

## CASE STUDY

### Emerging Neurodiverse Talent Attraction

#### Legal & General Neurodiversity Work Experience Programme



At Legal & General we're committed to building a diverse and inclusive culture, with a workplace where we enable our employees to be at their best, no matter who they are. As a company, we're diverse by our very nature. Our mission is to change society for the better, by investing in the economy to create a better future.

One of the ways we do that is by investing in our own next generation: the experts and leaders of tomorrow.

Legal & General has a very active employee led neurodiversity network, often held up as an example on how to establish a successful employee network. Members increased from 70 to 300+ within c16 months. The Neurodiversity network champions and advocates for neuro-inclusion in the workplace, from hiring through to equity of access to training and development opportunities for existing neurodiverse talent.

### The Initiative

The Neurodiversity Work Experience initiative was developed by the Network Chair, Nalini Solanki, having identified a need for this during outreach work. Designed to provide work experience opportunities to young adults aged 16 to 30 years, who would ordinarily struggle to access such placements due to challenges with navigating application and interview processes not designed to accommodate 'atypical' minds.

Targeted to coincide with the week commonly assigned by many London borough schools and colleges for Year 12 work experience, the programme consists of a series of structured sessions combining interactive insight into a career in Finance and the variety of roles within Legal & General, with coaching sessions designed to boost self-confidence and develop practical skills required to be successful in any career.

The timetable was designed to avoid the need for students to travel to our London office during rush hour, from 10.15 am to 3.30pm daily, with plenty of breaks built in and permission to retreat to designated quiet spaces any time a student felt the need for a break.

4 of the 16 students did not identify as neurodiverse, participation in the programme for these students was to test whether initiatives created to benefit neurodiverse individuals are fit for purpose for neurotypical individuals.

Circa 30 volunteers from across L&G divisions, from C-suite to Concierge, led individual sessions, gave motivational talks based on their own career journeys, provided small group coaching, mentoring, workshop style skills training on CV writing and how to use LinkedIn to search for jobs. The week ended with a practical 'speed mentoring' session, certificates for course attendance and a small celebration.

A confidential student profile was created for each student to enable presenters and mentors to understand their target audience and have confidence in meeting any adjustments required for some of the students.

## The Impact

The programme was delivered 26 – 30 June 2023, face to face at Legal & General, One Coleman Street, London EC2.

Cultivated by the experience of network members, some of the students were introduced through family members of L&G colleagues, some introduced through a previous neurodiversity workshop facilitator with links to ADHD and Autism focused organisations supporting schools and young adults in North - West London. One student was introduced to us through a relationship with Group for Autism Insurance and Neurodiversity (GAIN).

### Presenter/mentor/facilitator feedback

- Presenters/mentors reported how enjoyable they found the experience they led.
- A handful of presenters freely chose to commit further time to the initiative following their allocated session, by delivering additional small group coaching sessions during the week and/or spending time with the students to make themselves available for anyone requiring further support.
- Presenters found the students engaged, with lots of challenging questions asked during the sessions.
- Awareness of neurodiversity was raised, with strengths brought to life by the students. In turn this sparked interest and started conversations around 'which roles in my area would benefit from employing the strengths I can now see neurodiverse minds would bring to the team'.

## Student feedback

- Students enjoyed the week, developing confidence and bonding with their cohort peers as the week progressed.
- Students preferred small group and interactive sessions, citing LGIM Marketing, CV workshop, Confidence building and Speed Mentoring sessions.
- Splitting the group into teams for the interactive sessions made it easier for students to ask questions.
- Students would like to have more tasks/practical exercises to do.

## Organiser feedback

- Delivering the programme is resource intensive, requiring 1 FTE for approximately 5 full days leading into the week, to book rooms, lunches, create briefing packs, brief session leads and other volunteers, complete required paperwork for Year 12 students and other administrative tasks.
- During the week-long programme, 1.5 FTE is required for the week, to introduce session leads, manage student and presenter queries, generally act as a runner!

## Resulting Outcomes

- L&G Group Technology Apprenticeship recruitment closing date extended, to encourage, and allow time for this first cohort to apply for apprenticeships on offer. This action was taken as a result of L&G Group Chief Technology Officer leading sessions and witnessing incredible talent first hand.
- Two students successfully applied and progressed to final stage, with one student offered an Apprenticeship. This student will join L&G 29 September 2023.
- LGIM Finance considering scope for offering an apprenticeship scheme in Finance, with positive discrimination encouraging neurodiverse talent to apply.
- Consideration underway for creating longer term, paid work experience scheme in L&G Group Technology.
- Long term mentoring scheme created, following the success of speed mentoring, as requested by some students and offered by some of the mentors. This will be offered as informal mentoring, once a month over Teams, for 45 minutes to 1 hour.
- Employee morale is boosted, with comments acknowledging how great it is to work for a company like L&G, because they're doing something to improve neuro-inclusion in the workplace.
- Positive PR, L&G profile as leading on neuro-inclusivity raised.

## Other firms looking to introduce Neurodiversity Work Experience programme

- Don't think it, do it. You will get far more valuable learnings out of this than you may think possible.
- Presenters/mentors – the investment in your time, circa 3 hours in total for preparation, delivery, time for any follow up questions, will be dwarfed by the difference you make to students, not to mention the personal growth this experience stirs.

## Sound bites

### Students

- I really enjoyed my time at L&G last week, with the neurodiverse work experience group. I found it very helpful. As requested by Mark, I suppose my "superpowers" would be my ability to hyperfocus and to fully dedicate myself when given a challenge. – **Thomas Annan, Student**
- Firstly, I just wanted to say a big thank you for not only allowing me to attend this week but also for all the work you put in ensuring we had all the great activities on offer. It really was a thoroughly enjoyable experience, and I learnt a lot, meeting some interesting people and making friends along the way. I think it has also impacted my thinking as to what field I would want to go into after uni. Whilst I found many parts of the company interesting the sector which most captured my interest was the asset management and investment sector. – **Jonathan Albert, Student**
- ...It was a real pleasure to meet you and your other team members at Legal & General. It was also nice to meet all the other people on the course. I can't thank you enough for all the hard work you clearly put in to make the work experience so amazing. I really enjoyed the whole week and felt I learned a huge amount. I found the financial operations especially interesting, but I suspect I would find the legal side of it rather more challenging. I am working on my CV and will be sending it in this week... – **Max Buckley, Student**
- Thanks a lot again for organizing this and all the work and thought you and your colleagues put into it. Katia truly enjoyed the past week and was full of stories, impressions, and questions in the evenings. I hope this can become a regular exercise. – **Erik Lueth, LGIM Economist, parent of student**
- I just want to say a big thank you for this week and I learnt so much about both L&G and neurodiversity. I absolutely loved this week! – **Suvetha, Student**

## Presenters/Facilitators/Mentors

- “Nalini, I really enjoyed last week’s sessions. A massive thank you for driving this work and to everyone else for their fantastic support. I was humbled to speak to the cohort of students and hear about their fantastic experience. Really looking forward to seeing if we can do more.” – **Mark Hall, Chief Technology Officer, L&G Group Technology**
- Please them know it has been a privilege to have been involved with them all this week and I have learnt so much from them. Watching their confidence and communication skills grow through the week has been amazing. Special mention to Donal and Jonathan for working together on answering the fund management revenue question (and taking me through it). Keep in touch - work email, LinkedIn and happy to have some 1-1 mentoring sessions if they would like to get in touch. I’ve got so much out of the process as well and makes you think about things in a different refreshing way. It’s been a pleasure seeing them all open over the last couple of days... – **Marc Lloyd, Senior Finance Manager, LGIM**
- It was interesting, as lots of the Kids came over after the talk to say thank you and reinforce some of the advice and techniques. One said that's really interesting it looks like my therapist stole all your content . It was a great success, and you should be very proud! – **Deon Pillay, Head of Marketing Planning, LGIM**
- I found the session to be an eye-opener and refreshing to speak to people with such energy. I would be happy to be one of those future mentors, and/or help with the Neurodiversity network in other ways.
- I am pleased to hear they found it helpful. It was a well organised event and great pleasure to participate. We have given them LinkedIn connection to help them connect with people with various experiences and academic background, and happy to continue support over teams as long as they need it. Let me know how I can support more in the future.
- Thanks again for yesterday, Nalini, they were a really nice group to speak to, and I really enjoyed it! I hope the group enjoy the rest of their time at LGIM! – **Katherine George, Senior Sales Manager, Strategic Partnerships (Wholesale)**

## Heard in the Room

- “It is okay to not succeed at something, you can’t get it 100% every time” – **Student talking about take-away from Emma Byron motivational talk.**
- “The people here are great.”
- “I like having the freedom to act without being judged”.
- “Believing there are job opportunities long-term that are right for me, it’s how to make the first step in the process that’s the hardest”.
- “Telling myself, I’m not the only one who has taken the lattice job route. Before, I believed that most people I knew took the ladder approach”.
- “Not judging a book by its cover. Before coming into L&G I thought one job, one industry, now I know there are lots of roles in an industry.

## LinkedIn

- So humbled to have met such an amazingly talented group of students. I’d encourage everyone reading this to understand and engage more with neurodiversity and see the super skills and talents people can bring to the workplace. We are all different and there is no normal! I’d also love to hear from more people who can help with work placements and career opportunities, yesterday I met amazing talent that just needs a chance to shine. – **MH**
- Great event. Well organised and great fun to meet everyone and share experience – **Abukar A, CQF**
- At Legal and General Investment Management (LGIM) this week we welcome a great cohort of students for our first ever Neurodiversity Network led work experience programme. Organised by Nalini Solanki, this is an excellent scheme, and one I was very happy to contribute to by giving the students an introduction to Equities & Fund Management. Their great questions made for a really engaging discussion – **Camilla Ayling, CFA**
- As a recently diagnosed neurodivergent person I am incredibly proud to say that I work for a company that is neuroinclusive. My experience of sharing my ADHD diagnosis with my colleagues has been as positive one. Yesterday, I spent the day with these work experience students and shared my career and late diagnosis story with them. Thank you for putting this great programme together Nalini Solanki and letting me be a part of it. – **Emma Miles**

- Such a great initiative, well done LGIM – **Claudia Bastiani, MCR**
- Having a step daughter diagnosed with ADHD and understanding her daily struggles, this makes me so proud to work for Legal & General. – **Lauren Alexander**
- Great example other businesses can emulate – **Mark Peterson**
- Personally and on behalf of GAIN (Group for Autism, Insurance, Investment and Neurodiversity) thank you Nalini Solanki and Legal & General Investment Management (LGIM) for sharing the progress that you are making for the benefit of industry colleagues. The more as sharing “what works” is key to delivering the transformation that the Rt Hon Sir Robert Buckland KBE KC MP Review is setting out to achieve – **Johnny Timpson OBE**
- “I can’t wait to hear more about this Nalini - hope you are able to attend our work stream meeting next week, as I think the entire group will feel the same!” – **Rob Davies**
- While it is great to see neurodiversity finally on the radar of HR team and senior executives, we need to move past simply talking about it and see some action. What Nalini and her colleagues at LGIM have done through their work experience initiative for young neurodivergent individuals is truly inspiring. While I know how much hard work went into this in terms of preparation and the activities, the concept – like most great ideas – is simple and should be easily replicable at other asset managers. Well done Nalini for not just talking the talk, but walking the walk. – **Rob Davies**

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If you would like to find out more, please contact [info@diversityproject.com](mailto:info@diversityproject.com)