

## **Neurodivergence as an ECT**

Following a QB (Quantitative Behavioural) test and questionnaires filled in by myself, friends and family I was formally diagnosed with ADHD in May 2025 at the age of 31. While there were signs that I had ADHD I always masked it well and it wasn't until I started my career within education, it was noticed. Even my own family was unaware of my ADHD and that includes my own Mum who I work with! Because of this, I started the journey of being formally diagnosed in April 2024 and after a year of waiting, I went through the Right to Choose option through the NHS, I met with my clinician online to discuss the outcome. It was during this appointment that I received my formal diagnosis, and a lot came to light about how my mind works. Including how I can use this to my advantage in my career. The clinician went through some really good techniques that could work for me and discussed the options of trialling medication to see if this would also support me.

After my formal diagnosis, I knew I had to spin this into a positive. I kept thinking to myself "Just because you're 31 and newly diagnosed with ADHD doesn't mean you can't be a teacher." I also considered what advice was given during my appointment. Because of this, I decided to meet with my mentor about the report provided. A big part of this was accepting I now know why my brain works the way it does and that I can now use that to improve who I am as a teacher. We spoke about everything in an open and honest conversation. We agreed the best course of action is for me to be honest with how I am feeling or coping with tasks. From here we discussed what I struggle with and there were a few things. The main things we discussed were:

- How tasks need to be broken down into manageable chunks, including when I spend time completing Bright Space.
- I'll get overwhelmed if too much is happening at the once and how, for the life of me, I cannot use a planner.
- So, we developed a range of support mechanisms such as an awareness card I keep on me and how those around me learnt what ADHD was because they needed to know what it is just as much as I did.
- I also knew organisation skills might as well be non-existent. I didn't know how to utilise my planner to get the best out of my day and lessons until very recently, so it meant I struggled with some of the teaching standards because it linked to progression and teaching well planned lessons.

From this list, we worked on a plan of action to support myself and my mentor in understanding what helped me work to my highest potential. It also helped my mentor understand how my mind worked and how she could best support me. This drew us closer together and have developed a strong friendship out of this. We decided on several things to help, and we then went to another member of staff I trusted to see what they thought. Together we decided on the following:

1. Having a physical calendar and at the start of each term putting in important dates. I did this on bright green labels, so it drew my attention to it. I also chose a calendar that I could relate to. Naturally I picked one of my hyper-focuses, Supernatural.
2. Setting up a routine that worked for me that was still in line with the schools' expectations. We did this by looking at the policies for teaching and breaking it down into manageable chunks. As a teacher, I like students working in a calm and quiet environment. It meant I could work better with students on a 1-2-1 basis if they need support because I am focusing on what they are saying to me instead of the conversations around the room.
3. Making to-do lists in order of importance. If I was unsure on what order it needs to be in, I need to reach out to a trusted person for support. This also allowed me to work on larger tasks that is broken down into chunks and it prevents tasks being left until the last minute to be completed. We then worked this into my routine, so I had time dedicated to the tasks that needing completing.
4. Because I can have a lot of built-up energy, I consistently walk around the classroom. This helps release this energy and I can ensure students are on task, then support them with any concerns or misconceptions straight away. It also meant my step count is on average at 15,000!
5. Buying a planner that is more suitable for me. I did some research and spoke to friends within the industry with most of them recommending The Positive Teacher Company. When I investigated them, I appreciated how they designed their products. The planners are well designed and had space to write notes and to-do lists. While they are not the cheapest planners, they are by far, the best I have ever had! I actually enjoy using my planner and I it every day.
6. Finally, not to bottle up how I feel. Regardless of if this is an idea I've had or if I'm feeling overwhelmed by something. It allowed my mentor to work with me to overcome this feeling or support me developing my ideas into a usable resource for my whole department.

The best advice I can give to anyone in a similar situation to me, is not to give up because, you are making a difference to the students you teach. Regardless of how you feel. You will find that if you become open minded to your neurodivergence, you can use this to support students more. They will also relate to you more if they have a neurodivergent diagnosis because they can learn from you how to manage their difficulties from you. I would also recommend you talk to your mentor and ECT Lead for your school. During this chat, you need to be completely honest with them about any support you need, this can also raise awareness to them about how to support you and other staff in similar situations. I would also make an awareness card with agreed steps on it for you and sharing this with you mentor and ECT lead that you can keep with your ID card. Lastly, never think you are alone or singled out as there are always going to be others around you in a similar situation. From here, you can always ask if your ECT Lead if they would help you meet up with staff with others with a similar diagnosis, to you can discuss how you feel and tips to support you from a like-minded person.