

## **CDI Event Chat Summary**

**Topic:** Neurodiversity, careers practice, and inclusive approaches

**Format:** Summary of participant chat contributions and reflections

### **Welcome and introductions**

The session opened with a warm welcome from CDI Events, followed by introductions from participants joining from across the UK and Ireland, as well as Norway. Attendees represented a broad range of roles, including careers advisers, careers consultants, employment advisers, academics, independent practitioners, council teams, college and university staff, and those studying towards Level 6 qualifications.

Many participants highlighted their experience of working with:

- neurodivergent young people and adults
- EHCP learners
- care-experienced young people
- students with additional needs
- autistic learners and their families

This created a rich and experienced learning community for the session.

### **Early reflections**

From the outset, participants described the session as thoughtful, relevant, and engaging. There was strong appreciation for the way the speakers connected theory, research, and practice, and for the use of lived experience and real examples to ground the discussion.

Comments highlighted that the session was:

- thought-provoking
- insightful
- relevant to practice
- helpful in connecting research to day-to-day careers work

### **Key discussion themes**

#### **1. Masking and its impact**

One of the strongest discussion threads focused on masking. Participants reflected on the personal and professional impact this can have on neurodivergent individuals.

Key points raised included:

- masking can lead to exhaustion and burnout
- it may affect confidence, identity, and self-understanding
- it can make career choice and self-expression more difficult

- differences between home and school/college presentations can lead to misunderstanding or conflict

There was also discussion about how practitioners can better support “demasking” by creating safer, more accepting spaces and by adapting expectations and communication styles.

## **2. Learning wounds**

The concept of **learning wounds** particularly resonated with participants. Several commented that this gave language to patterns they regularly see in practice, especially when working with young people who have disengaged from education, are NEET, or have experienced repeated barriers.

Participants noted that this concept helped them think more clearly about:

- confidence and self-efficacy
- mistrust in educational systems
- the emotional impact of repeated negative experiences
- how career support can avoid reinforcing those wounds

## **3. Individual need over labels**

A repeated theme was the importance of adapting practice to the individual rather than relying too heavily on a diagnostic label.

Participants reflected that:

- autism and neurodivergence present differently in each person
- one size does not fit all
- practitioners should focus on traits, preferences, and support needs
- diagnosis status can affect access to statutory support, but support should not depend solely on diagnosis

## **4. Systems, structures, and barriers**

A number of attendees reflected on the tension between adapting individual practice and working within systems that remain inflexible.

Points raised included:

- organisations do not always adapt their processes or expectations
- there may not always be an appropriate “next step” available locally
- post-16 transition remains a significant challenge for some learners
- formal structures can create barriers for those who need more flexible or relational support

There was a strong sense that inclusive practice must involve not only individual adaptation, but also wider systemic challenge.

## **Practice implications raised by participants**

Throughout the session, participants identified practical implications for their own work. These included:

- slowing sessions down and allowing more reflection time
- using more visual prompts, diagrams, and written tools
- checking assumptions and not over-relying on body language alone
- contracting carefully and asking clients what works best for them
- creating emotionally safe, non-judgemental spaces
- adapting communication style to the person, rather than defaulting to professional norms
- reflecting on whether notes, materials, and follow-up communication are genuinely accessible
- drawing on counselling and coaching skills where appropriate

Participants also reflected on the need to examine how much “neuronorming” may be built into careers practice.

## **Breakout room reflections**

Feedback from breakout discussions showed strong engagement with the themes of the session. Participants shared that they were leaving with:

- a greater awareness of the impact of masking
- a stronger understanding of learning wounds
- renewed commitment to reflecting on and adapting their own practice
- a desire to better understand clients’ lived experience
- practical ideas for making guidance conversations more inclusive

There was optimism that things are improving, while also recognition that progress is often slow and uneven.

## **Resources and follow-up**

Participants asked for access to:

- slides
- recording
- chat
- additional resources mentioned during the session

There was particular interest in:

- co-creation guidance and resources

- neuroinclusivity materials
- further exploration of learning wounds
- practical tools to use with EHCP and neurodivergent learners

The organisers confirmed that slides, chat, and recording would be shared, and that additional resources would also be circulated where possible.

### **Closing reflections**

The event closed with very positive feedback from attendees, many describing it as one of the most useful and inspiring CPD sessions they had attended in some time.

Participants praised:

- the quality of the speakers
- the depth of reflection encouraged
- the practical relevance of the session
- the balance of theory, research, and lived experience

There was also interest in future events exploring related themes, including:

- post-16 transitions
- mature students and career changers
- systemic barriers in careers and education
- further practical approaches to neuroinclusive careers work

### **Final note**

Thank you to all speakers, facilitators, and attendees for contributing to such an engaged, thoughtful, and generous discussion.