

Same but Different



An insight into the experiences of neurodivergent students at UK universities

The challenges, the support available through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and the opportunities assistive technology provides to help them understand and be understood.

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About Texthelp

For the last three decades, Texthelp has led the way in creating innovative technology to help everyone read, write, and understand.

Texthelp continually celebrates a world where difference, disability or language are no longer barriers. It is focused on helping all people learn, understand and communicate through the use of digital learning and accessibility tools.

In February and March 2023, Texthelp, in partnership with Censuswide, surveyed over 100 neurodivergent university students. **The survey aimed to find out how much awareness there is around neurodiversity and the support available to neurodivergent students at university.**

About the Report


Students were asked about their understanding of the support that is available to them at university.


Key highlights from the survey revealed that:

- **Almost a third of students who had not applied for DSA said they have not heard of the DSA (32%) or that they didn't know they were eligible for DSA support (32%)**
- **(21%) of neurodivergent students did not know that neurodiversity was a disability**
- **Over half (55%) of neurodivergent students surveyed said they have not applied for the DSA at university**

These findings tell us that there is a wide range of reasons as to why neurodivergent students are not applying for DSA support.

33%  said the fear of judgement by peers

33%  said people not understanding the challenges they face

29%  said the fear of people thinking they are not as smart as they are





Introducing Texthelp's “Same but Different” Campaign

Texthelp wants to raise awareness of the DSA and the vital support neurodivergent students can receive to help them with their university studies.

The insights contained within this report will help us highlight the difference assistive technology can make to neurodivergent students' journey through university.

It also hopes to encourage neurodivergent students to apply for the support available, so they can reach their full potential.

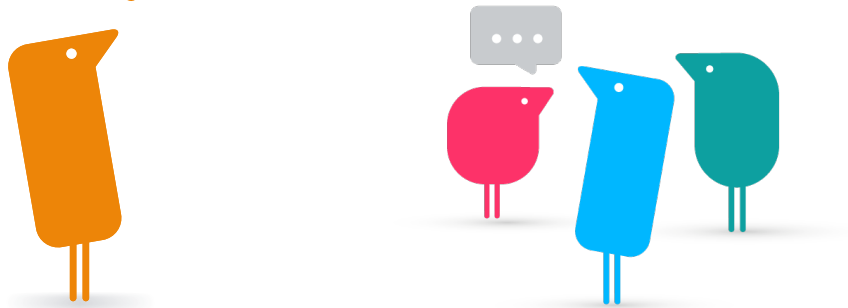


With over 60 million users worldwide, Texthelp's DSA portfolio includes Read&Write, OrbitNote®, Equatio®, ClaroRead®, Global AutoCorrect and Global Tasks. All products work alongside existing platforms including Microsoft Office and G-suite.

Celebrating the potential of neurodivergent university students

Awareness and feeling understood

"I think you hear people talking more openly about it [neurodiversity] rather than shying away and being embarrassed by it."



Raising awareness of neurodiversity not only benefits the individual, but also improves the understanding of others around the needs and differences of neurodivergent individuals.

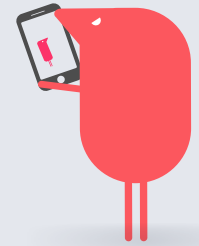
Neurodivergent students surveyed believe awareness of neurodiversity differs between platforms and social situations.

Social Media / Media

- Social media is seen as having awareness of neurodiversity (58%)
- (26%) said neurodiversity is **widely** talked about on social media

As for the media more generally, just 46% of the students we surveyed thought that neurodiversity was talked about.

54% said that "more could be done" to increase awareness of neurodiversity in the general media, while only 11% thought that neurodiversity was "widely" talked about.



Peer Groups

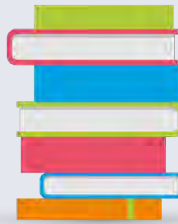
In terms of peer groups, there is a relatively even split between those who say neurodiversity is talked about among peers (51%) and those who say more could be done to increase awareness (47%).

Feeling misunderstood by their peers is a reality for many neurodivergent students surveyed.

- 1 in 5 (20%) said they either never or rarely feel understood by their peers when they disclose their neurodiversity condition

University

Given that universities are focused on education and therefore should have a strong understanding of neurodivergent conditions that affect learning, it is interesting to see there is a relatively even split between those who say:



This demonstrates that there is a clear opportunity to increase awareness of neurodiversity among universities. This lack of awareness is likely to result in few neurodivergent individuals feeling understood in the education sector, as their needs and differences may not be acknowledged by those teaching them.

- 1 in 5 said they are **rarely** or **never** understood by their lecturers (21%) or tutors (19%)
- A smaller number, just 1 in 6 neurodivergent students surveyed said they **always** feel understood by their lecturer (15%) and tutors (15%)

“I raised a few questions about having to do presentations and that I thought this would be more difficult for me. I was told that everyone is in the same boat and there weren’t specific things done to help me.”

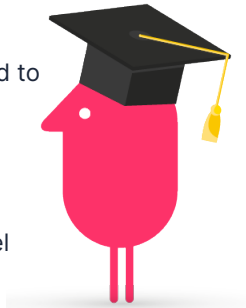
“I would like to see tutors having more knowledge about people like myself.”

ADHD Student

Support in Education

Given the lack of awareness and understanding of neurodiversity reported by the surveyed students, we wanted to explore how these students felt with regard to support.

- (58%) say they feel their university is supportive of their neurodivergent needs
- However, it is worth noting only 1 in 12 (8%) said they feel **very** supported



Our findings indicate an inconsistent level of support for neurodivergent students at university.

Feeling unsupported seems to be closely linked to the level of awareness the neurodivergent students feel their university has:

- Over a third (36%) of all those surveyed said they feel their university is **unsupportive** of their neurodiverse needs
- And this figure increases to 46% of students who responded that more should be done to increase awareness of neurodiversity in university

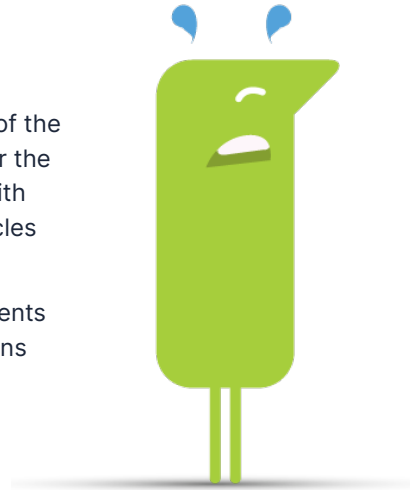
“I would say there is a surface level understanding of it, but I don’t think there is a deeper education about it.”

“I wouldn’t necessarily say my Uni has been great because I would have had nothing unless I had made the wellbeing appointment myself, and all the advice they gave me was that I had to speak to a GP anyway, so I don’t think it has been very positive.”

Neurodiversity and the DSA

Not only is the lack of awareness and understanding of the DSA a barrier for neurodivergent students applying for the allowance, but the judgement and fears associated with having a neurodivergent condition are also key obstacles for these students getting this support.

The majority of the fears held by neurodivergent students surveyed are centred around other people's perceptions and stigmas about their condition.



Fears and barriers



Said fears of judgement by peers



Said the fear of people thinking they are not as smart as they are would stop them from applying

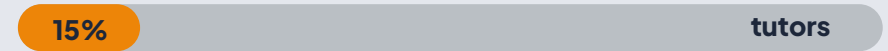
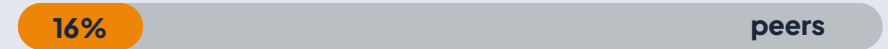


Said people not understanding the challenges they face would stop them from applying to the DSA



Said the same for the stigma attached to learning difficulties

It could be suggested these fears of judgement and stigma are centred not only around their peers, but also their lecturers and tutors, as less than 1 in 5 neurodivergent students surveyed said they always feel understood when they disclose their neurodivergent condition to their:



Perhaps an increase in awareness of neurodiversity and the positives these conditions bring to the individual would reduce the fears held by neurodivergent students.

This is evident in the fact that, of the students who said more could be done to increase awareness of neurodiversity, **1 in 10 had not disclosed their neurodivergent condition(s) to their lecturer or tutor.**



The DSA and assistive technology

Providing support

One way universities can support neurodivergent students' needs is through the DSA. However, it seems not all neurodivergent students surveyed are benefitting from this support.



Less than half of neurodivergent students surveyed had applied for the DSA at university



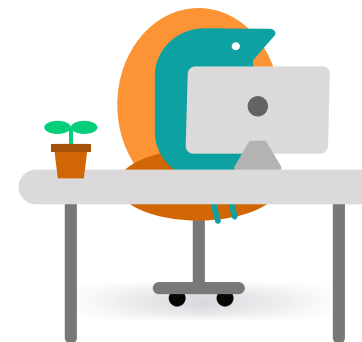
Over a quarter said they haven't applied yet and are not planning to



Almost 3 in 10 said they haven't applied, but plan to



This equates to over half saying they had not applied to the DSA or that they are yet to apply at their university and, therefore, **are not currently receiving the support that could benefit their education.**



Increasing the uptake of applications for the DSA is seen as the university's responsibility by many neurodivergent students surveyed:

Almost 4 in 5

79%

Agree that their university could be doing more to promote and encourage neurodivergent students to apply for the DSA support

Almost a quarter

24%

Strongly agree



Perhaps promoting the DSA and sharing more information around who is eligible would be beneficial in:

- Reducing the 27% of those who haven't applied to the DSA and don't plan to



- Increasing the number of students who are aware of DSA, as almost a third of those who have not applied for the DSA said they have not heard of the DSA (32%)



- Reducing the number of students who didn't know they were eligible for the DSA (32%)



Providing more information about what is included in the DSA could also be helpful:

25% of students surveyed who said they haven't applied for the DSA said they didn't know that assistive technology was available from the dsa

21% of neurodivergent students said they didn't apply because they didn't know neurodiversity was a disability

Increasing awareness of the DSA and who is eligible is key to ensuring neurodivergent students are able to access vital support and guidance. This will help eligible students to achieve their full potential at university.

This importance is demonstrated in that:

75%

Three quarters of neurodivergent students surveyed said having the DSA support (such as receiving assistive technology) for their academic studies would be / is beneficial, with almost 3 in 10 (29%) saying extremely beneficial.

Overall, it's clear more can be done to support neurodivergent students in accessing the help and support available.

"It is something that I would have found useful particularly when I first started university, when I had more lecture-based work".





**Rick Bell,
Head of Education, Texthelp**

“The findings from the survey and the tailored focus groups have been incredibly insightful. These findings will allow us to further understand what we can do to support the needs and unique aspirations of neurodivergent university students. We will also be able to share these insights when we are working with the DSA to provide a whole suite of literacy and numeracy support to more neurodivergent students.”

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from Censuswide. Total sample size was 100 National Respondents between 22/02/23-24/02/23. The survey was carried out online.

Focus Groups took place on 10th March 2023. The focus group was carried out via online video call.

At Texthelp, we understand that finding the right support makes a world of difference in education and beyond. Our assistive technology helps students to overcome barriers that previous generations experienced during their education.

Through the DSA, we provide eligible students with tools to help them reach their full potential.