

# DESPERATELY SEEKING THE NORMALISATION OF

## ClfA's informal neurodiversity network for archaeologists

It's been about three years since ClfA set up its informal neurodiversity network. At the ClfA2024 fringe session, *Dismantling legacies and collectively building new ones – breaking barriers and bias in archaeology*, held on 16 April 2024, we took the opportunity to reflect on what the network has achieved during this time and how we can continue to build on this.

### HOW THE NETWORK CAME ABOUT

In 2020 ClfA and Mentoring for Women in Archaeology and Heritage (MWAH) circulated a *Dyslexia and archaeology* survey. In this we wanted to explore the potential impacts that dyslexia had upon archaeologists and inform actions that we (individuals and employers) can take to support our neurodivergent colleagues. In response to the results of the survey, ClfA hosted an informal people-led digital chat for all members and non-members about what they want to see happen next, and the network grew from there.

### HOW IT WORKS

The network uses a 'tea break chat' format as an informal 45-minute online session. These take place approximately every two months with the purpose of sharing information and advice; to provide a space for people to meet new contacts; and for emotional support on the issues they may be facing.

Sometimes we have particular topics we want to cover, for example workplace adaptations, or challenges with attending in-person meetings, but generally we go where the conversation takes us and what questions or thoughts people have on the day. These sessions are open to anyone who wants to join.

We also have an occasional email circulation list and have opened up a Knowledge Hub space, but the success really seems to be through the online sessions.

### WIDER CPD AND RESOURCES

A lot of the discussions from the tea breaks have led to more in-depth training sessions and resources we can share more widely. These are collated on our *Neurodiversity and archaeological practice* webpage ([www.archaeologists.net/practices/equality/resources/disability/neurodiversity](http://www.archaeologists.net/practices/equality/resources/disability/neurodiversity)) and include

- top tips for workplace adaptations
- case studies and experiences from archaeologists
- panel discussions about exploring neurodiversity on archaeology and supporting neurodivergent colleagues so they can thrive
- links to useful resources

### WHAT IMPACT HAS THE NETWORK HAD SO FAR?

We know from feedback that the network and the associated activities have had a positive impact on the people who have been involved. The network provides an accessible and 'safe space' for people who previously would not have engaged with ClfA activities, particularly those that would have been held in-person. It has allowed us to start having wider conversations about neurodiversity and archaeology with individuals, employers and sector partners.

***'I look forward to 'meeting' this group as there is that whole feeling of understanding and similarity'***

The information we've received and experiences we've heard about from individuals involved in the network has also informed areas of ClfA's work. For example,

- thinking about how we present our work in neurodivergent-friendly formats
- informing the questions we ask as part of our data collection processes, such as our biennial member survey
- looking at the barriers in our processes that impact neurodivergent archaeologists, particularly the accreditation process

# N OF NEURODIVERSITY IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Cara Jones ACIfA (6085), Sector Skills Manager, and Alex Llewellyn MCIfA (4753), Head of Governance and Finance, CIfA

Ultimately, we have created a space for these conversations to take place in archaeology – we next need to make sure everyone knows that space exists.

## WHAT NEXT?

We don't want to lose momentum on this work as we can see the positive impact of what we've achieved so far. However, we are aware that our resources and knowledge are limited. At the end of our short presentation at the CIfA2024 fringe session we posed a few questions about how we can continue, and particularly how we can get more people involved – not only more colleagues who can benefit from the conversations and support so every neurodivergent

archaeologist can survive and thrive, but also how we can get more conversations happening with employers. That aim will foster a greater understanding of neurodiversity – and hopefully lead to significant and meaningful engagement which will result in positive changes.

## GET INVOLVED!

We'd love to get more people involved in the network so if you're interested in taking part, join us for our next tea break chat on 22 July, 12:30–13:15 ([www.archaeologists.net/civicrm/event/ical?reset=1&list=1&html=1](http://www.archaeologists.net/civicrm/event/ical?reset=1&list=1&html=1)).

If you can't make it but want to join the mailing list, please email [alex.llewellyn@archaeologists.net](mailto:alex.llewellyn@archaeologists.net)



**CIfA** Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

**We think**  
there is a greater percentage of neurodivergent people in archaeology than some other professions

**We know**  
neurodivergent people have many strengths including spatial awareness, problem solving, seeing different angles/scenarios in situations, excellent long-term memory, digital visualising skills and communication

**We want**  
to raise awareness and start conversations to help individuals and workplaces to better support archaeologists

[www.archaeologists.net/practices/neurodiversity](http://www.archaeologists.net/practices/neurodiversity)