

**UNITE
STUDENTS**

An asset, not a problem

Meeting the needs of
neurodivergent students

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'A lot of people just fail to understand that every day, every second, we are living in a world that was not made for us. It was made for a different sensory processing system.'

'It's like navigating when you are a bit drunk, you are trying to comprehend things that don't make sense, but something that makes sense to you doesn't make sense to others'



"28% of students say they have symptoms of neurodivergence, and nearly 18% of students are unsure whether or not they have symptoms of neurodiversity.

However, only 22% have said they have a diagnosis"

Student Beans, 2024

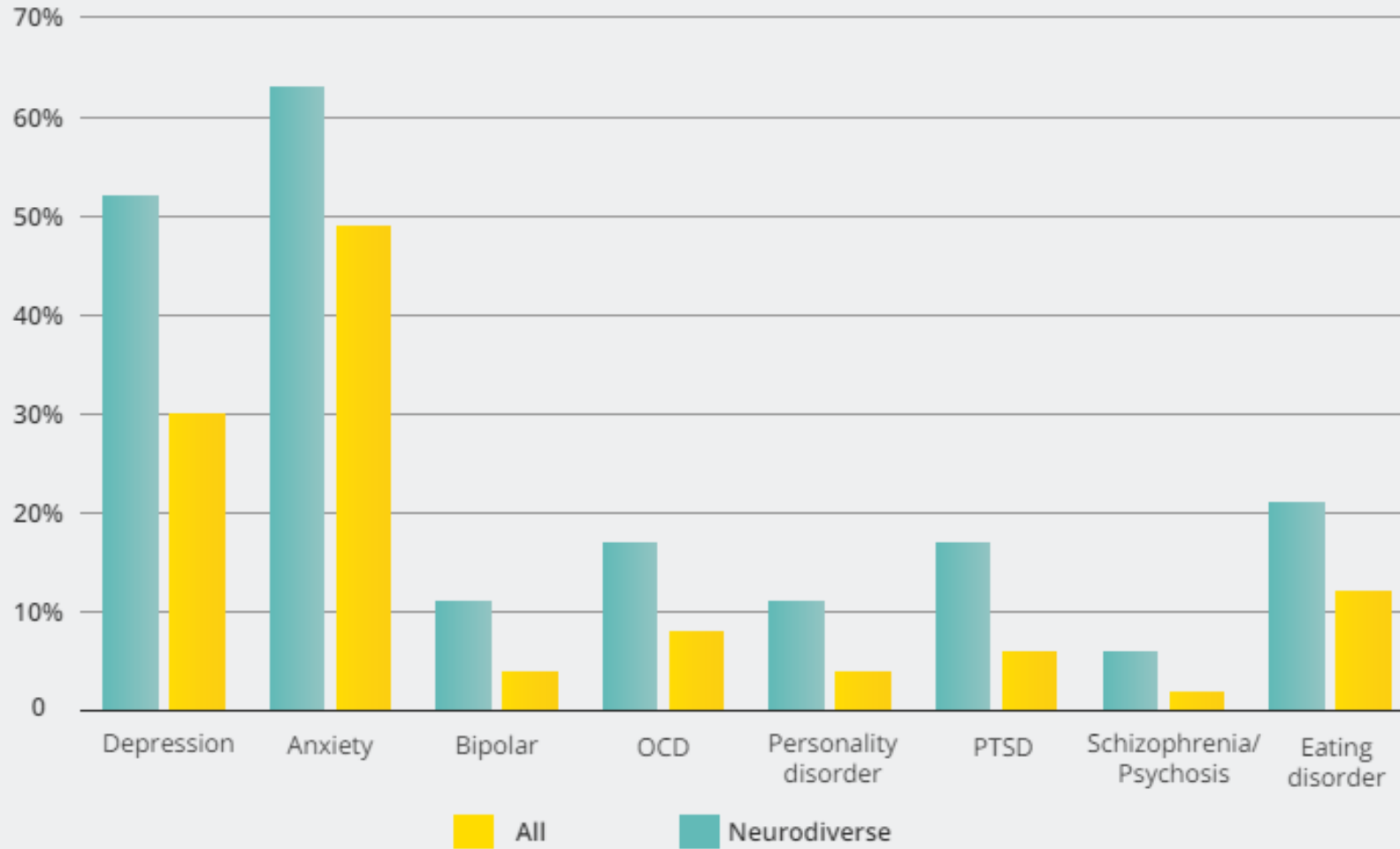
'An asset, not a problem'

This report is an exploration of the experiences and needs of autistic students and/or those with ADHD when making the transition to university and living in student accommodation.

Our Unite Students Applicant Index showed that there were lower levels of well-being and a higher instance of anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions among neurodivergent students.



Figure 1: Which, if any, of the following best describe the mental health issues you have experienced in the last two years?



'An asset, not a problem'

To make sense of these findings, and to understand the features of a more inclusive university transition and accommodation experience, Unite Students has worked with the Bristol University Neurodiversity Society (BUNS), a student-led society offering mutual support and advocacy for neurodivergent students at the University of Bristol, to understand some of the barriers faced.



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Qualitative research



'I definitely found it both exciting and... nerve wracking, that's the word I'm looking for. The whole meeting new people thing.'

'I was excited to get a chance to start life in a completely different way and meet loads of new people but it's also terrifying at the same time'



'I like this prospect of meeting new people, but I always end up being too anxious about actually meeting them.

I like this concept of something new, but I think while you are an adult you come with a very complicated package, with a whole lot of problems you have to explain to people

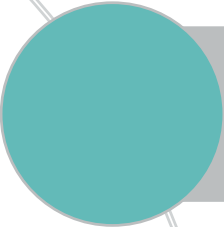




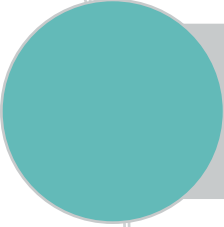
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RESEARCH & INSIGHTS
**NEURODIVERGENT
STUDENTS**

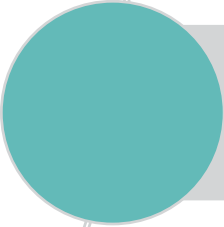
Recommendations – University life



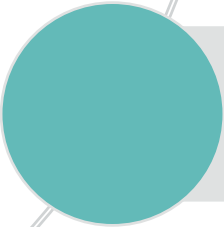
Introduction of a buddy system, so that students have a peer mentor who can support them with accommodation & university related difficulties.



Students to receive a single bullet-pointed summary list of all the administrative tasks to be done prior to university and in the first week of arrival.

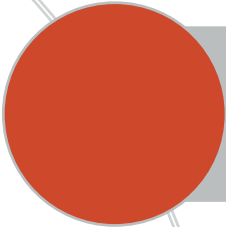


A neurodivergent students' guide to university services which can be provided to students upon moving in

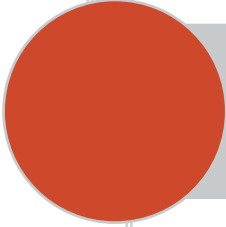


Student-led neurodiversity groups to be recommended for all universities, with university involvement. Benefits include peer support, shared experiences, and understanding social interaction. The group felt like this group was essential to their university experience

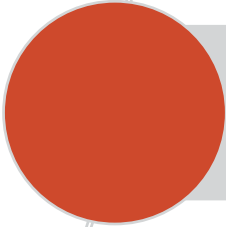
Recommendations – Student accommodation



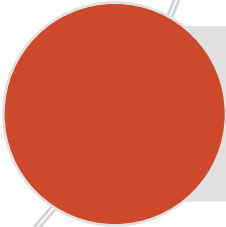
Early move-in option for neurodivergent students to allow time to acclimatise to the new environment without the added pressure of crowds and social interaction.



A video guide to the accommodation, with specific individuals' rooms shown upon request, including the walk from the accommodation entrance to the room.



Clearer communication about maintenance issues such as clear timescales, and understanding that sensory differences may mean that issues that seem minor to staff may be causing the student distress.



Consideration of 'quiet flat' placement away from noisy areas. If there is more than one quiet flat, allocate them as neighbours and consider the environment of the quiet flats.

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There are a couple of training recommendations for universities and accommodation providers;

- Neurodiversity training for all residence staff, including porters and maintenance staff. This will allow for better communication with neurodiverse students.
- Longer term, a badging scheme for neurodivergent friendly student accommodation in which staff are confident in working with neurodivergent students, providing students with reassurance of who they can talk to.



Thank you for joining.
Any questions?



Luke van der Kooij
Unite Students