

ACGR Good Practice Guidelines for supporting Neurodiversity in HDR

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Overview

- Broad themes that we know from the current literature
- Brief overview of the current ACGR project
- Case study discussion – how can we translate neuroaffirming approaches into HDR candidature support practice?

What do we currently know about neurodivergent students' experiences?

Academic cultures, structures, and expectations

Sensory and environmental challenges

Executive functioning

Insufficient supports and accommodations

Relationships with others

Ableism and disclosure

Mental health

Embracing neurodivergence

Key discourses

The hidden curriculum and power relations

- Numerous examples of the consequences of implicit expectations – communication breakdowns, masking, hesitancy to disclose
- The power dynamics in the supervisor-student relationship can amplify challenges experienced

Ableism in university administration and bureaucracy

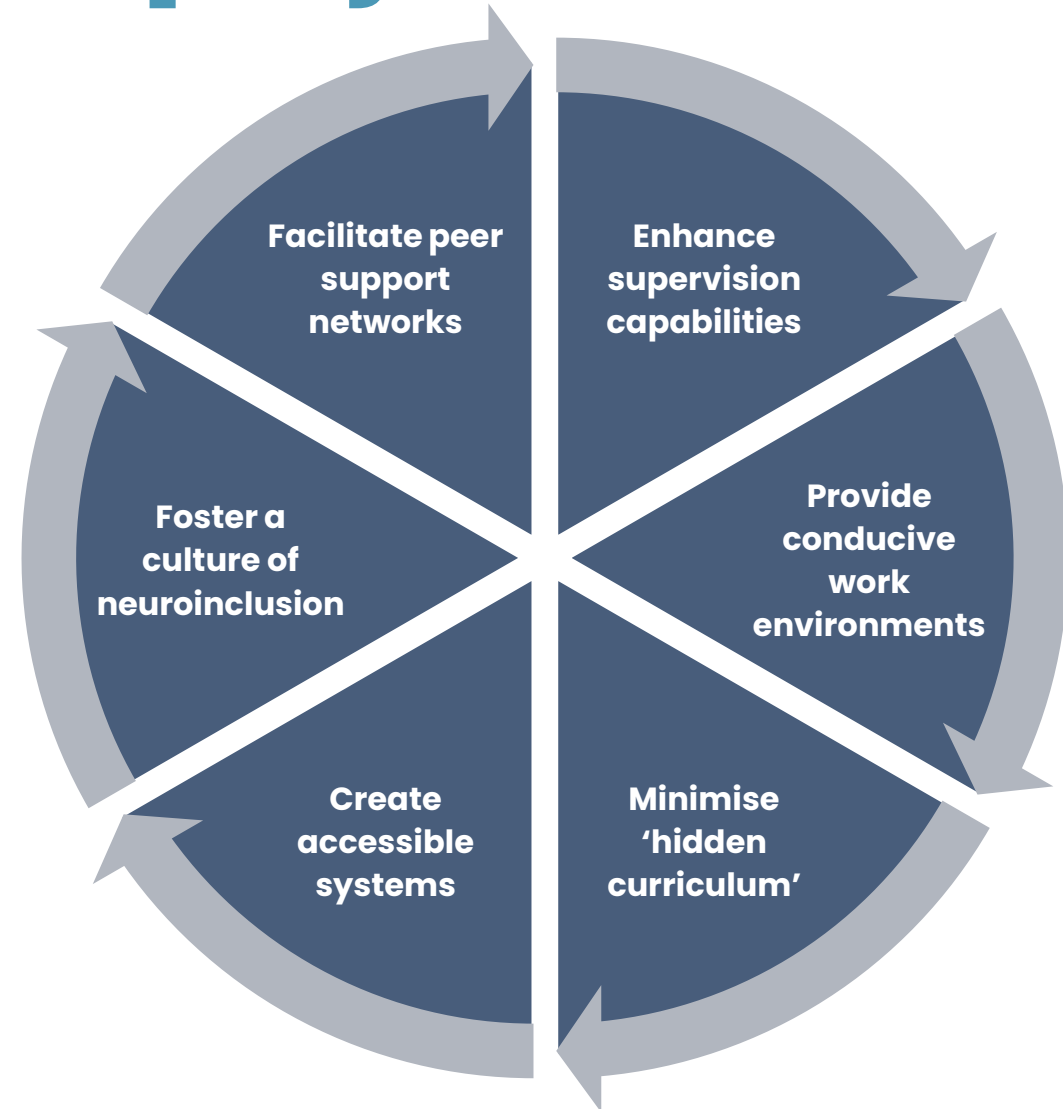
- Systems that are difficult to navigate can exclude neurodivergent scholars leading to frustration, exhaustion, and reinforcing a sense of otherness
- Repeatedly connected to poor mental health

Individual history of educational trauma

- Historical experience of being branded a failure by education systems
- Persistent feelings of inadequacy and not belonging

ACGR guidelines project

- Collaboration of researchers from UniSQ, ANU, Macquarie, Griffith, Aspect, University of Wollongong, Edith Cowan, UTAS, and La Trobe
- Focus on the roles of universities rather than individual experiences
- Delphi study in 3 rounds



Case study 1: Shared office space

Alex, a PhD candidate within your institution, has recently contact you as they are experiencing significant challenges in their shared office environment. They have disclosed a diagnosis of autism with the Equity and Diversity team in your institution.

In your recent discussion with them they report that frequent conversations and phone calls create distracting noise, while bright fluorescent lighting causes sensory discomfort and headaches. These factors have made it difficult for Alex to concentrate, manage stress, and achieve their research milestones. To address these issues, Alex has requested access to a sensory-friendly space that offers a quieter and less stimulating environment, believing this adjustment will enable them to meet deadlines and maintain their wellbeing.

What should you do?

What practical changes could be made to support Alex?

Who should be involved in developing a solution to the concerns raised?

What institutional policies, guidelines or services are available to address this request?

How do you balance Alex's needs with shared space constraints and equity for other candidates?

Case study 2: An extension request

You receive an application for an extension request from a candidate Riley asking for additional time and stipend support. The free text explanation for the request is as follows:

"I have experienced progress challenges throughout my degree. I have always struggled with writing and in the last six months I have been diagnosed with ADHD and ASD, therefore I need more time to get my writing done. Please consider this request."

Riley has attached a letter from a psychologist confirming the diagnoses. The principal supervisor has supported the request saying 'the candidate works really hard and they should be given more time because of the challenges they face', however, the requested timeframe exceeds what is usually available under policy.

You look at their record and see that all previous milestones have been passed as 'satisfactory' and no concerns have been raised about the candidate's work rate. You can either approve the request, reject it, or ask for more information.

What should you do?

Do you have enough information to make a decision?

Should an extension be automatic given the recent diagnosis?

What institutional policies, guidelines or services are available to address this request?

How do you balance Riley's needs within the policies that govern milestone management?

Case study 3: Team dynamics

A PhD student Eden contacts you to raise concerns about working with their supervisory team. Things were going well at the start but as the research enters the data collection phase, Eden is finding it challenging to discuss the specifics with their team. They would like to see more regularity in meetings and would prefer to meet in person rather than online.

The research approach combines several elements, and Eden is struggling to balance each of the components in a manageable way.

Eden has not disclosed their neurodivergence to their team as they are worried about this changing the relationship.

What should you do?

Who should be involved in developing a solution to the concerns raised?

How do you balance Eden's needs while respecting their right not to disclose to their team?

What practical changes could be made to support Eden?

What institutional policies, guidelines or services are available to address this challenge?

Where to from here...?

- Complete the Delphi study to capture understandings of agreement for principles
- Start to develop materials to support the operationalisation of the principles – both for students and supervisors
- Collaborations between all of us!

Thank you!