

THE IMPACT OF STEP+ MICRO-PLACEMENTS UPON NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS AND EMPLOYERS

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SCHEME BACKGROUND

Context

Informed by wider research

Shaped by our university's experiences

Student engagement

Identifying and reaching students

Application process

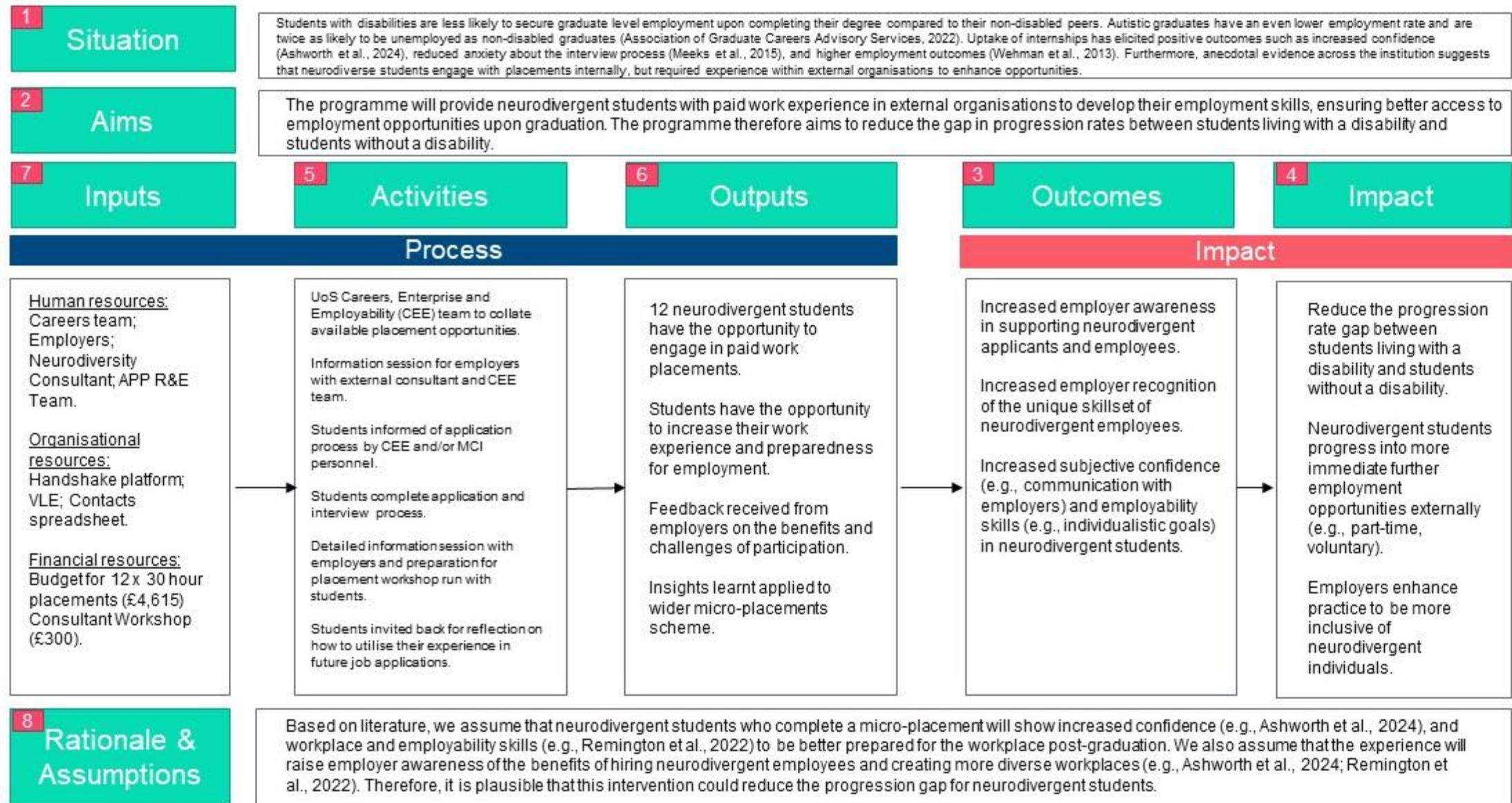
Placement support

Employer engagement

Targeting suitable organisations

Sessions on neurodivergence in the workplace

Co-creating meaningful roles



EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Sample (n=7):
4 neurodivergent
students
3 employers

1-1 interviews
Up to 1 hour duration
Conducted via Teams

Reflexive Thematic
Analysis (RTA) produced
353 codes

4 themes emerged

FINDINGS

Themes:

Navigating neurodivergence at work

Empowerment through inclusion

University as sole provider of employment

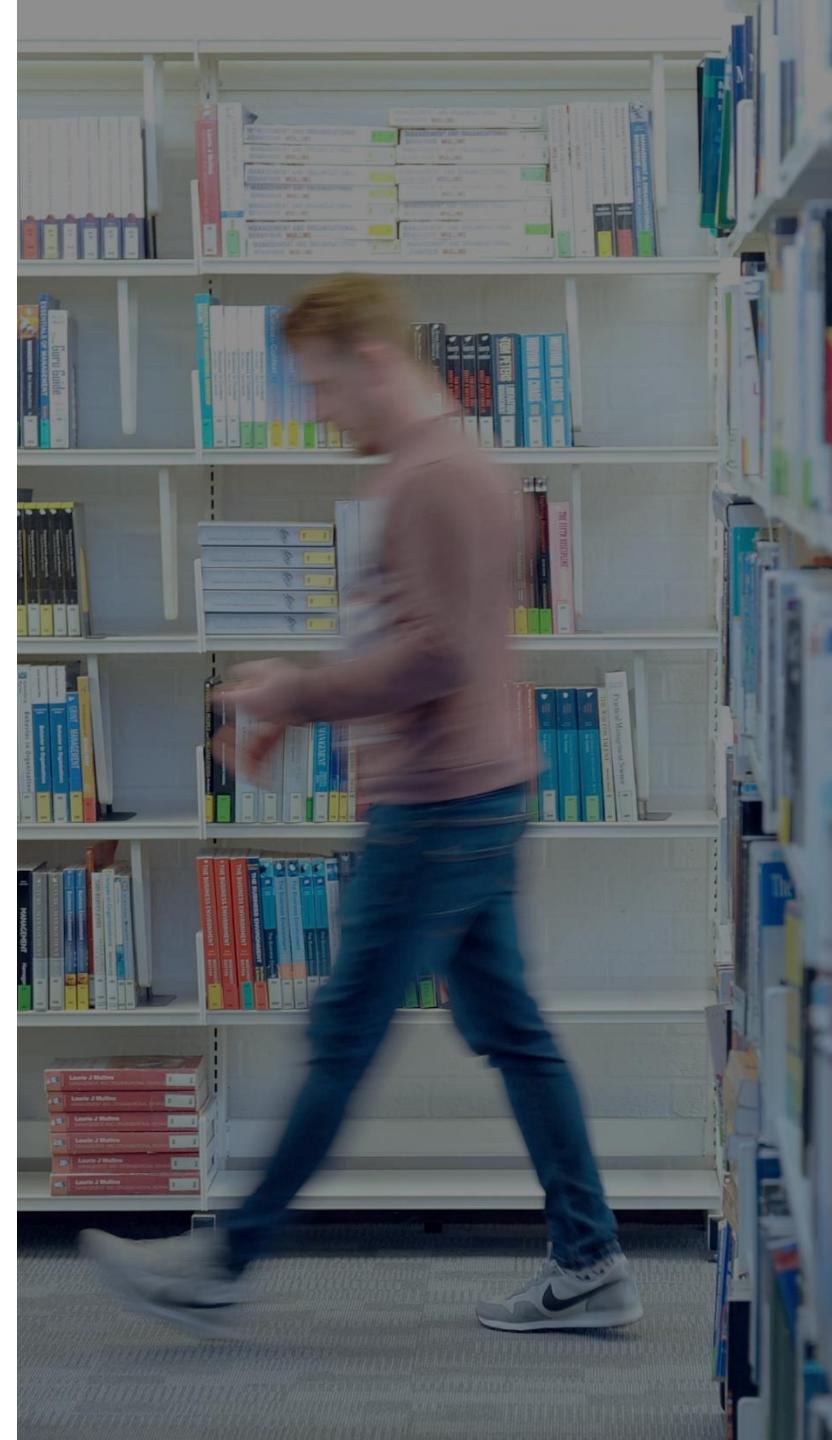
Bridging the gap

NAVIGATING NEURODIVERGENCE AT WORK

Students experienced negative impacts of neurodivergence upon their ability to gain and maintain employment, including:

- Self-presentation issues
- Employer stigma
- Fear of disclosure.

Pessimism about short- and long-term job prospects due to neurodivergence and repeated rejections. High anxiety about working with external employers.



“ I think being autistic as well, it's I guess I want to appear in the correct way to an employer. I understand it's very competitive to get a lot of graduate roles and everything. Um, and I think there is a bit of fear that being autistic might be more of a disadvantage there. Um, because again, it's about, can I sell myself an interview? Do I have the skills, the capabilities? Can I do well under pressure? ”

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INCLUSION

Students reported increased self-confidence and optimism about work after university due to steps taken by employers to reduce anxiety, for example:

- Pre-placement call to identify areas of interest and potential tasks.
- Providing meaningful experience to use in future job applications/interviews.

However, participating employers were already actively working to build an inclusive environment.



“ I think it was nice to see again, a very sort of welcoming and friendly environment and open environment. And it just made me more motivated to eventually get out into the workplace to full time employment, um, and really settle in a role and settle in an organisation and feel a part of it and feel very welcomed. Um, I just felt a bit more motivated to, to be in the working world really.

”



UNIVERSITY AS SOLE PROVIDER OF EMPLOYMENT

- Despite having positive placement experiences, students showed a strong preference for university-run micro-placements or other internships.
 - Flexible, familiar, less anxiety-inducing.
- Trust in the university was contrasted with rejection and stigma from external employers.
- Lead to students seeing the university as their only viable and reliable source of employment.
 - **How to support neurodivergent students without causing dependence?**

“ So far the uni has only been been my only real reliable employer who I've, who I've been able to actually count on... they're the only ones that haven't turned me down at any, every step of the way.

”

BRIDGING THE GAP

- The Careers, Enterprise and Employability (CEE) team acted as a trusted intermediary between students and employers.
- Proactive outreach and training helped bridge the gap.
- CEE support reduced students' anxiety.
- **However**, student feedback highlighted a need for a timeline and clear expectations.



“ A big worry for me is if I do a work experience with an external organisation, then it's I'm going to have problems or I'm going to go into it quite worried and I'm not sure what to do. But with this I knew that I was going to get plenty of support from the careers team and ended up I got plenty of support from [EMPLOYER NAME]. ”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Description
An informative resource	Develop information booklet outlining process, timelines and expectations.
Employer guide	Create best practice guide for employers based on student and employer feedback.
Continuing student progress (and avoiding regression)	Facilitate post-placement reflection sessions for students.

QUESTIONS?