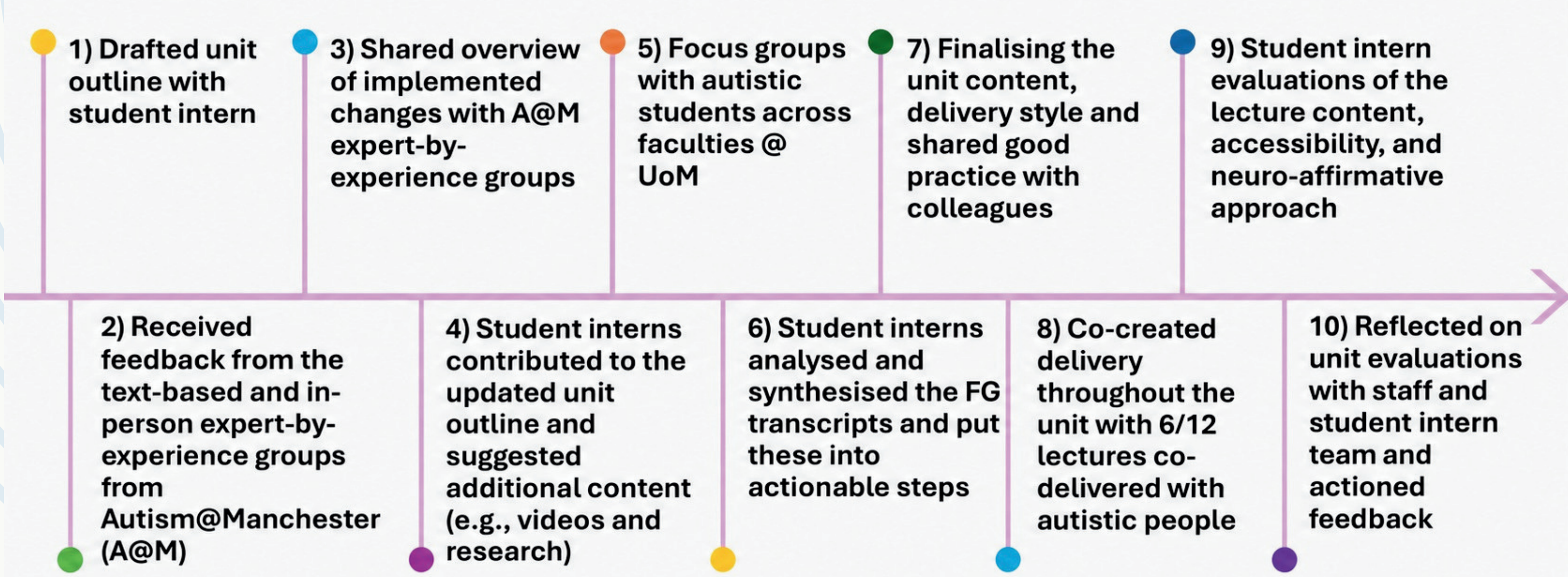


CO-PRODUCING WITH THE AUTISTIC COMMUNITY: PROMOTING NEURODIVERGENT AFFIRMATIVE PRACTICES TO FUTURE PSYCHOLOGISTS

Amber Ruigbrok

Autism Unit Co-Creation Development Timeline



Progressing Education via Co-Production

Confidence and Understanding

"This unit has made me feel more confident with working with and supporting autistic people in my future career, but also in my personal life."

"A lot of what we covered actually helped me understand my son better. It wasn't just theory, I could relate it to real situations at home."

Inclusive Learning Environments

"I appreciate how adjustments were made to some parts of the lectures too [...] as in other units we often do not have the liberty of choice and this has made me uncomfortable."

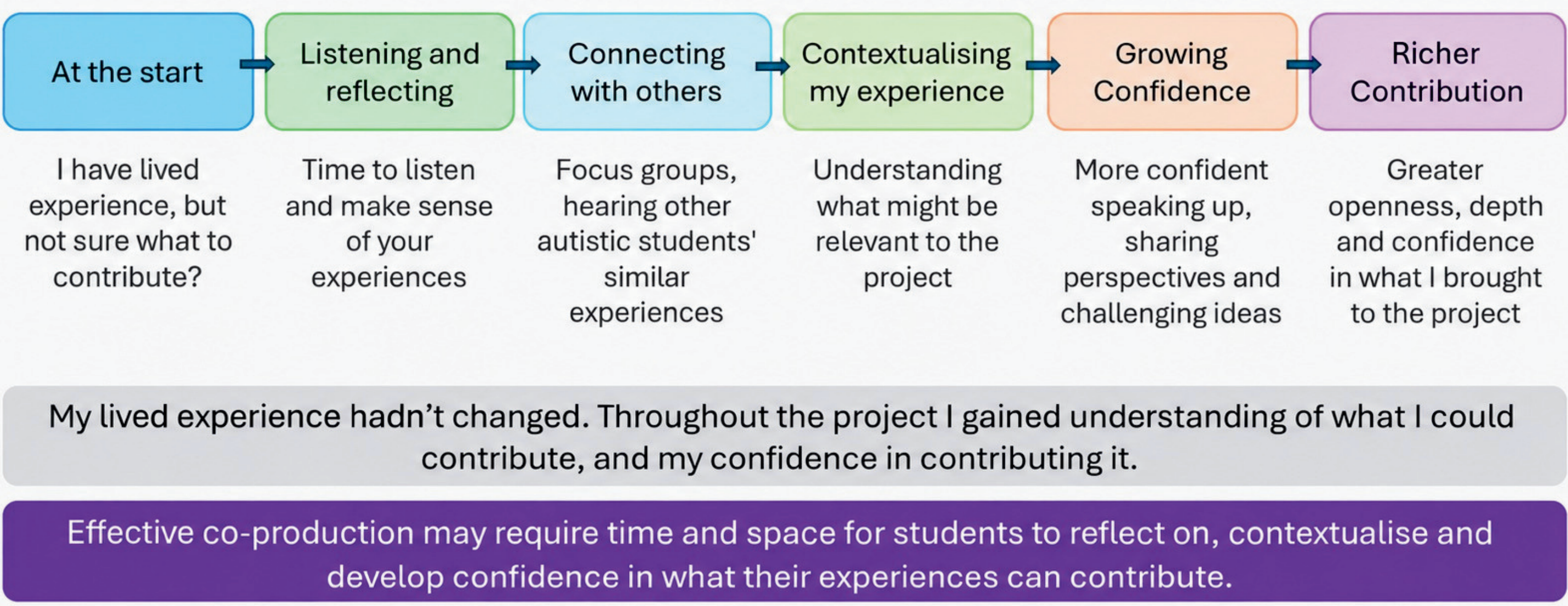
"[every effort has been made to] create a really pleasant and comfortable environment in the lectures and seminars themselves."

My Voice Matters: From Unheard to Empowered

Shifting from feeling like "just a student" with no voice in the education system to actually seeing content I had recommended being delivered to hundreds of students

Lived-Experience Contribution Can Develop Through Co-Production

The project team didn't just recruit students with lived experience – they created conditions in which student contribution could develop



The funding received from the Social Responsibility Fund allowed us to:

- (1) Co-deliver the co-created optional unit 'Autism: Research, Theory and Culture' for the first time on the BSc Psychology in 2025/2026 with autistic academics and autistic people
- (2) Reimburse our autistic co-producers who delivered lecture material for their time creating the materials allowing for sustainability in material development and delivery for future unit iterations
- (3) Reimburse our neurodivergent student interns for their time evaluating the lectures. As this was the first time we ran the unit, this feedback allows us to update materials and further address delivery of materials across the unit. This will allow our unit team to update their practices and consider the impact of material delivery from a lived-experience and student perspective

We worked with autistic students and community members to create a new optional autism module for second-year BSc Psychology students. In this unit, students explored real-life issues that affect autistic people and are taught about how these can be improved. The unit aims to develop graduates who are socially aware, ethical, and committed to inclusion. It teaches autism from a perspective that recognises and values neurological differences and focuses on removing barriers that can prevent autistic people from fully participating in society.

The module was co-designed by university staff, neurodivergent student interns, autistic community members, and the Autism@Manchester expert-by-experience groups (see Figure 1 for a co-creation timeline). Feedback from autistic students at the University of Manchester also helped shape the content and delivery of the learning materials and exam preparation.

Half of the lectures were developed and taught together with autistic people, this included a panel discussion where students heard directly from autistic community members. All lectures were reviewed by neurodivergent student interns. We are currently evaluating the module by (1) exploring changes in students' understanding and engagement, (2) addressing feedback provided by students in unit surveys, and (3) addressing feedback provided by the student interns.

The unit was co-created with autistic people, embedding the principle "Nothing about us, without us" from the outset.

This helped us develop teaching that reflects lived experience, challenges misconceptions about autism and creates a more inclusive learning environment for neurodivergent students. Student interns and co-producers directly influenced the unit's content and delivery, while feedback from the first cohort is informing future improvements.

"This is an excellent initiative and it will help to create a generation of psychologists that are more informed and compassionate towards autistic people."
— Autism@Manchester Expert-by-Experience Group Member

Our approach is also informing wider inclusive teaching practice across FBMH.