

Welcome!

Dear **ND&D Readers**,

Welcome to the **sixth edition** of the Neurodiversity & Disability Nexus! January may feel that it lasts an eternity, yet here we are already with Issue Two of 2026! We bring you another packed issue with loads of content and events. The **warmer weather** approaches with crocus, primrose, snowdrops, and even some daffodils already out, encrusting the ground with colour, so hopefully you've enjoyed some time outdoors (avoiding the rain showers!)

Articles for ND&D are submitted independently by members of the team and we have found a naturally-occurring theme this issue; a **thread of continued wellness and health** stretches across the pages, which has been great to collate into our sixth issue.

We trust that all our apprentices have **settled into the rhythm of 2026**, whether you're new and still early in your programme, in the midst, or whether you can see that EPA approaching on the horizon. We look forward to **continuing to support and work with you** across the coming months, and would love to see you at one of our [live events](#)!

from the Learning Support Team



In this edition you can look forward to:

- A **focus on the outdoors** by Kayleigh, on [pg. 3](#)
- An introduction to **body doubling** by Meadhbh on [pg. 4](#)
- Exploring **finding fulfilment** by Micha, on [pg. 5](#)
- Celebrating **Ramadan** by a guest contributor and one of our ND champions, Sarah, on [pg. 6](#)
- A **podcast and book review** by Karla on [pg. 7](#)
- **QA Apprenticeships Neurodiversity Network review** by another ND champ and guest author Meaghan on [pg. 10](#)
- Another instalment of **Neurocrafted** looking at **memory** by Kirstin on [pg. 11](#)
- **Event Calendar:** Upcoming events and opportunities to connect
- **Helpful Links:** Further resources and support available to help you

Submit any contribution ideas [here](#) and your feedback truly is invaluable! So please do share feedback [here](#).



Brought to you by the Learning Support Team

Team News

Our Teams have been busy supporting learners across all Apprenticeship programmes. We've had many students entering EPA, and seen an increase in learners as the final cohorts of Level 7 have begun their programmes.

In a surprise turn of events, we'd like to formally welcome back **Kayleigh Dachtler** (we told you she wasn't going far!) Kayleigh has returned to her role as a Learning Support Specialist to the delight of both her team and the exams team!



NB: This isn't us... we stick to land-based activities!

Some of you from the DA space, or who attend our Neurodiversity Network sessions, will recognise this familiar face, but we'd like to formally introduce **Alan Skelton** as our interim manager in Learning Support! Alan took over this role in November, and is managing our Team until October.

We'd like to take this opportunity give a **huge congratulations to Mark Soady** who is currently on adoption leave; Mark and his wife recently adopted a baby, which is incredible, so Mark exchanged his golf trolley for a push trike, and we couldn't be happier for them!



Alan Skelton
Apprenticeships
Senior Learner
Services Manager

QAA Learning Support Team (Levels 3-6)

Email – Specialist.LearningTeam@qa.com



Ray



Lisa



Kayleigh



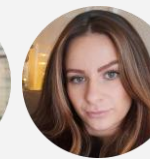
Kolsuma



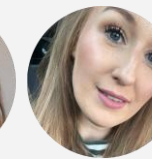
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Tracie



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Sarah



Mitzi



Jacob



Stacey



Meadhbh

Let's Get Outside!



by Kayleigh






Ahhh! The flowers are blooming, the sun is shining and the birds are singing! Everyone talks about how **exercise and being in nature can help** with everything **and it's true**. Living in Britain we're all likely vitamin D deficient and those of us who take supplements for this, well done, but it isn't the same as the sun. We often forget in this fast-paced life to take a moment to pause; to **stop and appreciate** what we have and the beautiful world around us.



What are the benefits of going outdoors?

- ✓ Gain Vitamin D 
- ✓ Lessens anxiety
- ✓ Makes us more sociable
- ✓ Exercise & healthier weight
- ✓ Improves sleep
- ✓ Improves self-esteem 
- ✓ Improves focus
- ✓ Builds immunity 
- ✓ Boosts creativity

Need more motivation?

- ❖ Sign up to a **walking challenge** or start your own with friends or family 
- ❖ Find **walking games** (I play Pokémon GO) 
- ❖ Create a **nature journal**, noting animals and flowers you see at different times of the year
- ❖ **Feed the ducks** at the local park (use specially-made feed for ducks: you can find this in most supermarkets - bread doesn't give them the nutrients they need)
- ❖ Ooo and don't forget the **suncream** and your **water bottle!** 

Capture The Outdoors

Outdoor photography is a great way to **explore your surroundings** and **notice details** you might normally overlook. Whether you use **a phone** or **a camera**, being outside gives amazing opportunities for a great snap!

Try **experimenting** with close-ups of plants, patterns, or interesting textures. You don't need to go far; beautiful photos can be found in your garden, local park, or on a short walk. Outdoor photography **encourages creativity**, **helps you slow down**, and **gives you a fresh perspective**. Enjoy the process and let nature inspire you!



Image Credit

Body Doubling: The Productivity Boost You Didn't Know You Needed



by Meadhbh



One of my favourite strategies for **overcoming procrastination and executive dysfunction** is body doubling. If you ever struggle to get started on tasks, this simple technique may be exactly what you need.

How it works: First, ask someone to spend time with you (virtually or in-person) while you are completing a task. Tell them exactly what the task is and set a specific amount of time to work on it. The more specific you can be on what you want to achieve, the better.

For example: *"I want to tidy my bedroom. Specifically, I want to change my bedsheets, put away laundry and Hoover. I will do this for 1 hour, from 10am-11am on Saturday."*

Ask your buddy to **join you** for that time and then **get to work on your task!** Your buddy isn't helping you with your task, they're just being present alongside you. This creates a **sense of accountability** that helps to **boost motivation, reduce avoidance, and minimise distractions**. It can work well if your buddy also has a task that they want to complete at the same time.



Who to ask: You can ask friends, family members, a partner, or a colleague. If you prefer, you can **use apps** like Focusmate or Dubbii to schedule sessions with strangers who are also focusing on completing tasks!



Things to consider:

- When is a **good time** for you to work on your tasks? Do you have more energy in the morning, for example?
- Can you **combine this strategy** with the 'Eat the Frog' strategy of getting your hardest task out of the way as early as possible?
- Could this be a **regular session** that you book in, such as a weekly meet-up with a colleague to keep on top of your Portfolio?
- How can you **celebrate the achievement** of ticking a task off your list? Could you get a treat with your buddy when finished as a reward?



Finding More Fulfilment in 2026

by Micha



Happiness, well-being and fulfilment is an individual pursuit, journeyed with others. I've found it helpful to **regularly reflect** and **define my core values**. They act as an anchor, to gently guide my choices towards things that align with what's truly important to me, what authentically makes me feel happy and fulfilled.

I find this especially helpful as an ADHD'r, where distraction comes easy, urgency steals attention and my memory is as efficient as a goldfish. **Finding your values takes some time** and quiet reflection. You're looking for **3-6 key words** to summarise what you find personally valuable. You can follow guides online or start with the following process.



1. Consider as many **peak, memorable and meaningful experiences** as you can in your life. Consider each situation - what was happening? What was great about it? What values were you honouring at that time?



2. Now consider times in your life you were **frustrated, angry or upset** - what was happening? What was being suppressed in that moment? What values were you not able to uphold?

3. Consider your **highest priority needs** - what is most important in your life? What basic needs must you have met?

4. **Group together all the words** you've listed, then spend some time refining them until you reach 3-6 key words.

5. Keep those words close, **reflect on them** - how can you meet them more regularly? What could you do yearly, monthly, daily where possible? How can you weave them into your daily life and decisions?



I'll share a personal example - **three of my values are health, movement, nature** - a **daily walk** before work greatly boosts my mood, makes me feel alive and like I'm living in alignment with my true nature. A **weekend adventure** to hike a mountain with friends does so even more, because two of my other core values are **connection and growth**. So, finding something more challenging to share with friends is really fulfilling for me. Knowing this helps me **plan and prioritise my time towards the activities that are best for my happiness**.



Ramadan: A Month of Mindfulness, Compassion, and Connection *by Sarah*



This article is brought to you by one of our amazing Neurodiversity Champions!

Ramadan is a sacred month observed by Muslims around the world. From dawn to sunset, many fast from food and drink while focusing on spiritual reflection, self-discipline, gratitude, and community. Beyond fasting, Ramadan is a time to **slow down, reset intentions, strengthen compassion** for others, and **deepen connection** - both spiritually and socially.

During Ramadan, your **normal patterns and productivity will feel different**, and that's okay. Here are some practical tips to support you on your apprenticeship if you are fasting:



Study around your energy, not your clock: Your focus will shift whilst you are fasting. Study at high energy times which can often be after Suhoor (pre-dawn meal) and after Iftar (post sunset meal) as these will be when you have the most clarity



Communication – having conversations with your employer can help put in small adjustments to support you, if needed. Adjusted breaks, or flexible working might better support you during this month



Pause and Plan - use your breaks wisely for prayer, rest, or a mental pause. Plan ahead during high energy moments to reduce the mental load



Hydrate – it is so important to keep hydrated during the day. Dehydration can significantly impact your focus, so keep your fluid intake high to keep yourself safe



Sleep – your sleeping pattern will change this month, so try and maximise rest where you can. Avoid caffeine before bed which can disrupt sleep rhythms, and if you need to rest during the day, that's okay



Image Credit

At the end of **Ramadan**, Muslims celebrate **Eid al-Fitr**, a joyful festival marking the completion of the month of fasting.

Eid is a time for **prayer, gratitude, family gatherings, generosity, and celebration**. If you are observing, we wish you a peaceful and meaningful Eid.

If you have assessments or deadlines close to this time, **plan ahead** where possible and don't hesitate to **communicate early** if you need support

Further Reading:

[What is Ramadan](#)

[Tips for Healthy Ramadan Fasting](#)



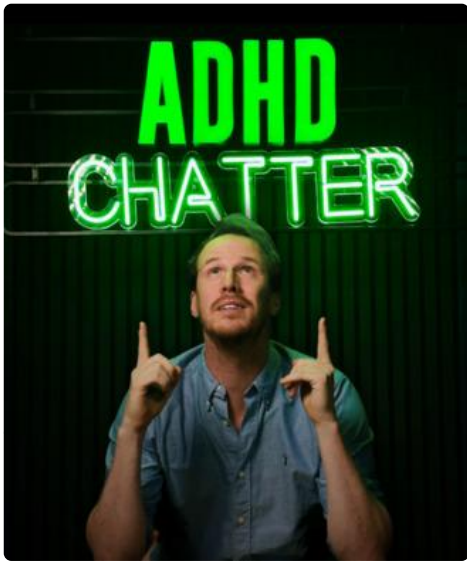
Brought to you by the Learning Support Team

ADHD Chatter: A Podcast Review



Hosted by Alex Partridge who created LadBible, ADHD Chatter is a podcast which is interesting, informative, and often very relatable.

by Karla



Every week, ADHD Chatter has a different guest. The recent lineup includes award winning psychiatrists, authors, world-leading ADHD specialists and clinical psychologists to name a few. They discuss the topics surrounding ADHD such as **rejection sensitivity dysphoria, executive function, burnout, overwhelm**, and lots about the struggles ADHD people face.

The Podcast is a **great source of learning** but also has some really interesting content and each week the guests give a different angle and insight, such as how to spot signs of AuDHD, overcoming ADHD overwhelm, and the emotional cost of undiagnosed ADHD. There is a lot of **validating the experiences** of ADHDers and suspected ADHDers, and they talk about **strategies** which can help ADHD brains to function in a world made for neurotypicals.



At the end of each episode, Alex presents the **'Washing Machine of Woes'**, questions presented to the experts from the listeners. The name based on one of Alex's personal ADHD struggles of filling the washing machine and then forgetting about it until it's got to that fusty smelling point. It's **definitely worth a listen**, whether it's for learning about ADHD or to seek support from the different expert's insights. I personally feel seen and there have been many an episode where I'm shouting "yes!" or "that's me!" for things I didn't even realise were ADHD related. Because it's normal, right? I don't know any different!

Alex is such an interesting guy and **draws upon his own ADHD experiences** such as creating LadBible in a state of hyper fixation and also delves into how ADHD has impacted on other areas of his life, exploring relationships and life at university. His book is also worth a mention - **Now It All Makes Sense** - which discusses how his ADHD diagnosis enabled him to live his life without feeling broken and finding strategies which worked for his brain.

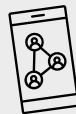
ALEX PARTRIDGE

**Now
It All
Makes
Sense**

How An ADHD Diagnosis
Brought Clarity to My Life

Find the ADHD Chatter
podcast here:

- [Youtube](#)
- [Apple Podcasts](#)
- [Spotify](#)
- [Audible](#)



Mood Boosters



Another instalment of ideas to feel a little brighter. Adapted from one of [Liggy Webb's](#) Bitesized Books, these are some simple ideas you can do to help lift your spirits. *by Lisa*



Stretch



Stretching is an excellent mood boosting activity. Apart from the physiological benefits, such as **increased flexibility** and the reduced chance of injury, stretching has other benefits too. It helps release neurochemicals in the brain, like **serotonin**, which is the primary chemical associated with joy and elation.

When you're sitting at your desk, make a point of **standing up every 30 mins and stretch**, even if it's only for a couple of minutes.



Eat "good mood" food



If you are feeling low, make a conscious effort to have a **healthy day**. Avoid foods which make your blood sugar rise and fall rapidly, such as sweets, biscuits, sugary drinks and alcohol. Eat lots of things you know will **boost your energy** and **eliminate all the toxins**.

Chop up some fruit and vegetables and keep them in the fridge to snack on. If you're looking for a **quick energy boost**, try a handful of pumpkin seeds, a couple of brazil nuts and small pieces of dark chocolate. This is much **more nutritious** than a refined sugary snack.

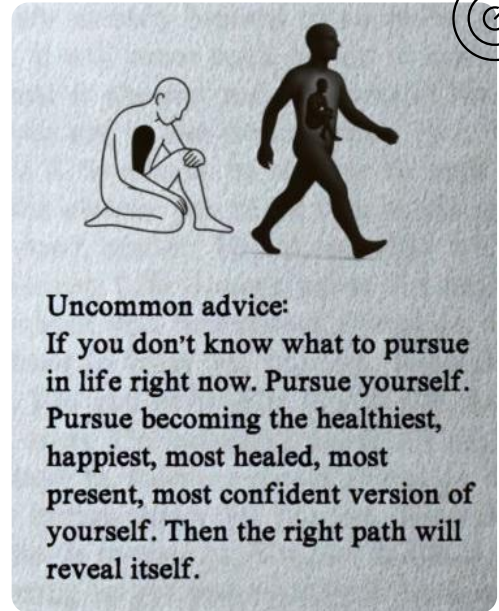


Spend time around animals



Spending time around pets can help you to **relax and feel calmer**. When you stroke an animal, you release feel-good **endorphins** that help to reduce your heart rate. Playing with a pet also increases the levels of the feel-good chemicals **serotonin and dopamine** in your brain, which can help you feel happier.

According to a [study](#) published in the Journal of Environmental Psychology, watching nature programmes can also **boost your mood** and reduce boredom levels from being indoors.



Uncommon advice:

If you don't know what to pursue in life right now. Pursue yourself. Pursue becoming the healthiest, happiest, most healed, most present, most confident version of yourself. Then the right path will reveal itself.

Image Credit

App Recommendation



Todoist

Doist Inc.
£ free (in-app purchases)

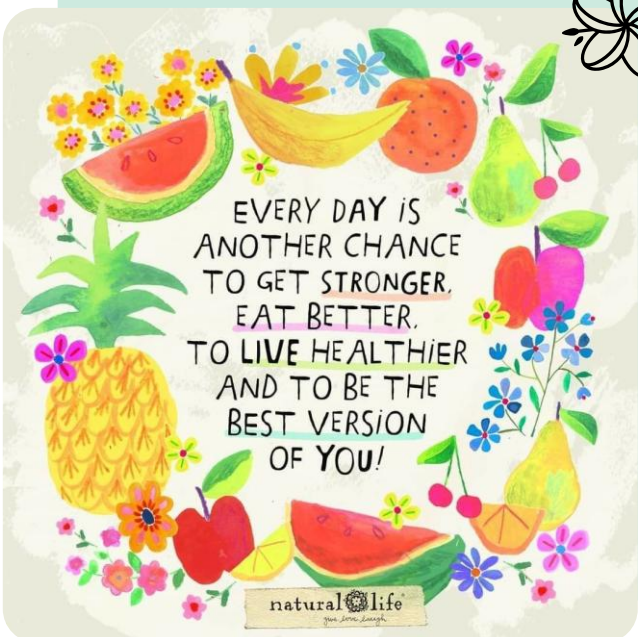
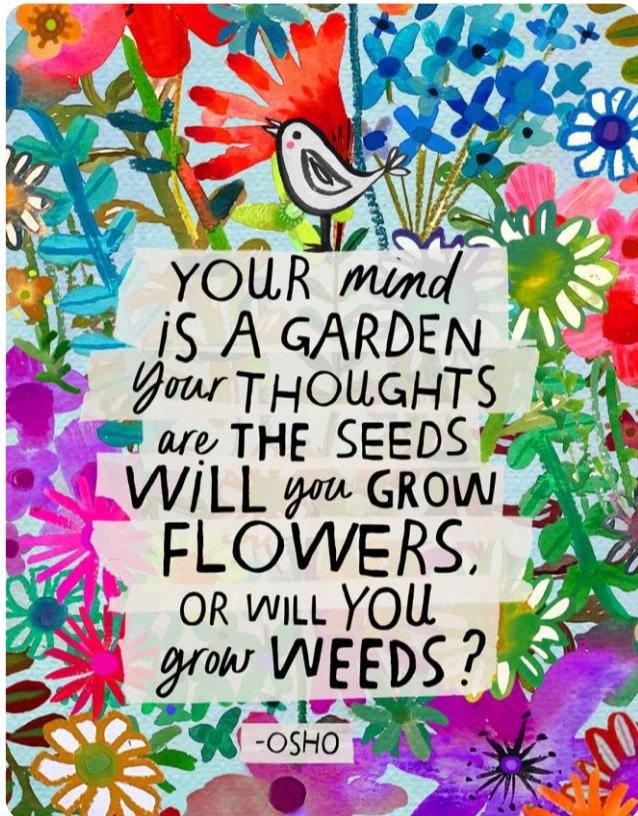
[Todoist](#) is an excellent choice if you want a simple, reliable, and flexible **task management** app. It's easy to **organise projects, set deadlines, and prioritise tasks** with colour coded labels and filters.

The clean interface keeps everything clear, and the **recurring reminders** help you stay on track. It **syncs smoothly** across devices, so you can plan at home, work, or on the go. With its balance of power and simplicity, Todoist suits both everyday to-dos and larger long-term goals.

Brought to you by the Learning Support Team

Creativity Corner

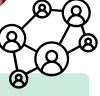
A selected piece of inspiration!



A beautiful set of artwork and inspirational quotes from [@naturallife](https://www.instagram.com/naturallife) to cheer your spirits!



Review - QA Apprenticeship Neurodiversity Network *by Meaghan*



This session's report is brought to you by one of our amazing Neurodiversity Champions!

We kicked off 2026's Neurodiversity Network sessions with **Relationships and Neurodiversity**, exploring how being neurodivergent can impact friendships, romance, work relationships, and family dynamics. Discussion was held across the rooms - 3Ds: Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and ADHD & Autism, with Parents' Corner available for those seeking to **share and support** others who parent ND children or are ND themselves.

Personal stories were shared around the highs and lows of "ghosting" and dating apps, **individual anxieties** on how a person might be **perceived in the workplace**, and **navigating romantic relationships** with or as an ND partner.



A popular tip that was shared was the **4 second rule** - when asked a question, give yourself 4 seconds to think about it before answering. This may be **helpful in both work and personal relationships**, encouraging more thoughtful responses and better listening.

We discussed other tips and tricks to help individuals work on their **self-belief** and **self-confidence** and how this can **positively influence the interactions** we have with other people. A record **116 attendees** were at this session, and we look forward to building on this momentum for the rest of the 2026 and beyond!

World Down Syndrome Day – 21st March

21st March is an annual day for international Down Syndrome networks to come together to **celebrate, raise awareness**, and **highlight human rights** for all people with Down syndrome. 1 in 800 babies are born with Down syndrome; making it the most common chromosomal disorder.



The theme for this year is **'Together Against Loneliness'**, highlighting the impacts of loneliness individuals experience, and calling for inclusion across communities. #lotsofsocks

Further Reading:

[World Down Syndrome Day](#)

[Downs Syndrome Association](#)

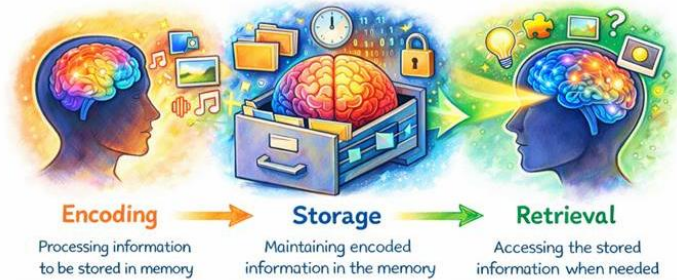


Neurocrafted: Built to Think Differently



by Kirstin

In this continuing series, we'll explore how different parts of the brain function and how these processes vary across individuals. Understanding this, especially through a neurodiversity informed lens, can help us identify simple, practical strategies that support the way brains learn best.



Images in this article have been AI generated

Memory is the process by which the brain acquires, stores, and retrieves information. There are three stages involved in this process, supported by three types of memory - **sensory**, **short term/working**, and **long term** - each linked to different areas of the brain. We'll begin by looking at the stages of memory and how information moves through them.

The three stages of memory are - **encoding**, **storage**, and **retrieval**.

Encoding



Sensory information (sights, sounds, feelings) is translated into neural codes by the brain.

How it works: You pay attention to information, and your brain converts it into a format for memory storage, usually in the short-term memory.

Storage



Also known as consolidation, the encoded information is held and stabilised largely by the hippocampus during sleep.

How it works: Information moves to long term memory usually through repetition or rehearsal.

Retrieval



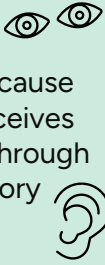
Accessing and bringing stored information back to conscious awareness.

How it works: this process can happen through **recall** (answering a question in an exam), **recognition** (recognising an old classmate you've not seen for years) and **relearning** (language acquisition; speaking language becomes easier the more it is practised.)

Brought to you by the Learning Support Team

Neurocrafted: 10 Simple Strategies To Help You Remember Information Better

1. Use different senses when you learn - this strengthens encoding, because your brain receives information through multiple sensory pathways



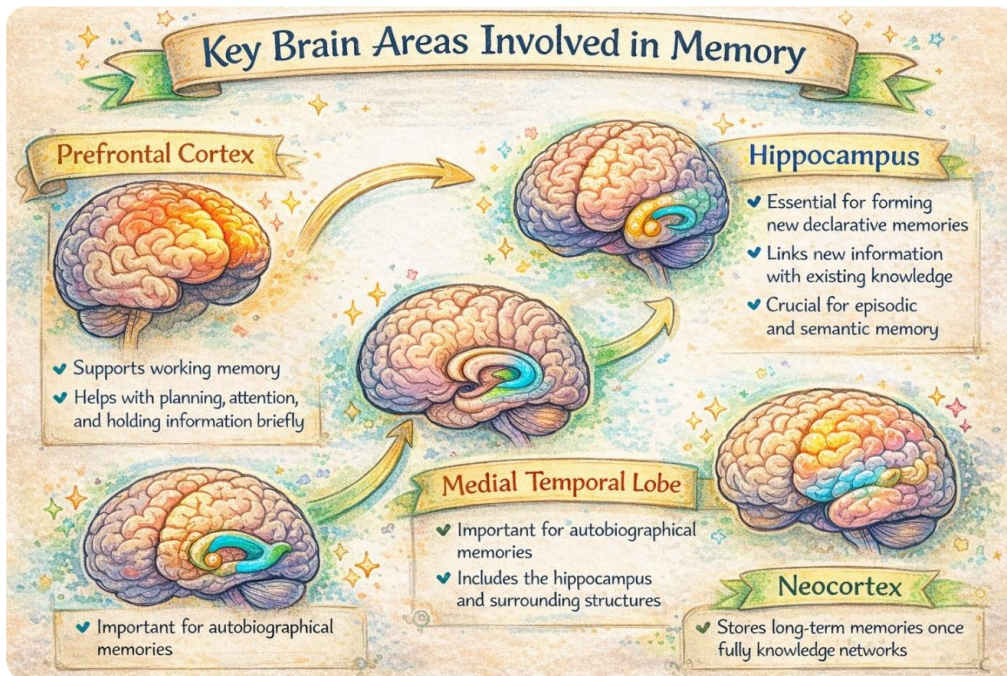
2. Keep things simple and break tasks into steps - reducing cognitive load supports working memory, making it easier for your brain to encode information accurately



3. Group information into small chunks - chunking helps your short-term / working memory manage information more easily, improving both encoding and long-term storage



4. Link new ideas to things you already know - making connections strengthens encoding and helps consolidate information during storage



Images in this article have been AI generated

5. Practise little and often (spacing) - spaced repetition gives the brain repeated opportunities to consolidate information into long-term memory



6. Test yourself regularly (retrieval practice) - using recall, quizzes, or flashcards strengthens retrieval pathways, making information easier to access later



10. Explain what you've learned to someone else - teaching others boosts retrieval and strengthens long-term storage through repeated recall and reorganisation of ideas.



9. Use tools that support your memory (checklists, planners, written reminders) - these reduce pressure on working memory, allowing your brain to focus on encoding new information.



8. Make learning meaningful or emotional - emotionally relevant information is prioritised during encoding, increasing the likelihood it moves into long term memory



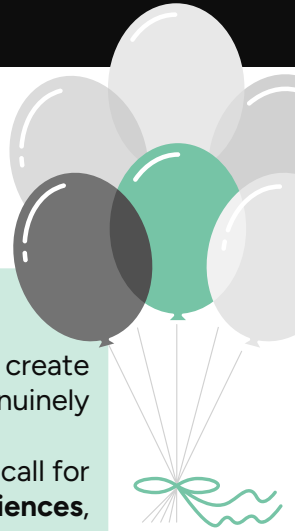
7. Use pictures along with words (dual coding) - combining visuals and text supports encoding and creates multiple memory traces, improving storage and retrieval



Neurodiversity Celebration Week 2026 – March 16th to 20th

Neurodiversity Celebration Week is an opportunity to **spotlight the strengths, creativity, and perspectives** that neurodivergent people bring to society. The purpose of this week of celebration is to **challenge stereotypes** and help create environments where different thinking styles are understood, valued and genuinely supported.

This year's theme focuses on taking things from **awareness into action**, with a call for organisations to run and host their own events. This gives space for **lived experiences, practical ideas** and **honest conversations** about what real inclusion looks like.



Beyond awareness: Building the case for equity

16 March 2026
13:00 to 14:00 (UK time)



Scaling support, reducing barriers

17 March 2026
13:00 to 14:00 (UK time)



Leading the way: Neuroinclusive leadership in action

18 March 2026
13:00 to 14:00 (UK time)



From process to practice: Embedding neuroinclusion in the employee journey

19 March 2026
13:00 to 14:00 (UK time)



The future of neuroinclusion: Innovation, data, and impact

20 March 2026
13:00 to 14:00 (UK time)

Events this week are designed to **empower individuals** and organisations to move beyond simply recognising neurodiversity and instead start making meaningful, sustained changes for a **more inclusive society**; when we celebrate different minds and design support that truly works for people, we build communities where **everyone can thrive**.



Ryan Gosling has ADHD?



Did you know...



Greta Thunberg is autistic?



Lewis Capaldi has tourette's?



Whoopi Goldberg is dyslexic?

Neurodiversity Celebration Week are hosting these events which you can book onto [here](#).

They also have a huge selection of [resources](#) on all aspects of neurodiversity and support, which is worth a look!

#ThisIsND

We'd love for you to share your stories! Using the hashtag **#ThisIsND**, we aim to celebrate the strengths, talents, and raise awareness of lived experiences of neurodivergent individuals.

What does neurodiversity look like to you?

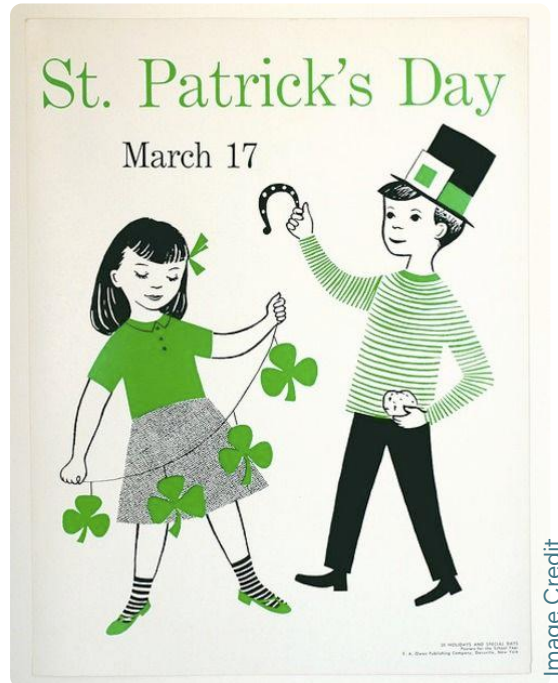


Brought to you by the Learning Support Team

Upcoming Events:

Check out all our upcoming events on the Wellbeing Calendar, and book onto all sessions [here](#).

- We have a session for **World Sleep Day**, focusing on practical strategies to improve stress and manage sleep effectively, with tips and the science behind healthy sleep, and take-away tools you can use every day - **March 13th**
- Join us for our **Introduction to Neurodiversity** sessions, aimed at those new to neurodiversity - **March 19th**
- Our Safeguarding Team are running monthly **Introduction to Safeguarding** sessions: a short live session to learn more about how we support you and how to make a referral – **March 27th**



We would love to see you at our next **QA Apprenticeship Neurodiversity Network** session -

- **22nd April – Neurodiversity in the Media** - we'll open the floor to discuss how neurodiverse individuals are portrayed across film, television, and online, exploring **common stereotypes**, sharing examples of authentic storytelling, and reflecting on the impact media narratives have on public perception and inclusion.

As part of your free **Association of Apprentices** membership, you can book onto some of their amazing regular events. Upcoming sessions include:

- **AI Literacy** – March 6th 12-1pm
- **The Assessment Toolkit** – March 13th 12-1pm
- **Smash Your Digital EPA** with our very own Naomi Lavendar – March 17th 12-1pm
- **Neurodiversity 101: Thriving in Your Apprenticeship** – March 20th 12-1pm
- **Money Matters: Finance Made Simple** – April 14th 10-11am

Book onto all AoA events [here](#).



SKILLS WORKSHOP

Smash Your Digital EPA
For Digital Apprentices
Tuesday 17th March 2026
12-1pm GMT | Online



With **Naomi Lavender**
Quality Director at QA



Learn. To Change.

Feel you need ND&D Support?

- If you are currently a QA Apprentice **without** learning support in place and you have a formal diagnosis, disability, or think you may be neurodivergent, please complete a **self-referral form**
- You need to have a disability or learning difficulty in line with **The Equality Act 2010** to access support, but are not required to have a formal diagnostic report for us to put reasonable adjustments in place. For further information, watch our **Learning Support Team Video** [here](#)
- You may have a formal diagnosis, disability, long-term medical condition, long-term mental health difficulties, have adjustments in the workplace, have received support in the past, or just be exploring a potential neurodiversity – **please link in with us!**
- If you would like to discuss receiving learning support please complete the correct **self-referral form** for your Apprenticeship and we will be in touch

QAA Learning Support (Levels 3-6)

[Self Referral Form](#)

Email – Specialist.LearningTeam@qa.com

DA Learning Support (Levels 4-7)

[Self Referral Form](#)

Email – DASpecialist.LearningTeam@qa.com

Helpful Links:

Check out the [Apprentice learner's portal](#) for information and support around your Apprenticeship. Access information on **your wellbeing, your success, your experience, your future,** and **your programme** and engage with everything QA can offer you on your journey!

If you feel that you'd benefit from **pastoral** or **welfare** support, then check out our incredible **Safeguarding Team**; they provide all kinds of support from crisis intervention, regular check-ins, mental health support, and short or long-term mentoring support. Please complete a [Self-Referral Form](#), or if you have a concern about a peer use this [Referral Form](#).

QA has partnered with the **Association of Apprentices (AoA)**: a membership organisation that connects apprentices across the UK. In working with AoA, QA provide **access to social and professional networks**, learning, guidance, and support to enhance the apprenticeship journey. All QA apprentices are eligible for **free AoA membership**. Find out more [here](#).



DA Only:

The Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) team provide guidance for **Degree Apprentices** alongside regular classes on topics such as academic style, critical analysis, relating theory to practice, research skills, reflective writing, referencing, and much more - [ACE DA Learner Portal](#)