

Evaluator Brief - Creative Approaches to Work: Making Neurodiversity Your Business

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Deadline for responses: 2nd September 2026 (5pm)

1. Background

Across the UK, including in Greater Manchester, neurodivergent (ND) individuals face persistent and systemic barriers to accessing and sustaining meaningful employment. Employment levels remain significantly lower than for their peers: only 22–34% of autistic individuals aged 16–64 are in work, compared with 81–82% of non-disabled adults, and just 15% of autistic adults are in full-time employment. These disparities are compounded by workplace perceptions - 40% of young people report viewing neurodivergence as a barrier to hiring or promotion, contributing to underemployment and inequitable advancement opportunities.

Greater Manchester is entering a significant period of reform in employment support and developing a Live Well approach that brings together health, skills, employment and community support into an integrated eco-system.

2. The project

Making Neurodiversity Your Business is a pilot project that has been developed by Greater Manchester Combined Authority, local authority work and skills teams, Venture Arts, ZU-UK and VCFSE organisations who support neurodivergent young people and adults. The project aims to support neurodivergent young adults (aged 18-30) to move closer to employment, strengthen confidence and progression, whilst also supporting employers to adopt neuroinclusive practices. The project is part of the wider Creative Health Place Partnership jointly funded by GMCA, NHS GM and Arts Council England.

There are three connected strands of the project coordinated and managed by Venture Arts
<https://venturearts.org/>

Strand 1: Developing Neurodivergent Creative Practitioners

We know that neurodivergent (ND) creatives can struggle to access professional development and are often underemployed. We also know that these very practitioners are potentially well placed to draw on their own lived experience and to deliver support to other neurodivergent people. Venture Arts will support neurodivergent creative practitioners by designing and then

delivering a CPD programme, and offering mentoring and development opportunities that build skills, confidence and employability. These practitioners will deliver strands 2 and 3.

Strand 2: Creative Work Readiness Programme

Venture Arts will co-design and deliver a six-week creative programme that supports neurodivergent young adults to identify strengths, develop confidence, improve communication, advocate for access needs and move closer to employment.

Participants will also have access to an immersive, scenario-based workshop using createch which gives participants the opportunity to rehearse high stakes interactions in low pressure environments (e.g. the first five minutes of an interview, asking for reasonable adjustments). This aspect of the project will be delivered in partnership with zu-uk.

Strand 3: Supporting Employers to Build Neuro-Inclusive Workplaces

An immersive, scenario-based employer learning programme co-designed with employers and neurodivergent people to improve recruitment, onboarding, workplace adjustments and support for neurodivergent staff. Delivered in partnership with zu-uk <https://zu-uk.com/>

3. The evaluation brief

We are looking for an evaluator/researcher to evaluate *Making Neurodiversity Your Business* as a potential model for future neuroinclusive employment support in Greater Manchester. The evaluation should determine whether this creative, lived-experience-led and employer-facing approach can support neurodivergent young adults to move closer to meaningful work, strengthen the capacity of neurodivergent practitioners and improve employer practice.

Purpose of the Evaluation

1. To assess not only whether *Making Neurodiversity Your Business* achieves positive outcomes for participants and employers, but also whether it generates sufficient evidence for a scalable model that could inform future devolved employment support.
2. To examine how creative, neuro-affirming and lived-experience-led approaches can contribute to Greater Manchester's ambitions for inclusive growth, economic participation, prevention and good work. There are four interconnected policy areas that can support this:
 - Work and Skills: supporting people furthest from the labour market to build confidence, skills and progression towards employment, while reducing inequalities in access to work. Greater Manchester identifies neurodivergent people and those with learning needs as priority groups within its emerging employment support framework.
 - Live Well Employment Support: delivering strengths-based, person-centred, community-led support that responds to the whole person and integrates health, wellbeing and employment outcomes.

- Good Employment and Inclusive Growth: supporting employers to create fair, flexible and inclusive workplaces that enable more residents to access, sustain and progress in good work.
- Bee Neuro-Inclusive Greater Manchester: embedding neuroinclusive leadership, culture, recruitment, workplace design, communication and workforce development practices across the city-region.

In addition to assessing participant, practitioner and employer outcomes, we would like the evaluation to reference potential wider economic and social value, including its contribution to labour market participation, inclusive growth, employer capability and a potential business case for neuro-inclusive employment support.

4. Ethics, Equality and Data Protection

We expect the evaluator/ researcher to:

- Adopt a neurodiversity-affirming approach, recognising neurodivergence as a difference rather than a deficit and avoiding deficit-based language.
- Ensure that participation is informed and accessible, with clear communication and consent processes tailored to different communication preferences.
- Create safe, inclusive and psychologically supportive opportunities for neurodivergent participants, employers and delivery partners to contribute their views and experiences.

The evaluator must comply with all relevant legislation and professional standards, including:

- UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 requirements.
- Safeguarding responsibilities where working with young adults and potentially vulnerable participants.
- Appropriate information governance, confidentiality and secure data management procedures.
- All data collection methods should be proportionate, accessible and minimise burden on participants.

5. Suggested outcomes for consideration

Strand 1: Developing Neurodivergent Creative Practitioners

- Improved specialist facilitation skills (working with neurodivergent participants)
- Improved self-advocacy as a neurodivergent practitioner
- Improved confidence

Strand 2: Support for Neurodivergent Young Adults to Move Closer to the Workplace

- Improved wellbeing and resilience
- Greater self-awareness of strengths and talents
- Increased ability to communicate needs and aspirations

- Greater agency and control over future plans
- Development of transferable skills
- Movement towards meaningful employment.

Strand 3: Employers

- Increased understanding of neurodiversity
- Greater confidence supporting neurodivergent employees
- Better understanding of workplace adjustments and inclusive practice
- Adoption of inclusive recruitment and onboarding approaches.

System Outcomes:

- Improved understanding of effective employment support for neurodivergent people
- More employers adopting inclusive employment practices
- Reduced barriers to work for neurodivergent young adults.

Economic Outcomes

- (Potential) progression into paid employment
- Improved wellbeing as a precursor to economic participation

6. Expected deliverables from this evaluation contract

- Evaluation framework and logic model (in consultation with project team and drawing on other programme strand logic model examples)
- Final evaluation report
- Indications of economic and social value as part of the above evaluation
- Scalability and commissioning recommendations
- Plain English summary report for participants and stakeholders.

All methods should be accessible, neuro-affirming and trauma-informed, with evaluation tools adapted to participants' needs and communication preferences. The project team will be able to support with their specialist expertise and with some onsite data collection.

7. Assessment criteria

Understanding of the brief and context (20%)

Evaluation approach and methodology (30%)

Approach to learning, insight and Knowledge Mobilisation (10%)

Relevant evaluation experience and expertise (30%)

Price (10%)

8. Timeframe

September 2026- July 2027

9. Budget available

Up to £20,000

10. Deadline for responses: 2nd September 2026 (5pm)

Please send a response to this brief, outlining your understanding of the brief and its context, your preferred evaluation approach and methodology, your approach to developing and sharing insight and an outline budget. This should not exceed 3 sides of A4.

Please also send a brief CV or a summary of relevant experience.

For further details and discussion of this brief please contact:

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