



Creative Industries
Creative Practices



AchieveAbility

AchieveAbility E-Journal Special Report | **Winter 2024**

Understanding Neurodivergent Thinking in the Creative Industries and in Creative Practices

A Call for Submissions for Part 1 of Double Issue 5 2025:

Neurodiverse Voices: The Creative Industries. First Call Deadline 31st March 2025

AchieveAbility is a charity led by Neurodivergent people which is unique in providing a platform for Neurodivergent authors.

Because of this provision and support we have been awarded Neuro Champion 2024 in the category of "Innovation and Ideas" by Genius Within.

AchieveAbility is entirely voluntary run. If you would like to be a supporter

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AchieveAbility E-Journal Special Report: Understanding Neurodivergent Thinking in the Creative Industries and in Creative Practices

Why we are focusing on the Creative Industries?

Hosted by the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD), the AchieveAbility 5th double edition e-journal will be a two-part publication in 2025 and 2026 focusing on creative industries and practices.

AchieveAbility will use the Department of Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport definition of the Creative Industries which incorporates the following sub-sectors:

- Advertising and marketing
- Architecture
- Crafts Design and designer fashion
- Film, TV, radio, and photography
- Museums, galleries, Libraries
- Music, performing and visual arts
- Publishing
- IT, software, and computer services (including video games)

Reference to these themes has occurred in previous issues of the e-journal and warrants further reflection and analysis. As well as facilitating spaces for neurodivergent creativity to be expressed, inclusion is also having people who are not neurodivergent understanding what neurodivergent thinking is. Through this research, we are working towards a call to action for improved understanding of neurodivergent thinking in the creative industries and practices.

Part 1 Call for submissions deadline is 31st March 2025. Part 2 deadline will be announced later this year.

These journals will seek to reveal other versions of thinking from the neurodivergent perspective. What is the dialogue needed for greater understanding in the creative industries and practices? A survey has been included in this report to find out the experiences of neurodivergent people within Creative Industries.

Contexts

The creative industries are worth £124bn to the UK economy and are seen as a growth economy. Over 970,000 people work within the Arts Sector, however persistent challenges on representation, working practice and retention remain. Approximately over 20% of the creative workforce are neurodivergent (Freeman and Morris, 2021 and Creative Review, 2024).

A range of complex scenarios can be identified for those who are neurodivergent (ND) these include recruitment techniques and representation; well-being (including bullying) and need for accountability; routes of entry which rely on volunteering, impact of wages with the cost of living and institutional cultures which affect all employees including neurodivergent people.

A recent Sutton Trust report (2024) on social mobility in the creative industries includes new analysis of Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) data on social mobility within creative higher education courses, alongside work carried out by researchers at the Sutton Trust, looking at the educational backgrounds of elite and 'high-profile' figures in television, film and music.

A link to this important Sutton Trust report on class, social mobility and access to the creative industries can be found here:

www.suttontrust.com/our-research/a-class-act

In order to identify, from the grassroots up, a set of themes relevant to the ND experience in the creative industries and practices, AchieveAbility brought together a group of ND practitioners and others working in the creative industries. The discussion forum was facilitated by Josette Bushell-Mingo, Principal at the RCSSD (host to the e-journal).

The four journal submission themes were identified with a main question linked to each and were discussed by the forum participants:

Theme 1:
Leadership Accountability in the Creative Industries

Main question:
How can the creative value of neurodivergent employees be recognised?

Theme 2:
The Neurodivergent Identity in Creative Innovation

Main question:
How can transparency of representation be achieved for the neurodivergent voice?

Theme 3:
Collaboration within the sub-sectors of the Creative Industries

Main question:
How can the various sectors across the creative industries collaborate to promote a positive culture?

Theme 14:
Managed Inclusion with Cognitive Empathy in the Creative Industries

Main question:
How can sustainability be managed for enduring creative neurodivergent thinking?

You can also explore your own themes for the Creative Industries and submit to us.

Discussion Forum Summary

What follows is a short summary of the much longer discussion which took place (a fuller version of this discussion is available on the AchieveAbility website). The main discussion points explored conventional boundaries and considered the valuable contributions that ND people make for positive action.

The narrative:

When we talk about collaborative cross-cultural arts, ND people speak about collaboration differently. The potential value offered by ND experience and thinking in terms of different perspectives needs to be articulated and recognised. **The question is how do you change the current situation? How do you change the institutional mindset? What are the steps that one can take to gradually get another version of thinking, to be thinking in the neurodivergent perspective?**

It is not being ND that is a challenge per se, it is that ND people are expected to comply by working in a certain way which can compromise the integrity of how they work and can lead to anxiety and frustration. They are often expected to behave and work in ways that do not play to their strengths, due to the greater value placed on mainstream systems.

Who decides what is valuable? who decides what kind of way of working or way of thinking is the best way? We need to think more about what type of leadership is valuable, and what is not valuable. Leadership implies a hierarchy and when talking about hierarchies, this also implies decision-making from the top.

Spaces need to be created to allow ND voices to speak, to be allowed a voice within a “brave space”, as opposed to a “safe space”. There is an idea that neurodivergent people are still sitting in an area of the most negative intersection of disability, but creative thinking is, by its nature, deep in meaningful thinking. This is not surface knowledge but integrity of thought.

How can neurodivergent employees be valued? This requires both industry reforms and the recognition that an ND person is often not informed because they have internalised the negative tropes which abound; as a neurodivergent community, we can perpetuate our own image. At the same time, attitudes are changing and we have to try to bring closure to the past traumas that haunt us to believe that things are moving forward in terms of who we are. We need to think about the reclaiming of neurodiversity as a social environment that is integral to the human condition. We ourselves need to look at ourselves with different eyes using joy and celebration to do that.

We might think about the creative industries as an all-encompassing sector without much focus on what works and what does not. It is useful to pose the following questions as part of this context.

- **How do we create support and sustainability?**
- **How can sub-sectors collaborate to promote a positive culture across the creative industries?**

Towards the AchieveAbility E-Journal Double Issue 5 2025/2026 Neurodiverse Voices: The Creative Industries and Creative Practices



Positive Action: The Survey

An invitation to participate in the **AchieveAbility/EMBED Survey on Neurodivergence and the Creative Industries**

We need research data to produce concrete answers to:

- **What factors prevent collective action within the Creative Industries?**
- **What do the Creative Industries achieve through access and inclusion?**

If we want the creative value of neurodivergence and of neurodivergent employees to be recognised, what we need is dialogue. This is how we work towards greater understanding of neurodivergent thinking in the creative industries and in creative practices. **How can sectors collaborate to promote a positive culture across the creative industries?** It is for this reason AchieveAbility and EMBED have designed this **survey**.

This survey is confidential, and all responses will remain anonymous. If you would like information in an alternative format, please get in touch with achieveabilityn@gmail.com

The analysis and findings of this **survey** will form a contribution to Part 1 of the AchieveAbility E-Journal Issue 5, Neurodivergent Voices: the Creative Industries. It will bring data together on institutions and organisations for greater accountability. It will offer real-time data on which to base bigger, broader political arguments and to strengthen our arguments more generally.

Positive Action:

A call for submissions for part 1 of Double Issue 5 2025 Neurodiverse Voices: The Creative Industries which address our four themes and questions

About the E-Journal

We know that neurodivergent people can be keen researchers and deep divers of information and creative, empathic thinkers for social change. Sometimes our experiences can make us hesitate to write our research, or imposter syndrome kicks in – am I good enough?

Every year we publish an e-journal on specific topics and key themes. Previous themes have included the Inclusive Workplace, Good Practice in the Workplace in a Time of COVID-19, Intersectionality and Neurodiversity and Intergenerational Differences.

Our Editorial Board is a mixture of people including academics who are neurodivergent. The Peer Reviewers are also neurodivergent people. The AchieveAbility e-Journal takes an inclusive editorial policy to encourage the particular experience, original thinking and preferred communication styles, formats and media of contributors. For text-based submissions, this should be no longer than 2000 words

From our lived experience, we are aware that asking for feedback or placing yourself in a positively challenging situation can be triggering. If you are working on research related to the journal theme and/or creative projects, this is what we can offer:

- Constructive feedback on submitted papers
- Workshop-style learning on key areas such as referencing and practical tips
- Opportunities to participate in a virtual and physical launch for the e-journal

We are a small charity so we are unable to fund creative projects, membership to access academic publications or time for research. However, here is some feedback on the journal so far:

‘Such a meaningful publication. I have enjoyed the like-minded connections, and I am encouraged that the journal is a platform for the neurodivergent voice’

Oliver West (email to AchieveAbility)

Guest Editors:

Josette Bushell-Mingo OBE
Principal and CEO The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

Professor Nicola Martin
Head of Research, Higher Degrees and Student Experience, London South Bank University

'The AchieveAbility journal is a fantastic achievement. At a time when co-production and accessible research are hot topics, the editors have raised the bar several levels, by ensuring the inclusion of diverse voices from outside the academic mainstream. In doing so, they have maintained high standards of peer review, showing that you can absolutely combine quality research and dissemination with accessibility and lived experience.'

Professor Nancy Doyle (email to AchieveAbility)

The E-Journal aims to:

- provide a forum for exchange and debate that informs policy, strategy and practice on Neurodiversity within our society
- support, promote and publish research-informed work of established and new academics and practitioners in the fields of education, training, employment, social justice and cultural change
- foster interdisciplinary work of Neurodivergent authors to find new audiences in the journal fields

The E-Journal uses standard British English, and the Editors reserve the right to alter usage to that end. The journal uses the Harvard (author-date) Reference System. Please make sure that all of the quotations, statistics, other research referred to, are fully and correctly referenced. A word about terminology, AchieveAbility uses the terms Neurodivergent, Neurodiverse and Neurodiversity.

Please use as few notes as possible. If you think a note is necessary, make it as brief and to the point as possible. Illustrations, diagrams, graphs, etc., are welcome.

The views expressed in articles in the AchieveAbility E-Journal are those of the authors of the contributions, and do not necessarily coincide with those of the Editorial Board or of the Editors of a particular journal issue.

Peer Review and Editorial Process

All articles are peer-reviewed first independently, and then agreed collectively, by the Editorial Board. Contributions selected for review receive a set of comments to address before publication, collated by the Editorial Board. We actively use a variety of ways of feedback and invite contributors to express their preference. These peer review and editorial processes are under continual monitoring to provide the best inclusive and consistent feedback for all our neurodivergent authors.

The Editors reserve the right to exercise final editorial control in the interests of the overall coherence of each issue, while respecting the journal's policy of encouraging originality and preference in the forms of expression and format in the contributions submitted to the journal. All web link references supplied by authors have been published in good faith and we apologise if following publication in a few instances these may no longer be available.

You can also explore your own themes for the Creative Industries and submit to us.



Editorial Board

See www.achieveability.org.uk for more details.

David Hermanstein • Dr Katherine Hewlett
• Professor Debra Kelly • Becki Morris

AchieveAbility Board

David Hermanstein • Dr Katherine Hewlett MBE
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• Kevin Maskell • Becki Morris

Chair by Richard Pitts

Dr Ross Cooper Emeritus Member

Dr Melanie Thorley Emeritus Member

Guest Editors


Guest Editors may be invited to edit an issue of the journal by the Editorial Board, or may approach the Board with a proposal for a themed issue.

Publication Schedule

The AchieveAbility E-Journal is published annually in response to the issues and work being undertaken by AchieveAbility and its partner organisations. Its aim is to be timely and to intervene in current debates.

Any queries concerning the format and presentation of articles may be addressed to the Editorial Board. If you have any questions, please contact: achieveabilityn@gmail.com

3 Donate to Support the World of AchieveAbility and its E-Journal

An illustration of a hand in a blue sleeve holding a red heart. The background is a vibrant yellow and orange gradient with various white and blue circles of different sizes, some with a stippled texture. To the right, there are stylized, colorful geometric shapes representing buildings or structures in shades of red, purple, and blue.

AchieveAbility is a charity led by neurodivergent people. It is unique, as it provides a platform for Neurodivergent authors and researchers to share their lived experiences, and their work within a positive, constructive environment led by a peer review Editorial Board and published e-journal.

AchieveAbility receives no funding to produce the E-Journal and people give their time, extensive knowledge and expertise voluntarily. The E-Journal does not have a paywall. It is for this reason that we ask for donations.

Due to our commitment to this work and as a small charity we ask that donations be sent to our Local Giving Button on our website to assist us with the publication costs.