THEMES FROM DSN QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES:

- **Change the culture to one that promotes inclusive practice**

This is the overarching theme that comes through from the responses to our questionnaire and this ties in with the ‘Our New Vision - One University’ paper which asks ‘What kind of University should we be?’.

As one respondent put it; ‘unless there is continued pressure nothing will change’.

This qualitative data gives examples that illustrate the main emerging themes:

- **Need to improve understanding, both for the individual and the institution, of what adjustments are possible**

‘I think implementing reasonable adjustments means understanding what adjustments are possible- which is the biggest barrier both for the person with the disability and the line manager’.

‘instead of feeling that I don't require any [reasonable adjustments], I'm just not sure what those would look like’

‘Our own knowledge of what can help' was cited as the main barrier preventing reasonable adjustments.

Also cited by one respondent was “Being scared to ask for what you need. Not understanding what is available to support you. Not knowing what would be beneficial. Not wanting to be judged’.

‘Very much depends on the line manager; patience is required ie sometimes it is a matter of trial and error to see what works - won't necessarily find the right adjustments straight away’

- **Institutional culture that asking for reasonable adjustments is to “make a fuss”**

‘In my current role there is a constant unspoken anxiety that if I make 'too much of a fuss' or draw further attention to my difficulties that I will be disadvantaging myself, based on previous conversations and requests for adjustments to the role being turned down or not implemented. I already feel that I will eventually have to leave my post (and seek more suitable employment elsewhere) due to the negative view people have of me here and the lack of adjustments being made for me, and this will be a sad waste of the knowledge and training I have built up in the role’.
‘Occupational Health assessed my workstation but advised not to make too much fuss as reasonable adjustments also need to suit business needs, and they could say that I was not fit for the job in question’.

‘The attitude of my colleagues and managers (who, for context, do not have any mobility issues) seemed to be that I should stop making a fuss and just work around the parking situation because ‘everyone else did’ - a clear lack of understanding / sympathy for work-related barriers and other disability issues’.

‘Our attitudes towards reasonable adjustment . . . firmly sit in the 1800s, I feel like disabled people should not be seen or heard. I am even considering a change of institution as a result’.

‘I don't feel that raising the issue and having to make this known to everyone I work with - sometimes even before they've met me or got to know me - would be justified by the small adjustments that I might receive. (And I don't know what they would be)’.

‘It is difficult to admit you can't do your job without extra support, or that you would benefit from adjustments that other members of staff do not have, so it is sometimes easier to just manage as best you can’

‘Ignorance and bullying is rife. Ableism, both internalised from the disabled staff member, and from the management can make it harder to access reasonable adjustments and/or feel comfortable enough to disclose them’.

‘It is horrendous and makes you feel a nuisance and discriminated against’

● Inconsistencies in how disabled staff are treated

‘There should be a consistent approach across all managers, departments and faculties to ensure a fair and supportive environment for disabled employees’.

‘I think the experience of bringing up disabilities and requesting reasonable adjustments varies widely depending on the attitudes and experiences of the manager(s) involved. There are managers within the University who will be hugely supportive in putting adjustments in place, and others who do not want to make any adjustments or who just do not understand the reasonable adjustment process / requirement and the ways that it would benefit them to adjust a role for a disabled employee’.

‘support seems to come down to the personality of your manager - if they are not a particularly empathetic person, it is much harder to ask for support’

‘It does depend on the HoD’

‘All depends on the person that you are dealing with at TUOS’
‘I think the power should not lie with line managers and be centrally overseen to avoid discrimination’

‘The whole attitude of my manager was very inflexible to HR guidelines, and not supportive of me as an individual. My current manager is completely different, I am pleased to say - I am allowed to attend medical appointments and cancer-related courses in work time, and everything is always up for discussion if I want it to be’.

- Departments/managers feel that they are “doing you a favour”

‘It doesn’t feel like this is understood as a ‘duty’, but as a thing they’re going out of their way to do’.

‘I do feel like I can have conversations with my manager, however it always feels like it’s pitched as my department "going out of its way" to help, rather than a discussion of reasonable adjustments’.

‘I felt like even though they were recommended by an NHS clinician and agreed with by occupational health, the culture within the university makes it feel like I am seen as “not wanting to pull my weight”or “using it as an excuse to not work as hard as others do”.

‘Instead of adjustments being in place to meet deadlines, I either 'fail' to meet deadlines or they are removed. This deskills me, feeds into a false narrative that I constantly ‘fail’ and creates bad feeling with colleagues/bullying’.

‘Certain forms of disability are easy to understand and sympathise with, but when disabilities affect perceptions of behaviour the onus still seems to be on the disabled person to change’.

‘I have found myself having to justify why I am following [the reasonable adjustments] when challenged on them (people also forget) if my behaviour doesn't fit with the historical culture of the team’.

‘There needs to be much more emphasis on it not being seen as a failing if you need reasonable adjustments - almost expected that you would request them’.

- Need to improve manager training/knowledge about reasonable adjustments

‘Getting better, but managers should be given compulsory training’.

‘Some managers do not like to have people with disabilities. More training is required so that staff are not made to feel overlooked’.

‘I think it is sometimes hard as a manager to know what constitutes reasonable - last time I looked the information for managers regarding reasonable adjustments on the internal HR website was extremely basic and very focused on e.g. mobility. It would be good to see some practical examples of reasonable adjustments for different disabilities (including neurodivergences) - and also a clear explanation of when Access to Work might be involved.’
Also if you have more than one person on your team with a disability that requires reasonable adjustments then sometimes those adjustments can conflict.

'It would be really useful if there was someone with relevant expertise that managers could talk to to get advice. I previously line managed someone with a disability and had some really difficult issues to resolve, but when I tried to contact HR they never answered the phone or replied to an email'.

- Lack of support

'I felt intimidated, alone and like I was not being listened to. I was not allowed an advocate. The reasonable adjustments I asked for were denied, when I feel as if they should have been tried on a trial basis. I felt humiliated and unsupported. I felt as if the "business needs" came well before my needs'.

'I was on the suicide at risk list with no support from my employer for 100 days'.

'‘lack of knowledge, understanding and compassion and being perceived as “difficult” ‘.

'It's embarrassing, especially if you are a private person. It makes you feel vulnerable putting your head above the parapet and drawing attention to yourself. Makes you a target for gossips, bullies and negative attention. You feel very alone'.

'There is nowhere for staff to go to seek advice from in terms of workplace adjustments ie someone who is independent, impartial, knowledgeable and experienced in such matters i.e. an equivalent to DDSS for students'.

'I was denied reasonable adjustments in the first place by my old manager and was given a list of reasons why they could not be put in place. These were not fair and I was not given a chance to dispute these. I was also denied being allowed an advocate in those meetings'.

'All my requirements were turned down by my employer (managers) even though some were backed by a GP from Occupational Health. Perhaps I should have taken the University to tribunal about it, but I wasn't in a strong enough state mentally or physically to undertake this; which is how the University is able to get away with illegal, discriminatory practices'.

'These issues always fall back onto the individual....'

- Delays with implementation of reasonable adjustments

'Over 6 months and still not in place'.

'The problem is HR blocking certain items I needed, they also took weeks and weeks and weeks to respond. Have instead had to fund items myself'.

'it has taken 4.5 years to get a work place assessment! awaiting report'.
'Neither the department or the faculty appeared to understand the protocol to implement these adjustments and I have been passed around from person to person for almost two years. I was also deeply saddened by the way I was spoken to by members of the University during the whole process. I felt that neither the faculty or my department knew how to engage with me in a positive manner'.

'A disabled colleague has been waiting over two years for adjustments to be made to the building to allow full wheelchair access. Absolute disgrace and illegal'.

'I am still without basic things that would allow me to more easily do my job'.

**Positive effects of reasonable adjustments being made**

'I can manage my time better, I don't feel so much under pressure and I feel RESPECTED!'

'They have meant I am able to get on and do a job I love, focus on the work and developing my knowledge and experience. I thought I would be forced out without them, my anxiety levels were so high'.

'I don't think I would be able to work at all without my reasonable adjustments, so they have been transformative'.

'I think it can be difficult to ask for what you need, or to take what you need (e.g. taking regular breaks) if you are under a lot of pressure at work, if you are very conscientious about your work or if you are not a very confident person. It can be uncomfortable to 'out' yourself as disabled and request help from colleagues (e.g. sometimes I have to ask someone else to take notes during a meeting if I can't write/type), especially if you know that they are struggling with workload or under a lot of pressure themselves. The flipside of this is that having these conversations can help to raise awareness of disability and promote inclusive practice'.

**Support that was/would be useful:**

'It became possible this time [to get reasonable adjustments] because I was helped through the process by my support worker, I wouldn't have had the strength or stamina to go through it alone. It's frightening and it's an ordeal'.

'I would like to add the importance of getting reasonable adjustments agreed in writing - from both the manager and employee perspective. Building reviews of reasonable adjustments into the SRDS process is also invaluable'.

'Nobody knew about access to work funding, so I obtained this and then bought everything I needed and arranged for the money to be refunded through access to work'.

OH [Occupational Health] was probably the most effective at instigating adjustments.
we need central support now and 1-2 central staff on adjustments

Unless you have a disability, reasonable adjustments are really not well known, and I think there should be positive HR input from the start, as soon a disability is disclosed, or from another professional/peer support who may have more of an idea of what adjustments might help. I really like that Health & Wellbeing is on my 121 agenda and that such importance is given to it. There needs to be much more emphasis on it not being seen as a failing if you need reasonable adjustments - almost expected that you would request them.

• Recommendations

Expand the scope of the Disability & Dyslexia Support Service (DDSS) to cover staff as well as students or invest in a separate team to provide impartial, relevant expertise and advice to people who have an impairment or condition which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. This would ensure that all staff had access to:

1. Individually-tailored support based on discussions with them about their requirements.
2. A consistent approach to reasonable adjustments across departments to ensure University environments, policies and practices do not place disabled staff at a substantial disadvantage.
3. Advice for managers of disabled staff including practical examples of reasonable adjustments for different disabilities.
4. Information about, and help with applying for, external funding available to provide reasonable adjustments.