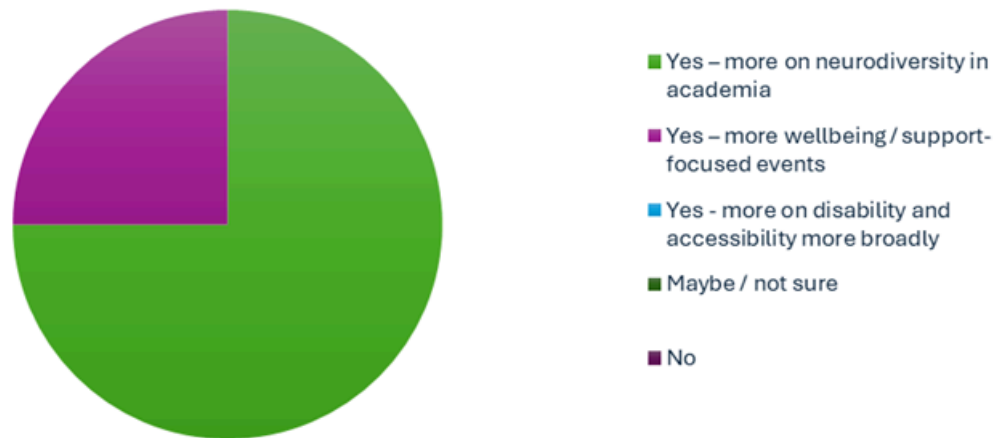


Fig. 9 – Responses to whether attendees would like to see more events like this in the future. (notably, participants could only select one option)

## Appendix 2b. Qualitative Responses (Open Text Questions)

The following tables include direct open-text responses from attendees. Each has been allocated a Citation for shorthand in the main text, for example [Q1].

**Table 1.**

*Attendee Post Event Responses to “What worked well for you today?”*

<b>Cite</b>	<b>What worked well for you today?</b>
Q1	It was great to be in a space that was comfortable, neurodivergent-friendly and calm. The community feeling was great and I felt warmly accepted. It was also great that the organisers set out the plan for the day and they adapted phenomenally to the changes in plan.
Q2	meeting other ND PGRs and have hands-on first experience of the methods and tools they use with their supervisors, university, and through their research.
Q3	Having the lights dimmed, smaller groups making talking to others easier, fidgets
Q4	chatting and collaboration
Q5	talking to people
Q6	how to work with supervisor
Q7	Multiple options to interact and ask questions
Q8	having hybrid sessions so I could join online and in the chat. Very interesting panels with a mixture of ND PGRs and ND/non-ND supervisors.

**Table 2.**

*Attendee Post Event Responses to “What could we improve for future versions of this event?”*

<b>Cite</b>	<b>What could we improve for future versions of this event?</b>
Q9	Some knowledge of the kinds of food at the buffet beforehand would have been good.
Q10	More visibility for this event because I am sure some of my cohort would benefit truly from such ND-focused events.
Q11	It wasn't really clear what the crafts on the timetable were
Q12	more discussions
Q13	I think it's already great !
Q14	Print out of Menti QR codes on tables with a tinyURL or bit.ly link version which would mean those without phones that can scan QR codes could access the Menti
Q15	I didn't personally benefit from the session on creative approaches because this is not relevant or feasible for my research area.

**Table 3.**

*Attendee Post Event Responses to “Was anything difficult, overwhelming, or inaccessible for you today?”*

<b>Cite</b>	<b>Was anything difficult, overwhelming, or inaccessible for you today?</b>
Q16	The initial socialising at the event was a little bit tricky - perhaps some structure, such as some conversation prompts on tables or a couple of icebreakers, would have been good.
Q17	No, it was indeed so emotional of how ND-inclusive was the whole setting. Thank you so much for making us feel seen and heard.
Q18	No
Q19	No
Q20	Lots of panel sessions requiring active listening, ideally in future events there could be a wider variety in the workshops - a crafts based session allowing for expression other than spoken or written words, a viewing of a short film that a student has produced related to ND perhaps(?)
Q21	no

**Table 4.**

*Attendee Post Event Responses to “What aspects of today’s event should future organisers prioritise to make events more accessible? (Tick all that apply)”*

Cite	What aspects of today’s event should future organisers prioritise to make events more accessible? (Tick all that apply)
Q22	Breaks and pacing, Sensory considerations (noise, lighting, quiet space), Sharing materials in advance
Q23	Clear structure and expectations, Flexible participation (e.g. chat, speaking, silence, movement), Breaks and pacing, Sensory considerations (noise, lighting, quiet space), Multiple ways of engaging with content (talking, writing, visuals, activities), Sharing materials in advance, Lived-experience perspectives, Clear access information beforehand, More fidget toys that are a bit bigger in size. Apologies for being spoiled by you
Q24	Clear access information beforehand
Q25	All of the above
Q26	Breaks and pacing
Q27	Clear access information beforehand
Q28	Multiple ways of engaging with content (talking, writing, visuals, activities)
Q29	Clear structure and expectations, Flexible participation (e.g. chat, speaking, silence, movement), Breaks and pacing, Sensory considerations (noise, lighting, quiet space), Multiple ways of engaging with content (talking, writing, visuals, activities), Lived-experience perspectives, Clear access information beforehand

*Note. The options attendees could select from were as follows: “Clear structure and expectations, Flexible participation (e.g. chat, speaking, silence, movement), Breaks and pacing, Sensory considerations (noise, lighting, quiet space), Multiple ways of engaging with content (talking, writing, visuals, activities), Sharing materials in advance, Lived-experience perspectives, Clear access information beforehand, all of the above”.*

**Table 5.**

*Attendee Post Event Responses to “Space for any additional comments you might want to add, including anything you are taking away from this event”*

Cite	Space for any additional comments you might want to add, including anything you are taking away from this event.
Q30	This was a fabulous event. I honestly felt really alone in academia as a neurodivergent person, and the event solidified that I'm not alone and there are ways to use my neurodiversity to my - and others - benefit. Thank you for putting this on.
Q31	I want to thank the organisers indeed. I had a lot to take, but the most was I learnt how supervisors can be of immense support to ND researchers. So, I am learning to be more communicative with my supervisory team and I will have my first ADHD-focused meeting with them in April. I learnt also that it is important to show my strengths as an ADHDer rather than addressing the challenges I face. I come from a culture where we shy off from showing our merits and positive aspect as these might be a form of "arrogance". But, now I have learnt it is important that my supervisory teams sees my ADHD superpowers :), although they might not be much, but they are indeed superpowers.
Q32	Thank you, it was nice to talk to other students in a less overwhelming environment!
Q33	This was an amazing event and it's clear a lot of time, thought and effort was put into the event by the organisers. I'm looking forward to seeing the follow up report and any future events you organise - thank you!
Q34	thank you to all the organisers

## Appendix 3: Mentimeter Data from the Event

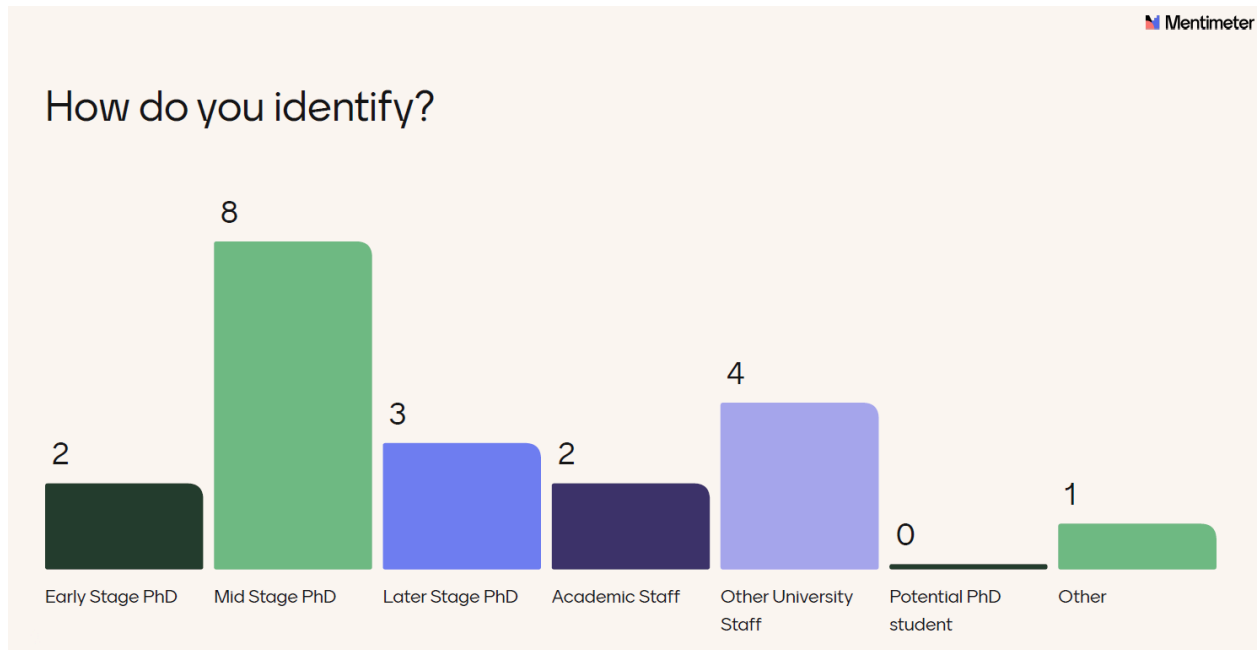


Fig 10. Breakdown of attendees' academic roles.



Fig 11. Word map of attendees' feelings towards current university practices.

Misunderstandings or stereotypes about neurodiversity we have encountered within academia

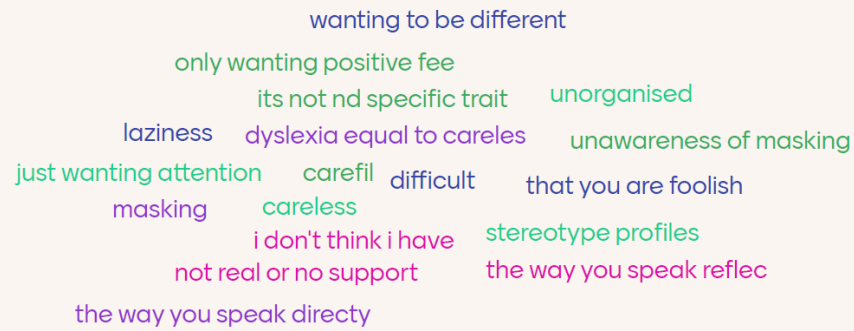


Fig 12. Word map from event attendees - misunderstandings and stereotypes.

What does inclusion mean to you?



Fig 13. Inclusion word map.

How would you describe your experience with advocating for your needs at your University?

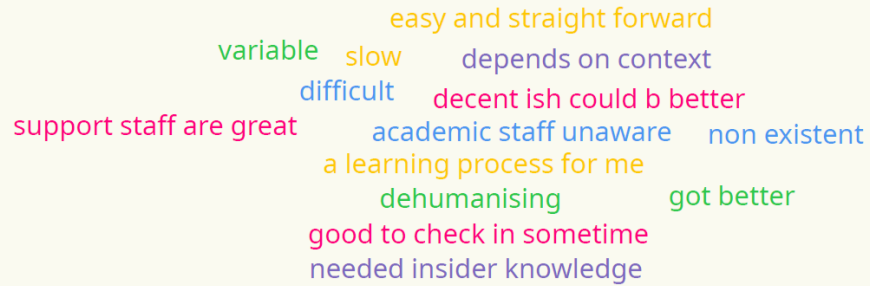


Fig 14. Attendees' experiences with advocating for themselves at their institution.

How accessible do you think the existing supports are for neurodivergent PGR students?

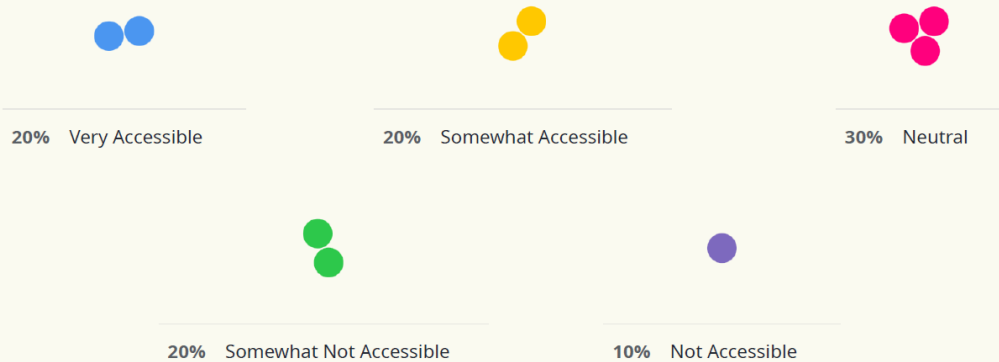


Fig 15. Attendees' perceptions of accessibility of current neurodivergent PGR support.

Can you describe today in one word?

personal - in a good way    interesting  
 refreshing    encouraging    牛逼  
 excellent! 💡    pleasant  
 a top-up of gw4 connect  
 groundbreaking  
 replicate this

Fig 16. Word map of attendees' experience of the event at the end of the day.

## Appendix 4: Event Programme



# EVENT PROGRAMME

<b>MONDAY</b>		<b>23 FEBRUARY 2026</b>
<b>9:00 AM</b> <b>AUDITORIUM</b>	<b>REGISTRATION OPENS</b> Familiarise the venue - explore the venue at your own pace Speed networking - introduce yourself to other attendees Poster setup - use this time to set up if you would like to display and share your research	
<b>10:00 AM</b> <b>AUDITORIUM</b>	<b>OPENING SPEECHES</b> Welcome - An overview of the programme, what to expect, and how to engage Introduction to the committee Safety information relevant to the event, such as fire safety	
<b>10:45 AM</b>  <b>AUDITORIUM</b>  <b>UPPER ROOM</b>	<b>PARALLEL SESSION 1</b> Our parallel sessions will be open, discussion-based workshops that encourage interaction between attendees and session hosts. You are welcome to use a mixture of in-person and online, anonymous platforms to contribute ideas.  <b>EMBRACING NEURODIVERGENCE IN YOUR RESEARCH</b> Exploring how to embrace neurodivergence in research, and how this may alter autonomy  <b>UNWRITTEN RULES IN ACADEMIA</b> Addressing common misunderstandings faced by PhD students, such as terminology, phrases and expectations	
<b>11:45 - 12:45</b> <b>LOBBY</b>	<b>LUNCH</b> Lunch will be a buffet-style selection of items suitable for a range of dietary needs. A copy of the expected lunch menu will be made available online in advance. Seating will be available in the auditorium	



<p>12:45 PM AUDITORIUM</p>	<p><b>PARALLEL SESSION 2</b> <b>SUPERVISOR SUPPORT</b></p> <p>Discussing how supervisors can best support PhD students and how students can set beneficial boundaries. The hosts for this session will include staff with experience supervising neurodivergent students.</p>
<p>UPPER ROOM</p>	<p><b>ADVOCATING FOR YOUR NEEDS</b></p> <p>Identifying the common challenges faced by neurodivergent PGR students, and how to advocate for the changes needed to reach your potential.</p>
<p>13:45 PM</p>	<p><b>BREAK</b></p> <p>Refreshments, including hot drinks, will be available during the break</p>
<p>14:00 PM AUDITORIUM &amp; LOBBY</p>	<p><b>POSTER SHOW AND OPEN SESSION</b></p> <p><b>Poster show</b> Present your research to other neurodivergent PGRs in a low-pressure environment.</p> <p><b>Interactive post-its</b> Various neurodivergence-related questions will be available to answer and discuss via anonymous post-its.</p> <p><b>Crafts and relaxation</b> Crafts will be available throughout the day, though this session offers time to decompress without missing session content.</p>
<p>15:00 PM AUDITORIUM</p> <p>UPPER ROOM</p>	<p><b>PARALLEL SESSION 3</b></p> <p><b>CREATING POSITIVE CHANGE WITHIN UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENTS</b></p> <p>Discussing creative ways to proactively adapt university environments to promote inclusivity</p> <p><b>EXPRESSING YOUR WORK CREATIVELY</b></p> <p>Exploring how you can use creative methods when sharing your research</p>
<p>16:00 PM AUDITORIUM</p>	<p><b>DEBRIEF</b></p> <p>Requests for feedback How feedback and observations from the day will be used to influence the experiences of future neurodivergent PGRs Thank you and acknowledgements</p>
<p>16:30PM</p>	<p><b>DAY ENDS</b></p>