

Proposal to Improve Accessibility of Union Activities for People Who Are Neurodivergent

Proposer: **Ariana Sadr-Hashemi** (Mental Health Liberation Officer)

Seconder: **Michael Edwards** (RCSU President)

The Union Notes:

- [1] Neurodiversity is an umbrella term used to describe “the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017). In particular, neurodiversity refers to people who learn and process information differently although there are a range of definitions with regards to the diagnoses to which it refers. For the purposes of this paper, neurodiversity will be used to refer to the following diagnoses: dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- [2] The Union Strategy recognizes the importance of inclusivity in its work. It officially states that “we will tear down any barrier that keeps you from our opportunities and our democracy ... and we recognise that our strength and our power comes from the diversity of our membership.” (Imperial College Union, 2017). However, accessibility improvements are not explicitly mentioned in Our Plan 2017-18 (Imperial College Union, 2017).
- [3] People with neurodivergent conditions that have lasted, or will last, over 12 months are defined as disabled for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 (Prospect Union, 2017). Hence, they are entitled to reasonable adjustments and an environment free from both direct and indirect discrimination.
- [4] Our Plan 2017-18 outlines plans to review the Union website (FY3: Democracy and Governance), improve eVoting administration systems (FY3: Systems), review online and printed advice content (YS1: Advice), revise CSP inductions and update the training manuals and quizzes (FD3: Student Development) (Imperial College Union, 2017).

The Union Believes:

- [1] Neurodiversity in an organisation is beneficial, allowing for a wide variety of perspectives and talents. Because of this, the Union should be constantly striving to ensure that all Union activity is as accessible to people who are neurodivergent as possible.
- [2] Inclusivity of Union activity should be a major guiding factor of Union annual plans going forward, and be considered for all strategy sections (For You, For Your Support, For Your Development, and For Your Voice).
- [3] All actions referenced in Union Notes Section [4] would be good opportunities to ensure that Union online content and training meet guidelines to ensure it is accessible to neurodivergent people.
- [4] Due to the lapsing and re-evaluation of many policies, it is a convenient time to ensure that all Union documentation available to the public meets guidelines to ensure it is accessible to neurodivergent people.

The Union Resolves:

- [1] All documentation produced by Union council, its subcommittees and any future working groups, should meet the guidelines for Dyslexia accessibility outlined by the British Dyslexia Association, excluding the need for cream/pastel coloured paper. Efforts should be made to ensure that meeting spaces for these groups meet the accessibility standards set out by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network during booking. Official policy should be drawn up on how people can attend these meetings if they cannot be present in person (e.g. video call) and mandatory 2-minute rest breaks held every 45-minutes. As much as possible, meetings should be ensured to have: a detailed agenda, meeting times limited to 2 hours and meetings not held at early hours (i.e. before 10am).
- [2] All documentation produced by the Constituent Unions should meet the guidelines for Dyslexia accessibility outlined by the British Dyslexia Association, excluding the need for cream/pastel coloured paper. Efforts should be made to ensure that meeting spaces for these groups meet the accessibility standards set out by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network during booking. Official policy should be drawn up on how people can attend these meetings if they cannot be present in person (e.g.

video call) and mandatory 2-minute rest breaks held every 45-minutes. As much as possible, meetings should be ensured to have: a detailed agenda, meeting times limited to 2 hours and meetings not held at early hours (i.e. before 10am).

- [3] All documentation produced by the Management Groups should meet the guidelines for Dyslexia accessibility outlined by the British Dyslexia Association, excluding the need for cream/pastel coloured paper. Efforts should be made to ensure that meeting spaces for these groups meet the accessibility standards set out by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network during booking. Official policy should be drawn up on how people can attend these meetings if they cannot be present in person (e.g. video call) and mandatory 2-minute rest breaks held every 45-minutes. As much as possible, meetings should be ensured to have: a detailed agenda, meeting times limited to 2 hours and meetings not held at early hours (i.e. before 10am).
- [4] Cream/pastel coloured paper meeting the requirements as outlined by the British Dyslexia Association should be purchased by the Union. For all printed documents for the aforementioned groups, an option to have said documents printed on this paper should be offered.
- [5] A review should be conducted in order to produce a timeline for the Union to fully transition to using appropriate paper. This review should also include an evaluation into other ways neurodivergence inclusivity could be implemented within the Union (e.g. ensuring clear procedures for all Union activities/use of Union resources).
- [6] A review should be conducted in order to evaluate the possibility of training and/or resources being offered to Union volunteers on increasing the inclusivity of their activities (e.g. provided through CSP induction sessions, training manuals and quizzes or other student development initiatives).
- [7] The website redesign referenced in Union Notes [4] should include an evaluation of how the guidelines on accessible website design outlined by the British Dyslexia Association can be implemented, and a further review of the accessibility of the website as a whole should be conducted.
- [8] Information should be gathered on the experiences of neurodivergent students so that their intersectional experiences can be acknowledged and used to inform future accessibility reviews.

Further reading:

British Dyslexia Association Guidelines:

http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/About_Us/policies/Dyslexia_Style_Guide.pdf

Autistic Self Advocacy Network White Paper (See pg. 8 onwards for active guidelines):

<http://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/whitepaper-Increasing-Neurodiversity-in-Disability-and-Social-Justice-Advocacy-Groups.pdf>

TUC Report on Autism in the Workplace (See g. 43 for active guidelines):

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Autism.pdf>

References:

Imperial College Union. (2017). *Our Plan 2017-18*. London: Imperial College Union.

Imperial College Union. (2017). *Our Strategy 2017-20*. London: Imperial College Union.

Oxford English Dictionary. (2017, November 8). *Neurodiversity Definition*. Retrieved from Living Oxford English Dictionary:

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/neurodiversity>

Prospect Union. (2017, November 8). *Neurodiversity: a guide to the law*. Retrieved from Prospect Union Website: <https://www.prospect.org.uk/at-work/neurodiversity/law>