

# ND&D Nexus

Brought to you by the Learning Support Team



## Welcome!

Dear **ND&D Readers**,

Welcome to the fourth edition of Neurodiversity & Disability Nexus! As the year of 2025 is drawing to an end for many of us it's the same thing we're hearing "where has this year gone?!"

2025 has been **a really exciting year** for our Learning Support Team, we've had some fantastic initiatives take flight, such as the **QA Apprentice Neurodiversity Network**, and the publication of the **ND&D Nexus**, as well as many additional sessions running on the Wellbeing Calendar. We've already started prepping our 2026 diaries – if there's a particular topic on neurodivergence, disability, or wellbeing that you want us to cover please share ideas [here](#)!

As our apprentices continue working tirelessly, the **season of festivities** is certainly drawing in! Whether you will be celebrating Bonfire Night, Thanksgiving, Diwali, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, New Years, or just enjoying some additional bank holidays it's a time for enjoyment, connection, and well-deserved rest - whatever and however you choose to celebrate this season.

*from the Learning Support Team*



In this edition you can look forward to:

- **Disability History Month** and ways to raise awareness by Kayleigh on [pg. 3](#)
- An article to mark **World Aids Day** on December 1<sup>st</sup> on [pg. 6](#) with a webinar on the [Wellbeing Calendar](#)
- **ND&D in Focus** looks this issue at Fibromyalgia [pg. 11](#)
- **Teamworking Tips** for apprentices [pg. 8](#)
- Lisa brings us **Power Up Your Productivity** with four techniques to try on [pg. 4](#)
- The third part in **Neurocrafted** by Kirstin looks at the six cognitive domains on [pg. 10](#)
- We have an article on **Enjoying the Festivities : Surviving the Festivities** including strategies and available support this season [pg. 13](#)
- November has a focus on **Men's Health** including **International Men's Day** [pg. 12](#)
- **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](#)



## Team News

“Ch-ch-ch-ch-changes!” More exciting changes have been occurring in the Learning Support Team over recent weeks - we are super excited to welcome **two new LSS** members to the QAA Learning Support Team!

**Karla** has worked at QA for the last 18 months in Functional Skills and then as a DLA; she has a background working in prison education with a passion for encouraging learner engagement and supporting people to achieve their goals. We’ve also just been joined by **Meadhbh** so wanted to include her in this issue and give her an additional warm welcome to QA! Meadhbh is joining us from Glasgow where she worked at the University of Strathclyde, supporting neurodivergent and disabled students to succeed at their studies. We’re **so excited** to have Karla and Meadhbh join our Learning Support Team!

Kayleigh



Vix



However; as excited as we are for new colleagues, it does mean that we are saying farewell to two; but fear not, they are staying in Learner Services! **Kayleigh** has moved across to the **ACE Team**, and **Vix** has joined the **Safeguarding Team**. Both Kayleigh and Vix will be missed in our Learning Support Team with each leaving huge holes, so we’re glad they’re not going far! They will both remain as Leads in our QA Apprenticeship Neurodiversity Network and continue to contribute to this publication – but we wish them well in their new roles and a huge **thank you** for their work in our Learning Support Team!

## QAA Learning Support Team (Levels 3-6)

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Ray



Lisa



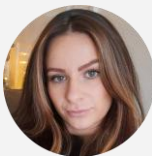
Kolsuma



Micha



Ruth



Ashlea



Karla



Meadhbh

## DA Learning Support Team (Levels 4-7)

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Tracie



Kirstin



Sarah



Mitzi



Jacob



Stacey



**Mark Soady**  
Apprenticeships  
Head of Learner  
Services

## It's Disability History Month - wait what does that mean?

*by Kayleigh*



Disability History Month (DHM) runs from 16<sup>th</sup> November to 20<sup>th</sup> December in the UK. It was created in 2010 to create a **better understanding of disability issues**, to **raise awareness of the challenges** that many people with a disability face and **promote inclusivity** through education on these topics. This year the focus of DHM focusses on **disability livelihood and employment**, ensuring there are fair opportunities for disabled people and ensure we confront inequality.

**DISABILITY  
HISTORY  
MONTH**

### The Social Model of Disability



When discussing equality in today's world it is imperative we mention the **Social Model of Disability** which proposes that it is the current way in which society is run that disables people, not the individual's differences.

[UK Disability History Month](#)

[Celebrating UK DHM in the workplace](#)

#### How can I get involved?

- Use this as an opportunity to **talk to your colleagues** and educate them about the inequality and challenges faced by disabled people
- **Celebrate** the contributions of disabled people within your company. Has someone with a disability created something you use regularly?
- Give people **something they can do** to realistically help with (don't make it a huge task though)
- Ensure you and others have **reasonable adjustments** in place. You can speak to your HR team, or you can take advantage of the [Access To Work](#) programme; you do not need a diagnosis to apply



**UK  
disability  
history  
month**

- **CELEBRATING OUR LIVES**
- **CHALLENGING DISABLISM**
- **ACHIEVING EQUALITY**




## Power Up Your Productivity

by Lisa




I've been sharing this resource for the last few months with my learners who **struggle to organise** themselves and be **productive**, particularly during their study periods. I've used the Pomodoro Technique and Eisenhower Matrix for many years with very positive feedback from apprentices who've found these strategies very useful and beneficial to support them juggling their busy job roles alongside their apprenticeship.

### 2 Minute Rule

1. Estimate the length of time needed for your tasks
2. If it's less than 2 minutes, **do it immediately** – do not postpone! 
3. If it will take more than 2 minutes **defer**, delegate, or break it down into smaller steps which can be done in 2 minutes

### Eisenhower Matrix



This is a great way to categorise tasks if you're feeling overwhelmed. 

- **Do**: urgent and important tasks
- **Decide**: important but not urgent tasks
- **Delegate**: urgent but not important tasks
- **Delete**: not urgent/not important tasks

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Do	Decide
Not Important	Delegate	Delete

### 3-3-3 Method



The 3-3-3 is great for structuring a work day or tackling a big task:

1. Allocate **3 hours** for deep work on an important task with defined goals 
2. Complete **3 other urgent, shorter tasks**, like calls, quick meetings etc
3. Do **3 "maintenance" tasks**, like emails, sending messages, or reviewing tasks 



### Pomodoro Technique

1x Pomodoro

1. Select a task 
2. Set a timer for 25 mins
3. Work on the task until the timer rings
4. Take a 5-min break 

Steps 1-4 is 1 completed Pomodoro round – repeat the cycle to support you working towards completing a task.

We've adapted these techniques from a post by [Jason Macham](#) - explore and see if you can boost your own productivity!

## Movie Review – I Swear *by Kayleigh*



This weekend I went to go and see “**I Swear**” – what a film!

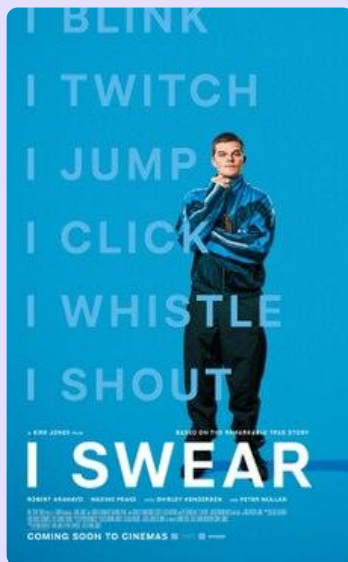
Based on **the true-life story of John Davidson** we see the real trials, tribulations and situations that people with **Tourette’s syndrome** have and still do face to this day.

This film amazingly managed to capture what living with Tourette’s is truly like, from the sometimes-funny moments to the worst moments and the true frustrations that comes with it. The **inspirational and heart-warming story** also included the love of people around you, who support you to be the best version of yourself and why allies are so important too. It may not be an easy watch, but it isn’t meant to be.

The aim of the film was to continue to **educate people on Tourette’s**, and it certainly did that. John’s dedication and continuation of educating people and making people aware of his condition has reminded me why it is so important, that no matter the condition, the continued efforts are the only way we can **develop understanding, create tolerance** and **promote inclusivity** within our society.

Leaving the cinema, I felt inspired to write this review; I feel impelled to **continue to challenge the stigma on disabilities**, to continue promoting awareness and accurate education on the different conditions so that ultimately, we can all live in a better, more inclusive society together.

Watch it at a cinema near you!



**Alexithymia** translates to ‘no words for emotion’ in Greek – from [@itsemykatie](https://www.instagram.com/itsemykatie)

## App Recommendation



**Speechify**  
Speechify Inc.  
£ free (in-app purchases)

[Speechify](https://speechify.com) is a text to speech app which lets you listen to so many formats of written text – emails, PDFs, reports, documents, articles – anything you need to read you can have it read aloud.

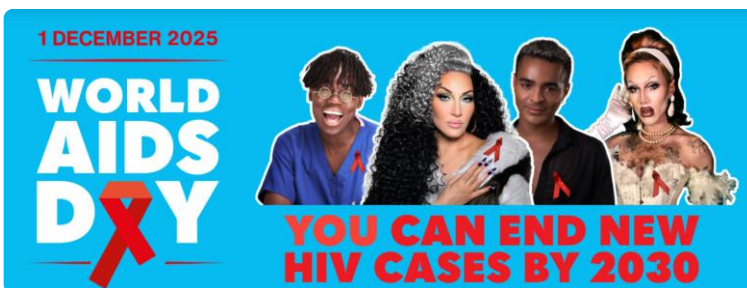
With naturally-sounding voices, text highlighting, screenshot or photos of text to audio you can listen to anything. Additional features include support with notetaking, saving audio bookmarks, integration across apps or programmes, and a selection of audiobooks – give it a try!

## World Aids Day

World AIDS Day is a global initiative that brings people together in the **fight against HIV and AIDS**. Since its inception in 1988, communities around the world have united each year to **challenge HIV-related stigma** and **honour** those who have lost their lives. In the UK, **over 105,000** people are currently living with HIV.



**UNAIDS** is the leading global advocate in the fight to end AIDS. As **strategic leaders** they coordinate global action, setting goals, researching, and providing data. They promote human rights and equity, calling for an **end to stigma** and discrimination by uniting governments, communities, and individuals.



### Further Reading

[World Aids Day](#)

[UNAIDS](#)

[National Aids Trust](#)

[Aidsmap](#)

[Terrance Higgins Trust](#)

There are some great films and documentaries available online or on streaming services to help you learn about HIV and AIDS. The BBC's **Understanding HIV, Science, Stigma and Sex** is available on [Youtube](#) as an informative discussion on living with HIV. Also keep your eyes out on the [Wellbeing Calendar](#) for our on-demand webinar for December's World Aids Day.



If you remember one thing, make it this:

### Undetectable = Untransmissible

This means that if someone has an undetectable viral load (i.e. they're taking their HIV medication correctly) they are **unable** to transmit HIV at all to another person. Not by bodily fluids. Not by blood. **Not at all.** #endthestigma

### Myths x and Facts ✓

- × HIV is a death sentence
- ✓ *People with HIV can live long and healthy lives*
- × If you have sex with someone with HIV, you will get it too
- ✓ *People taking HIV medication cannot pass on HIV (U=U)*
- × HIV and AIDS are the same thing
- ✓ *Everyone who has AIDS has HIV, many people with HIV will never develop AIDS*
- × You can be cured of HIV
- ✓ *There is a lot of research, but still no cure for HIV*

### World Aids Day is on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2025

Despite scientific advances in treatment, prevention, and in education about the conditions, HIV and AIDS remain largely stigmatised in society, so how can you help end the stigma?

- Wear a red ribbon
- Watch our [webinar](#), or read an article
- Support the day via social media



## Creativity Corner

*A selected piece of neurodiversity inspiration!*

Another set of artwork by the amazing [@superskillsadhd](https://twitter.com/superskillsadhd) with some gentle reminders for NDers.





## Teamworking Tips for Apprentices

It can be a challenge for neurodivergent individuals to settle into a team as we can experience additional challenges. A real underrated skill that can help you in your career is **being easy to work with**. Having a **“we” not a “me” mindset** can help you be collaborative, effective, and become a trusted team member. Here are some hints and tips taken from Brody Box on [LinkedIn](#) that may be helpful to developing your teamworking skills.



### Respect Other People's Time

Be prepared, keep things concise, and be mindful of other's time



### Don't Overcomplicate



Keep it simple, find solutions not problems

### Listen First Speak Second



Try and understand others before giving your view

### Take Ownership of Errors



Own up to your mistakes quickly; taking accountability earns respect

### Stay Flexible



Change can be difficult, be the calm in the storm and try to adapt when things change

## Being Easy To Work With

### Be Reliable

Do what you say you will, and on time if you can - consistency builds trust



### Project Positivity

Be that energy to lift others up - a good attitude is contagious



### Always Give Credit

Celebrate others' contributions, share the spotlight, don't take credit for others' work



### Adapt To Other People



Try and match communication styles, and adapt to team dynamics to avoid friction

### Be Open To Feedback

Listen to both the positive and constructive feedback, always looking for ways to improve



### Further Reading

[The Overlooked Career Skill That Drives Success](#)



## Review - QA Apprenticeship Neurodiversity Network

We've held two more amazing Networking Sessions, book [here](#) to join us!



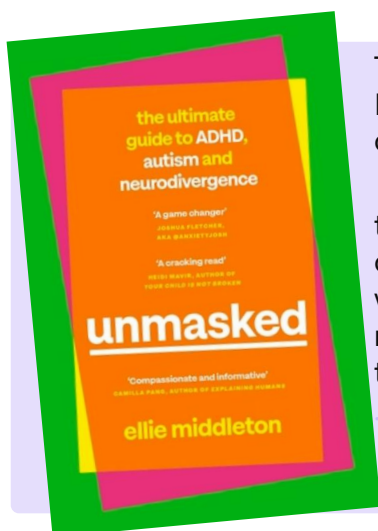
October's session had a slightly different rhythm as we were looking at **Hormones in Motion – The Neurodivergent Experience**. In the breakout room we had some teaching on hormone fluctuation and patterns for both sexes at varying life stages, before opening the floor for discussion.

In both sessions we held **Parent's Corner**, which is an amazing space for parents of ND children, or parents with a ND lived experience themselves to come and share and support one another.

For September's Networking session we explored **Nurturing Wellbeing in a Neurodiverse World**. We discussed the challenges of navigating mental health with a neurodivergent experience, sharing personal experience, wellbeing strategies, and highlighting the importance of self-awareness and linking in with external support when needed. The session ended with a guided breathing activity from Clare from Safeguarding.



## A Good Read



This issue's book recommendation is **Unmasked**, by **Ellie Middleton**. Ellie was diagnosed with autism and ADHD in 2021 and found like a lot of us who have been diagnosed later in life 'what now'?

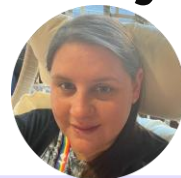
This book is available in paperback or audiobook and is designed to serve as a supportive guide to dip in and out of or read cover to cover. Designed to support both NDers and those supporting people with a neurodivergence this book covers loads of areas including masking, navigating the diagnostic process, sensory overload, and how to manage in the workplace. It's a really well written guide for those new to neurodivergence or who are newly diagnosed. Her second book **Unmasked: How to Be You** is also a recommended great read!

[Book Link](#)

## Neurocrafted: Built to Think Differently

In Issue 3 we explored the mental processes involved in cognition. This issue builds on this by showing how these processes are **grouped into cognitive domains** or categories to help us understand and measure different aspects of thinking.

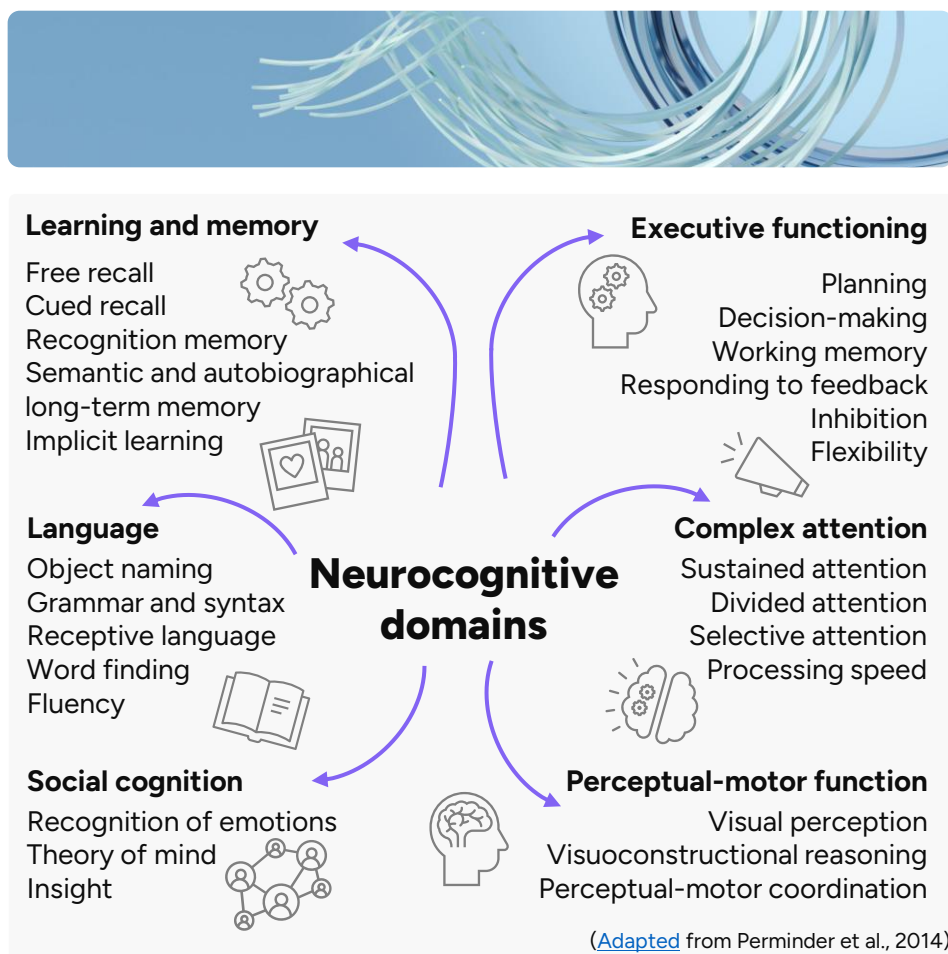
*by Kirstin*



One of the most widely used frameworks for defining these domains is the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition). Used by UK mental health professionals, the DSM-5 outlines **six core cognitive domains** to assess conditions such as autism and ADHD. Each domain represents a distinct area of mental function, helping us better understand how individuals learn, focus, communicate, and interact.

### The Six Cognitive Domains:

- **Complex Attention:**  
Focusing, filtering distractions, and sustaining concentration
- **Executive Function:**  
Planning, decision-making, and problem-solving
- **Learning and Memory:**  
Acquiring and recalling information
- **Language:**  
Understanding and expressing ideas
- **Perceptual-Motor Function:** Coordinating sensory input with movement
- **Social Cognition:**  
Interpreting social cues and understanding others

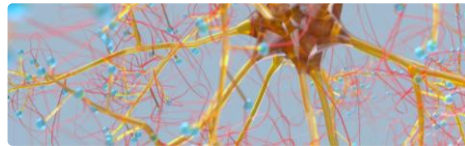


Cognitive domains are widely used in clinical assessments and are increasingly adopted in education and workplace settings to support neurodiverse individuals. By **identifying strengths and challenges**, they enable more **personalised and inclusive support** across different contexts. Next issue we'll look at how these domains can be applied to support a neuroinclusive environment.



## ND&D In Focus: Fibromyalgia

*Our monthly dive into a neurodivergence or a disability*



Fibromyalgia is a **chronic neurological illness** which causes pain and tenderness throughout the body, it typically affects more women than men. There is currently **no cure** for fibromyalgia, symptoms can be managed and treated to make the condition easier to live with.

There is **no known cause** of Fibromyalgia; it causes widespread pain across the body, other symptoms include fatigue, sleep difficulties, brain fog, muscle and joint stiffness, numbness or tingling in the arms and legs, and digestive issues.

**Despite being difficult to diagnose fibromyalgia is one of the most common causes of pain in the UK**

The term **fibromyalgia** comes from its key characteristics: "fibro" refers to **fibrous tissues** like tendons and ligaments, "my" relates to **muscles**, and "algia" means **pain**.

**Treatment** for fibromyalgia may include exercise, cognitive therapy, pain management, or medication. Some people may be referred to a pain management clinic to receive an assessment and specialist advice.

**Relaxation, rest, and energy management** may help with symptoms. Trying to keep active and doing moderate aerobic exercise a couple of times a week can also help.



### Further Reading:

[Fibromyalgia: Symptoms, Diagnosis & Treatment](#)


[Fibromyalgia - Symptoms – NHS](#)

[FMA UK - FMA UK - UK's National charity for fibromyalgia](#)

Many apprentices have a diagnosis of fibromyalgia and manage this condition alongside their work and studies. **Access To Work** may support with ergonomic furniture or tech accessories, assistive technology, or adjustments to working patterns may be considered for the workplace.

Students may require **additional time, attendance** may be affected, they may struggle on some days with **workshop engagement** and may need additional breaks.

## Movember: It's All About The Men

The month of November – also known as Movember – seeks to raise awareness for men's health issue as it's **Men's Mental Health Month** with **International Men's Day** celebrated on November 19<sup>th</sup>. (You may notice an increase in facial hair this month!) 

With a focus on **men's health and wellbeing** this November gives opportunity to highlight the challenges, issues, and contributions of men around the world. Every day men deal with life's pressures and expectations, with many experiencing impacts on mental health and suicidal thoughts during their lifetime

Organisations for men's wellbeing are growing, with places such as [Andy's Man Club](#) advocating "**it's okay to talk**" and providing a safe space for men to meet and access peer support. International Men's Day is a great time for men to be reminded to put themselves first sometimes, to link in with others, take care of both their physical and mental health, and to challenge stereotypes of masculinity which can lead to great pressure.



### Links:

[Movember](#)

[UK Men's Day](#)

[Andy's Man Club](#)

### The 6 Pillars of International Men's Day:

- To promote positive male **role models**
- To celebrate men's positive **contributions** to society
- To focus on men's **health and wellbeing**
- To **highlight discrimination** against men
- To improve gender relations and promote **gender equality**
- To create a **safer better world**



*The theme for this year's International Men's Day is "supporting men and boys".*



Movember is a **global movement** tackling **mental health, suicide, and prostate and testicular cancer**. Check out [Movember](#) for events close to you, consider a fundraiser in your workplace, or start a conversation around men's mental health and wellbeing.

Join our **Men's Mental Health** session on 28<sup>th</sup> November [here](#).







*This time of year can be a real mix of emotions; some people delight in the festivities and love attending events whilst other can experience sensory overload, impacts on mental health, and find socialising overwhelming. If you are struggling whilst QA is closed for the Holidays our **Safeguarding Team** will be available each day 12-2pm - keep an eye out for the notifications!*

## Enjoying the Festivities



There can be some amazing **sensory joys** to experience this time of year: multicoloured lights, music, fragrant candles, festivities, celebration food and drink, and traditions which can bring comfort or excitement.

This can be a great time of year to **connect**: spending time with family and friends, workplace celebrations, meeting new people, reconnecting with others or attending cultural or events in your local area. It can also be a great time to maybe reconnect with yourself and spend some time enjoying the things you love.

Lots of people have **traditions** they follow this time of year, whether it is around specific events, or getting ready to set those new year resolutions. Whatever your own personal traditions just embrace them! Even if they are different from the mainstream way of doing things.

With the longer nights, and shorter days it's a great time to slow down and savour the season. **Mindful moments** like snuggling down with a hot chocolate, journalling, practicing gratitude, doing something creative, or enjoying an outdoor walk can really bring some joy!



## Surviving the Festivities

Whilst the festive season is usually associated with joy and kindness for mankind, for many of us the **realities of this time of year** can be a different experience. **Sensory overload** can be a real challenge for some people; you can use strategies such as navigating events to find quieter areas, managing your time, taking breaks, or investing in noise-cancelling headphones to help manage.

Whilst it is the time of year to connect, some people can really struggle with **social fatigue or social anxiety** in larger groups. It's okay to need to take a break, and you don't have to say yes to every invite. It's also important to acknowledge the additional **financial and emotional stress** that this time of year can bring. Try setting yourself a realistic budget, maybe DIY some gifts, say "no" if things feel too overwhelming, and make sure to take breaks and recharge afterwards.

Sometimes we can also have the false thought that **everyone else is having an amazing time**, when we're not. Seasonal movies can be amazing, but they don't reflect the norm. The good news is that **this is just a season**. So whether you're enjoying or surviving the festivities make sure you look after yourself; keep yourself safe, reach out if you need support, do some positive things for yourself, and give yourself permission to rest, even if joy isn't front and centre.

## Upcoming Events:

Book onto all of our upcoming [Wellbeing Calendar](#) events [here](#).

- Check out **The Prevent Pod** podcast, brought to you by our Prevent Lead Jaspreet from Safeguarding; the next episode is due in December
- For **World Aids Day** on **December 1<sup>st</sup>** there is an on-demand webinar available
- **Introduction to Neurodiversity** sessions for those new to neurodiversity - **November 26<sup>th</sup>** and **December 18<sup>th</sup>**
- Join us **28<sup>th</sup> November** for a **Men's Mental Health Session**
- We would love to see you at our **QA Apprenticeship Neurodiversity Network** sessions!
  - **19<sup>th</sup> November – Mind the Message:** verbal and written communication in an ND world
  - **17<sup>th</sup> December – Who do you think you are?**



## Transgender Awareness Week

November 13<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>

Transgender Awareness Week is dedicated to **celebrate and raise awareness** of the transgender community. It seeks to highlight the challenges they face, including discrimination, healthcare barriers, and violence, and to celebrate gender identity, trans history, and trans rights. November 20<sup>th</sup> is **Transgender Day of Remembrance**.



[GLAAD](#) has some **tips** to support you becoming a **better ally** to transgender people. By becoming a better ally "your actions will help change the culture, making society a better, safer place for transgender people and for all people (trans or not) who do not conform to conventional gender expectations" (GLAAD, 2025)



## 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 receive support with us but are not required to have a formal diagnostic report for us to put reasonable adjustments in place. 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](mailto:Specialist.LearningTeam@qa.com)

### DA Learning Support (Levels 4-7)

[Self Referral Form](#)

Email – [DASpecialist.LearningTeam@qa.com](mailto: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](#)