



Below are some of our SMU Staff testimonials, which highlight some of the barriers, and solutions, staff have whilst navigating work with a disability.

TESIMONIAL 1

I've experienced anxiety and depression for years, which has often been made much worse by stresses that come up in the workplace. After being diagnosed properly I was signed off work at St Mary's for a short period, and started on SSRIs (antidepressants). When I transitioned back into work, it was important to me to have some level of openness with people at work about what I was navigating. I kept an open channel of communication with my Line Manager about how it was working or not working, including some side effects of SSRIs and how these affected my day to day life, which many people wouldn't know about. Attending events with the Disability Network has been really positive as a place to learn from other people, and share experiences and info about disabilities that any colleague would want to know, so that they can be inclusive of everyone they work with.

TESIMONIAL 2

My diagnosis of ADHD affects many different aspects of my life, both personally and professionally. Especially during the current medication shortage it can be particularly difficult for myself to navigate my day-to-life. Things I sometimes struggle with include concentration, motivation and emotional regulation, as well as sensory sensitivity.

Fortunately, I have been able to identify different strategies that help me as an individual to cope with the day-to-day difficulties ADHD brings. These include, but are not limited to:

*• **Communication:** By openly communicating my struggles with my team and line manager, I can discuss potential accommodations and generally navigate the teamwork.*

*• **Noise-Cancelling Headphones:** This helps massively with my concentration. I often put on my favourite playlists or play some Lo-Fi, which I find very calming.*

*• **Lists:** I created lists for prioritisation every single day and use the same colour codes, as this helps me to organise my day as consistently as possible.*

*• **Work space:** I have personalised my own desk quite a lot and put little trinkets and fidget toys on there, as this helps me to keep myself grounded and homely.*

*• **Engagement:** I often engage with other people affected by ADHD via LinkedIn and follow their tips and tricks to navigate the learning difficulty. Talking with some of them and exchanging knowledge is also very helpful.*

TESIMONIAL 3

This is my personal experience and may not necessarily reflect other people with the same conditions. I have dyspraxia and IBS. I experience challenges with coordination, perception of time, and fluctuations in energy/ discomfort levels; I find fine motor coordination difficult, and growing up, I found speech quite tricky. I can struggle with uncertainty, sensory sensitivity, and understanding social nuances (I overthink sometimes), and organisation can take me longer than my peers. Additionally, as my mind uses a lot of energy to navigate the world around me, I have to write things down and set reminders as I will forget things if not.

Some strategies that help me:

- Allowing myself additional time in the mornings.
- I set things out the day before and try not to leave things at the last minute.
- I have lots of clocks/timers around me.
- I know where bathrooms are and incorporate rest breaks into my day; I try to take time to eat my lunch and go for a walk to rest my eyes. Make sure to take breaks for water and keep items that make me feel comfortable close by (hot water bottle, fidget toys, reminders for anxious days and medication).
- I also use assistive technology to reduce the glare on my computer and dim lights when possible.
- I try to keep a structured diary and keeping things electronically avoids misplacing things (I am pleased that my team do not operate with just paper folders!); additionally, familiarity helps, and I'm very grateful that we work at a campus university, and I visited St Mary's a couple of times before starting my role to familiarise myself with the area.
- Calming music and reducing sound can also help with sensory sensitivity.

QUICK WINS

- **Consider using Zoom instead of Teams**, Zoom has more sophisticated noise suppression settings (3 settings), so is **much better at getting rid of background noise** and interference, great for staff who have specific learning differences and are easily distracted, or colleagues who have hearing impairments.
- Use the **in-built accessibility tool in Microsoft Office**, to ensure your documents are digitally accessible. Also, using the heading function makes navigating a document for those using assistive technology so much better.

FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES

- 'How do you cope' podcast
- Disability Staff Network webpage
- Access to work
- St Mary's AccessAble guide