

2026



# NEURODIVERGENT LANGUAGE TEACHERS

A lived experience study

**Global  
White Paper**

BOELO VAN DER POOL

***“I didn’t do this to sell. I want us to work together and make something happen, not just talk about it. Imagine a society where neurodivergent teachers can thrive.”***

Boelo van der Pool

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## Data / Disclaimer

Survey responses were collected via Google Forms between November 2025 and February 2026. Findings describe patterns within the respondent dataset (N=221) and should not be interpreted as prevalence estimates for the language teaching profession as a whole.

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The field of English Language Teaching has long prided itself on being inclusive. We speak of differentiated instruction, of meeting learners' needs, of building classrooms that welcome every kind of learner. And yet, for far too long, that welcome has been extended in one direction only, toward the learner and not the teacher.

This white paper asks the question: What about the teachers?

Neurodiversity, the natural variation in human neurological development that encompasses conditions such as dyslexia, ADHD, autism spectrum conditions, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, and others, is not rare. It is estimated that around one in five people has a neurodiverse profile. That means neurodiverse teachers are not an exception in our schools, educational institutions and professional communities. They are teachers, directors of studies, course designers and so much more. They are *you*. They are, in many cases, the teachers whose lived experiences of being neurodivergent have brought more creative and empathetic approaches to language teaching; however, these teachers remain largely invisible in our professional discourse.

The literature on neurodiversity in education focuses mainly on learners. How do we support the dyslexic learner reading an exam paper? How do we adapt tasks for the learner with ADHD? How do we help our dyspraxic learner write? These are crucial questions, and the research conducted around them has genuinely transformed teaching practice. But, somewhere along the way, we seemed to have created an image of neurodivergent people as the recipients of support, not the providers of it.

Neurodiverse teachers of English navigate a professional world that was not designed with them in mind. Training programmes rarely account for the candidate who processes written instructions differently, or who finds the demands of observed teaching uniquely stressful. Institutional requirements such as timetabling, marking deadlines, staff meetings, emailing can place disproportionate burdens on those whose executive function, sensory processing, or social communication works differently. Performance management frameworks may penalise working styles that are different from a neurotypical norm, even when outcomes for learners are excellent.

The cost of this is borne not just by individual teachers, but by the profession as a whole. When neurodiverse teachers hide their difficulties, burn out quietly, or leave the teaching profession altogether, we lose something significant: their distinctive perspectives on language, on learning, teaching, on what it means to struggle with something difficult as an adult and a professional.

Many neurodiverse teachers bring a particular depth of understanding to their learners precisely because they have experienced, first-hand, the effort it takes to acquire and use language in a world that expects a certain kind of fluency, a certain kind of mind, a certain kind of thinking.

Supporting neurodiverse teachers is not an issue that should be on the margins of professional development. It is central to any serious commitment to inclusion in ELT. An institution cannot claim to be truly inclusive if that inclusivity applies only to those enrolled in its courses. Equity in education means equity for the whole educational community, the people who deliver learning and those who receive it.

What would genuine support look like? It begins with visibility, with creating safe professional spaces where teachers can disclose their neurodivergency without fear of stigma or professional penalty. It continues with flexible systems in assessment, communication, and workload management that recognise there is no single right way to be an effective teacher. It becomes even more relevant with research into the experiences of neurodiverse ELT professionals, that showcases their strategies and insights, and that build an evidence base for a change with the ELT profession.

This white paper is part of that work. It does not offer easy answers, because the questions it asks are not easy ones. Those questions must be asked, and our field is overdue in asking them. The conversation about neurodiversity in English Language Teaching must include every person in the (class)room.

**Aleksandra Popovski Golubovikj**  
*Teacher Educator*  
*IATEFL Past President*



***“My explanations are out-of-the-box and unconventional. Some students need two lessons to adjust—one to acclimatise, then they thrive. Watching autistic kids and ADHD/dyslexic kids finally grasp the lesson and remember the information... it’s like lifting a veil from their eyes. They’re bright, their minds are sharp, and they have a hunger for learning.”***

English Teacher (ADHD & Autism) - South Africa

## **Acknowledgements**

This white paper exists because hundreds of teachers chose to share their experience. To every neurodivergent language teacher who took the survey — and to everyone who shared it, forwarded it, or encouraged colleagues to participate — a big thank you. Your openness is the reason this conversation can finally move forward.

I would also like to thank Leon Franzen for supporting the research process, and Javier Beamuz, Martin Bloomfield, Alejandro del Nogal, Nick du Preez, and Mike Hogan for proofreading and layout support. I’m grateful for your time, your care, and your attention to detail.

A special thank you to Aleksandra Popovski Golubovikj for writing the foreword, and to the colleagues and industry partners who offered short endorsements and helped amplify this work.

Finally, while many people contributed to shaping this project, any mistakes or omissions remain my responsibility.

Boelo van der Pool

After a very successful presentation on Dyslexia and ADHD in the language classroom at the 2025 IATEFL conference in Edinburgh, one of the teachers in the room came up to me with a simple question that stayed with me.

She said: **“I loved your presentation about neurodivergent students... but what about me?”**

She had ADHD. And as we talked, it became clear that her ADHD affected her work in many ways — sometimes positively, sometimes negatively — in the classroom, in preparation, and in the wider workplace.

That short conversation made something painfully obvious: there is still a major story in our profession that remains largely untold — **the story of neurodivergent language teachers.**

For years, our sector has been working hard to better understand and support neurodivergent learners — students with dyslexia, ADHD, autism, and other neurotypes. But we have rarely, if ever, asked the same questions about the people sustaining those inclusive classrooms every day: the teachers.

If we want inclusion to be sustainable, we cannot only talk about learners. We also need to talk about workplaces. In other words: not only inclusive learning environments, but also **supportive teaching environments.**

This is why I started a global survey among neurodivergent language teachers. To date, it has generated **221 valid responses** from teachers working in diverse contexts around the world.

This white paper is the first result of that survey. The aim is not to label teachers, but to better understand a reality that is already present in our schools and organisations.

My hope is that this paper helps to start an open conversation, raise awareness, offer a leadership lens, and open the door to further research and development in the area of neuro-inclusive teacher support.

*Boelo van der Pool*  
*April, 2026*



This Global White Paper shares early insights from a survey of **221 neurodivergent language teachers** worldwide (strongly Europe-based). The goal is to make teacher neurodivergence visible in our sector and explore what more neuro-inclusive workplaces could look like. The findings reported here describe patterns **within this dataset** and are intended to support reflection and action across language education organisations.



## Key insights (from the survey)

- **Neurodivergence profiles in this dataset are often complex:** around **70% of respondents selected ADHD**, and many report co-occurring conditions—highlighting that support needs are rarely “one-size-fits-all.”
- **Late identification is common:** among formally diagnosed respondents, only a small minority report receiving a diagnosis during school age, suggesting many teachers navigate their careers for years without understanding their neurotype.
- **There is a clear CPD gap:** **89%** would like professional development tailored to neurodivergent teachers, while only **8%** report having regular workplace training on neurodiversity.
- **Disclosure is shaped by safety and systems:** **42%** have not disclosed at work and only **19%** have disclosed widely; fear of stigma and uncertainty about how to disclose are key barriers.
- **Goodwill does not always translate into support:** while **52%** of disclosers report supportive reactions, practical outcomes are often limited—only **16%** report receiving adjustments, and many report “no change” or “verbal support only.”
- **Workplace friction is often structural:** unclear processes and excessive workload are among the most commonly reported barriers, alongside predictable pressure points such as sensory demands, time management, admin load, long meetings, and reading-heavy preparation.

### What this paper is / is not

**This paper is:** a leadership-focused snapshot of patterns reported by ND language teachers (N=221).

**This paper is not:** a prevalence study of all language teachers.

## ✓ What this means for language education leaders

These insights point to a leadership opportunity: improving staff wellbeing and inclusion is not primarily about “special treatment”, but about **reducing friction and increasing clarity** for everyone.

Leaders may want to begin by asking:

- **Do our systems create avoidable friction?** (unclear processes, admin overload, meeting culture, last-minute changes)
- **Do we have a safe pathway for disclosure?** (clear options, confidentiality, “how to disclose” guidance, a named contact)
- **Are adjustments normalised and easy to request?** (not dependent on confidence, seniority, or personal relationships)
- **Are we investing in the right CPD?** (high demand exists; provision is currently uneven)
- **Are we recognising strengths as well as challenges?** (many respondents report strengths that are real assets when conditions are right)

## ➤ What happens next

This white paper is a starting point, not an endpoint. The next phase of the project will deepen understanding through

- **follow-up interviews** on lived experience.
- a **screening-based prevalence study** in partnership with language schools.

Interested in supporting the next phase? Contact: [boelo@boelovanderpool.com](mailto:boelo@boelovanderpool.com)

# 1

# INCLUSION CAN'T STOP WITH STUDENTS

Many schools have already begun to take neurodivergent students seriously, although we're still far from "done" with that part of inclusion.

But if we want truly inclusive education, we also need to look at the people delivering it. Teachers are not neutral "tools" in the system. They are human beings working under pressure, carrying workload, managing energy, and navigating workplace cultures. If neurodiversity is naturally present in our learners, it is statistically unlikely to be absent among those who teach them.

That is what this white paper is about: **making teacher neurodiversity visible**, not as a trend or a label, but as a workplace reality with consequences, but most of all with opportunities.



## From goodwill to systems

In conversations about inclusion, many workplaces rely heavily on goodwill. A supportive manager. A caring team. A "we understand you" attitude.

**Goodwill matters. But goodwill alone is not a system.**

One of the clearest messages emerging from this survey is that a workplace can be supportive in tone and still fail to translate that support into practical conditions that reduce friction. Teachers may receive empathy, but not adjustments. They may be understood, but still be overwhelmed by processes, admin load, meeting culture, or sensory environments.

This is why this paper repeatedly returns to a central leadership idea: **Supportive reactions are not the same as supportive workplaces.**

If the sector wants inclusion to be sustainable, it needs structures that do not depend on individuals. It needs clarity, predictable systems, sensible workloads, realistic admin expectations, and environments where teachers can thrive.

There is another reason this topic matters: the story we tell about neurodiversity in teaching shapes what happens next. If neurodivergence is framed only as a problem, workplaces will treat it as something to hide, fix, or accommodate reluctantly. Teachers will stay silent. Leaders will avoid the conversation. And talent will be lost, quietly, through fatigue, misunderstanding, and unnecessary friction.

**But if neurodivergence is also framed as an opportunity, as a source of strengths, teaching assets, and different ways of thinking, something changes.**

- Teachers feel safer to understand themselves.
- Leaders become curious rather than defensive.
- Schools start redesigning systems, not “correcting people.”
- Inclusion becomes a quality strategy, not a compliance exercise.

This is not about romanticising neurodivergence. The frictions are real. But it is about refusing to let the conversation be only negative, especially in a profession where human talent is the main value we offer.



## Why now?

The industry is changing fast, with platforms that offer cheap, instant, 24/7 language learning. But what those platforms cannot replace is the human value of a great teacher: the ability to notice, connect, adapt, motivate, and create a learning relationship where students feel capable.

That is why **teacher working conditions are not a “soft topic.”** They are a strategic topic. If schools want quality, retention, and reputation, they need environments where their best teaching talent can emerge and thrive, not environments where talent is drained by avoidable friction.

This white paper is structured around three simple questions:

1. **The who:** Who participated in this survey and what contexts do they work in?
2. **The what:** What do neurodivergent teachers experience in strengths, frictions, disclosure patterns, barriers, and support systems?
3. **The opportunity:** What does this mean for leaders and for the industry, and how do we stop wasting teaching talent through one-size-fits-all workplaces?

To my knowledge, this is among the first global survey-based projects focused specifically on neurodivergent language teachers. It is not the final word. But it is an important beginning. Because **once you see this topic, you can't unsee it.** And if our industry wants inclusion to be more than a classroom slogan, then the staffroom and the workplace have to become part of the inclusion story too.

# 2

## HOW THIS PAPER WAS BUILT

This white paper started in a very simple way: with **curiosity**, a **question**, and a growing feeling that our profession is missing an important part of the inclusion story.

To explore that missing part, I created a short global survey for **neurodivergent language teachers**. The survey was built in **Google Forms** and shared online over a period spanning **November 2025 to February 2026**. Participation was voluntary and responses were collected anonymously (unless respondents chose to leave contact details for follow-up research).

To date, the survey has generated **N = 221 valid responses** from neurodivergent language teachers.



### How respondents were recruited

The survey was distributed mainly through **LinkedIn** and my own professional networks in the language teaching industry. I shared it multiple times myself, and many people helped amplify it, both teachers who identify as neurodivergent and colleagues who do not. Some respondents shared the survey after completing it; others shared it simply because they felt the topic mattered.

That ripple effect is very significant. It suggests that this is not a “niche conversation” for a small group of language teachers. Even among those who did not take part, the willingness to share the survey indicates that the topic of neurodiversity among teachers resonates widely across our field, among educators, academic managers, school owners, and organisations.

In the weeks the survey was running, I also received a steady flow of messages and emails from **teachers, school leaders, publisher contacts, and researchers** expressing interest in the topic, in the results, and in the idea of a white paper. That interest, often from people who were not part of the survey themselves, has reinforced the sense that this conversation is arriving at the right moment.



## What the survey explored

The survey focused on three broad areas:

- **Context:** who respondents are and where they work (roles, sectors, teaching contexts, delivery modes, and experience).
- **Work reality:** how neurodivergence can influence teaching and workplace tasks, both as strengths and as friction points.
- **Support and culture:** disclosure, workplace responses, adjustments, barriers, and access to professional development.

Alongside the closed questions, the survey also included several open questions where teachers could share examples, experiences and insights in their own words. This adds depth that statistics alone can never provide, and points directly towards the next phase of this project: interviews and longer-form stories.

One of the most encouraging outcomes so far is that the vast majority of respondents (over 80%) chose to leave their name and email address, explicitly indicating that they would like to participate in the next phase of this project. This tells me two very important things: first, that **many teachers feel seen by this topic**; and second, that there is a real willingness in our profession to **move from quiet recognition to open conversation**.



## A note on how to read the data

Some survey questions allowed respondents to select more than one option (for example, where they work, which conditions they identify with, or which barriers they face). In those cases, percentages may not add up to 100%, because respondents could select multiple answers.

## ≠ What this paper is (and is not)

This white paper is not an attempt to “diagnose” teachers or turn neurodiversity into a trend. It is an attempt to understand a reality that is already present in our schools and organisations, but is still rarely spoken about openly.

It is also important to be clear about what this paper does not claim. The findings describe patterns within this dataset of neurodivergent language teachers who chose to respond to the survey. This is not a screening-based prevalence study of the profession as a whole. That kind of research is part of the next stage.

For now, the purpose is to start an open conversation, to make neurodiversity more visible, and to offer insight into what more supportive workplaces can look like in language education.

# 3

## WHO RESPONDED



### Sectors and employment contexts

Respondents work across a variety of sectors within language education. The majority work in private language schools, but the dataset also includes teachers working in other settings and combinations of settings (because respondents could select more than one sector).

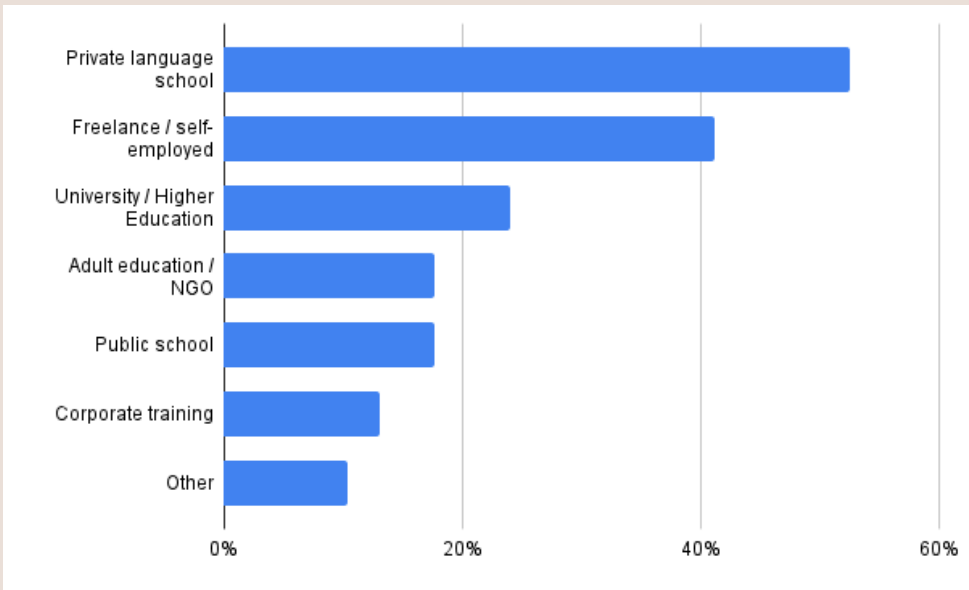


Fig 1. Sector of respondents (multi-select) (N=221)

Employment situations also vary. Some respondents are employed on a contract basis, others work freelance, and some combine different types of work. This is an important point when thinking about support, because access to adjustments, professional development, and workplace policies often looks very different depending on employment type.

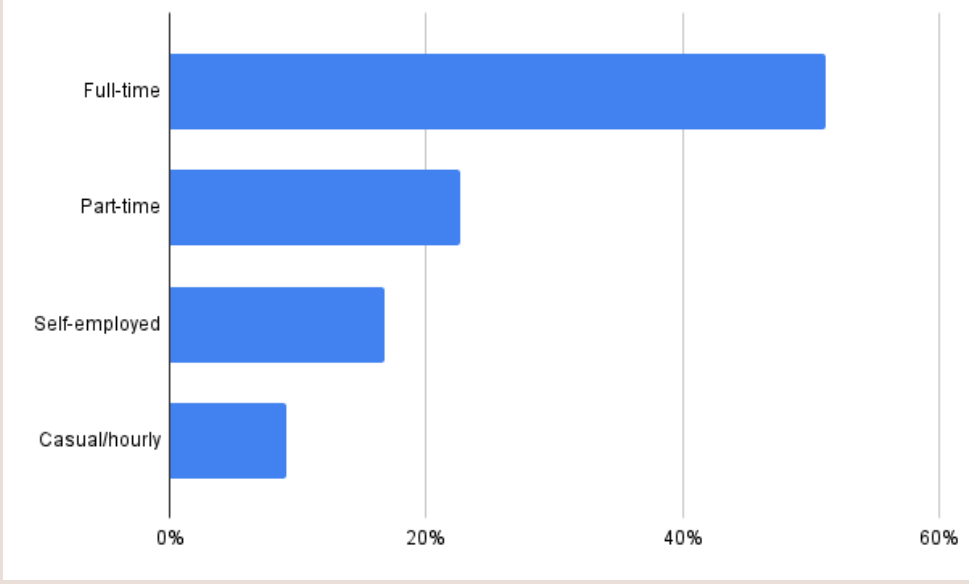


Fig 2. Employment type (N=221)

## 🕒 Teaching load and delivery mode

Respondents reported a wide range of teaching hours per week. For some, teaching is a full-time role; for others, it is part-time or combined with additional responsibilities such as coordination, management, materials work, or teacher training.

The way teachers deliver lessons also differs. Some teach mostly face-to-face, others mostly online, and many work in blended formats. This matters because different modes can amplify or reduce certain frictions, like sensory load, technology demands, pacing, and transitions between tasks.

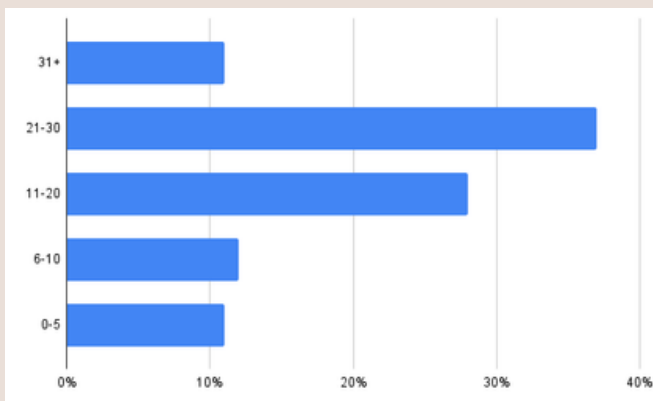


Fig 3. Teaching hours per week (N=221)

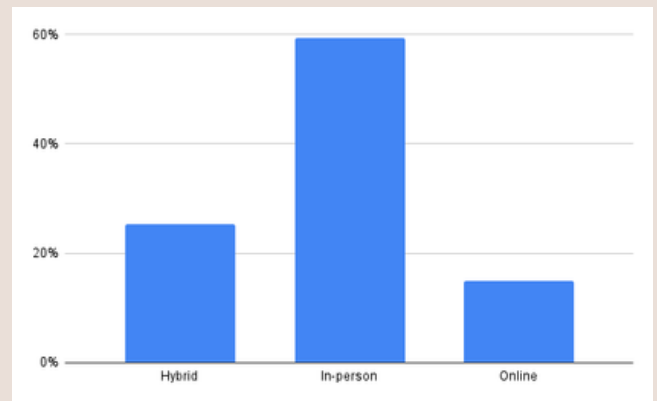


Fig 4. Delivery mode (N=221)

## 📋 Diagnostic status: formally diagnosed, self-identified, and exploring

One of the aims of this project is to **make space for teachers with different relationships to diagnosis**. Some respondents are formally diagnosed, others self-identify without a formal diagnosis, and some are still exploring. In other words, the dataset includes both teachers who have clear labels and those who are still making sense of their own experience.

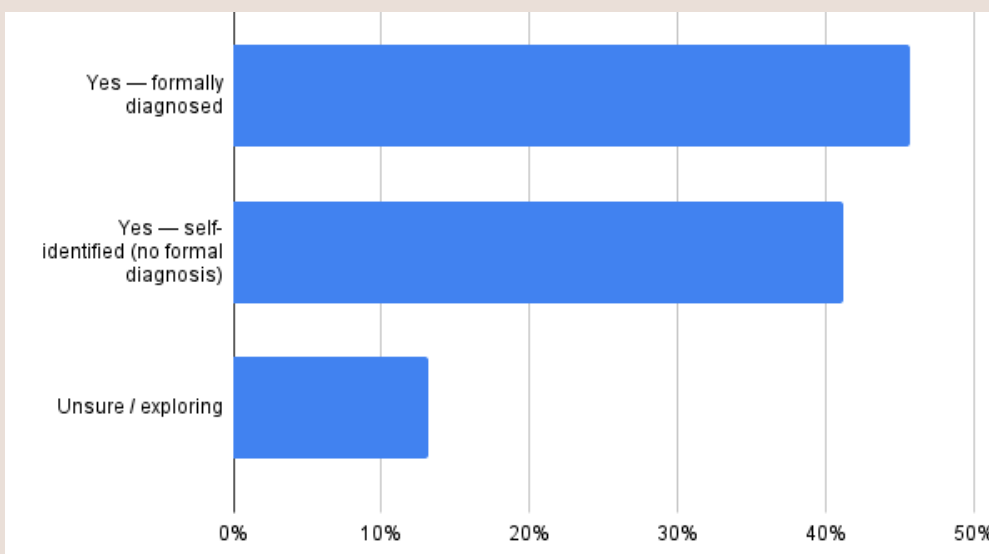


Fig 5. Diagnosis status (N=221)

This matters for leadership and workplace culture. In many countries, formal diagnosis is expensive, slow, or difficult to access. And for many adults, diagnosis only becomes relevant later in life. Very often after years of coping, compensating, and masking. Recognising this and **accepting self-identified neurodivergent conditions is essential if we want a realistic conversation about support.**

This awareness, which is the main aim of this white paper, should eventually also lead to higher levels of (self-)diagnosis and fewer teachers wondering why they are “different”.



## Experience in the profession

Respondents represent different career stages, from early-career teachers to highly experienced professionals. This is important, because **neurodivergence does not disappear with experience**, but experience does have a say in how teachers manage it, talk about it, and request support (if they request it at all).

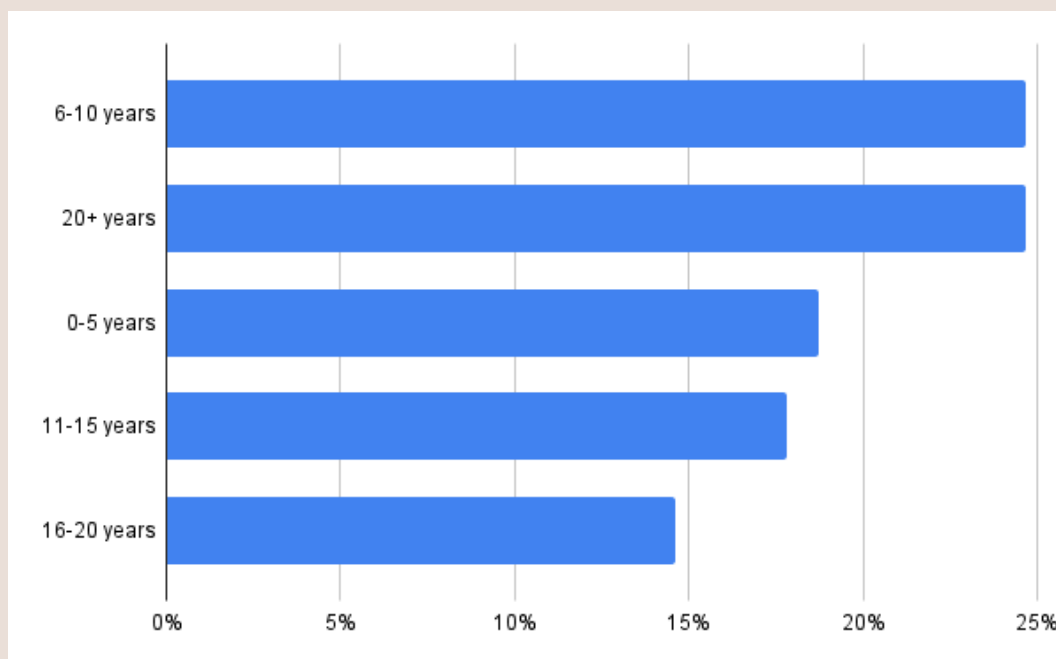


Fig 6. Years of teaching experience (N=221)

With this context in mind, we can now look more closely at the neurodivergence profiles reported in this dataset, including which conditions teachers selected, how common mixed profiles are, and what the survey suggests about diagnosis timing.

***“I am in control of the environment in the class. Outside the classroom it feels like the wild west — and I really struggle to know how to deal with certain situations.”***

English Teacher (Autism) - The Netherlands

# 4

# ND CONDITIONS AMONG LANGUAGE TEACHERS

This chapter looks at the neurodivergence profiles reported in the survey. I want to be very clear from the start: the patterns described here are **within this dataset** of neurodivergent (ND) language teachers (N=221). This is by no means a prevalence study of the profession as a whole. Even with that limitation, the distribution of conditions in this dataset raises questions that are very hard to ignore.



## Which conditions were reported most often?

Around **70% of respondents selected ADHD** in this dataset, being it the most selected neurodivergent condition. What stands out is not only that ADHD appears so often, but also the distance to the next conditions. In this dataset, ADHD was reported at a much higher rate than dyslexia, roughly **four times higher**.

Another striking point is that **autism was also selected at a higher rate than dyslexia** in this dataset, approximately **double**. In other words, ADHD appears most frequently, followed by autism, with dyslexia in third place.

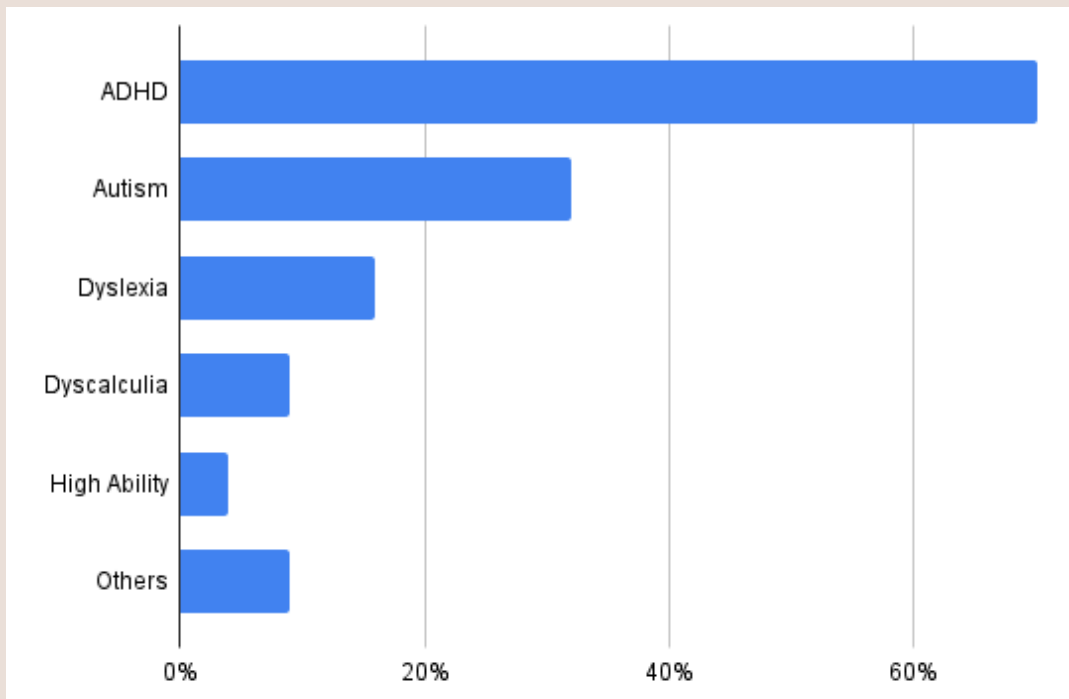


Fig 7. Conditions selected by respondents (multi-select) (N=221)

This is interesting because, in the general population, dyslexia is the most prevalent learning-related neurotype. Yet within this dataset of neurodivergent language teachers, ADHD clearly dominates, and autism appears surprisingly high as well.

We cannot conclude from this survey that ADHD or autism are more common among all language teachers. But we can ask why, within this dataset, these profiles appear so strongly. Two possible interpretations are worth exploring:

- **Language teaching may be relatively ADHD-friendly** in certain ways. Many teaching contexts involve movement, relatively short cycles of attention, variety, improvisation, and frequent interaction. All elements that can suit an average ADHD working style, especially when a teacher is engaged and energised by the classroom environment.
- **People with ADHD may be drawn to teaching** because the profession often rewards qualities and working conditions that many ADHD adults recognise in themselves: empathy, communication, creativity, responding in real time, switching between tasks and activities, being “on stage”, and the absence of repetitive routines (at least in many classroom moments).

Both interpretations point in the same direction: there may be a strong fit between aspects of language teaching and the specific traits of ADHD, at least for many teachers. Later chapters will show that this fit comes with strengths, but also with predictable friction points and barriers, especially outside the classroom.



### Mixed profiles and comorbidity

Another important pattern in the dataset is that many respondents do not report a single condition only. Mixed profiles are common, and the most frequent comorbid combinations in this dataset include ADHD and dyslexia, with others involving autism and dyscalculia.

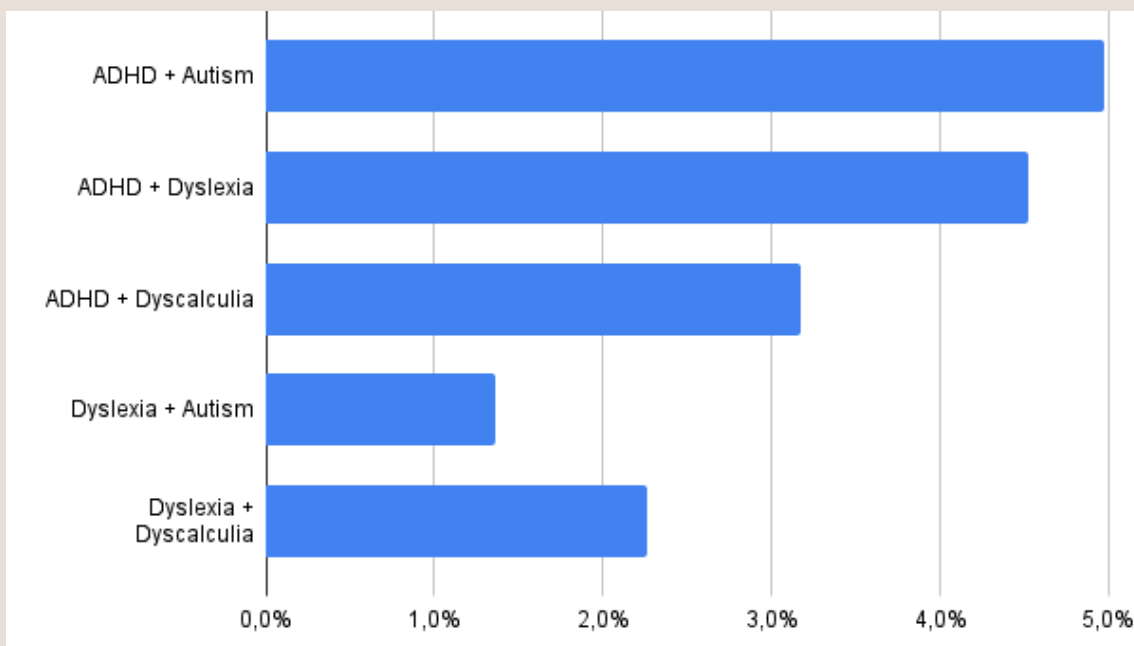


Fig 8. Comorbidity (N=221)



## Diagnosis timing: late identification (and underdiagnosis)

The dataset also suggests that **late diagnosis is very common**. Among those who are formally diagnosed and reported age of diagnosis, only a small minority received a diagnosis during school age (before 18). For many, identification happened later, often well into adulthood.

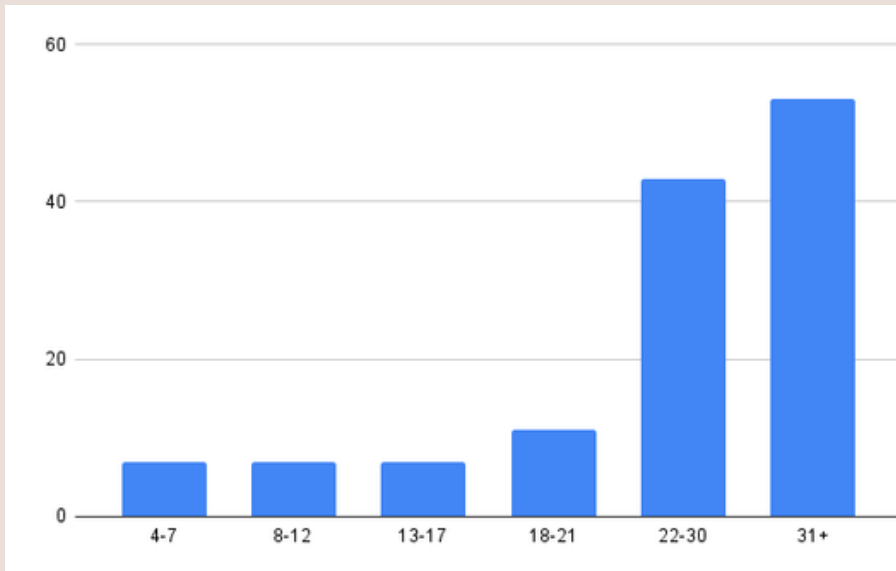


Fig 9. Age at first diagnosis (Diagnosed respondents only) (N=129)

This links to a wider issue: **underdiagnosis**. Many adults, especially those who learned early to compensate, mask, or “push through”, may never have been identified at school, even when the signs were present. Others simply did not have access to assessment pathways. In practice, this means **neurodivergent teachers may very well be present in every staffroom**, including teachers who have never considered neurodivergence as part of their story, but have always felt different.

Over the past years, through my own teacher-training work, I have repeatedly seen teachers begin to recognise themselves in the descriptions of ADHD, dyslexia, or autism, sometimes for the first time. For some, that recognition has later led to formal assessment and a late-in-life diagnosis. It is worth mentioning that several of the teachers who shared their data in this survey are part of that journey too.

A late diagnosis does not “solve” everything. But for many adults it can bring something that is hard to overstate: relief, language, self-understanding, and a measurable improvement in emotional wellbeing. It can change the way people interpret their past, the way they advocate for themselves at work, and the way they build working (and life) strategies that actually fit.

The next chapter moves from labels to lived reality: what neurodivergent teachers say they bring to the classroom, and why those strengths matter for learners, colleagues, and organisations.

# 5

## WHAT ND TEACHERS BRING TO THE CLASSROOM

If the conversation about neurodiversity in teaching stops at challenges, which it usually does when talking about students, we will completely miss the point.

Yes, neurodivergent teachers can face very real and important frictions, some of them even exhausting. But this survey also shows something else: many neurodivergent teachers describe **strengths that are not just “nice extras”**. They are real teaching assets.

For **school leaders**, this chapter is about recognising talent that may already be in your staffroom, and making sure it doesn't get wasted through avoidable barriers in the workplace. For **teachers**, it is about language and validation: many of the things you do naturally may be exactly what your learners need, and not just the neurodivergent ones.

Let's have a look at the main strengths neurodivergent teachers say they bring to the language classroom, and which they link to their neurotype.

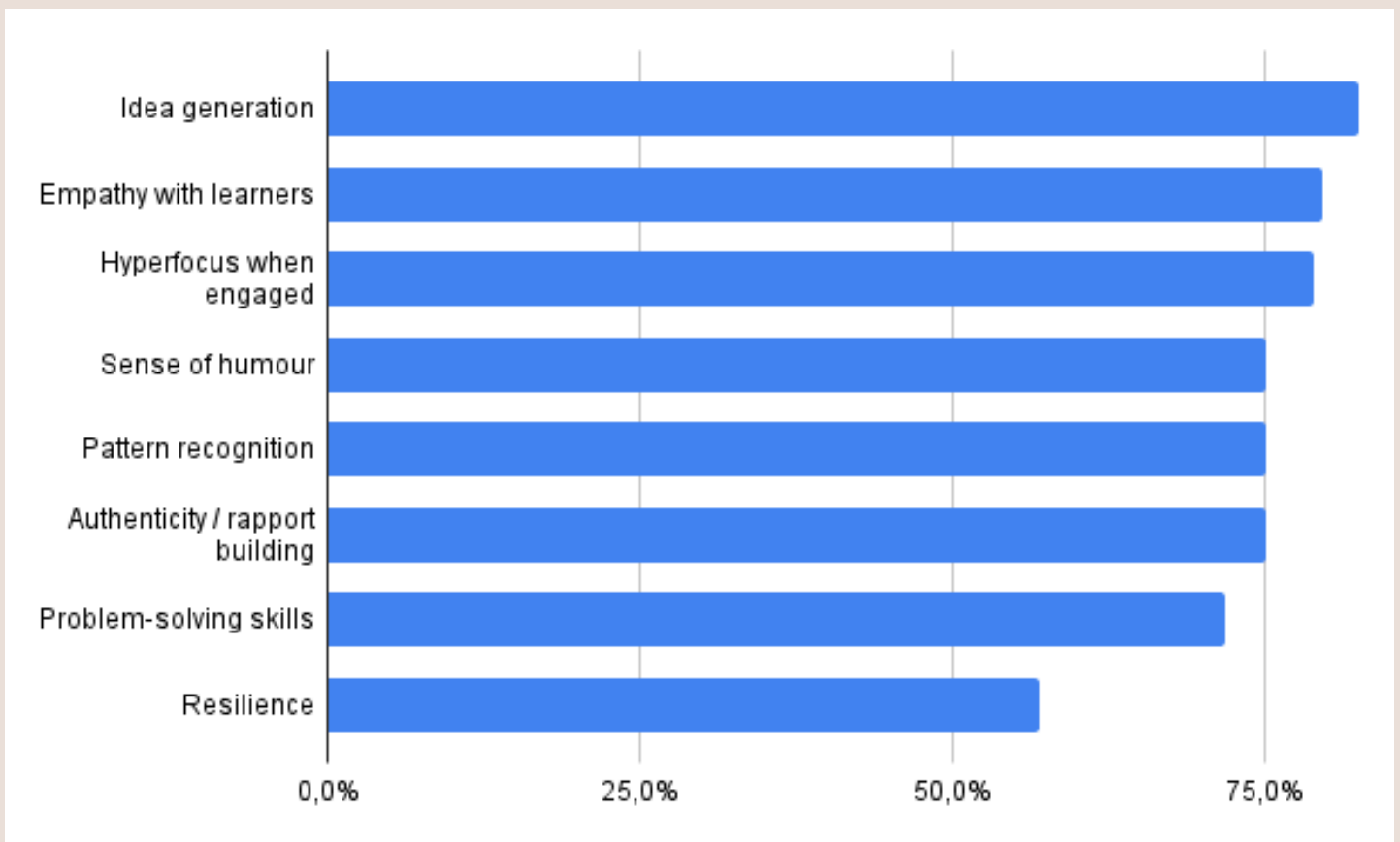


Fig 10. Top strengths (net impact) (N=221)



## Idea generation and creative lesson design

A strong theme in the data is idea generation. Many respondents describe themselves as quick at coming up with examples, activities, alternative explanations, and creative ways to deliver content. In real classroom life, this often looks like:

- improvising an extra practice activity when something isn't working as planned
- turning a boring drill into a quick game without needing preparation
- finding an example that suddenly "clicks" for a learner
- adapting activities or materials on the spot for different levels in the room

In language teaching, this is not a small skill. It is one of the most important ways teachers keep lessons interesting, engaging, and learner-centred.

**What leaders can notice: some of your most effective teachers may not be the most "orderly" teachers. Their value often shows up in creativity, flexibility, and classroom energy.**



## Empathy with learners and a strong "radar" for struggle

Another strength that appears strongly is empathy with learners. Many neurodivergent teachers describe a **heightened sensitivity to student experience**: noticing confusion, sensing student's embarrassment, and understanding what it feels like to be intelligent but struggling at the same time.

In practice, this often looks like:

- giving reassurance at the exact moment a learner is about to shut down
- spotting early signs of frustration, overwhelm, or shame
- creating a classroom atmosphere where mistakes feel safe
- building trust quickly, especially with "difficult" or withdrawn learners

For many schools, this strength is directly linked to student satisfaction, retention, and word-of-mouth, because learners remember how a teacher made them feel.

**What leaders can notice: some of the most inclusive teachers aren't inclusive because they've been trained to be. They're inclusive because they feel the learner's experience deeply, and can see themselves reflected in it.**



## Hyperfocus when engaged

Many respondents report **hyperfocus** when engaged. In teaching, this can be a real advantage. When a teacher is in flow, the classroom experience can become exceptionally dynamic and connected.

You might see this in teachers who:

- deliver high-energy lessons that feel “alive”
- get deeply into a topic and make it contagious
- lose track of time because they are genuinely present with their students
- go the extra mile for a group when they feel the work has meaning

Of course, hyperfocus has a “flip side” (we’ll return to that in the friction chapter), but it is worth naming the upside clearly: **it can create some of the most incredible learning experiences students ever have.**

**What leaders can notice: some teachers shine the most when they have autonomy over teaching and learning outcomes, not when the job becomes mostly admin.**



## Pattern recognition and problem-solving

Although not every teacher would name it this way, many respondents indicate strengths related to **pattern recognition** and **problem-solving**. In language teaching, this might show up as:

- spotting recurring errors quickly and identifying the underlying pattern
- noticing group dynamics and adjusting class structure accordingly
- seeing what’s missing in a course design or assessment
- finding efficient fixes when something is not working

These strengths can be extremely valuable in roles like mentoring, materials development, or academic coordination, if the workplace allows them to be used rather than buried under bureaucracy, procedures, and administration.

***“I’m better able to observe learners, notice patterns, and monitor their affective reaction to the lesson — and I adjust accordingly.”***

English Teacher (ADHD) - Egypt



## Authenticity, rapport, and classroom presence

Several strengths cluster around **authenticity** and **rapport building**. Many neurodivergent teachers describe themselves as more direct, more real, and often more willing to be transparent about learning and struggle, drawing many times from their own experiences. For students, this can be powerful. It creates:

- trust
- psychological safety
- a sense that “my teacher gets it”
- a classroom where effort matters more than perfection

It also connects to something leaders often underestimate: teaching is, in many ways, performance. Some teachers naturally thrive in that “in the spotlight” role, and it can become a source of energy rather than stress.



## The question is: are we losing talent through friction?

If a school only views neurodivergence through the lens of problems, it may unintentionally push some of its best teaching talent into coping mode, out of the school, or even **out of the profession**.

The practical question for leaders is not: “Do we have neurodivergent teachers?”  
**You do.**

The real question is: **Are we creating conditions where they can be the best version of themselves, without burning them out?**

Because **the cost of not doing so** is very real:

- losing excellent teachers
- replacing them with less experienced staff
- increased stress and sick leave
- lower student satisfaction and retention

Neurodivergent teaching talent is not rare. But it can be wasted when workplaces are built only for one (neurotypical) type of brain.

# 6

## WHAT BARRIERS AND TEACHERS FACE

Before we go into detail, it helps to separate two things, and two ways of measuring them.

- **Frictions** are the parts of the job that can feel easier or harder while you're doing the work (in class and out of class). The next two charts show net impact: positive ratings minus negative ratings. A negative score means the task tends to drain teachers more than it helps; a positive score means it tends to support them.
- Later in this chapter, we look at **barriers**. Barriers are not "tasks", but workplace factors (workload, unclear processes, missing policies, stigma) that make support harder to access. The barriers chart is shown as percentages: the higher the percentage, the more commonly that barrier was reported.

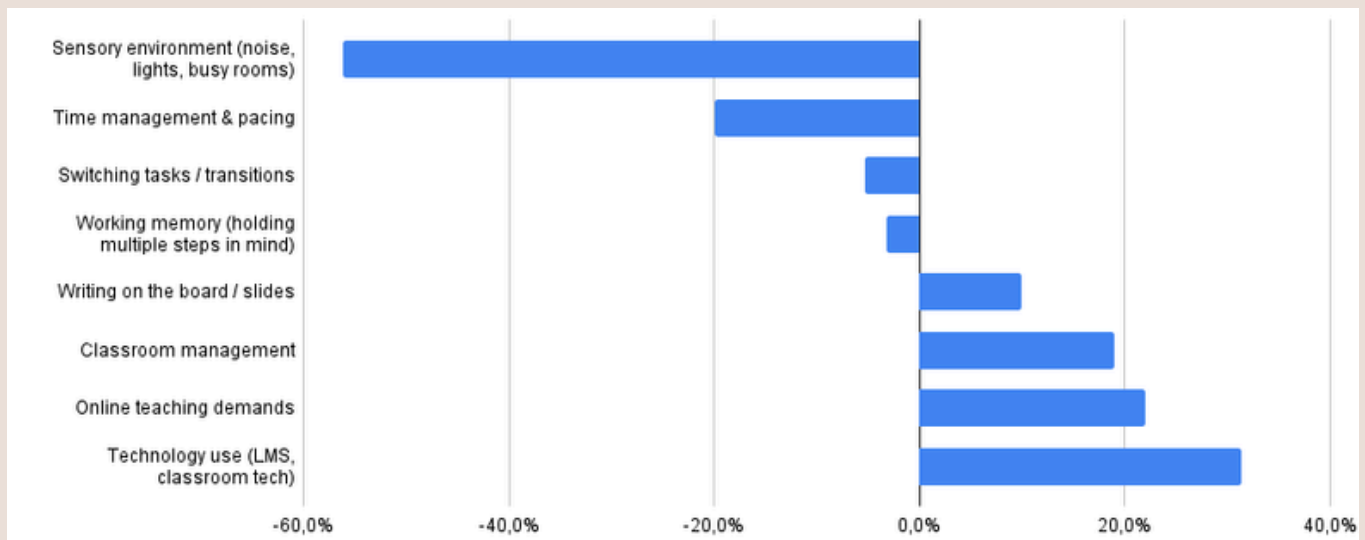


Fig 11. In-class friction (net impact) (N=221)

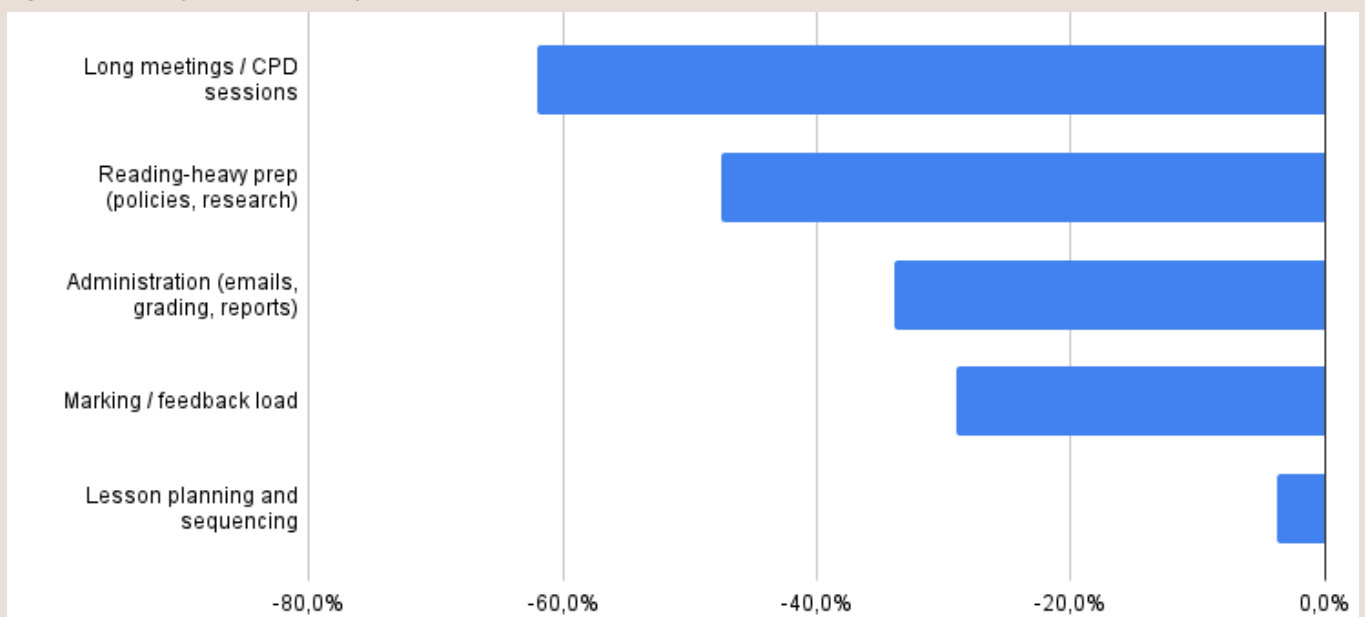


Fig 12. Out-of-class friction (net impact) (N=221)



## In-class frictions: what happens in the classroom

In-class friction points exist for many teachers. But in this dataset, one friction point stands out dramatically:

### ➤ **Sensory environment (noise, lights, busy rooms)**

With a net impact of **-56.3%**, sensory overload is by far the biggest in-class friction reported. That is a huge signal to schools.

This includes things like:

- constant background noise and interfering voices
- bright or flickering lighting
- visually busy rooms
- unpredictable interruptions
- tight spaces and constant movement

For some teachers, this is just an occasional annoyance. For many neurodivergent teachers, it becomes a daily drain that builds up across the day and week. It can lead to **extreme levels of exhaustion** even when lessons go well.

**What leaders should know: sensory overload is not “being sensitive.” It is an environmental load issue, and small changes can make a big difference.**

### ➤ **Time management and pacing**

The second major in-class friction is time management and pacing (**-20%**). Compared to sensory load, the number is smaller, but it still matters, especially because it affects lesson flow and stress levels.

This friction can show up as:

- difficulty estimating task timing
- getting deeply engaged and losing the clock
- juggling individual support with whole-class pacing
- feeling pressured by tight schedules and back-to-back classes



## Out-of-class frictions: not teaching, but still part of the job

For many respondents, the most difficult parts of the job are not the classroom, but the workplace demands around it.

### ➤ Long meetings and CPD sessions

This is the biggest out-of-class friction by far: **-62%**.

Long meetings or CPD sessions often combine multiple elements at once:

- sustained attention without interaction
- unclear structure and shifting topics
- information overload without written follow-up

For neurodivergent teachers, meetings can be one of the most draining parts of the working week.

### ➤ Reading-heavy preparation

Reading-heavy prep has a net impact of **-47%**. This is especially relevant in workplaces where teachers are expected to engage with:

- long policy documents
- research-heavy materials
- dense training texts
- complex written instructions

This is not about intelligence. It is about how information is delivered, time pressure, and cognitive load.

### ➤ Administration (emails, grading, reports)

Admin also shows a strong negative net impact (**-34%**).

And here's the reality: admin is disliked by almost everyone. In 30 years in this industry, I've met very few teachers who genuinely enjoy it.

But for many neurodivergent teachers, admin isn't just unpleasant, it can become a real barrier to well being and staying effective, because it demands:

- sustained attention on low-interest tasks
- prioritisation and organisation
- multiple platforms and switching between them
- constant small deadlines with little feedback

**This is one of the places where excellent teaching talent can quietly get wasted:** not because the teacher can't teach, but because the job becomes dominated by tasks that drain them.



## Barriers: what makes support harder to access

Frictions tell us where strain happens. Barriers tell us why it often stays unresolved.

In this dataset, the most frequently reported barriers were:

- **Unclear processes (41%)**
- **Excessive workload (40%)**
- **Lack of policy (35%)**
- **Stigma / culture (34%)**

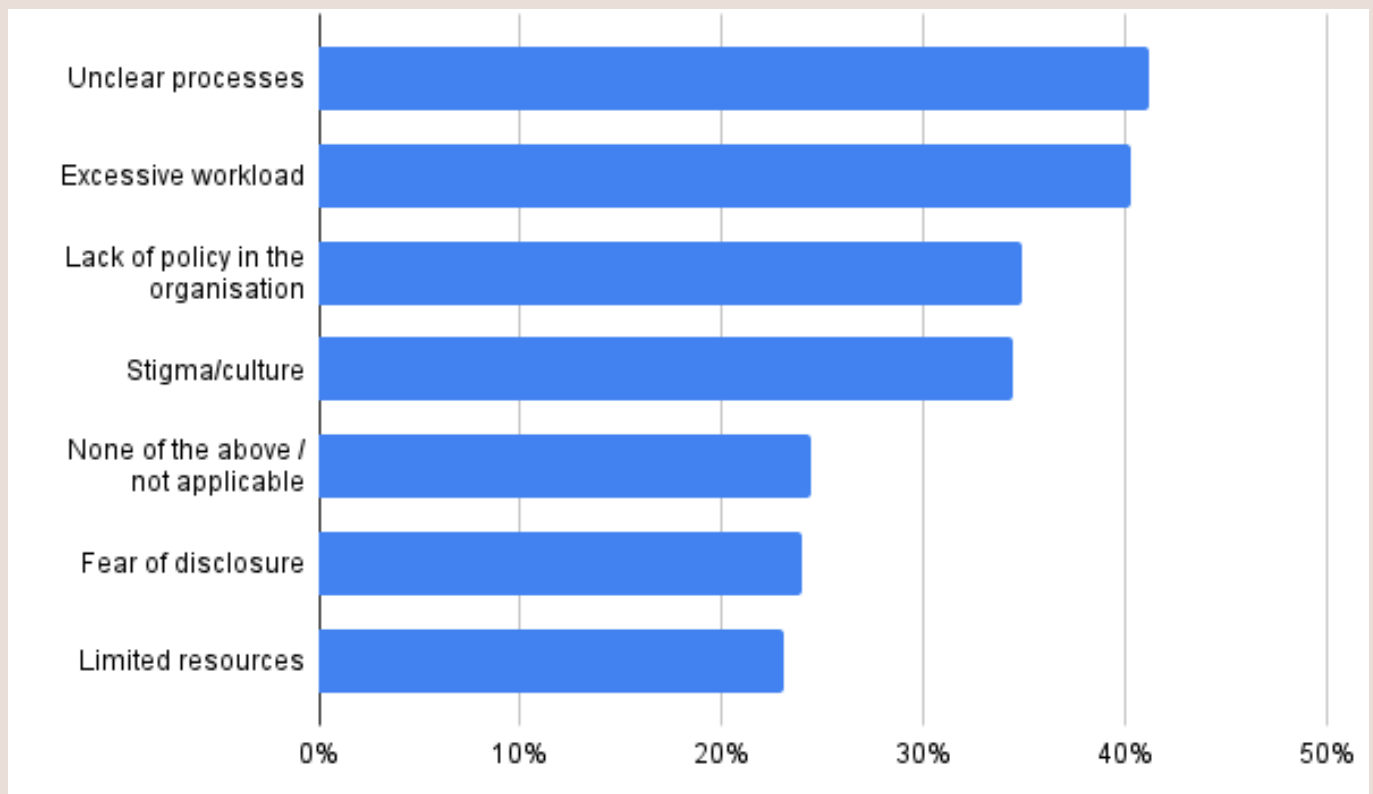


Fig 13. Main barriers at work (net impact) (N=221)

These are organisational-level factors. And they matter because **they increase the “cost” of everyday work.**

- If processes are unclear, teachers spend more energy guessing, chasing information, and worrying about hidden expectations.
- If workload is excessive, recovery time disappears, and even the smallest frictions become chronic stress.
- If policies are missing, support becomes inconsistent, informal, and dependent on personal relationships.
- If stigma is part of the culture, teachers are less likely to disclose or request adjustments

# 7

## DISCLOSURE AND WORKPLACE CULTURE

Disclosure sits at the core of the workplace culture. Not because it is a goal in itself, but because it tells us **how safe it feels to be your true self at work**.

In this dataset (N=221), disclosure is far from universal. **42% have not disclosed at all**, while only **19% have disclosed widely**. The remaining respondents fall in between, disclosing to some colleagues or managers, but not broadly.

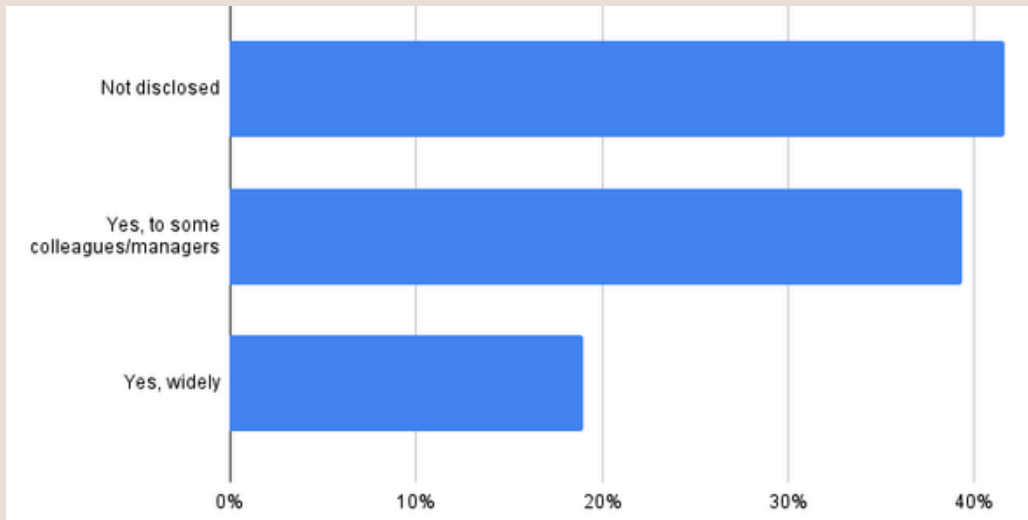


Fig 13. Disclosure levels (N=221)

This is significant. If almost half of ND teachers don't disclose, leaders can't assume "we don't have any neurodivergent staff" just because nobody has said anything.



### Why teachers do not disclose

The most frequently selected reasons for non-disclosure are revealing: **Unsure how to disclose (35%)**, **Fear of stigma (28%)**, and **30% selected "Not relevant to role"**

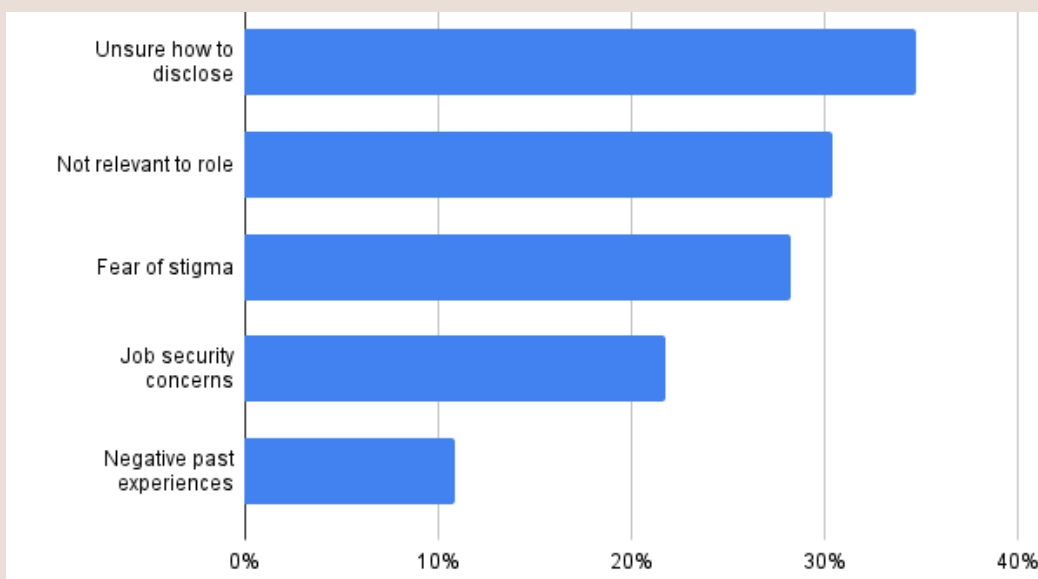


Fig 14. Reasons for non-disclosure (% of non-disclosers)

Two of these reasons point directly to workplace culture:

- **Fear of stigma** suggests that disclosure feels risky.
- **Not knowing how to disclose** suggests that even when risk is low, the pathway is unclear.

And that third reason, **“not relevant to role”**, is also useful. It does not necessarily mean “my neurodivergence doesn’t matter.” It could mean:

- “I’ve survived so far, so why bring it up?”
- “Nothing would change anyway.”

From a leadership perspective, this can be a long-term issue. When teachers feel that disclosure is only relevant if there is a problem, many will avoid it. But when disclosure is understood as part of normal professional wellbeing, **hidden teaching talents can be unleashed, and teacher retention enhanced.**



## What happens after disclosure: reaction vs reality

One of the most important findings in this dataset is the contrast between **goodwill** and **practical change**.

Among those who disclosed (N=129), the majority reported a broadly positive response:

- **52%** reported a **supportive or very supportive** reaction
- Only **8%** reported an **unsupportive or very unsupportive** reaction

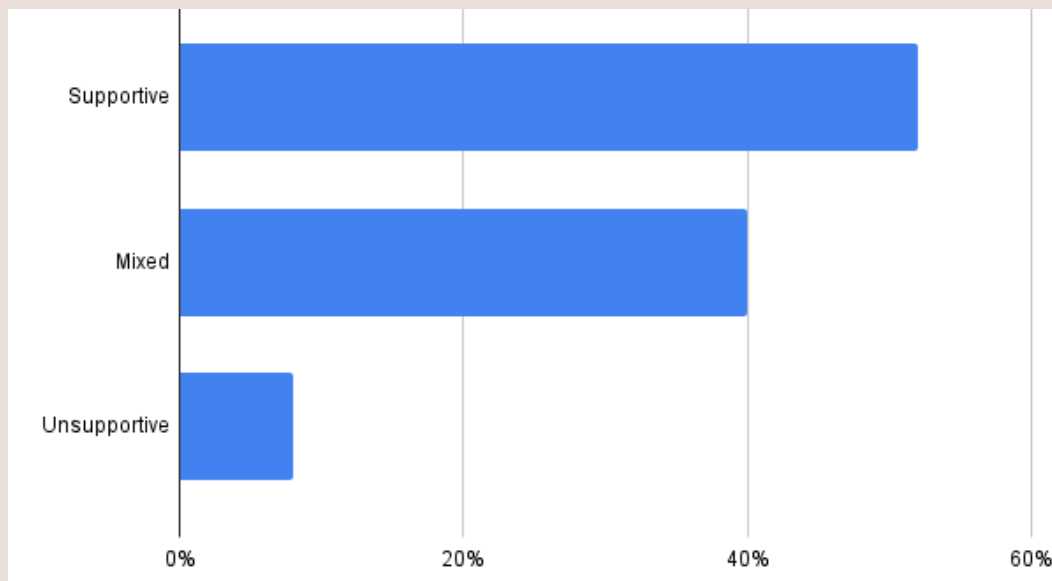


Fig 15. Reaction after disclosure (% of disclosers) (N=129)

On the surface, this looks very encouraging. It suggests many workplaces contain people who want to respond well. **But the outcomes tell a different story.**

When respondents were asked what actually changed after disclosure, the most common answer was: **No change (54%)**

And when disclosure did lead to something, it often remained at the level of conversation (15%).

From this dataset, of those who disclosed, only 16% had adjustment granted, which very much contrasts with the 52% supportive reactions.

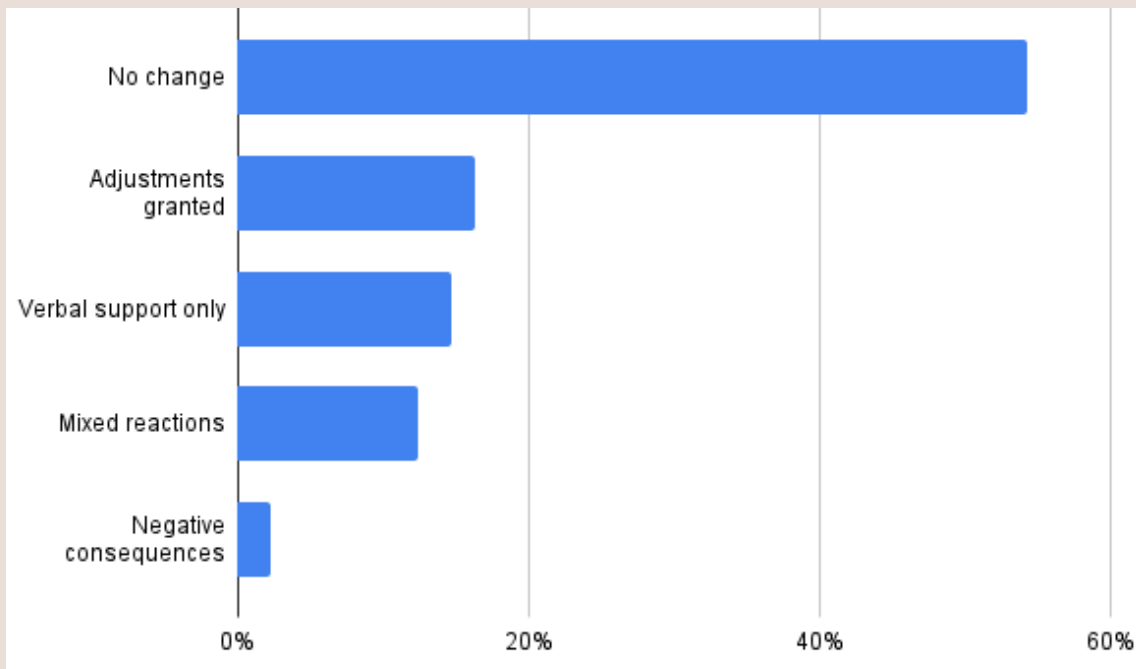


Fig 16. What changed after disclosure (% of disclosers) (N=129)

This is where the leadership message becomes very clear:

**Supportive reactions are not the same as supportive systems.**


A workplace can be kind, well-intentioned, and supportive in tone, but still fail to translate goodwill into practical conditions that reduce friction for those who need it.



## The “goodwill vs action” gap: why it matters

The gap between goodwill and actually doing something to help matters because it shapes future behaviour. **If teachers see that disclosure often leads to sympathy but no change, then disclosure becomes less appealing the next time**, both for them and for colleagues watching quietly on the side line. Over time, workplaces can develop a culture where being neurodivergent is fully “accepted”, but not actively supported.

And that is exactly the point where talent can be lost: not because teachers aren’t capable, but because they feel left alone.

A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a red vest over a white shirt and tie, is juggling three red balls. The background is a blurred outdoor setting. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

***“Teachers have a lot to juggle all the time. For years, it was hard to know what the root cause of my problems was: is it me, or is it the job being so hectic? I assumed I was just lazy and incompetent. My colleagues talked about weekend plans and I couldn’t understand. Didn’t everyone use weekends to hide away, sleep, and recover?”***

English Teacher (ADHD) - UK

# 8

## SUPPORT SYSTEMS: ADJUSTMENTS AND CPD

Let's clarify what we are comparing. In the previous chapter on disclosure, we focused on the group of teachers who had disclosed their neurodivergence (N=129).

Within that group, **only 21 respondents** reported that disclosure resulted in adjustments being granted. That tells us something about what happens after disclosure, and it strongly highlights the "goodwill vs action" gap.

In this chapter, however, we zoom out to the full dataset (N=221) and we look at a broader question: **What adjustments do teachers currently receive or use, regardless of whether they have disclosed?**

That distinction matters. Because in many workplaces, teachers do not receive formal adjustments. Instead, they often **self-grant** adjustments, quietly and informally, through their own strategies, routines, and experience.

This is exactly what we see in the data: **46%** of respondents report that they receive or use **no adjustments at all**, which also means that **54%** report receiving or using at least one adjustment. But that does not automatically mean these adjustments were formally provided by the organisation. In many cases, they were created or negotiated by teachers themselves.

This also links back to an insight from the disclosure chapter: 30% of non-disclosers said disclosure feels "not relevant to my role." One possible interpretation, worth exploring in future research, is that some may already have personal coping systems or self-granted adjustments in place and therefore don't feel a need to disclose. In other words, "not relevant" may sometimes mean "I've found ways to manage myself." Whether that is sustainable over time, and **what it costs teachers in energy and wellbeing**, is an important question for deeper research.

### **A note on wording: "received" vs "used"**

For this reason, throughout this chapter, when we talk about adjustments we use the phrase "receive / use" deliberately. It includes:

- adjustments formally granted by an organisation,
- informal adjustments agreed with a manager or colleague,
- and self-initiated strategies teachers use to make the job doable.

This is not a minor detail. It helps explain why some workplaces may appear supportive on paper, while teachers are still responsible for their own adaptations.



## What adjustments teachers currently receive or use

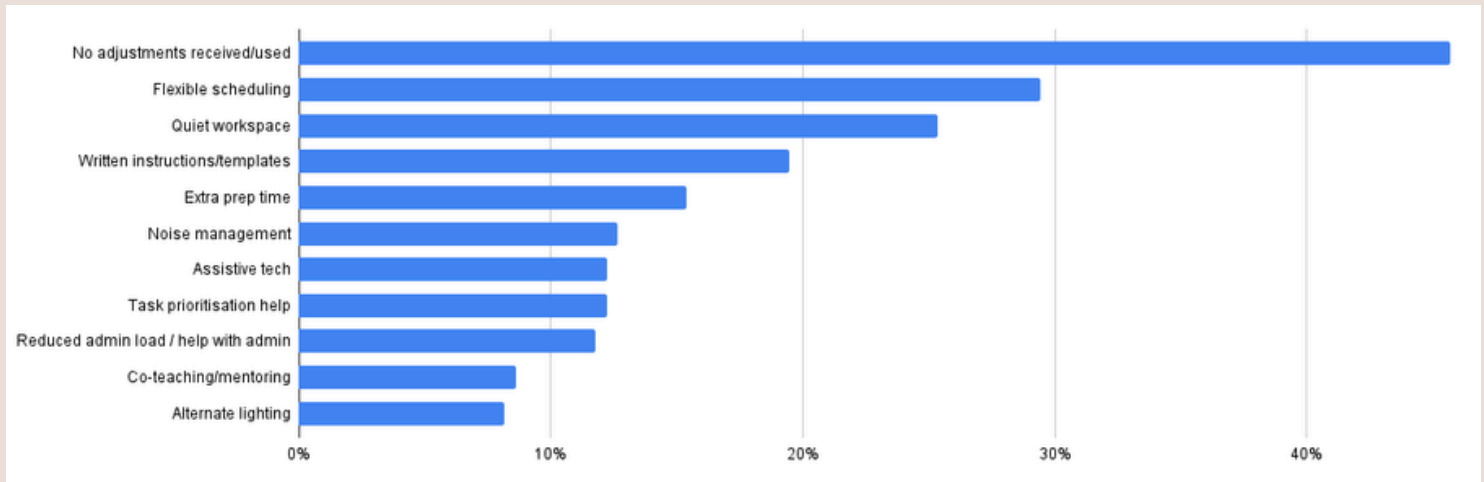


Fig 17. Adjustment currently received (including "none") (N=221)

Respondents reported a range of workplace adjustments. The most commonly reported were:

- **Flexible scheduling (29%)**
- **Quiet workspace (25%)**
- **Written instructions / templates (19%)**
- **Extra prep time (15%)**

These are meaningful supports, and it's encouraging that they exist in some workplaces.

At the same time, one figure stands out because it connects directly to the friction chapter. Only **12%** of respondents reported receiving or using a **reduced admin load**, even though administration showed up as a significant friction point in the out-of-class workload.

This suggests a common pattern in schools: some adjustments are relatively easy to offer informally (for example, flexibility or a quiet working space), while others require structural decisions (for example, redistributing admin tasks, redefining responsibilities, or redesigning processes).

***"Having a consistent schedule and reliable management."***

English Teacher (ADHD) - Spain



## What teachers find most helpful

A note on how to read this section: we asked the full dataset (N=221) to rate the helpfulness of a range of adjustments. This means these ratings include both teachers who already receive or use certain adjustments and teachers who currently receive no adjustments, but rated how helpful those supports would be if they were available. In other words, the results below reflect perceived usefulness, not only “what is already in place.”

Now the picture becomes even clearer. The most positively rated adjustments were:

- **Quiet workspace (77%)**
- **Noise management (63%)**
- **Reduced admin load (60%)**

By contrast, **flexible scheduling**, while it seems a commonly granted adjustment, ranked lower in helpfulness, around **49%** and placed fifth in the ranking.

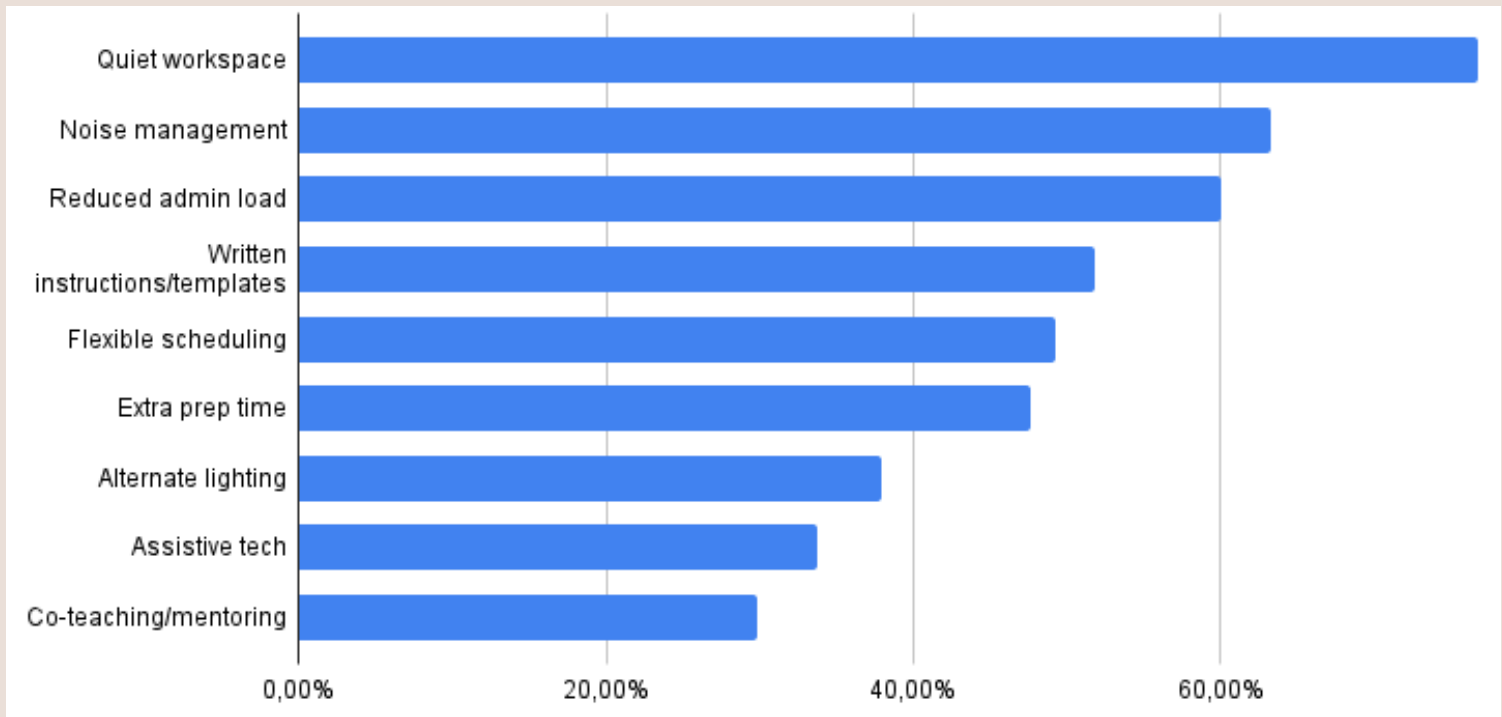


Fig 18. Helpfulness of adjustments (positive ratings) (N=221; excluding N/A)

This is **one of the most important leadership takeaways** in this white paper:

**The adjustments teachers need most are often about reducing sensory load and reducing administrative load.**

And this is where the data gives leaders a practical opportunity. The gap between “what exists” and “what helps” is especially striking in one area: **Reduced admin load**: only **12%** report receiving or using it, yet **60%** rate it as helpful.

It's worth briefly naming why flexible scheduling often appears as a common adjustment but not the most helpful one.

Flexibility can be valuable, especially for energy management, recovery time between classes, or avoiding certain peak-load moments. But flexibility also has a downside: if it is informal and inconsistent, it can become unpredictable. And unpredictability is itself a source of friction for many neurodivergent profiles.

In other words: **flexibility helps most when it is paired with clarity.**



### Professional development: demand is high, provision is low

Support systems are not only adjustments. They are also **knowledge** and **shared language**.

In this dataset:

- **89%** of respondents said they are interested in **neurodiversity-focused CPD** tailored to teachers.
- Yet only **8%** report having **regular training** on neurodiversity in the workplace.

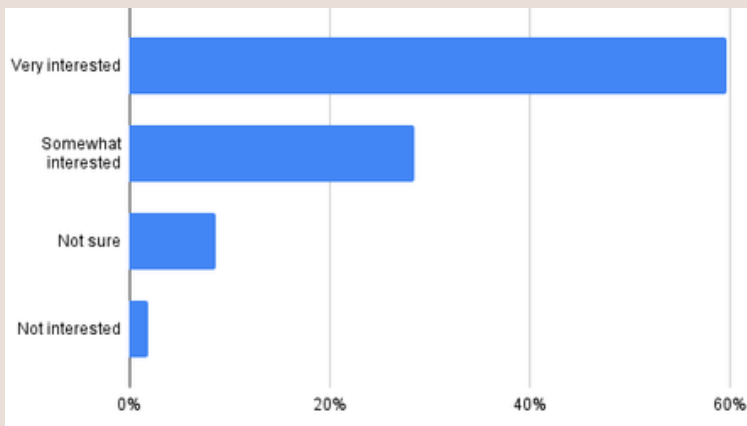


Fig 19. Interest in tailored neurodiversity CPD (N=221)

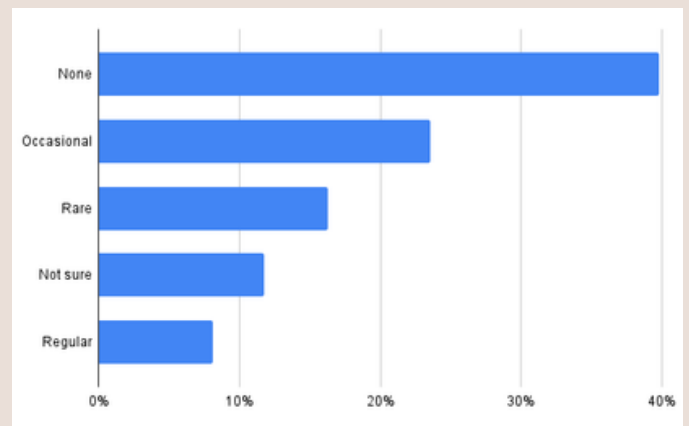


Fig 20. Access to neurodiversity CPD at work (N=221)

This gap matters because **leaders and teachers can only act on what they understand and can talk about.** Without shared knowledge, workplaces rely on individual goodwill, and disclosure often leads to supportive words but limited practical change.

# 9

## WHAT LEADERS AND THE INDUSTRY CAN DO

By this point in the white paper, a simple conclusion becomes hard to avoid: neurodivergent teachers are not an exception in our sector, and the barriers they report are not “personal problems.” Many of them are **workplace design problems**.

This goes beyond teacher wellbeing. It matters for quality, retention, and the future of language education.

We are working in a global industry that is increasingly competing with platforms that offer language learning that is cheaper, instant, and available 24/7. Many of those platforms do useful things, but **they cannot replace what a great teacher does**: noticing, adapting, encouraging, challenging, connecting, building confidence, and creating belonging. All **strengths of neurodivergent teachers**.

If we want language schools and language education organisations to thrive in that landscape, **we cannot afford to waste teaching talent**. And we certainly cannot afford to lose the very professionals who create the human value that technology cannot replicate.

In other words: if we already agree that **one-size-fits-all teaching does not work** for our learners, we also have to accept something equally important:

**One-size-fits-all working environments do not work for our teachers.**

What follows is not a checklist of “accommodations” for a few teachers. It is a leadership framework for building **neuro-inclusive workplaces**. Workplaces that reduce avoidable friction for everyone, not “just” the neurodivergent teachers, while allowing teacher strengths to show up consistently.

***“Having a senior person in an organisation reveal they are neurodivergent — to show it’s understood and not just lip-service.”***

English Teacher (ADHD) - France



## A Neuro-Inclusive Teacher Framework: five principles

### ➤ 1) Create safe disclosure pathways and a stigma-free culture (embrace diversity)

A supportive culture is not only about attitudes. It is about psychological safety and clear pathways.

Leaders can ask:

- Do staff know how to disclose if they want to?
- Is there a named person and a clear, confidential process?
- Do we treat disclosure as normal professional wellbeing, not as “a problem”?

The data shows that fear of stigma and uncertainty about how to disclose are major barriers. The solution is not a new policy document, but creating and communicating a clearer, safer culture: one where difference is not punished, and where support is not a negotiation.

### ➤ 2) Reduce admin load (or redesign it)

Admin is one of the clearest friction points in the dataset, especially outside the classroom. Most teachers don't love admin. But for many neurodivergent teachers it becomes an almost unbearable drain.

Reducing admin load doesn't necessarily mean “doing less work”, it means “doing your work smarter”.

It can mean:

- removing duplicate reporting
- simplifying what needs to be written
- reducing frequency of non-essential updates
- sharing admin tasks differently (teachers helping teachers)
- automating what can be automated
- creating templates that make tasks easier and faster

**What admin task is costing the most energy, while adding the least educational value?**

### ➤ 3) Redesign processes and communication (clarity beats goodwill)

One of the most frequently reported barriers in the dataset is unclear processes. When expectations are vague, teachers spend a lot of energy guessing, chasing, and worrying about hidden rules or unclear expectations. That cost is invisible, but real.

Neuro-inclusive process design can be surprisingly simple:

- fewer channels, clearer channels (what goes where?)
- predictable formats (emails, reports, lesson notes)
- clear instructions
- pre-meeting agendas and short written follow-ups after those meetings
- clear deadlines and priorities
- documents that are readable (layout, headings, spacing)

This is not “special treatment.” It is quality communication. And it helps **everyone**.

### ➤ 4) Offer targeted CPD (demand is high)

The CPD gap in the dataset is striking: many teachers want neurodiversity-focused development, but few report receiving regular training at work.

This is an opportunity for the industry. Targeted CPD can help:

- leaders respond better after disclosure
- teams develop shared and inclusive language (less misunderstanding)
- teachers learn practical strategies that reduce friction
- schools move from goodwill to consistent systems
- **higher levels of self-awareness and well being**

Importantly, this CPD should **not only** be about “how to teach neurodivergent students.” It should also include:

- how neurodivergence can show up in teachers
- what supportive workplaces look like
- how to request and offer adjustments in realistic ways

## ➤ 5) Focus on teacher strengths and talent (don't waste it)

The survey makes a strong case that many neurodivergent teachers bring real strengths: idea generation, empathy, hyperfocus, adaptability and other qualities that directly improve the learner experience.

Leadership questions:

- Where do our teachers shine?
- Do our roles and systems allow that talent to show up, or does it get buried under friction?
- Are we designing jobs around human value, or around strict rules and bureaucracy?

**A neuro-inclusive school is not only a “supportive” place. It is a place that knows how to use talent well.**

## ⓘ The takeaway

If schools want to remain competitive, they have to double down on what only schools can offer: **a high-quality human learning experience.**

That experience depends on teachers.

So the leadership question is not whether neurodivergent teachers can cope. **The question is whether organisations will evolve quickly enough** to stop wasting teaching talent through avoidable friction, unclear processes, and one-size-fits-all working environments.

This white paper is a starting point. The next chapter outlines how this project will continue, through interviews, deeper analysis, and the next research phase, so that the sector can move from insight to long-term change.

# 10 LOOKING AHEAD

This white paper is a starting point, not an endpoint. It brings together early patterns from a global dataset, but the bigger purpose is practical:

**Stop wasting teaching talent and build workplaces where neurodivergent teachers can thrive**

In the short term, this paper is meant to do three things: keep the **conversation** moving, help the industry **recognise** what is already present in our staffrooms, and support leaders in **thinking beyond goodwill** towards real systems that reduce friction and help emerge talent.

## >> What comes next

The next phase of this project will create a clearer picture of the reality of neurodivergent language teachers.

First, the survey will be followed by **one-to-one interviews** with a smaller group of teachers who participated in the survey and explicitly opted in for follow-up. The aim is to understand the stories behind the numbers: what helps teachers thrive, what drains them, and what adjustments make the biggest difference.

Second, a screening-based **prevalence study** with language schools will begin on a small scale (starting in Spain) with the goal of expanding internationally over time. This will allow the sector to move beyond self-report and explore prevalence patterns through a structured screening approach.



## Staying connected

Because this work is ongoing, I will publish future updates and releases on my website and social media. Any teachers, school owners, and industry stakeholders who want to follow the project as it develops, and stay informed as new findings, publications, and practical frameworks become available, can contact me here: [boelo@boelovanderpool.com](mailto:boelo@boelovanderpool.com)

The long-term goal of this project is not only awareness. It is a shift towards **inclusive education that also includes the professionals who make learning possible.**

***“Earlier diagnosis. I was 53. My entire career would have been different — I would have lived up to my potential sooner — if I had known what I was dealing with and how to manage it earlier.”***

English & German Teacher (ADHD) - USA

With an estimated 20% of people worldwide being neurodivergent, understanding neurodiversity isn't simply about awareness and inclusion — it's about changing the way we see learning. It means rethinking our norms of education, growth, and success; centring our practice on empathy, compassion, and a recognition of every learner's strengths; and seeing ourselves as members of a diverse community, rather than "othering" those we've traditionally seen as different.

**Dr Martin Bloomfield**, Lecturer in Applied Ethics (HWR Berlin) and Trainer and Consultant in Dyslexia Awareness.

Understanding how different languages affect dyslexia in distinct ways is something every teacher should be aware of. Building on this awareness, society would benefit greatly if schools acknowledged and supported neurodiverse individuals by hiring an expert in this field. In addition, it is crucial to push for further research in this area so that both students and teachers can be set up for success.

**Mads Johan Øgaard** - Norwegian Special ed Teacher and dyslexia educator.

Neurodivergent teachers, like their neurodivergent learners, need specific components that enable them to thrive, overcome challenges and grow. They need support, also like everyone else. People that will show up for them consistently and with the skills required to be helpful to them. Understanding neurodiversity isn't just for our little learners, it's for all of us.

**Will Rixon** - Global Academic Engagement & Content Manager, Macmillan Education.

Neurodiversity isn't just something we see in our students - it's present in the teachers who show up in our classrooms every day. This white paper offers school leaders a practical lens on how workplace culture and systems can either support that talent or quietly hold it back. It's a timely contribution for any organisation serious about teacher wellbeing, retention, and quality.

**Emma Hoyle** - Managing Director IHWO

*Boelo*

[www.boelovanderpool.com](http://www.boelovanderpool.com)