
Embracing neurodiversity to enhance the post-graduate researcher experience: Reflections from a doctoral student.

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ABSTRACT

Neurodiverse post-graduate researchers are underrepresented within higher education owing to systemic ableism and disablism. The aim of this paper is to highlight how embracing neurodiversity, rather than focusing on perceived deficits, minimises barriers to, and even enhances, doctoral level studies. This is achieved through a commentary of the author's lived experience, supported by emerging asset-based evidence on the benefits of neurodiversity within academia. The paper concludes by calling upon HE institutions to make changes towards accessibility and inclusivity.

Introduction

This paper presents a reflective commentary from a neurodiverse post-graduate researcher (PGR) conducting doctoral studies. My experience of re-entering higher education (HE) has provided an opportunity for me to delve into topics I am passionate about, as well as an opportunity for personal growth and self-discovery. Neurodiversity has rarely impacted my working, personal and social life, but rather it is within the education system that challenges occur. Undertaking doctoral level studies has presented some unique barriers stemming from ableism within academia. From this experience I have become aware of my own strengths as a neurodiverse researcher, and how utilising those strengths enables barriers to be minimised.

As a researcher working within a critical realist paradigm, I apply this view to neurodiversity and disability. As such, I acknowledge there are physical

and neurological differences which can lead to impairments and challenges within themselves (den Houting, 2019; Griggs, 2021; Pollak, 2009). However, many barriers that neurodiverse and disabled individuals face are in fact a result of social and institutional structures in which we live (Adam-Bagley, 2022; Pollak, 2009). HE is one such institution which, like most education systems, has been developed by and for a neuronormative population, maintaining ableism within academia. (For further definitions of terms used within this paper please see the 'A note on terms' box below.)

The aim of this paper is to highlight how embracing neurodiversity, rather than focusing on perceived deficits, minimises barriers to, and even enhances, doctoral level studies. This is achieved by first presenting a broad overview of literature to illustrate the current issues of ableism within academia. Evidence outlining the benefits and assets of neurodiverse PGRs is then presented, followed by a personal account of how I utilised my own strengths to conduct doctoral level research. It

should be noted that the latter section presents an individual experience and so one that may not be comparable to other neurodiverse PGRs. The paper concludes by calling upon HE institutions to make changes towards accessibility and inclusivity.

A note on terms

The focus of this paper is on the experiences of neurodiverse PGRs; however, it is common for research to reflect the overlapping experiences of both neurodiversity and disability. As such the terms neurodiversity and disability have been used to reflect the findings within individual sources, and have been defined below for clarity.

Disability is defined within this paper using a social model, highlighting difference from the norm, rather than focusing on deficits and impairments, as is traditionally used within the biomedical definition of disability (Brown, 2020; Brown and Leigh, 2018).

Neurodiversity is a relatively new term used within the past two decades to describe how the brains of people with particular conditions are wired differently from the 'norm'. Originally used as an alternative term for autism, neurodiversity now encompasses other conditions such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (AD(H)D) and Tourette Syndrome (Grant, 2009; Griffin and Pollock, 2009).

Ableism describes how able -bodies/-minds are valued above disability, seen as the 'norm' and even compulsory. Different ways of being and thinking that do not fit the norm are rejected (Dolmage, 2017; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012).

Disablism describes the negative construction of disability through assumptions and practices that promote unequal treatment (Dolmage, 2017).

(Dis)Ableism in academia

A brief overview of ableism in academia is provided here to elucidate the barriers faced by neurodiverse PGRs. Pollak (2009) notes that the number of disabled and neurodiverse students entering HE

since the turn of the millennium has been increasing. This has been attributed in part to the introduction of legislation within the UK, such as the Disability Discrimination Act in 1995 and subsequent iterations, which have prompted adjustments to be made within HE (Pollak, 2009). Such legislation aims to protect disabled and neurodiverse students from discrimination, and it became a legal requirement for HE institutions to make reasonable adjustments (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001). However, neurodiversity still remains underrepresented within HE, with only 5.4% of all PGR students declaring a neurodiversity in the UK (HESA, 2021). A similar trend of underrepresentation has also been found within disability generally (Brown & Leigh, 2018).

A reason for the underrepresentation of neurodiverse and disabled PGRs is the manifestation of ableism within the education system. Until recently, the biomedical model has contributed to the dominant view of neurodiversity within society as a purely medical issue and not a concern within the field of education (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Pollak, 2009). Griffin & Pollak, (2009) argue that the education system 'remedialises' neurodiverse students, singling them out as incapable due to difference (p.36). As such, education systems have been constructed and are maintained through a neuronormative lens, placing value on productivity and specific types of knowledge, ability and thinking (Brown & Leigh, 2018, 2020; Dolmage, 2017; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012). Skills such as the ability to read large amounts of information quickly is one example of a traditional expectation in HE, however this skill does not indicate level of intelligence or the ability to critically review information (Pollak, 2009). An ability to focus has also been identified as an academic skill, yet research has found that people with AD(H)D have higher levels of real-world creative achievement compared to neuronormatives (White & Shah, 2011). Placing value on specific abilities such as reading and focus, results in neurodiverse students' strengths and intelligence being overlooked. These traditionally held values within HE are maintained, not just by education systems but also the people within them. It is commonly reported that academic staff have a lack of understanding and awareness of neurodiversity

and disability (Adams & Brown, 2006; Barnard et al., 2008; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012). In fact, in a study by Barnard et al. (2008) it was revealed that disability was not considered as a factor in diversity by academic staff, leading to a lack of support and barriers to engaging within HE. Unfortunately, direct discrimination and unconscious bias are common experiences for disabled and neurodiverse students within HE institutions (Clouder et al., 2020; Griffin & Pollak, 2009; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Shaw & Anderson, 2018; Trott, 2009). The combination of neuronormative systems and cultural norms exemplifies systemic ableism within academia, and the attitudes of people within HE institutions highlights the issues of disablism.

Underrepresentation also means that policies and knowledge production do not include the voices of neurodiverse and disabled students, and so change is minimal (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012). In a review exploring the impact of the anti-discrimination act within HE institutions, Adams and Brown (2006) found that whilst institutions were employing disability officers, there was little engagement from the wider University community. In particular, there were few changes made to teaching and learning practices by academic staff, who rarely engaged with reasonable adjustments (Adams & Brown, 2006). In the twenty years since this review there is still an emphasis on making reasonable adjustments as the main requirement to make HE inclusive. However, Pollak (2009) argues that the concept of making reasonable adjustments actually reinforces the notion that neurodiverse students are 'different'. For example, the process of gaining support within HE requires an individual to be pathologised first, which then leaves students vulnerable to dis-/ableist stigma (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Pollak, 2009). Research also highlights that support for reasonable adjustments in HE is inconsistent (Griffin & Pollak, 2009; Lizotte & Simplican, 2017). Placing the emphasis on the individual to seek support also suggests that the role of HE institutions is passive and reduces their responsibility towards inclusivity (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012).

Such research illustrates that there has been no systemic change within HE to acknowledge and embrace neurodiversity, or to provide an education that is truly inclusive. Neurodiverse students are

instead required to fit-in with the existing system that is designed and managed within a neuronormative paradigm. In short, HE institutions promote disablism even when making reasonable adjustments, and ableism when they fail to do so.

The PGR Experience

PGRs hold a unique position within HE institutions as apprentice researchers, neither taught students, nor members of staff (Grix, 2001). Farrar (2006) found that PGRs often do not have access to essential support, which effects PhD completion. Plus, PGRs do not have access to the occupational health services provided to staff members. This is exacerbated by an attitude that disabled and neurodiverse doctoral students have 'made it this far' and so accessibility is not an issue (Farrar, 2006). This is not the case. Research has highlighted that neurodiverse students often compensate by working harder than their neuronormative counterparts (Dolmage, 2017; Pollak, 2009; Sedgwick et al., 2019; Shaw & Anderson, 2018). This is an expectation I experienced upon returning to HE as a mature post-graduate student. Disclosure of my own neurodiversity led to me being informally advised by an academic staff member that I would, '... just have to work harder to keep up'. However, there are detrimental consequences to having to work harder including aggravating symptoms (Andrews, 2020), depletion of already low energy levels (Farrar, 2006) and loss of social life and thus social support (Shaw & Anderson, 2018). Therefore, neurodiverse individuals are expected to adjust to fit within an ableist education system, rather than the education system itself changing.

Another characteristic of the PGR experience is that the culture of independent working often results in feelings of isolation (Grix, 2001; University of York, n.d.). Isolation is exacerbated when living with neurodiversity through the experience of being 'othered' (Farrar, 2006; Shaw & Anderson, 2018). The relationship with supervisors is of particular importance to PGRs as independent students and requires the development of a different type of relationship with academic staff (Farrar, 2006; Grix, 2001; Lizotte & Simplican, 2017). Lack of understanding from supervisors, fear of disclosure and judgement impacts the development

of this relationship for disabled and neurodiverse PGRs (Ellis et al., 2022; Farrar, 2006; Shaw & Anderson, 2018). Yet, when supportive partnerships are in place between PGRs and their supervisors, many challenges are overcome and independence, rather than dependence, is fostered (Farrar, 2006). I can attest to this fact having developed positive working relationships with my supervisors, I have felt comfortable enough to ask for support. However, having experienced stigma within education, it has taken time for me to build trust, and has required a willingness from academic staff to take a person-centred approach (i.e. treating me as a person and taking a holistic view of the PGR experience, rather than focusing purely on academic performance).

The combination of compensatory over-working, isolation and ableism results in disabled and neurodiverse academics having to ‘trade-off’ their identity (Brown & Leigh, 2018). Ableism and disablism becomes internalised leading to a negative effect on sense of self (Brown & Leigh, 2018, 2020; Griffin & Pollak, 2009; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012), resulting in a detrimental effect on mental health (Shaw & Anderson, 2018). Taking a person-centred approach and meeting likeminded people has been found to foster a positive sense of self (Griffin & Pollak, 2009). In order to begin removing some of the challenges faced by neurodiverse and disabled PGRs, ableism and disablism needs to be challenged and addressed. The culture within HE institutions needs to move towards an asset-based view of neurodiversity to foster understanding and change.

Neurodiversity as an asset

The call for an asset-based approach to neurodiversity has been taken up by a number of international organisations. For example, Made By Dyslexia (2021) are campaigning to change the definition of dyslexic thinking to focus on strengths, producing evidence-based reports to highlight the contribution dyslexic thinkers can, and have, made to society. The National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (2022) is dedicated to presenting research-based evidence on the benefits of diversity within HE. For example, Asmal et al. (2022) found that diversity within research teams reduced groupthink, improved decision making and

innovation within research projects. Embracing different perspectives through a diverse research team helps to reduce knowledge gaps and produce more robust research outputs (Asmal et al., 2022). Evidence from in-depth research projects such as *Getting Things Changed* (2018), has highlighted that inclusivity brings new perspectives to academia and enhances knowledge production.

Such research demonstrates the wider benefits of embracing diversity within HE, which is supported with evidence of common strengths of neurodiversity. Living with neurodiversity may develop positive personal attributes such as diligence (Shaw & Anderson, 2018). Martin (2020) found individuals who experienced adversity relating to their neurodiversity developed a tenacious attitude to overcoming barriers, resulting in excellent problem-solving skills. Problem-solving skills have also been attributed as a specific cognitive ability, linked to high levels of creativity and lateral thinking (Colley, 2009; Griggs, 2021). For example, evidence has been found that people with AD(H)D have higher levels of creative original thinking compared to a neuronormative control group (Sedgwick et al., 2019; White & Shah, 2011). The explanation for this ability is that when thoughts are less inhibited by working memory, more spontaneous, non-linear neural connections occur (Sedgwick et al., 2019).

This evidence highlights that problem-solving, lateral thinking and creativity are common strengths across different types of neurodiversity, regardless of other cognitive processes being deemed atypical. Griffin & Pollak (2009) also note that a preference for visual processing and learning is also a shared attribute. It should be noted however that neurodiversity creates a unique experience for each individual and so these characteristics may be common but are not a given (Pollak, 2009). I have highlighted these particular skills as ones that I have identified as important in my personal PGR experience.

Personal reflections

This section outlines my experience as a neurodiverse PGR. As noted above, everyone’s neurodiversity is unique and so I want to emphasise that my experiences may not be comparable to other

PGRs. These reflections have stemmed from the process of conducting doctoral level research and the personal strengths and abilities I have drawn upon. It is important to note that problem-solving skills and creative thinking are common, shared abilities amongst all PGRs. The point I am making here is that due to some of my cognitive processes being deemed 'not neurotypical', I rely more on problem-solving skills and creativity. These skills have helped to navigate barriers due to ableism and have allowed me to achieve a consistently high standard of academic work. As established in the introduction, it is important to remember that there is a real neurological difference between neuronormative and neurodiverse thinkers (Griggs, 2021; den Houting, 2019). I argue that by embracing strengths linked to neurodiversity, the potential barriers to doctoral level research created by ableism can be minimised, and alternative approaches to knowledge production can be offered.

Problem-solving skills

My PhD studies are in the field of Psychology, researching how and why community arts aid in serious mental illness recovery. I have used a scientific realist approach within my research, conducting a realist literature review and a realist evaluation. Realist research is designed to explore complex systems and generate causal explanations through theory development (Emmel et al., 2018; Pawson, 2006). Whilst this approach is increasingly being taken up by doctoral candidates, there are warnings that the complexity of the approach is not suitable for novice researchers (Pawson et al., 2004). Pawson et al. (2004) argues that 'novice decision making... is rule-bound, formulaic, and reductionist', and so unsuitable for the flexible and idiosyncratic approach required within realist research (pp. 39). By its very nature, realist research is a messy and non-linear process, requiring nuanced and complex connections to be made across diverse data sources (Pawson et al., 2004; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Whilst it is true that realist research is challenging, perhaps the propensity for divergent thinking by neurodiverse PGRs can offer an alternative approach. In particular, lateral thinking may help to overcome the rule-bound approach of novice researchers as thoughts are less inhibited by working memory, allowing for non-linear connections to be made (Sedgwick et al., 2019).

I applied my problem-solving skills when undertaking a realist literature review, which requires theory to be developed from synthesised data. Whilst there is much published guidance on conducting a realist review, there is a lack of published examples of conducting a realist synthesis and demonstrating programme theory development (Gilmore et al., 2019; Jagosh, 2020; Rycroft-Malone et al., 2012). This issue is commonly reported from both doctoral students (Realist PhD Network, 2022), and examiners alike (Howe, 2021). Realist methodology training offers an alternative to learning the approach utilising multiple learning styles (beyond reading alone), however training is only offered within a few HE institutions. To overcome the challenge of limited examples of conducting a realist synthesis, I utilised my problem-solving skills to create my own synthesis approach by trialling several different analysis techniques. I found that I had utilised analysis tools such as coding and conceptual mapping in an alternative way compared to previous research (Peters, in press). This experience shows a departure from the rule-bound thinking of novice researchers (Pawson et al., 2004) in creating my own approach. This is not to say that other PGRs have not achieved the same, but rather I aim to demonstrate that neurodiversity is not a barrier to engaging with complex and challenging approaches.

As a result of my experience within realist research, I have been asked to deliver a skills training session for other PGRs to teach realist research (University of Huddersfield, 2022). Problem-solving is also useful in a teaching context as strong reasoning skills enable complex concepts and information to be simplified (Made By Dyslexia, 2021). To aid my teaching I draw on different techniques to simplify information such as active participation tasks, small group discussion, and provide opportunities to gain feedback. I also draw on creative methods such as using visual representations and metaphor to explain concepts. Such techniques are regarded as good practice within HE pedagogy (Race, 2014). Also, research has found that when educators have good awareness of neurodiversity it improves the learning experience (Shaw & Anderson, 2018). My ability to teach the realist research approach is exemplified by the below feedback and highlights

that neurodiverse thinkers can be effective educators.

I think you've done brilliantly to bring it to life and make it accessible - better than many I've seen!

I LOVE how your busy and complicated CMO configuration map gets translated into a nice clear final programme theory!

PGR feedback

Again, there are many educators who utilise problem-solving skills to improve learning. My point here is to demonstrate that despite neurodiversity being deemed a 'learning difficulty', it can in fact be a strength in developing accessible learning opportunities.

Creativity and Visual processing

A key feature of lateral thinking and complex problem solving is the use of creativity. HE institutions have highlighted that creativity is required to make an original contribution to knowledge (Baptista et al., 2015), and so is a key skill for PGRs. In addition, researchers have noted that creativity is a feature of the realist approach (Emmel et al., 2018; Jagosh, 2020; Pawson et al., 2004). This is exemplified by Jagosh et al. (2014) who note that retroductive thinking is a unique feature of a realist synthesis and utilises creativity to theorise. As a creative person, with a background within the creative arts, I feel I have a strength in this area that I have utilised throughout my research by using visual methods for data collection, analysis, and synthesis.

Primary data collection was conducted using arts elicitation interviews (an adaptation on photo elicitation). Whilst photo elicitation has been found to be appropriate to research within mental illness (Collier & Collier, 1986; Glaw et al., 2017), visual methods are not widely used within psychological research (Bates et al., 2017). The procedure within a photo-elicitation interview is to use imagery to generate discussion, which is then transcribed for analysis (Bates et al., 2017). In order to expand on the interview, I decided to include arts-based data provided by participants in my analysis. Previous studies have found that incorporating arts enriches the analysis (Berbary, 2011; Kara, 2015),

particularly when reflecting complexity (Lapum et al., 2012). This allowed me to utilise my skills in abstract visual reasoning (reasoning strategies based on distinctly visual representations (Bacon & Handley, 2014)) to analyse the images and explore concepts of serious mental illness from an alternative perspective.

Here I provide an example of how visual reasoning was utilised for retroductive thinking and theorising within a realist synthesis. During an interview exploring how arts activities help people recover from serious mental illness, a participant noted that:

for a long time, we had a nice garden... we had a dog, so we always went for walks, and you see nature in different seasons, but we sort of lost touch from that really.

Participant, female

This extract provides insight into the loss experienced when living with serious mental illness. However, it was not clear from the interview transcript alone how and why arts activities helped mental illness recovery. For this insight I turned to the participants' artworks, an example of which is provided in Figure 1. The participants artwork often explored themes of nature with vibrant colours relaying positivity. Furthermore, the highly detailed nature of the art indicated to me a commitment to creating the artwork, suggesting the importance of the subject matter to the participant.



Figure 1: Participant artwork from an arts elicitation interview of a free-style floral embroidery.

By combining this interpretation with the interview extract above, I applied retroductive reasoning to theorise that the arts activity was allowing the participant to enact the part of themselves that enjoyed nature, which had previously been lost due to serious mental illness. The result is the participant was able to reconnect with their identity, an established recovery process (Leamy et al., 2011). The process of reconnection is not one the participant was consciously aware of and so it is only through the inclusion of visual data that I was able to draw such an insight. This example not only makes a case for the use of visual methods, but also highlights how they may be particularly useful for neurodiverse PGRs who have a strength and preference for visual reasoning. Therefore, creative analysis tools could prove beneficial to academics in general and by embracing such methods encourages an inclusive approach to conducting research.

I also used visual techniques as a specific aid to analyse written data. This involved using drawing as an analytical tool, which is not a widely recognised technique. Recent research has identified that drawing for analysis promotes a relational focus within the content, rather than deconstructing data, which aids the theorising process (Michael, 2020). Furthermore, when neurodiverse thinkers are able to utilise strengths in visual reasoning, it frees-up the capacity of other cognitive processes (Bacon & Handley, 2014).

This was my experience when analysing transcripts and attempting to theorise within the complexity of the realist paradigm. To explore interrelated experiences and concepts within a linear transcript, I sketched a storyboard of a participant's narrative,

as exemplified in Figure 2. Through this process I was able to identify aspects of lived experience that were not explicitly stated within the interview transcript. From the example provided in Figure 2 I conceptualised the experience of loneliness as reducing an individual's personal world. This can be seen in the imagery within Figure 2 as the focus of the figure becomes more prominent with the detail in the surroundings lessening. I then took these interpretations back to the interview transcript and verified against the data. It is not to say that other researchers could not have made these interpretations directly from the transcript, but rather it highlights an alternative method to be able to draw these conclusions. I used drawing as an aid for transcript analysis however, reflecting on this experience supports the emerging evidence of drawing as a valid analytical tool for researchers (Michael, 2020). Embracing such approaches would allow the research process to become more inclusive of neurodiverse thinkers.

Opportunities in academia

It is my hope that my personal reflections outlined above demonstrate that when a strength-based approach is taken within academia, barriers can be minimised for neurodiverse PGRs. My reflections also highlight that academia does provide an opportunity in which to do this. I acknowledge that my use of visual methods may be deemed more appropriate given the topic of my research involved community arts.

Nevertheless, I hope it demonstrates how alternative approaches to knowledge production could offer an inclusive approach to research in general. I believe my experiences demonstrate that



Figure 2: An excerpt of a storyboard sketch representing a participant transcript.

taking a strengths-based approach to research promotes equality and inclusivity for neurodiverse PGRs. Furthermore, being supported by academic staff to pursue these different approaches has encouraged my engagement.

A key source of support for me in relation to my academic work has stemmed from my supervisors. I have developed a positive working relationship with my supervisors over the years that is built on trust and a person-centred approach to the PGR experience. As such I have felt able to discuss issues I am facing or ask for support, which has been important to overcome barriers due to ableism in academia. Disclosure is not an easy process however, and in doing so you become vulnerable to discrimination and unconscious bias. I hope my experiences provide an example of how inclusivity can be improved through good social support within HE.

Another source of social support I have found has been meeting many like-minded PGRs, and in particular other neurodiverse and disabled PGRs. This is important as meeting people with a shared experience has been found to reduce internalised stigma (Griffin & Pollak, 2009). Being part of both a PGR community and a neurodiverse community, has enabled me to reflect on my skills and abilities outlined previously through a new, positive lens.

A key characteristic of research is to provide an 'original contribution to knowledge' (Baptista et al., 2015), and so research offers an opportunity to incite change. As a PGR you are exposed to current research, not only within your research field but also topics of personal importance. Becoming aware of Brown and Leigh's (2018, 2020) important writings on ableism in academia was a turning point in my self-discovery journey, and for the first time I started to feel I belonged within HE. It is the opportunity to engage with such knowledge production that can give voice to the neurodiverse PGR experience. The current paper aims to contribute to this body of knowledge and in doing so, take another step towards making positive change.

Recommendations

There are concerns that HE is becoming more ableist through bureaucratisation and capitalism, which promotes a focus on outcomes and productivity (Brown & Leigh, 2018; Dolmage, 2017; Grix, 2001). Furthermore, challenging the status quo is discouraged, particularly for PhD candidates and early career researchers who fear repercussions affecting career development (Asmal et al., 2022). However, ableism, and all issues relating to equality, diversity, and inclusivity, need to be challenged to incite change. In the face of a 'box-ticking' culture, there is a call for HE institutions to make systemic cultural changes to remove ableism in academia (Adams & Brown, 2006; Asmal et al., 2022; Griffin & Pollak, 2009; The National Archives, 2019). An inclusive academic culture would see:

- Disability and neurodiversity being viewed as an aspect of diversity.
- The academic community embracing an asset-based view of disability and neurodiversity.
- Accessibility embedded within learning, teaching, and research as standard, reducing the emphasis on individual adjustments.

Such a cultural shift requires everyone within academia to engage, and changes to occur at all levels. At a structural level HE institutions need to co-produce policy to ensure the voice of disabled and neurodiverse students (and academics) are included (Adams & Brown, 2006; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012). Curriculum and teaching approaches should also be coproduced, with flexibility and choice built in to embrace different ways of thinking (Adams & Brown, 2006; Farrar, 2006; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012). Coproduction and embedded accessibility would mean that all students would benefit and the need for individual adjustments would be minimised (Adams & Brown, 2006; Barnard et al., 2008; Griffin & Pollak, 2009). This may help to transform the attitudes of those members of academic staff who see disability and neurodiversity as a burden rather than an asset (Barnard et al., 2008).

Staff attitudes are both a barrier and facilitator to HE engagement so there needs to be consistency across faculties that embraces disability as a

beneficial aspect of diversity (Barnard et al., 2008). Adams and Brown (2006) argue that engagement from academic staff is essential to make inclusivity sustainable, however apathy towards issues of equality, diversity and inclusivity is common within HE (Adams & Brown, 2006; Barnard et al., 2008; Kohli & Atencio, 2021; Lizotte & Simplican, 2017). This has been linked to poor levels of awareness and understanding, which is widely reported within HE (Asmal et al., 2022; Barnard et al., 2008; den Houting, 2019; Farrar, 2006; Griffin & Pollak, 2009; Griggs, 2021; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Shaw & Anderson, 2018; The National Archives, 2019). Training academic staff would seem to be a clear solution to rectify this issue. Teacher training at lower levels of the education system often involves transforming attitudes to improve inclusivity and diversity, however this is not evident within HE educator training (Barnard et al., 2008). Specific resources have been developed through research projects such as *Premia* (Farrar, 2006) and *Getting Things Changed* (2018) to enable academic staff to support disabled and neurodiverse students and supervise PGRs. Comprehensive texts such as *Neurodiversity in Higher Education* by David Pollak (2009) are also a great source of information and insight to foster understanding amongst HE academic staff.

I hope that this article has provided insight into the experiences of neurodiverse PGRs, and the skills and abilities we bring to research culture. The uptake of equality, diversity and inclusivity changes is slow within HE (Asmal et al., 2022) but as individuals we can all take actions to make changes. Reading this article is one such action and I hope you are inspired to take another step towards inclusivity.

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