



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government



# Getting the right training to the right people in the right way

## Thematic report on the Neurodivergence Workforce

March 2024



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How organisations prepare and what skills and learning workforces need, is to some extent led by national programmes and national priorities. However, to ensure a sustainable, flexible, diverse neurodivergent aware workforce we need to look at the current shape of the workforce; its undergraduate and post graduate training, working hours, ageing and support workers and recognise that although this looks different across different professions the need for neurodivergence knowledge and learning is very similar.

### Background

Over the last 18 months Welsh Government policy has expanded its focus on autism to include other Neurodivergent (ND) conditions with the aim of improving awareness and achieving parity in service provision. An **independent review of the demand, capacity** and design of services for children, young people and adults has been undertaken, the outcomes of which forms the basis for the new **Neurodivergence Improvement Programme**.

Integral to the success of the Neurodivergence Improvement Programme is a competent, confident and well-resourced workforce. To inform the programme regarding any change required in learning and development for staff, Welsh Government are working with Health Education Improvement Wales (HEIW), Social Care Wales (SCW), Head of Education, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), The Royal Colleges, People with Lived Experience and the Wales National Neurodivergence Team (NNT) (previously known as the National Autism Team) to deliver the learning and changes identified by the workforce.

Our first task was to capture the current learning and development on neurodivergence across organisations and disciplines, look at outcomes of training, gaps and new ways of learning. We developed and circulated a short questionnaire, the subsequent report of findings offered constructive recommendations for next steps to improve training provision and going forward ensure staff felt appropriately equipped and were receiving the right learning to undertake the work expected of them.

We made a bold statement on concluding the report by suggesting what was required was for service providers to recognise their responsibility to ensure their

whole workforce was knowledgeable, confident, competent and supported to undertake the work they were employed to do.

Building on the recommendations of the report we organised, with support from HEIW, SCW, NNT and WG Education colleagues a workforce workshop, intended to bring together workforce managers across all organisations. The priorities of the workshop were to understand training needs, gaps in provision and accessibility.

It was evident from the attendance at the workshop that the commitment to improve neurodivergence learning by workforce managers is tangible. The understanding that neurodivergence is everyone's business, including service managers is clear. With this continued drive for improvement and knowledge, developing a wider workforce with specific training will ensure continuity and the delivery of prudent care going forward. This knowledgeable workforce will be the foundation on which to challenge current service provision, embrace change, deliver innovative care and build sustainable integrated services for the future.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the organisations who supported in the delivery of the workshop and the health, social care and education workforce representatives who offered invaluable knowledge and experience to the outcomes of the workforce training workshop.

## **Overview**

This thematic report provides a summary of the outcomes from the virtual Workforce Workshop held on Friday 8 March 2024.

The aims were to

- To explain what learning currently looks like
- To talk through ideas
- To get initial feedback
- To discuss partnership working and next steps

## **Thematic Discussions and Outcomes**

### **Training resources**

Ensuring the right content and accessibility to training is paramount. It is often the case that staff attend training courses only to find the content is not applicable to their area of work. These issues generated a great deal of discussion regarding the quality, accreditation and production of training material. High in importance was ensuring the development and delivery of training had a lived experience approach (expert through experience).

It was felt that being empathetic and nonjudgmental and tackling the stigma that remains or the unconscious bias that people might have, were some areas that

needed to be addressed. However, improving those skill sets and building them into e-learning in relation to neurodivergence would be useful.

An important element of the training material was consistency of language. With the increasing development of multidisciplinary / multiagency service provision, it was seen as important to ensure all training used the same terminology and language to reduce ambiguity.

Additionally, due to the increase in multiagency / multidisciplinary working there were suggestions that regions could pool together to share training sessions, theming and targeting specific topics or specialisms. This could include different levels of training and knowledge needs.

There was an ask from workforce leads and managers for better promotion and raising awareness of key training dates for existing training and learning such as, communities of practice and to make available a directory of providers who deliver good quality training. A one resource point was suggested so that when commissioning training there was credibility and consistency throughout Wales.

Additionally, a weekly training bulleting to raise awareness was discussed. There was also discussion regarding how to get the balance right with mandatory training especially with a workforce that is already feeling pressured. There were excellent examples shared of how workforce managers had increased the neurodivergence training across their organisation without mandating the topic.

## **Specialist training**

Although there is a drive towards neurodivergence being everybody's business and the need for understanding and awareness across the whole workforce, there were discussions regarding developing certain specific training such as a tool kit for manager around asking the right questions and how to make reasonable adjustments to support colleagues and employees in the workplace.

We know that there is already some specialist training however, it was felt that this was again not always meeting the needs of specific teams. Training for specialists such as Speech and Language therapists (SALT), LD / Child Social Workers, Occupational Therapists, Health Visitors, Midwives was highlighted as a gap in training. Work has already commenced with SALT courses including both neurodivergence and augmented communication aids for non-verbal individuals being incorporated into undergraduate training.

The need for training on specific conditions was raised and although this would be a prerequisite for diagnosticians it was considered a more medical approach. Awareness of conditions was important but the needs of the individual regardless of diagnosis was seen as more in line with the social model of disability.

The development of specific training or knowledge in neurodivergence for health and social workers working in mental health services, undertaking mental capacity assessments was identified. As was training for social workers undertaking family assessments for child protections processes. Many of these practitioners are highly

skilled and knowledgeable but we need to build on this with specific training courses to upskill staff to understand and when required, view from a neurodivergent perspective.

There was also some discussion regarding the advanced practitioner courses and embedding neurodivergence into these courses.

## **Governance**

Governance was seen in many different ways, from ensuring that senior managers understand the requirement for appropriate training for staff to undertake the work expected of them, to the support for staff identifying as neurodivergent.

One area highlighted was to ensure senior leadership received appropriate training, knowledge and understanding so that there was buy in from the very top to support workforce development and service change.

The need to build in supervision for staff being positively supported with comments that it needed to be incorporated into the design of training and not as a standalone or afterthought was seen as important.

HEIW also highlighted that there are already key themes in learning contracts around compassionate leadership and quality improvement and these are being embedded into all the learning that is under development.

It was seen as important for workforce managers within organisations to undertake a training needs analysis and map against a national training framework was raised. The National Neurodivergence Team are currently reviewing their training needs analysis framework and are looking at developing a national training framework to work alongside.

Whilst undergraduate learning can be controlled by universities and organisations such as HEIW which commission the learning, it was appreciated that it would not include all the workforce but for this cohort it was suggested that working with partners to raise awareness of the resources and training, develop placement opportunities to help embed skills and knowledge for our future professionals would be the way forward. There was also conversation regarding mandating neurodivergence training as part of induction training for new staff which could be incorporated into Equality training.

There was a wider conversation regarding improving accessibility to digital systems to support e learning, with examples of busy wards with no computer access discussed. It was felt that the way forward would be to create more flexible learning models that still meet regulatory standards.

## **Workforce**

We have an obligation to support our workforce, to develop their careers and to develop their skills we know that retention of staff is an issue in Wales. When staff

can see they are being invested in as well as being offered opportunity to provide a better, more holistic service there is every chance that they will remain.

To build a resilient and supported workforce there is a need for managers to understand and ensure support for their own neurodivergent workforce. Research informs us that a large proportion of neurodivergent people will work in caring professions. It is inevitable that all the organisations being represented at the workshop would have neurodivergent individuals in their workforce.

A suggested area for opportunity was the introduction of neurodivergence champions within hospitals, community services, education or any public service similar to dementia champions.

Facilitating and joining up ND and Disabled groups was suggested as a concept to take forward.

It was identified as important for managers to ensure there was a safe place for neurodivergent colleagues and employees to utilise and that this should be promoted as a support resource.

[Neurodivergence services workforce training questionnaire – December 2023 English](#)

[Neurodivergence services workforce training questionnaire – December 2023 Welsh](#)

## HEIW

HEIW discussed work based learning and apprenticeships for future planning and sustainability of the workforce which covered both health and social care up to learning level four.

Developing an ND aspect to these courses could be shared learning with Education colleagues to support the development of Learning Support Assistants.

HEIW are planning to undertake sessions with Heads of schools in Universities to better prepare students regarding neurodivergent patients and members of the public. Looking at accessibility to services and how to better support individuals through the care system.

They also host resources in terms of bite size education, which are online resources. These meet with a rigorous Quality Assurance process. There are currently some ND resources available and HEIW are exploring how to host these and offer access to the workforce in Wales.

There was reference to the learning objectives set out by Welsh Government Education Colleagues in terms of the importance of overlapping physical health, mental health and co-occurring conditions with neurodivergence. This was seen as incredibly important in terms of prudent care. We know that many neurodivergent people are sitting in services that are not necessarily appropriate or may be seen by staff who are not looking at their needs through a neurodivergence lens.

## National Neurodivergence Team

Offered an overview of the resources available on their website including recorded Communities of Practice sessions. [www.autismwales.org](http://www.autismwales.org)

They explained that their eLearning modules were now available on health, social care and education learning platforms and that they were working closely with HEIW to upload these resources and develop new modules on to Y Ty Dysgu.

## Next Steps

- Create task and finish groups to look at specific content:
  - Senior management training.
  - Health Visitor, Social work, Mental health, midwifery, therapists, teachers, GP's, support workers.
  - Supporting work colleagues.
- Link with University course co-ordinators.
- Work with the Royal Colleges / Deanery's.
- Improve links with people with lived experience with a view to developing resources.
- Link with Cwm Taf University Health Board regarding their work on shared language.
- Development of management toolkit to support neurodivergent staff.
- Link with WG Education colleagues to develop a tripartite suite of learning modules which include the whole school approach, child development and neurodivergence.

Once again thank you for attending and contributing to the workshop. If you are interested in being a part of any of the next steps, please get in touch [Neurodiversity@gov.wales](mailto:Neurodiversity@gov.wales)