Engineering Professors COUNCIL
The voice of engineering academics

TOWARDS NEUROINCLUSIVE ENGINEERING EDUCATION THE EPC MATURITY FRAMEWORK

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EXECUTIVE INTRODUCTION

Neurodivergent students are a significant but often invisible part of every engineering cohort. Their experiences of delayed diagnosis, stigma, and structural barriers shape confidence, belonging, and progression - and ultimately who remains in the discipline. Because securing a formal diagnosis can take years, students rely particularly heavily on the learning environment itself rather than clinical interventions to succeed. When institutional support only activates after a formal diagnosis is recorded, a large proportion of engineering students will remain outside the system's line of sight. Neuroinclusion cannot remain a reactive accommodation; it must became a design feature.

This report introduces the EPC Neuroinclusion Maturity Framework: a co-designed, evidence-led tool that helps engineering faculties understand their current practice, set aspiration, and plan meaningful, achievable improvement. It moves away from generic, tick-box exercises, providing a discipline-specific approach grounded in the lived experience of navigating engineering programmes. Organised across four maturity levels and seven domains, the framework establishes cognitive accessibility as a core driver of educational quality and student success.

By directly linking inclusive practice to measurable outcomes – such as retention, attainment, and student satisfaction – this framework provides senior leaders and academic teams with a. shared language for strategic planning. Backed by structured evidence archetypes and upcoming case studies, this document offers engineering faculties a practical roadmap to shift form individual goodwill to sustainable, systemic change.

What this framework is not:

- a compliance tool
- a ranking mechanism
- an EDI checklist
- a replacement for professional judgement

The authors wish to thank the Delphi panel participants who contributed to the original workshop and subsequent consensus process, and the institutional teams who have provided detailed feedback on drafts.

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FOREWORD

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Founder Do-IT Solutions; co-author, City & Guilds Foundation Neurodiversity Index 2026

The Engineering Professors' Council's Neuroinclusion Maturity Framework is one of the most thoughtfully constructed discipline-specific tools I have seen in this space. It resists reducing neuroinclusion to a checklist, ranking system or a compliance exercise. Instead, it offers engineering faculties a developmental model that recognises inclusion as a property of systems, not individuals.

Having spent the last few years immersed in the data for the City & Guilds Foundation Neurodiversity Index, I read this framework with real interest. Many of its message's echo what we found in workplaces: awareness has risen, but delivery remains uneven. The challenge now is not simply knowing more but designing better.

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Good intentions plateau without structure

The EPC's staircase model captures something our workplace data shows clearly. In the 2026 Index, 70–75% of employers rated their neuroinclusion readiness positively, rising to 78–80% among senior leaders, yet only 32–38% of neurodivergent employees reported feeling psychologically safe to disclose or trusting that adjustments would be implemented consistently. The EPC's warning about the "equity hazard" of Stage 2 isolated pockets of good practice which mirrors this potential 'competence gap'. Champions do matter, but they cannot carry a system alone.

2. Barriers are structural, not individual

One of the strongest messages in the EPC report is that barriers are often manufactured at the design stage: in ambiguous assessment briefs, unstructured group work, lab marathons, unclear transitions and assumptions about what a "real engineer" should look or sound like. This is directly aligned with our Index findings that workplace adjustments are still too often reactive, person-dependent and poorly matched to actual tasks. Whether in education or employment, the principle is the same: prepare and get your structures right and don't wait to repair.

3. Engineering shows why context matters

Engineering education has its own microclimate: high cognitive load, multiple learning environments, safety-critical activity, group work, accreditation requirements and tightly sequenced curricula. The EPC framework shows how a technical, high-rigour discipline can take cognitive accessibility seriously without lowering standards.

4. The framework is portable beyond engineering

Although developed for engineering education, the structure has much wider relevance. The domains: leadership and capability, funding and impact, transitions and progression, learning and teaching, assessment, learning environments and student experience could be adapted for healthcare education, apprenticeships, professional services, construction, manufacturing, energy, retail and hospitality.

The same questions apply everywhere: where are the barriers, who experiences them, what evidence do we have, and what needs to change at system level?

5. Neuroinclusion must become quality improvement

The real strength of the EPC model is that it links inclusion to measurable outcomes: retention, attainment, student satisfaction, graduate readiness, complaints, adjustment demand and institutional performance. This matters. Neuroinclusion should not be considered as a side project. It is about educational quality, workforce readiness, productivity and human potential. In the workplace, we found the same pattern: policy statements and awareness sessions are not enough unless they change everyday practice.

WHERE THIS COULD TRAVEL NEXT

I see the EPC framework becoming a model for other sectors wanting to move from aspiration to action. Translated into other educational and workplace settings, it could help employers and educators assess whether neuroinclusion is embedded in all stages of their delivery.

Its greatest value is the shared language it creates between leaders, educators, managers, EDI teams and those with lived experience. That is precisely the gap we have seen in the 2026 Index: organisations often believe they are doing better, while neurodivergent people report that lived experience has not changed enough.

I welcome this report as a valuable, practical and transferable framework. It gives us a clearer route from awareness to action, and from individual goodwill to systemic, sustainable neuroinclusion.

NAVIGATING THIS DOCUMENT

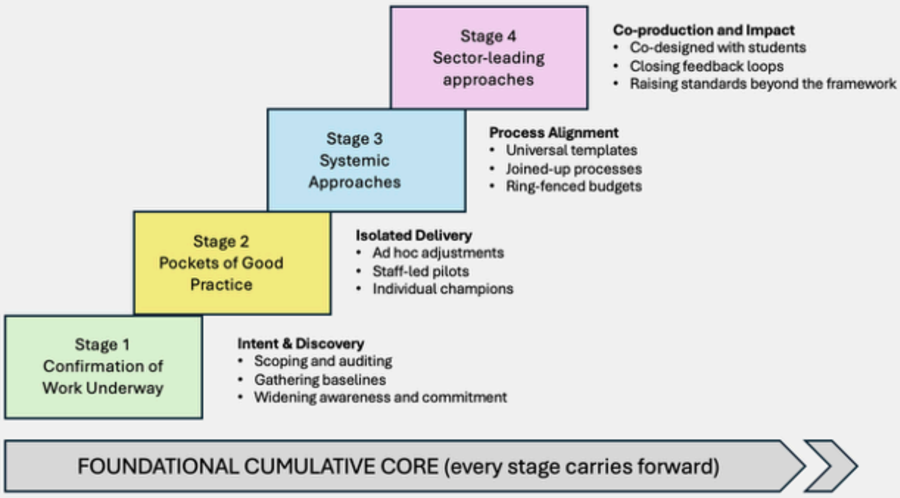
- If you lead an institution, faculty, or department - or represent a professional body –begin with ‘A Hidden Challenge at the Heart of Engineering Education’ (p9) and read through to the appendices. This gives you the full strategic and conceptual case.
- If you’re an EDI lead, go directly to ‘Distinguishing Cognitive Accessibility from Physical Accommodations and Mental Health’ (p13) to understand why neuroinclusion requires its own discipline-specific approach.
- If you’re a programme lead, start with ‘Four Insights that Demand a New Approach’ (p10) to understand the engineering-specific drivers behind the framework.
- If you’re an academic team ready to implement, begin at ‘A Practical Tool for Change’ (p17) to learn about the domains and stages.
- If you’re a student, go to ‘Why this work started with students’ (p15) see how lived experience shaped the framework.
- If you’re an enthusiast change-maker, go to ‘Strategic Note for Champions’ (p21) for guidance on how to lead from where you are.
- If you want concrete evidence examples, go straight to the Appendices (p26)
- If you want the business case, go to ‘Strategic Value, Measurable Impact’ (p22)

FRAMEWORK AT A GLANCE

A discipline-specific maturity model for strengthening neuro-inclusive engineering education across seven domains of practice and four developmental stages.

The Framework uses a staircase model of maturity across four stages as follows:

The EPC Maturity Staircase: A Cumulative Self-Assessment Model



These stages can be used to self-assess maturity against seven domains of practice:

- A. Leadership & Capability
- B. Funding & Impact
- C. Transitions & Progression
- D. Learning & Teaching
- E. Assessment
- F. Learning Environments
- G. Student Experience

Each domain includes typical features and evidence examples at every stage, enabling teams to self-assess with clarity and consistency.

Use the domains to identify your strengths and gaps. Use the stages to understand your maturity. Use the evidence archetypes to validate your self-assessment. Use the staircase to plan your next step.

The framework is co-designed with neurodivergent engineers and educators, ensuring lived experience shapes every domain.

A HIDDEN CHALLENGE AT THE HEART OF ENGINEERING EDUCATION

Engineering education is at an inflection point. Across the UK, universities are working hard to widen participation, modernise curricula, and build learning environments that reflect the realities of contemporary engineering practice. Yet one dimension of inclusion remains persistently underexamined despite its scale, its relevance to engineering, and its profound impact on students' ability to thrive: neuroinclusion.

Neurodivergent students are present in every engineering cohort. Many arrive without a formal diagnosis, and many will never receive one during their degree. Neurodivergence is, by and large, an invisible condition and the differences that students show in communication, thinking, or physical behaviour can carry significant stigma. Some neurodivergent students arrive in universities having been labelled as awkward, high maintenance, or lacking "common sense" - a phrase that appeared repeatedly in our evidence gathering. These experiences are not marginal. They shape confidence, belonging, and progression. They shape who stays in engineering.

While traditional institutional frameworks are designed around known, formal disability disclosures, they systematically fail the neurodivergent student body. Data indicates that neurodivergent learners represent one of the fastest-growing demographics in higher education; however, an unprecedented number enter university without a formal diagnosis, or exhaust significant cognitive and emotional energy "masking" their challenges to avoid stigma. When institutional support only activates after a formal diagnosis is recorded, a large proportion of neurodivergent engineering students remain outside the system's line of sight and their needs go unrecognised until difficulties become acute. Neuroinclusion cannot remain a reactive accommodation; it must become a structural default.

The higher education sector needs a structured, evidence-led way to understand and respond to these realities. This will not be achieved in a generic EDI tool, even whilst we acknowledge the realities of intersectional complexities. Instead, we believe a discipline-specific approach is warranted, co-designed with neurodivergent engineering students, academics, and professional services colleagues, and grounded in the lived experience of navigating engineering programmes. Through this work, we want to identify and acknowledge the particular challenges - and opportunities - that engineering education offers neurodivergent learners.

Engineering education is entering a period where neuro inclusion is no longer optional. Demographic shifts are bringing greater cognitive diversity into every cohort, regulatory scrutiny on quality and outcomes is intensifying, the student mental health crisis is exposing the limits of reactive, accommodation based models, and workforce shortages mean the profession cannot afford to lose talent through avoidable friction or exclusion. Institutions that adapt now will strengthen retention, student satisfaction, capability, and graduate readiness. Those that don't will fall behind on quality, compliance, and competitiveness.

FOUR INSIGHTS THAT DEMAND A NEW APPROACH

Four insights from our work make the case for a discipline-specific neuroinclusion maturity framework that can serve to describe the development of best practice across the dimensions of their experience that students have described as being barriers and enablers. These insights are that:

1. Neurodiversity is widespread, invisible, often misunderstood, and there are substantial barriers to diagnosis

Despite public narratives about overdiagnosis, the evidence points in the opposite direction: neurodivergence is under diagnosed, especially among adults, women, and those with predominantly inattentive traits. Diagnosis can take years – the entirety of a degree in fact – and even when diagnosed, there are no ‘magic bullet’ treatments. Students must therefore rely heavily on the learning environment itself rather than on clinical interventions in determining whether they can succeed.

2. Engineering appears to have a distinctive neurodivergent population.

Although robust and systematically gathered prevalence data is lacking, current data strongly indicates a pattern. Dyslexia is estimated to be three times more common among engineers than in the general population (IET 2024), and engineers are more likely to experience traits associated with autism related conditions than any other profession (IMechE 2014). This aligns with what many educators observe: engineering attracts, and benefits from, a wide range of cognitive profiles (Belhari & Bielefeldt 2026). A framework that helps institutions understand and support this diversity is not a niche exercise; it is core to educational quality.

3. Barriers in engineering education are often structural, not individual.

Our co design process surfaced a set of engineering specific challenges that are rarely addressed in general inclusion frameworks. These include:

- Cultural expectations about what “real engineering” demands, often expressed through groupwork norms or assumptions about professional behaviour. Educators can attempt to mimic industrial communication environments, applying expectations without the coaching, mentoring, or rapid feedback cycles that a workplace actually offers.
- Perceptions of accreditation that can constrain inclusive practice. Respondents repeatedly emphasised that

accreditation is not the barrier, but a misunderstanding of accreditation is.

- Groupwork and peer assessment, which can be transformative when well-designed but isolating and demoralising when poorly supported.
- Assessment practices that rely heavily on examinations or ambiguous coursework instructions, creating unnecessary barriers for students who process information differently.
- Frequent transitions between learning environments - labs, workshops, makerspaces, placements – transitions which can be particularly challenging for neurodivergent students.
- The timing and integration of theory and practice, which students describe as crucial to their ability to make sense of concepts.

These are not peripheral issues. They are central to how engineering is taught, assessed, and experienced.

4. Student-centred design has a disproportionate impact in engineering.

While student-centred design benefits all learners, its impact is particularly significant in engineering because of the discipline's complexity, pace, and cognitive demands. When departments design more coherent learning environments, the benefits are amplified: students navigate programmes more confidently, variability in outcomes reduces, and the whole cohort experiences a more stable and supportive learning environment. In engineering, where multiple learning environments, high-stakes assessments, and tightly sequenced curricula intersect, student-centred design is not simply good practice - it is essential to educational quality.

Taken together, these insights show why a discipline specific framework is not only justified but necessary.

COGNITIVE DIVERSITY AS A DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ASSET

For engineering faculties, treating cognitive accessibility as a standard quality-assurance gate is not merely an exercise in legal compliance or a benevolent adjustment. It is an engineering-specific innovation strategy. The complex technical challenges of the 21st century demand divergent thinking, hyper-focused pattern recognition, and non-linear spatial visualisation - exactly the cognitive profiles native to many neurodivergent minds. When we do not explicitly consider cognitive accessibility in curriculum design, we risk creating patterns of learning that inadvertently disadvantage some of the very thinkers engineering most needs. The result is not deliberate exclusion, but a gradual narrowing of who can thrive within our programmes.

DISTINGUISHING COGNITIVE ACCESSIBILITY FROM PHYSICAL ACCOMMODATIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH

A frequent institutional point of resistance asks why neurodiversity requires an explicit governance framework when other inclusion or wellbeing categories do not receive isolated call outs. The answer lies in the unique nature of the barriers, and the frequent, harmful conflation of neurodivergence with mental ill-health. Whilst all of these conditions can co-occur, they are not the same thing.

A student with physical mobility or visual impairments faces hurdles which can be addressed through well-established estate standards and building regulations, or through central assistive hardware where the core parameters of those adjustments are governed by clear, centralized frameworks. Conversely, the barriers which prevent neurodivergent students from thriving are invisible, pedagogical, and structural; they are actively created by academic teams at the design stage. Because these cognitive barriers are manufactured during the design and delivery of teaching, they cannot be wholly resolved through standard estate modifications or reactive counseling; they must be intentionally and regularly audited and mitigated.

While mental health conditions are fluctuating wellness challenges that require medical and counselling support, neurodivergence refers to permanent differences in human cognitive processing. Neurodivergent students do not suffer from a permanent state of poor mental health; rather, poor mental health is often the consequence of navigating a structurally inaccessible environment.

The barriers preventing neurodivergent students from thriving are entirely invisible, pedagogical, and structural. They are actively created by academic teams at the design stage - embedded within ambiguous assessment phrasing, unstructured group work dynamics, or un-paced technical lab marathons. Because these barriers are manufactured during the curriculum design process, they cannot be resolved by wellbeing apps or reactive counselling. They must be intentionally audited, unpicked, and mitigated at that exact same governance, curriculum design, and validation stage.

OUR CO-DESIGN PROCESS FROM INSIGHT TO FRAMEWORK

WHY THIS WORK STARTED WITH STUDENTS

At its heart, this work is about dignity, capability, and belonging. It is about ensuring that students who think, learn, and communicate differently are not treated as problems to be managed, but as engineers in the making who will add a great deal to the profession. It is about recognising that engineering thrives on cognitive diversity, and that our educational systems must reflect this reality.

Most importantly, it is about designing environments in which all students - not just those who fit traditional norms - can see themselves as engineers.

OUR PROCESS

Developing a meaningful response to neuroinclusion in engineering education demands an approach that is participatory, discipline-specific, and anchored in lived experience. For this reason, the framework emerged through a structured, multi-stakeholder co-design process that brought together neurodivergent students, engineering and computer science academics, and the professional services colleagues who shape institutional systems. The intention was not simply to catalogue barriers, but to build a shared language for change - one that strengthens institutional capability while protecting student choice and dignity. A fuller methodological account is provided in Tait, Gibbs & Fowler (2026); what follows is a summary of the process.

From the outset, balance was a guiding principle. Neurodivergent students' voices were prioritised, but never isolated; instead, they were held in dialogue with those designing and delivering programmes. More than 100 participants from 32 institutions contributed across three phases of work. The first, in summer 2024, centred on collaborative exploration. A cross-institutional workshop surfaced the realities of current practice, the systemic barriers students encounter, and early conceptions of what a subject-specific framework might need to hold. This stage grounded the work in authentic student experience and set the boundaries for what followed.

The second phase, in early 2025, used a modified Delphi process to refine the framework. Each stakeholder group's responses were analysed independently, ensuring that student perspectives were not diluted by institutional norms. Through iterative rounds, the framework's dimensions, descriptors, and progression model took shape - not as a single viewpoint, but as a carefully balanced synthesis of three.

The final phase broadened engagement. Institutions tested the framework within their own contexts, offering feedback that sharpened clarity, usability, and practical value. This decentralised consultation reinforced the framework's purpose: a tool designed not for abstract compliance, but for real, local change.

Taken together, this approach reflects the core principle of the framework itself: inclusion emerges from systems shaped collaboratively, tested in practice, and continually refined.

A PRACTICAL, TOOL FOR CHANGE

The neuro inclusion maturity framework provides a structured way for engineering departments and faculties to understand how neuroinclusive their current practices are, what an appropriate aspiration is for their context, and descriptors to help inform an action plan. It is organised around four levels of maturity which can be used to evaluate seven domains of activity.

Maturity Levels

- Confirmation of Work Underway
- Individual Pockets of Good Practice
- Systemic Approaches in Place
- Inclusive, Sector-Leading Practice

Activity Domains

- Leadership & Capability
- Funding & Impact
- Transitions
- Learning & Teaching
- Assessments
- Learning Environments
- Student Experience

Together, these levels and domains provide a shared language for diagnosing current practice, setting aspirations, and planning meaningful, achievable change.

The framework is designed to be a developmental and dialogic tool rather than a checklist. It recognises that institutions start from different places, face different constraints, and have different strengths. It is designed to support student engagement, strategic planning, evidence gathering, and continuous improvement. It is best used by teams rather than individuals, because neurodivergent learners have told us that neuroinclusion is a systems property rather than a personal attribute.

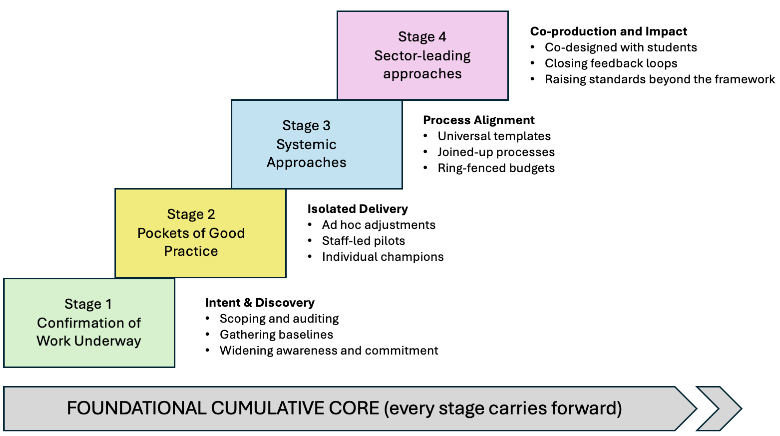
THE STAIRCASE APPROACH

Maturity is assessed across four levels which function as a staircase. Thus, Stage 3 does not replace Stage 2; it absorbs and systemises it.

- **STAGE 1, CONFIRMATION OF WORK UNDERWAY:** Departmental leaders formally acknowledge the importance of neuroinclusion and grant permission for baseline exploratory audits.
- **STAGE 2, POCKETS OF GOOD PRACTICE**: Building on Stage 1, leaders actively endorse and provide ad-hoc funding for localised, informal collaboration between individual academic staff and student support teams.
- **STAGE 3, SYSTEMIC APPROACHES:** In addition to Stage 2 practices, leaders formalise these connections by implementing mandatory protocols and shared data environments that systematically join up departments.
- **STAGE 4, SECTOR-LEADING APPROACHES:** Sustaining Stages 2 and 3 as baselines, leaders expand these frameworks externally, co-producing systemic strategies with students that set new sector benchmarks.

To comfortably claim a stage of maturity, a faculty must demonstrate that it meets the requirements of that stage and retains the preceding stages.

The EPC Maturity Staircase: A Cumulative Self-Assessment Model



THE EQUITY HAZARD OF STAGE 2

While Stage 2 (Pockets of Practice) represents a vital and necessary step away from institutional inaction, the Delphi consensus and our neurodivergent student co-designers highlight it as an inherently unstable and high-risk phase.

Relying on individual, passionate "neuroinclusion champions" to drive adjustments creates an unfair educational lottery for students. A learner may experience profound safety and clarity in a laboratory session on Monday, only to encounter severe cognitive barriers and ambiguous instructions in a design studio on Tuesday. Furthermore, Stage 2 places the entire burden of disclosure, self-advocacy, and emotional labour onto the student, while running the severe risk of burning out the isolated staff members who are carrying the faculty's inclusive practices voluntarily.

Therefore, Stage 2 must never be viewed as a comfortable destination or an acceptable baseline. The explicit goal of this maturity framework is to provide faculties with the structural roadmap required to move through Stage 2 as rapidly as possible, formalising those isolated pockets into the permanent, automated safety of Stage 3 (Systemic Approaches).

	STAGE 1 Confirmation of work underway	**STAGE 2** Individual pockets of good practice	**STAGE 3** Systemic approaches in place	**STAGE 4** Inclusive, sector-leading approaches
A. Leadership & Capability *Domain Scope: Includes structural forms of institutional leadership, staff upskilling capacity, student-led governance voices, and data privacy frameworks.*	Departmental leaders formally acknowledge the importance of the neurodiversity paradigm and signal an intent to investigate current institutional barriers, or faculty teams register intent by initiating bottom-up, grassroots audits to establish an initial evidence base. Active systemic implementation has not yet begun.	Building on the initial awareness of Stage 1, identifiable examples of localized knowledge sharing and reactive services can be seen, usually driven by individual staff champions or specific modular initiatives.	Embedding and formalising the practices of Stage 2, leaders routinely integrate neurodivergent students into strategic thinking, ensuring inclusion is systematically built into all planning, operations, and academic policies.	Sustaining Stages 2 and 3 as a permanent institutional foundation, faculty leadership and culture are recognized by both internal and external stakeholders as being open, co-produced, and progressive with respect to neuroinclusion.
B. Funding and Impact *Domain Scope: Includes budget allocation, staff resourcing capacity, assistive technology infrastructure, and the evaluation of student well-being outcomes.*	The department formally acknowledges that a lack of predictable resourcing introduces severe barriers to student equity and staff capacity; the faculty signals an intent to evaluate its long-term resource needs, or academic teams initiate baseline business cases to map out the funding required for future neuro-inclusive infrastructure. Active budget restructuring has not yet begun.	Building on the initial awareness of Stage 1, identifiable examples of localized capacity building, small-scale project funding, and ad-hoc resource allocations can be seen, though spending remains reactive and dependent on short-term module budgets.	Embedding and formalising the practices of Stage 2, capacity building and resource allocations are systematically integrated into permanent faculty operating budgets and capital expenditure plans, moving far beyond bare-minimum legal compliance.	Sustaining Stages 2 and 3 as a permanent institutional foundation, the department's funding models and capacity-building frameworks are recognized by external stakeholders as an exemplary, data-backed investment strategy that shifts sector benchmarks for student thriving.
C. Transitions and Progression *Domain Scope: Includes student recruitment and pre-arrival induction through to graduate destinations, explicitly encompassing pre-entry onboarding, year-to-year progression, work placements, and industrial year arrangements.*	The department formally acknowledges the unique friction points neurodivergent learners encounter at critical pivot points - including pre-entry, year-to-year transitions, industrial onboarding, and grduate career navigation - and signals a strategic intent to investigate these barriers, or academic teams initiate localized pre-entry audits to map foundational student transition trends. Active systemic coordination has not yet begun.	Building on the initial awareness of Stage 1, identifiable examples of localized transition support, pre-arrival acclimation, and reactive services can be seen, though delivery remains heavily dependent on individual staff champions or specific modular initiatives.	Embedding and formalising the practices of Stage 2, the transition needs of neurodivergent students are routinely, predictably met across the entire lifecycle through institutionalized frameworks, ensuring smooth, proactive continuity from pre-arrival to graduation.	Sustaining Stages 2 and 3 as a permanent institutional foundation, the department's practice in anticipating, co-producing, and transforming transition challenges across the entire student and professional lifecycle sets an exemplary benchmark for external stakeholders and the wider engineering sector.
D. Learning & Teaching *Domain Scope: Includes curriculum, pedagogy, course organization, and digital learning environments.*	Departmental leaders formally acknowledge the specific cognitive and sensory friction points inherent in traditional engineering education, including laboratory environments, Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) structures, and collaborative group design projects; the faculty signals an intent to investigate these specific pedagogical friction points, or academic teams initiate baseline audits of current module structures and VLE layouts to uncover hidden barriers. Active curriculum-wide redesign has not yet begun.	Building on the initial awareness of Stage 1, identifiable examples of localized knowledge sharing and active learning can be seen, though delivery remains heavily dependent on individual staff champions or specific modular initiatives.	Embedding and formalising the practices of Stage 2, the needs of neurodivergent students are routinely and predictably met across the entire curriculum through standardized faculty policies and quality-assurance checks.	Sustaining Stages 2 and 3 as a permanent institutional foundation, the department's teaching delivery and digital infrastructure are recognized by both internal and external stakeholders as an exemplary, co-produced model of inclusive engineering education.
E. Assessment *Domain Scope: Includes format, timing, environment, and clarity, with particular attention paid to group work and communication demands.*	The department formally identifies the structural, formatting, and environmental barriers neurodivergent students encounter before and during assessments; the faculty signals an intent to map these assessment challenges, or academic teams initiate localized data reviews of student performance across different testing modes to establish baseline patterns. Active assessment restructuring has not yet begun.	Building on the initial awareness of Stage 1, identifiable examples of localized flexibility, modular assessment adjustments, and clear brief formatting can be seen, though delivery remains entirely dependent on individual module leaders.	Embedding and formalising the practices of Stage 2, assessment and feedback strategies are systematically designed at the program level to proactively eliminate cognitive barriers, enforced through mandatory faculty approval processes.	Sustaining Stages 2 and 3 as a permanent institutional foundation, the department's overarching assessment strategy and industrial grading alignment are recognized by external stakeholders as an exemplary model of inclusive, professional engineering evaluation.
F. Learning Environments *Domain Scope: Includes physical layout, digital learning infrastructure, sensory conditions, and spatial policies across laboratories, lecture halls, and private study areas.*	The department formally acknowledges the sensory, architectural, and digital barriers built into traditional technical spaces—including high-noise workshops, sterile computer labs, and inflexible attendance tracking; the faculty signals an intent to review these spatial limitations, or academic teams initiate baseline sensory and digital audits of current learning environments to map immediate friction points. Active structural or estate remodeling has not yet begun.	Building on the initial awareness of Stage 1, identifiable examples of localized spatial modifications, adaptive equipment usage, and module-level digital consistency can be seen, though delivery remains entirely dependent on individual staff or technical champions.	Embedding and formalising the practices of Stage 2, physical, digital, and cultural learning environments are systematically governed by standardized faculty-wide rules to proactively eliminate sensory and operational barriers.	Sustaining Stages 2 and 3 as a permanent institutional foundation, the department's physical estate layout and advanced digital architecture are recognized by external stakeholders as a sector-leading model of cognitive accessibility and sensory-sensitive design.
G. Student Experience *Domain Scope: Includes holistic well-being, pastoral care, peer community health, and navigation of central university support systems.*	The department formally acknowledges that navigating complex university systems, high academic workloads, and unpredictable schedules introduces severe executive functioning and well-being strain; the faculty signals an intent to review these student experience barriers, or academic teams initiate baseline research into current student disclosure rates and workload bottlenecks to establish an initial evidence base. Active systemic support restructuring has not yet begun.	Building on the initial awareness of Stage 1, identifiable examples of localized pastoral care, ad-hoc student support bubbles, and informal peer spaces can be seen, though delivery remains entirely dependent on individual staff or student initiatives.	Embedding and formalising the practices of Stage 2, the student experience is governed by consistent, predictable, and connected support frameworks that move far beyond bare-minimum legal compliance to guarantee holistic well-being.	Sustaining Stages 2 and 3 as a permanent institutional foundation, the department's student-centred systems and advanced co-production models set a sector-leading benchmark for empowering neurodivergent independence, confidence, and capability.

STRATEGIC NOTE FOR CHAMPIONS

If your faculty lacks the senior leadership commitment to formally engage with this framework at an institutional level, do not wait. Individual academics, module leaders, and student networks are actively encouraged to use these descriptors as a local diagnostic tool. Use the Stage 2 and 3 descriptors to redesign your own modules, labs, and assessment briefs. The localised data and student success metrics you gather will become an evidence base to secure executive buy-in later.

The neuro inclusion maturity framework is designed to be used in practice. By offering a structured, evidence-based pathway for improvement, it shifts neuro inclusion from an aspirational ideal to a practical lens through which engineering faculties can plan, prioritise, and act. It gives teams a way to move beyond describing their current position and instead understand what to do next, why it matters, and what difference it will make to students.

The process begins with a simple but powerful step: locating the current stage of maturity across each dimension - leadership, funding, teaching, assessment, transitions, environments, and student experience. This act of positioning immediately generates four outcomes. First, it surfaces the strengths and weaknesses of the existing context. Second, it enables teams to set a realistic level of aspiration for each dimension. Third, it provides a clear set of next steps, grounded in the descriptors of the following stage. And fourth, it helps teams articulate the benefits of progression versus the risks—strategic, operational, and educational—of remaining static.

This reframing allows academic leads, programme directors, and professional services colleagues to connect abstract maturity levels to issues they already recognise: inconsistent module design, high demand for individual adjustments, pressure on support services, or variability in student outcomes. The framework becomes a tool not only for asking "Where are we?" but for asking "What improves next, and why does it matter?"

This approach resonates strongly in engineering because it mirrors familiar disciplinary thinking. Each dimension can be treated as a subsystem with identifiable performance gaps and targeted interventions. The framework supports iterative improvement: teams identify their current stage, examine the defined transition (for example, Stage 2→3 in assessment), and use the accompanying benefit and risk narratives to prioritise action. In doing so, neuro inclusive practice becomes embedded within core curriculum design, quality assurance, and enhancement processes - not as an add on, but as part of the discipline's own logic of continuous improvement.

STRATEGIC VALUE, MEASURABLE IMPACT

A benefits led approach gives the framework its real strategic power because it operates simultaneously at multiple levels of the institution. For programme teams, it offers a practical route to improvement. For senior leaders, the aggregated picture across dimensions becomes a strategic asset: a clear, evidence based narrative for investment and change.

At faculty level, the framework highlights where risks concentrate, where the highest impact gains can be made, and how progress links directly to priorities such as retention, attainment, student satisfaction, and graduate readiness. It positions neuro inclusion not as an ethical responsibility, but as a driver of educational quality, performance, and reputation. This alignment is particularly important in engineering, where regulatory, accreditation, and funding pressures intersect with complex learning environments and diverse student needs.

Crucially, the framework aligns practice with performance. It connects specific improvements - such as moving from Stage 2 to Stage 3 in assessment - to measurable outcomes: stronger NSS assessment and feedback scores, fewer complaints, and reduced demand for individual adjustments. These are not hypothetical benefits; they are patterns already visible in institutional case studies.

By grounding neuro inclusion in demonstrable impact, the framework speaks directly to the performance indicators that shape programme review, quality assurance, and institutional decision making. It creates a clear line of sight between inclusive practice and the metrics that matter to engineering faculties. This clarity enables leaders to justify investment, prioritise interventions, and track progress over time.

In this way, neuro inclusion becomes part of the core business of engineering education: a means of strengthening student success, enhancing programme quality, and improving institutional performance. It is not a separate initiative competing for attention, but a way of doing the work better - more coherently, more sustainably, and with greater benefit to students and staff alike.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE SECTOR

The publication of this framework is not the end of the work; it is the beginning of a new phase of sector wide learning and collaboration. Over the next year, three institutional case studies will explore how the framework operates in practice across different engineering contexts. These studies, running through the second half of 2026, will examine how teams use the maturity levels and domain descriptors to diagnose current practice, plan improvement, and track the impact of change. Their findings will be shared openly to support collective learning across the sector.

Alongside this, a growing set of resources will be curated, including guidance materials, examples of practice, student generated insights, and tools developed by institutions as they work with the framework. This resource base is designed to evolve: colleagues are invited to contribute materials, reflections, and adaptations so that the framework continues to develop in response to real institutional experience.

To sustain this momentum, the Engineering Professors' Council is establishing a Neuro Inclusion Community of Practice. Open to academics, professional services colleagues, students, and sector partners, the community will provide a space for shared problem solving, peer support, and ongoing refinement of the framework.

Together, these next steps signal a shift from framework development to framework adoption, testing, and collective stewardship. Neuro inclusion is a shared responsibility across the engineering education community. By working collaboratively, we can build environments in which all students - and the discipline itself - can thrive.

We invite you to get involved, and become a part of shaping the next phase of neuro inclusive engineering education.

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APPENDICES EVIDENCING NEURO-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

APPROACH TO SELF-ASSESSMENT

1. CORE PRINCIPLES OF SELF-ASSESSMENT

This framework is designed as a developmental and dialogic tool, not a compliance audit. When gathering evidence to locate a faculty's current stage of maturity, teams should be guided by two core principles:

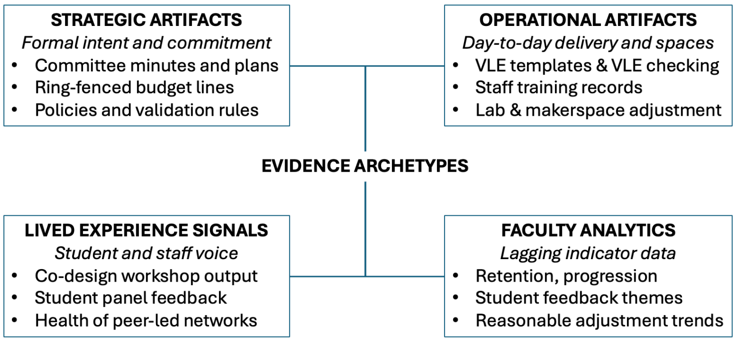
- **Maturity is Cumulative:** As described on page 18, **t**he four stages function as a staircase, not a multiple-choice quiz. Stage 3 does not replace Stage 2; it absorbs and systemises it. To comfortably claim a stage of maturity, a faculty must demonstrate that it meets the requirements of that stage and retains the foundations of all preceding stages.

- **Systems Over Checklists:** Neuroinclusion is a property of educational systems, not a personal attribute of individual staff or students. Evidence should look beyond isolated good intentions and focus on how processes, environments, and cultures are structurally designed.

2. THE FOUR EVIDENCE ARCHETYPES

Academic teams are not expected to produce a unique piece of paperwork for every single descriptor in the matrix. Instead, a single high-quality initiative will often provide evidence across multiple domains. Examples – rather that requirements – for evidence are included in appendices so teams can choose evidence that best represents their contexts.

Teams should look for evidence across four distinct archetypes, ensuring a balance between institutional intent, impact, and the actual lived experiences of students.



Archetype 1: Strategic & Governance Artefacts demonstrate formal institutional commitment, accountability, and long-term planning.

Examples include: Faculty strategic plans, board or committee minutes, ring-fenced budget lines, course validation criteria, and formal policy review stamps.

Archetype 2: Operational & Environmental Artefacts prove that strategic intent has been translated into day-to-day academic delivery and physical spaces.

Examples include: Cognitive accessibility checks on Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), module guides with embedded pacing/breaks, staff training logs, and sensory audits of laboratories, workshops, or makerspaces.

Archetype 3: Lived Experience Signals capture the qualitative reality of whether students feel listened to, safe, and valued.

Examples include: Outputs from co-design workshops, minutes or recommendations from paid Student Advisory Panels, anonymous feedback trends, and the presence of funded, student-led peer networks.

Archetype 4: Faculty Analytics provide the data-led "lagging indicators" that show whether inclusive design is moving measurable metrics.

Examples include: Student retention and year-to-year progression data, themes from National Student Survey (NSS) qualitative comments, and patterns or volumes of reasonable adjustment requests.

3. THE DOMAIN APPENDICES

One appendix for each of the 7 framework domains (A to G) follows. Each appendix contains:

- A statement of engineering context
- Three dialogic reflection prompts, to support team discussion in the self-assessment
- More detailed features of each stage within this domain
- Evidence examples for each stage in this domain

APPENDIX A: EVIDENCING DOMAIN A (LEADERSHIP AND CAPABILITY)

Engineering Context

Cultivating strategic leadership that actively understands and champions neuroinclusion, ensuring that executive decision-making, financial planning, and institutional culture value cognitive diversity as a core strength of professional engineering innovation.

Dialogue Reflection Prompts

Before agreeing on a maturity level for Leadership & Capability, the self-assessment team should discuss the following questions:

- Question 1: When our executive team discusses strategic changes to the faculty or its budgets, do they naturally consider the cognitive and sensory impact on our student community, or is neuroinclusion treated as a minor EDI detail (if at all)?
- Question 2: To what extent do our leaders use modern, respectful, identity-affirming language naturally and consistently in public meetings, or do they still rely on outdated compliance and medical-deficit phrasing?
- Question 3: How well is leadership support for neuroinclusion built into our formal governance structures and long-term financial plans, or would it completely disappear if a few passionate individual leaders left the university?

Feature and Evidence Menu, by Stage

Stage 1: Confirmation of Work Underway

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Baseline self-audits or preliminary scoping reports are initiated by academic champions or formal leadership.
- Leaders engage in exploratory briefings to establish a modern understanding of neurodivergence.
- Leaders understand the foundational legal responsibilities surrounding cognitive accessibility.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Executive board or faculty leadership minutes recording a formal agreement to research contemporary neuroinclusion frameworks.
- Operational Artefacts: Initial scoping papers or draft briefing notes detailing the business case for adopting a neuroinclusive maturity framework within the engineering faculty.

Stage 2: Pockets of Practice (Includes Stage 1)

Typical features of this stage will include:

- In addition to Stage 1 awareness, neurodivergent students are invited to share views on localised policy and practice decisions, though this occurs occasionally or on a case-by-case basis.
- Individual neurodivergent staff or students who choose to be visible are supported on an ad-hoc basis, with platforming relying on personal initiative rather than faculty-wide infrastructure.
- Localised, reactive feedback channels exist where students can voice concerns to trusted staff allies, ensuring inputs are addressed on an individual basis.

- Leaders permit case-by-case, student-initiated communication between academics and support teams to navigate immediate legal privacy constraints and resolve barriers as they arise.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Published leadership statements, faculty blogs, or internal videos from the Dean or Heads of Department actively supporting neurodivergent student initiatives.
- Operational Artefacts: Attendance logs showing individual senior leaders or committee chairs completing modern neuroinclusion leadership or unconscious bias training within the last 12 months.
- Lived Experience Signals: Notes from ad-hoc consultation meetings where senior leaders have invited individual neurodivergent students or staff to share their personal campus experiences.

<u>Stage 3: Systemic Approaches (Includes Stages 1 & 2)</u>

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Sustaining all Stage 2 support channels as a baseline, neuroinclusive design principles are formalised as a standard requirement within curriculum validation and strategic planning templates.
- The department explicitly allocates workload hours for staff leading neurodiversity networks and ensures broad, protected representation on internal committees.
- Systemic, institutionalised feedback loops and paid standing student advisory panels ensure neurodivergent student voices automatically alter faculty policy.

- Dedicated, recurring budget codes are established to ensure funding for neuroinclusive initiatives and digital tools is structurally permanent.
- Leaders implement formal data-sharing governance and privacy notices that utilise standard 'consent once' mechanisms, legally automating support across departments while protecting student privacy rights.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Faculty strategic plans and key performance documents that explicitly use contemporary, strengths-based terminology (e.g., "the neurodiversity paradigm") rather than outdated medical-deficit language.
- Operational Artefacts: Formal appointment records identifying named executive sponsors or champions for the university's neurodivergent staff and student networks.
- Faculty Analytics: Dedicated, recurring budget codes showing that funding for neuroinclusive initiatives, digital accessibility tools, and staff training is embedded in the faculty's annual financial strategy.

<u>Stage 4: Inclusive, Sector-Leading Practice (Includes Stages 1, 2 & 3)</u>

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Driving Stage 3 systems forward, leaders cultivate an open and safe culture where traditional educational assumptions are actively challenged, including their own unconscious biases.
- The environment is sufficiently safe that senior leaders, alumni, and industry partners openly share their cognitive profiles as standard professional assets, normalising visibility.

- Leaders advocate for neurodivergent students amid needs that are in tension with other compliance practices
- The evolution of faculty practice is actively co-led by neurodivergent staff and students, with implementation milestones dynamically adjusted based on real-time feedback loops to set sector benchmarks.
- Leaders are recognised externally by professional accreditation bodies (e.g., IET, IMechE) as exemplary models of neuroinclusive engineering education.
- The faculty moves entirely away from medical-deficit disclosure models, successfully onboarding a "single source of truth" system that eliminates label dependency.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Faculty policy governance rules requiring all major strategic, estate, and structural revisions to undergo a formal neuroinclusive impact check before sign-off.
- Operational Artefacts: A standing, paid Neurodivergent Student Advisory Panel that co-authors governance reviews and holds formal, structured voting seats on major academic committees.
- Lived Experience Signals: Annual leadership perception scores from student and staff surveys, proving that neurodivergent communities feel actively seen, safe, and systemically supported by senior management.

APPENDIX B: EVIDENCING DOMAIN B (FUNDING AND IMPACT)

Engineering Context

Ensuring that engineering programmes have the dedicated resources, specialist technologies, and staff capacity required to support neurodivergent students across laboratories, workshops, design studios, project based environments, and on placements, with investment decisions informed by clear evidence of student wellbeing and educational impact.

Reflective Dialogue Prompts

Before agreeing on a maturity level for this domain, the self-assessment team should discuss the following questions together:

- Question 1: To what extent is our neuroinclusion funding a predictable, permanent part of our yearly budget, as opposed to relying on staff making exceptional, case-by-case requests?
- Question 2: What data are we gathering to evaluate whether our financial investments are directly improving the retention, confidence, and quality of life of our neurodivergent engineering students?
- Question 3: To what extent does our funding model proactively equip every student with inclusive technology from day one, as opposed to students waiting for an official diagnosis or adjustment request to unlock support?

Feature and Evidence Menu, by Stage

Stage 1: Confirmation of Work Underway

Typical features of this stage will include:

- The department initiates preliminary scoping reviews to understand its current gaps in specialist staff and equipment.
- Academic teams draft initial business cases to secure internal funding for future neuroinclusion pilots and staff resources.
- Leaders evaluate current spending to identify where case-by-case, reactive adjustments are causing financial inefficiency or delays.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Departmental minutes noting a formal agreement to research neuroinclusive needs.
- Operational Artefacts: Initial scoping papers or draft business cases requesting exploratory resource allocation.

Stage 2: Individual Pockets of Practice (Includes Stage 1)

Typical features of this stage will include:

- In addition to Stage 1 scoping, discretionary module budgets are utilised on an ad-hoc basis to fund localised, standalone neuroinclusion pilots or minor equipment tweaks.
- Funding is available for basic student adjustments, though these financial decisions are made case-by-case and remain entirely reactive to individual student disclosures.
- General university Disability Support Advisors are available to students, but these advisors often lack

engineering-specific technical expertise or structural funding to imbed themselves in the faculty.

- The department provides small pockets of funding for interested staff to access introductory external training resources or webinars about neurodiversity.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Discretionary budget logs showing case-by-case funding for individual student adjustments.
- Lived Experience Signals: Student feedback or project logs from localised, standalone neuroinclusion pilots.
- Operational Artefacts: Abstracted analyses of appointment logs showing student access to general Disability Support Advisors.

Stage 3: Systemic Approaches (Includes Stages 1 & 2)

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Sustaining all Stage 2 reactive support channels as a baseline, neuroinclusion resources are explicitly recognised as a strategic priority within permanent, yearly faculty budget planning.
- Core funding is systematically allocated to provide all staff with specialised training resources, ensuring technical teams can confidently manage inclusive lab and design environments.
- The department funds and provides universal institutional access to assistive and accessibility technologies, ensuring software tools are available to all students by default without a formal diagnosis.
- Capital project budgets mandate that sensory and physical design adjustments are permanently funded

and built into all upcoming laboratory, studio, and workshop refurbishments.

- The faculty ring-fences recurring funding to ensure engineering-specific disability and pastoral support teams have the long-term capacity to support students predictably.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Ring-fenced lines in the yearly Faculty operating budget for neuroinclusive support.
- Operational Artefacts: Capital project plans showing sensory adjustments built into laboratory and studio refurbishments.
- Lived Experience Signals: Documented processes ensuring every student is guaranteed a collaborative individual learning support plan.

<u>Stage 4: Inclusive, Sector-Leading Practice (Includes Stages 1, 2 & 3)</u>

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Driving Stage 3 systems forward, the institution funds automated, rapid in-house screening pathways or fast-track diagnostic partnerships with external services (such as Footsteps or Foothold) to eliminate diagnostic delays.
- The faculty takes the proactive lead in funding universal site licenses, grants, or equipment loans, ensuring every student has immediate access to cutting-edge inclusive technologies from any location.
- Institutional analytics use progressive, non-traditional metrics - co-designed with students - to rigorously evaluate how resource investments directly improve student quality of life, self-belief, and confidence.

- Longitudinal data tracks and proves that the faculty's proactive financial investments have structurally closed retention, progression, and graduate employment gaps for neurodivergent engineers.
- Feedback from neurodivergent learners is continuously sought, addressed positively, and utilised to dynamically adjust resource allocations, ensuring budgets remain aligned to the community's evolving needs.

Evidence examples may include:

- Institutional Analytics: Evaluative data linking funding to positive impacts on student retention, confidence, and progression.
- Operational Artefacts: Service agreements for fully funded, in-house screening pathways or fast-track diagnostic partnerships.
- Strategic Artefacts: Site licenses or automated funding streams ensuring immediate, universal student access to inclusive technology.

APPENDIX C: EVIDENCING DOMAIN C (TRANSITIONS AND PROGRESSION)

Engineering Context

Supporting neurodivergent students through demanding pivot points, including the transition into higher education, moving between academic years, navigating industrial placements, and stepping into professional engineering environments.

Reflective Dialogue Prompts

Before agreeing on a maturity level for Transitions and Progression, the self-assessment team should discuss the following questions:

- Question 1: How do we proactively prepare students for high-sensory environments like labs and workshops in advance of transition points? Do they only find out what to expect when they walk into their first session?
- Question 2: When students go on industrial placements, do we have a systematic way to protect and transfer their adjustments to the employer, or does the student have to self-advocate and negotiate from scratch?
- Question 3: How well do we interrogate retention, progression and satisfaction data to evaluate differential impacts on neurodivergent students?

Feature and Evidence Menu, by Stage

<u>Stage 1: Confirmation of Work Underway</u>

Typical features of this stage will include:

- The department initiates baseline reviews or preliminary scoping audits to understand the specific barriers students face at arrival and progression milestones.
- Formal opportunities and structural adjustments to reduce transition anxiety are identified in principle.
- Individual academic champions or support staff gather baseline data on known transition friction points across the full student lifecycle.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Minutes from curriculum or industrial advisory boards agreeing to review the accessibility of placements and induction periods.
- Operational Artefacts: Draft transition checklists or scoping documents mapping out known friction points for incoming neurodivergent engineering students.

Stage 2: Pockets of Practice (Includes Stage 1)

Typical features of this stage will include:

- In addition to Stage 1 discovery work, localised pre-entry acclimation experiences (e.g., voluntary welcome labs, early access to accommodation, or early site orientation) are offered on an ad-hoc, inconsistent basis.
- Pre-arrival questionnaires or transition surveys are sometimes utilised to understand student preferences, relying on individual module leaders or support teams to react to and act on the information.
- Individual neurodivergent students have access to standard, one-to-one university careers advice and structured guidance, with accommodation or placement adjustments made on a voluntary, case-by-case basis by interested advisors.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Placement agreements showing ad-hoc, case-by-case adjustments negotiated for individual students.
- Operational Artefacts: Standalone induction sessions or introductory "welcome labs" run by individual, passionate module leaders to lower anxiety before the semester starts.
- Lived Experience Signals: Exit interview notes or feedback forms from neurodivergent students reflecting on their specific placement or transition experiences.

Stage 3: Systemic Approaches (Includes Stages 1 & 2)

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Sustaining all Stage 2 support channels as a baseline, the faculty actively identifies transition challenges in advance and embeds an automated, formalised protocol to communicate adjustments smoothly between academic years.

- Explicit scaffolding and guided frameworks are implemented to help students confidently discuss their communication preferences and working profiles well before they reach key academic or industrial transition points.
- The curriculum embeds a long-runway professional development framework from day one, giving neurodivergent learners sustained time to progressively decode, practice, and master complex executive and workplace navigation skills before entering industry.
- The faculty embeds specialised, neurodiversity-aware career pathways, ensuring core careers staff are explicitly trained to guide students on application adjustments, professional disclosure strategies, and workplace executive functioning demands.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Formal institutional partnerships and clear, standardised protocols with placement employers regarding neuroinclusive workplace adjustments.
- Operational Artefacts: Universally available "Pre-Arrival" digital packages, including sensory/navigational maps of engineering labs, workshops, and makerspaces.
- Faculty Analytics: Aggregated data tracking the drop-out, deferral, and course-transfer rates of neurodivergent students specifically at key transition milestones (e.g., Year 1 to Year 2).

Stage 4: Inclusive, Sector-Leading Practice (Includes Stages 1, 2 & 3)

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Driving Stage 3 systems forward, neuroinclusion is positioned as a core institutional strength across all recruitment media, with outreach events and pre-entry open days actively co-delivered alongside paid neurodivergent student ambassadors who represent the faculty's inclusive culture first-hand.
- The faculty actively leverages its industrial partnerships to co-create neuroinclusive work experiences, utilising its own co-design frameworks to upskill external employers and set new professional sector benchmarks for neurodivergent engineering talent retention.
- Graduating neurodivergent students are provided with targeted networking, peer-mentoring, and transition schemes co-delivered alongside neuroinclusive employers and external advocacy organisations; this provision explicitly scaffolds students' psychological readiness, empowering them to decode professional engineering workplace cultures, navigate disclosure, and confidently self-advocate for their sensory and social needs without pressure to mask their identity.
- the institution implements a single 'source of truth' system where a student discloses their environmental preferences once, automatically activating seamless transitions between academic years and professional services without requiring a medical label

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Work placement frameworks co-authored with industrial partners that set a sector benchmark for neuroinclusive engineering internships.

- Lived Experience Signals: A peer-to-peer mentoring scheme where upper-year neurodivergent engineering students are paid to design and lead transition workshops for incoming students.
- Faculty Analytics: Long-term graduate outcome data showing equitable career progression and employment metrics for neurodivergent engineering alumni compared to their peers.

APPENDIX D: EVIDENCING DOMAIN D (LEARNING AND TEACHING)

Engineering Context

Designing and delivering lectures, collaborative project work, and high-stakes practical lab or workshop sessions that explicitly account for varied cognitive profiles, executive functioning needs, and sensory thresholds without diluting technical rigor.

Reflective Dialogue Prompts

Before agreeing on a maturity level for Learning & Teaching, the self-assessment team should discuss the following questions:

- Question 1: Are effectively organized are learning materials and lab instructions – do they support independent navigation, or do they rely on implicit, unwritten "unspoken rules" to figure out what to do?
- Question 2: When we assign major group work or open-ended design projects, how do we explicitly scaffold how teams should function and assign roles? What support do we provide to help students navigate social expectations and executive function demands?
- Question 3: To what extent is neuroinclusive teaching an embedded, everyday standard, as opposed to a

specialised adjustment made by a few passionate staff members?

Feature and Evidence Menu, by Stage

Stage 1: Confirmation of Work Underway

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Staff start to collect data about what helps or makes learning harder for neurodivergent students, in ways that reflect the students' communication preferences
- Academic teams begin identifying where complex engineering jargon or unwritten rules cause learning bottlenecks.
- Staff upskilling on neuroinclusion is offered voluntarily to build baseline awareness of cognitive load.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Teaching and Learning committee minutes recording a commitment to audit current curriculum delivery against neuroinclusive principles.
- Operational Artefacts: A completed baseline self-audit or review checklist of current Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) page layouts and technical module delivery methods.

Stage 2: Pockets of Practice (Includes Stage 1)

Typical features of this stage will include:

- In addition to Stage 1 audits, individual lecturers break up long passive listening blocks with problem-solving, practice, or discussion tasks.
- Within these pockets of practice, staff connect theory to hands-on work quickly and use templates to make group project roles clear.

- Lecturers avoid talking about one topic while expecting students to read about a different one on a slide. Important instructions are always provided in writing, never verbally alone.
- Staff do not assume software navigation or lab rules are "common sense"; they explicitly explain which buttons to press and what students can, cannot, should, and must do.
- Voluntary upskilling is available for staff on how to manage neuroinclusive team projects and high-sensory lab spaces.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Individual lesson or module plans showing discretionary adjustments, such as providing lecture notes 48 hours in advance or recording technical demonstrations.
- Operational Artefacts: Standalone pilots led by individual lecturers utilising clear, visual step-by-step operating procedures for complex machinery or lab equipment.
- Lived Experience Signals: Feedback notes or informal survey responses from neurodivergent learners regarding specific team dynamics during a group work project.

<u>Stage 3: Systemic Approaches (Includes Stages 1 & 2)</u>

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Sustaining all Stage 2 support channels as a baseline, faculty-wide templates consistently scaffold teamwork and communication across all modules to ensure uniform practice.

- Professional expectations align strictly with Engineering Council standards to eliminate unwritten academic assumptions about workplace behavior.
- Technical competencies and professional behaviors are clearly explained, free of unexplained jargon, and built up incrementally across academic years.
- Formal policies and quality-assurance checks are in place to guarantee that all teaching materials, assessments, and digital layouts are neuroinclusive.
- The faculty enforces a clear, locked-down calendar of all assessment deadlines for the entire academic year to support students' strategic planning.
- The faculty enforces formal lock-down dates for all academic timetables. Unavoidable calendar changes require executive approval and trigger a mandatory notice period.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Mandated faculty templates and clear design baselines for all digital learning environments (e.g., standard font styles, structured file nesting, and uncluttered text).
- Operational Artefacts: Academic timetabling rules that systematically embed cognitive pacing, such as structured 10-minute breaks during long three-hour design studio or lab blocks.
- Faculty Analytics: System-generated logs showing compliance rates across all engineering modules for uploading lecture and lab materials significantly ahead of live delivery.

<u>Stage 4: Inclusive, Sector-Leading Practice (Includes Stages 1, 2 & 3)</u>

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Driving Stage 3 systems forward, neurodivergent students are supported to grow their confidence and abilities, even in areas they find difficult, through sustained long-term frameworks.
- Support strategies for complex tasks take place over time and across modules, or through multiple targeted interventions where needed.
- All students are explicitly taught emotional skills, time management, influencing others, and how to handle difficult conversations within engineering teams in ways that are tailored to student needs.
- Every engineering course incorporates open, flexible learning capacity where the curriculum explicitly encourages and rewards students for exploring technical tangents and following passionate special interests in their assessments.
- Feedback from neurodivergent learners is continuously sought, addressed positively, and responded to, setting a sector benchmark for co-design.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Validation and periodic review criteria that require all new engineering courses to prove they have built cognitive accessibility into the core curriculum design.
- Operational Artefacts: Peer-observation schemes where staff are formally observed and mentored on neuroinclusive delivery, such as minimising sensory distractions in learning environments.
- Lived Experience Signals: Co-designed group work frameworks where neurodivergent students have actively helped shape how teams are formed, roles are allocated, and conflicts are managed.

APPENDIX E: EVIDENCING DOMAIN E (ASSESSMENT)

Engineering Context

Designing and executing technical assessments, laboratory reports, formal examinations, and professional presentations that accurately measure engineering competence while removing irrelevant barriers related to working memory, processing speed, and executive functioning.

Reflective Dialogue Prompts

Before agreeing on a maturity level for Assessment, the self-assessment team should discuss the following questions:

Question 1: To what extent are our assessment briefs written with clarity, explicitly listing expectations and presentation criteria, as opposed to relying on ambiguous language and ‘work it out’ approaches?

- Question 2: Do our assessments test a student's actual engineering competence, or are we accidentally testing their working memory, speed under pressure, and ability to navigate executive-functioning stress? Are our assessment testing engineering competence, or a student’s ability to correctly decode assessment expectations?
- Question 3: How often do we have high-quality conversations about the provision of alternative assessment formats, and is this considered a complex, bureaucratic exception for diagnosed students? How effectively is variety in assessment built directly into the fabric of our curriculum?

Feature and Evidence Menu, by Stage

Stage 1: Confirmation of Work Underway

Typical features of this stage will include:

- The department reviews previous exam performance and drop-out data to locate traditional testing bottlenecks.
- Staff collect initial student feedback to understand the specific anxiety and executive functioning triggers in current assessment briefs.
- Individual academic teams begin exploring where ambiguous wording or inflexible testing environments create unfair barriers.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Minutes from the Faculty Board or Exam Committee recording an agreement to audit current assessment methods against inclusive design standards.
- Operational Artefacts: A baseline review document mapping out all assessment formats across a program to identify heavy concentrations of traditional, high-stakes written exams.

Stage 2: Pockets of Practice (Includes Stage 1)

Typical features of this stage will include:

- In addition to Stage 1 discovery work, individual module leaders provide choice in assessment formats, such as offering a balance between practical lab outputs and written reports where possible.
- Staff ensure that open-ended engineering design briefs are highly structured and completely free of ambiguous language, avoiding unhelpful phrases like "just use your judgment."

- Localised pilots utilise alternative assessment options or low-hurdle passes to test core engineering competencies without reliance on traditional, high-stakes memory testing. Individual module teams provide clear grading rubrics alongside explicit, step-by-step visual breakdowns of how to structure the final submission.
- Focused upskilling is available for educators on how to write cognitively accessible assessment briefs and design inclusive rubric criteria.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Individual student file records showing ad-hoc adjustments, such as granting extra time in exams or providing alternative formats for a specific presentation.
- Operational Artefacts: Standalone module folders showing technical assessment briefs that include an explicit grading rubric and a structural breakdown of the required layout.
- Lived Experience Signals: Feedback logs or appeal forms where individual students have raised clarity issues regarding ambiguously worded technical questions or exam papers.

<u>Stage 3: Systemic Approaches (Includes Stages 1 & 2)</u>

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Sustaining all Stage 2 flexibilities as a baseline, all program assessment schedules are formally reviewed and approved by a central committee to prevent deadline clusters and manage student workload stress.
- Course-specific regulations systematically mandate inclusive testing environments, including permitting

students to have food, drink, and sensory items during all formal assessments.

- Faculty policies require a standardised, monitored digital mechanism for students to ask questions and receive instant, transparent clarification while an assessment brief is active.
- Assessment briefs and marking rubrics undergo a mandatory, centralised check for cognitive accessibility, clarity, and consistency before they are published.
- Trends in reasonable adjustments and extensions are reviewed every semester to identify and structurally remove recurring, systemic assessment barriers. Where technical requirements or professional accreditation make an alternative mode of assessment impossible, the design process is scrutinised annually to maximise formatting flexibility.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Formal institutional guidelines requiring all new or revised engineering module briefs to undergo a "clear language and accessibility check" before publication.
- Operational Artefacts: A structured curriculum map demonstrating that students are provided with authentic, non-exam alternatives (e.g., portfolios, project viva, or video demonstrations) to prove technical competencies.
- Faculty Analytics: Aggregated institutional logs tracking the volume, approval rates, and specific themes of mitigating circumstances or extension requests across different engineering assessment periods.

Stage 4: Inclusive, Sector-Leading Practice (Includes Stages 1, 2 & 3)

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Driving Stage 3 systems forward, students are routinely given a choice over the format, timing, or environmental parameters of high-stakes assessments, managed through a seamless, automated process. Where it is deemed impossible to offer a choice the assessment process is scrutinised and reviewed annually for possible future improvements
- Assessment design regulations are co-authored with engineering accreditation bodies to prove that inclusive, multi-modal testing fully satisfies rigorous sector standards.
- Collaborative group work is structurally insulated by advanced, co-created team strategies that explicitly assess individual contributions and reduce common peer communication difficulties.
- Students are provided with continuous opportunities to discuss, unpack, and act upon developmental assessment feedback, creating a highly visible, positive loop for learning growth.
- Feedback from neurodivergent learners is continuously utilised to dynamically refine faculty assessment policy, setting a sector benchmark for co-produced educational standards.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Assessment design regulations co-authored with professional engineering accreditation bodies (e.g., IET, IMechE) that prove alternative assessment formats fully satisfy professional standards.
- Operational Artefacts: An automated system where all digital exams are pre-formatted to support screen-

readers, text-to-speech software, and customisable visual settings by default.

- Lived Experience Signals: Exemplar banks of previous student submissions, complete with anonymised marker feedback, co-curated with neurodivergent students to explicitly illustrate what "good looks like" for complex engineering assignments.

APPENDIX F: EVIDENCING DOMAIN F (LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS)

Engineering Context

Equipping academic lecturers, laboratory technicians, graduate teaching assistants, and professional support teams with the practical skills, contemporary vocabulary, and confidence required to support neurodivergent engineers in both theoretical and practical environments.

Reflective Dialogue Prompts

Before agreeing on a maturity level for Learning Environments, the self-assessment team should discuss the following questions:

- Question 1: Where in our current teaching, lab, or digital environments do neurodivergent students still have to work harder than they should to access learning, and what patterns do we notice across modules or spaces?
- Question 2: Whose evidence, experiences, or insights are informing our sense of what ‘good’ looks like, and how do we know we’re not missing perspectives that matter?
- Question 3: How do we evaluate the sensory and cognitive impact of our physical and digital spaces, and how do we know that our environmental design mitigates differential student exclusion and fatigue?

Feature and Evidence Menu, by Stage

Stage 1: Confirmation of Work Underway

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Design plans for new builds or upcoming room refurbishments include formal checklists to support neurodivergent sensory profiles.
- The department initiates baseline reviews of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) navigation loops to identify digital clutter.
- Staff map out current physical bottlenecks, locating high-glare lighting or overwhelming acoustic spaces across the faculty estate.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Human Resources or Faculty development committee minutes noting an agreement to baseline current staff confidence and identify specific neuroinclusion training gaps.
- Operational Artefacts: A draft training strategy or scoping document outlines future professional development needs tailored for engineering-specific teaching settings (such as managing noise and safety in workshops).

Stage 2: Pockets of Practice (Includes Stage 1)

Typical features of this stage will include:

- In addition to Stage 1 audits, quiet, restorative physical spaces are available within specific buildings to allow students to decompress between intense practical sessions.
- Normalisation of DSA software use

- Individual instructors use audio microphones responsibly in large rooms, keeping volumes clear and consistent without causing acoustic distortion or harsh feedback.
- Staff initiate baseline audits of current VLE layouts to check for clutter and hidden barriers.
- Localised study zones feature interesting, visually engaging objects and engineering Artefacts to create a welcoming, non-sterile learning environment.
- Lecturers format their individual VLE module pages cleanly, ensuring that immediate lecture resources and software guides are easy to locate.
- Pockets of practice provide private, shielded computer desks or study alcoves where students can work without feeling watched by passers-by.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Individual annual appraisal goals or personal development plans showing that specific staff members have independently requested neuroinclusion training.
- Operational Artefacts: Participation logs showing a small number of passionate module leaders, lab technicians, or student advisors attending generic institutional disability or webinars about neurodiversity.
- Lived Experience Signals: Qualitative feedback from students noting specific instances where an individual staff member went above and beyond to understand and support their communication or learning needs.

<u>Stage 3: Systemic Approaches (Includes Stages 1 & 2)</u>

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Sustaining all Stage 2 spatial provisions as a baseline, restorative and teaching spaces consistently embed adjustable features, including dimmable lighting, adaptable furniture layouts, and localised climate controls. Students have ways of requesting changes to their environment on a case-by-case basis.

- Faculty policy mandates that all teaching materials and necessary software files are shared ahead of time via the VLE as a standard operational requirement.
- Rigid attendance policies are systematically replaced with flexible engagement frameworks, allowing students to access core tutor support outside of scheduled lecture hours without penalty.
- Clear operational rules govern classroom behaviours, ensuring that individual coping strategies - such as wearing noise-cancelling headphones or moving around during long sessions - are universally accepted and normalised by all staff.
- Digital platforms are optimised across the department, ensuring students have simple tools to personalise their interfaces, alter text sises, and toggle high-contrast display settings.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: A mandated professional development policy ensuring that neuroinclusive pedagogy training is a compulsory module for all new academic staff and graduate teaching assistants.
- Operational Artefacts: Dedicated, engineering-specific training materials and guides hosted on the staff intranet, covering topics like neuroinclusive group work management and sensory safety in labs.
- Faculty Analytics: Centralised HR dashboards tracking the completion rates of neurodiversity training across different departments, ensuring full coverage among student-facing staff.

Stage 4: Inclusive, Sector-Leading Practice (Includes Stages 1, 2 & 3)

Typical features of this stage will include:

- Driving Stage 3 systems forward, digital and physical environments strictly follow international best practices in cognitive accessibility and universal design benchmarks.
- The physical campus environment actively inspires belonging, utilising inclusive architectural layouts, custom artwork, and student-designed sensory spaces.
- High-performance engineering software and simulation tools are made accessible outside of isolated computing labs, utilising secure remote access options or distributed, low-sensory docking zones across campus.
- The faculty provides an open choice of diverse learning environments, allowing students to seamlessly match their workspace to their current cognitive and sensory needs.
- Feedback from neurodivergent learners is continuously utilised to dynamically alter spatial and digital procurement policies, setting a new industry standard for inclusive technical campuses.

Evidence examples may include:

- Strategic Artefacts: A peer-led professional mentoring network where advanced practitioners are recognised, rewarded, and given dedicated workload hours to coach colleagues on neuroinclusive curriculum design.
- Operational Artefacts: Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs that are co-developed and co-delivered alongside neurodivergent students, allowing staff to hear lived experiences directly.
- Lived Experience Signals: Staff survey data demonstrating high levels of confidence among academics and technicians when handling complex

neuroinclusive adjustments or managing communication dynamics in teams.

APPENDIX G: EVIDENCING DOMAIN G (STUDENT EXPERIENCE)

Engineering Context

Supporting neurodivergent engineering students to sustain their wellbeing, access pastoral care, build peer community, and navigate central university systems within the uniquely demanding structure of engineering programmes, where dense timetables, multiple learning environments, and high administrative load make predictable support, clear communication, and culturally safe relationships essential to belonging and progression.

Reflective Dialogue Prompts

Before agreeing on a maturity level for Student Experience, the self-assessment team should discuss the following questions:

- Question 1: To what extent do neurodivergent students experience our support systems as predictable, connected, and easy to navigate - regardless of which module, tutor, or service they interact with?
- Question 2: To what extent are our wellbeing, pastoral, and peer community practices co-produced with neurodivergent students, rather than designed for them?
- Question 3: To what extent do our systems reduce both the navigational and emotional burden placed on neurodivergent students as they access support, manage requirements, and move between academic, pastoral, and administrative environments?

Feature and Evidence Menu, by Stage

Stage 1: Confirmation of Work Underway

Typical features will include:

- The department initiates formal workload impact logs to track exactly how engineering course deadlines affect student wellbeing.
- Staff review current student data to identify known structural barriers within the university's diagnostic and screening pathways.
- Leaders engage in preliminary discussions to understand how a lack of predictability across services impacts neurodivergent student retention.

Evidence examples include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Committee minutes showing that the faculty has begun formally exploring the experience of neurodivergent students and has initiated early data gathering discussions with central services.
- Operational Artefacts: Short internal report summarising barriers in diagnostic or screening pathways, or notes from meetings between academic teams and central support teams discussing communication or service predictability.
- Lived Experience: Anonymised student feedback and committee discussions indicating emerging concerns about course organisation, timetabling, and workload pressures for neurodivergent students, supported by informal staff notes capturing issues such as masking, process confusion, and reluctance to disclose.
- Faculty Analytics: Early faculty level analysis separating neurodivergent students’ adjustment, extenuating circumstance, and withdrawal data, accompanied by committee documentation showing emerging concerns about repeated referrals between services and the

identification of a named role holder to intervene when this occurs.

Stage 2: Pockets of Practice (Includes Stage 1)

Typical features will include:

- In addition to Stage 1 discovery work, individual pastoral tutors and student advisors act as localised "neuroinclusion champions" to help students navigate complex university environments.
- Pockets of practice utilise ad-hoc, module-level support bubbles where students can access optional, one-to-one coaching to manage executive functioning demands.
- The department provides informal, student-led peer circles that give neurodivergent learners a safe space to connect, share experiences, and comfortably unmask among peers.
- Staff within individual departments can explain the basic internal and external disability support pathways available to students on a case-by-case basis.
- The student bears the primary responsibility for disclosing personal data and self-advocating for adjustments across individual modular silos.

Evidence examples include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Committee minutes showing that individual tutors have begun taking on informal neuroinclusion champion roles and that small, ring-fenced micro-budgets are being used to support local pilot interventions and staff engagement with external neurodiversity CPD.
- Operational Artefacts: Module level records showing staff making small, locally driven adjustments to support neurodivergent students such as optional

support bubble sessions, case by case liaison with Disability Services, informal peer support circles, or simple guidance sheets with evidence that students are engaging with and benefiting from these practices.

- Lived Experience Signals: Student feedback and pastoral notes indicating reliance on a small number of trusted individuals or informal peer spaces for support, with students often needing to re explain their needs to different staff because information is not shared consistently.
- Faculty analytics: Module and tutor level analytics showing that neurodivergent students engaging with particular staff or local support bubbles experience fewer emergency extensions, escalations, or withdrawals, alongside identifiable clusters of extenuating circumstance applications around modules with heavy organisational or deadline management demands.

<u>Stage 3: Systemic Approaches (Includes Stages 1 & 2)</u>

Typical features will include:

- Sustaining all Stage 2 support channels as a baseline, every neurodivergent student is provided with a formalised individual learning plan that moving beyond basic legal adjustments to actively support their personal autonomy.
- Staff peer-observation criteria and student module feedback templates include explicit, objective metrics to measure the inclusion and validation of diverse communication styles in the classroom.
- Central policies mandate that these learning support plans are automatically shared with and acted upon by all relevant module leaders and workshop technicians.

- The faculty implements structured, proactive safeguarding interventions that automatically trigger support when a student experiences acute academic or administrative overwhelm.
- Different elements of the program come together systematically to guarantee predictability and consistency across all pastoral, academic, and career touchpoints.
- Engaged neuroinclusion specialists ensure that training is up to date and positive, and that support offered is of high quality
- Staff and students have access to foundational neurodiversity-fcoused and allyship training to establish a baseline of shared vocabulary across the entire department.
- Sustaining Stage 2 support, the faculty adopts proactive, inclusive curriculum defaults that eliminate the need for repeated student disclosures to access standard adjustments.

Evidence examples include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Committee approved documentation showing that programmes are required to implement standardised student support protocols, with these expectations embedded in faculty policy.
- Operational Artefacts: A faculty wide induction package that gives all engineering students clear, standardised information about support pathways and communication expectations, with evidence that this is now used consistently across programmes.
- Lived Experience Signals: Student feedback indicating that support now feels consistent and predictable across modules and staff, with neurodivergent students reporting reduced confusion about processes and greater confidence in navigating the system.

- Faculty Analytics: Year on year data showing reductions in emergency extensions, mitigating circumstances requests, or withdrawals among neurodivergent students, indicating that structured support pathways are beginning to have a measurable impact.

Stage 4: Inclusive, Sector-Leading Practice (Includes Stages 1, 2 & 3)

Typical features will include:

- Driving Stage 3 systems forward, a single "source of truth" digital system securely and transparently shares student adjustment data across all services, completely eliminating the need for students to repeat their disclosures.
- All faculty-wide neurodivergence and allyship training programs are fully co-designed and co-delivered by neurodivergent individuals, establishing a progressive, sector-leading standard.
- Institutional culture visibly frames cognitive diversity around student strengths and innovation capacity, while proactively dismantling systemic barriers that force students to mask their identity.
- Students are equipped with advanced, co-produced toolkits and structural frameworks that seamlessly support both their academic studies and their social integration into the wider engineering community.
- Feedback from neurodivergent learners is continuously sought, addressed positively, and utilised to dynamically rewrite student experience policies, ensuring the system remains genuinely co-owned by the student body.
- the student is at the centre of the system and is involved in discussions around their support, having

good awareness of work that is happening to support them

Evidence examples include:

- Strategic Artefacts: Faculty governance records showing that neurodivergent students hold formal, paid co-chair roles with equal decisionmaking authority alongside academic leaders.
- Operational Artefacts: A co designed digital “single source of truth” platform that integrates academic, pastoral, and support information so neurodivergent students no longer need to repeat their disclosure.
- Lived Experience Signals: Student feedback indicating high levels of trust in faculty systems, with neurodivergent students reporting that they feel safe to disclose because support is predictable and respectful.
- Faculty Analytics: Year on year analytics showing sustained improvements in retention, progression, and attainment for neurodivergent students, with gaps closing or disappearing.