

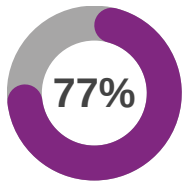
DSA Evaluation 2022 Summary

This evaluation is an analysis of Brain in Hand's (BiH) effectiveness in increasing students' overall wellbeing in their day-to-day life and overcoming barriers whilst studying at university, during 2022.

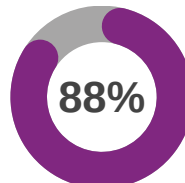
Findings are based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, including student user feedback surveys, usage data, eight semi-structured interviews, and supporter feedback.

brain in hand

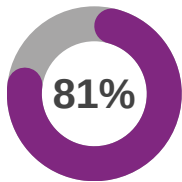
2022 evaluation at a glance



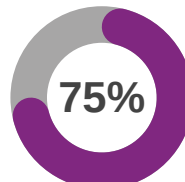
77% of respondents agreed BiH helped them overcome challenges at university



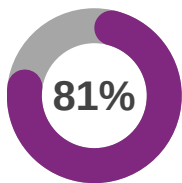
88% of respondents would recommend Brain in Hand to other students



81% of students felt more confident managing day-to-day activities (e.g. studies, routines or daily living)



75% of students felt more able to participate at university



81% of students felt more able to cope with day-to-day stressors



75% of students felt they have an improved quality of life

DSA Funded Student Online Survey
July 2022 | 233 respondents

Which areas of life does Brain in Hand impact?

Brain in Hand positively impacts students in a range of areas. Based on survey data and one-to-one interviews the data demonstrates the versatility and consistency of the system which enables students to manage daily routine, remember things, organise and manage anxiety.

- ✓ Managing daily routine
- ✓ Remembering things & organising myself
- ✓ Managing anxiety and mental health
- ✓ Knowing what to do in stressful situations
- ✓ Increased independence & resilience
- ✓ Feeling more confident
- ✓ Managing the unexpected
- ✓ Managing emotions & mood

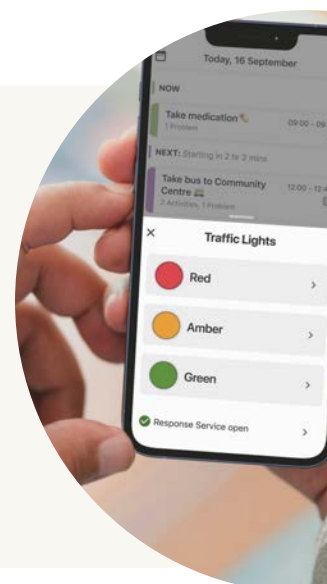


100% of professional supporters said BiH helped students with building independence, organisation, confidence, navigating new living situations and managing anxiety

“Brain in Hand has been a lifesaver for me in coping with the complex daily schedules at university and with giving me a support structure in the way of coping mechanisms for handling stressful busy lectures”

“Thanks to Brain In Hand, I’ve been able to live independently at university”

“Brain in Hand is great because the traffic lights allow me to track how I’m feeling (and consider why) and have solutions at my fingertips. Knowing the response service is there gives a great feeling of security.”





Contents

Executive Summary	3
About Brain in Hand	4
Summary of Outcomes	6
Areas of Impact	7
Brain in Hand Features Review	11
Supporter Feedback	16
Top 100 Users	19
Conclusion	21
Appendices	23

Author: Sarah Todd
Date February 2023

Executive Summary

About Brain in Hand

Brain in Hand supports around 6,000 students who are neurodiverse, autistic or have an anxiety-based mental health need. It combines practical human support and digital tools to help students live more independently and thrive at university. Brain in Hand can support students to overcome barriers in their academic life, in areas such as remembering things, organisation and managing anxiety.

It supports students in their daily life, so they get to do the things that are important to them, such as: achieving at university, planning their studies, attending lectures, and looking after their wellbeing.

Brain in Hand is designed to help ease transition into university life, improve student retention and transition from university to the workplace or elsewhere. It also acts as a reminder of their skills and strengths, which are transferrable, as well as supporting with the language and communication barriers people may face.

About this evaluation

This evaluation is an analysis of Brain in Hand's effectiveness in increasing students' overall wellbeing in their day-to-day life and overcoming barriers whilst studying at university, during 2022.

This evaluation is a combination of qualitative and quantitative data including student user feedback survey, usage data, eight semi-structured interviews, and supporter feedback.

Key outcomes

The areas Brain in Hand has supported with are confidence, independence, reduction of anxiety, organisation, and time-management. A high percentage of students were able to transition to university, become more organised and overcome barriers using Brain in Hand. Students have also changed their mindset when approaching new situations, developing skills to cope better with stressful situations which reduces anxiety, and further builds confidence and independence.

- **Improved confidence & independence**
- **Improved participation in university life**
- **Increased ability to cope with day-to-day stressors**
- **Improved organisation & time management**
- **Supported students to overcome challenges at university**
- **Improved quality of life**

About Brain in Hand

Brain in Hand is unique in enabling personalised coping strategies, new routines and reflection that build self-activation and efficacy. It has been developed specifically for use by people with additional needs, combining the best of technology with the best of human support.

Specialist human support – bespoke, paced, user-led guidance from experienced education, autism and mental health professionals - enables a student to co-produce solutions and maintain motivation to achieve academic success.

Our technology supports the user to perform repetitive, daily, time-consuming activities – reminding students to initiate tasks, step-by-step instructions on routines and accessible coping strategies - whilst adding in the value of in-depth data analysis for reflection and habit formation.

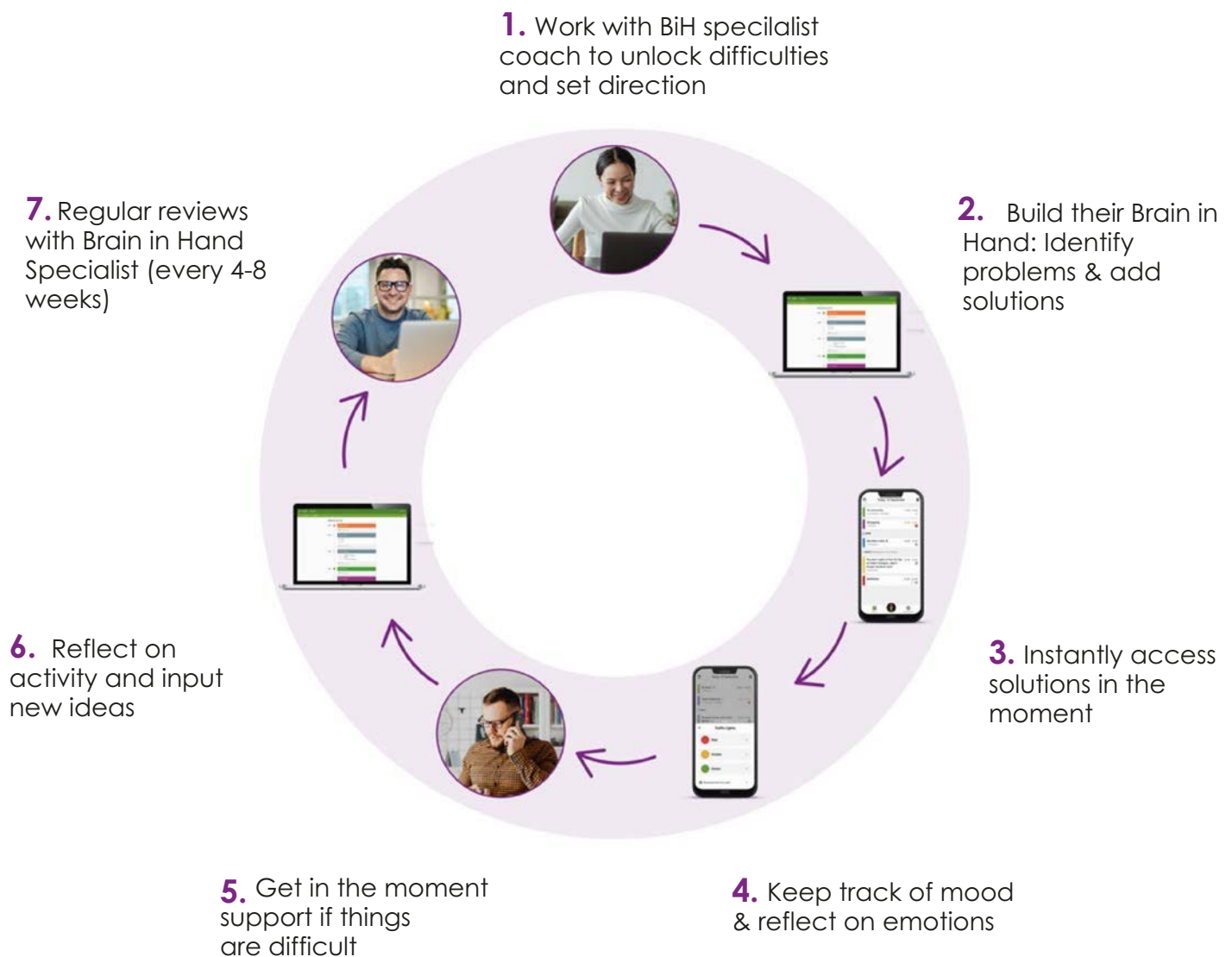


Figure 1

Brain in Hand is built around events and solutions. Solutions can be built around planned events or unplanned events.

Students work with their **specialist coach** to understand and set up Brain in Hand and develop the system to suit their individual and unique needs. This includes supporting students in a solution focussed way to come up with their own strategies to problems they might be facing in their day-to-day life, which could prevent participation, impact confidence and independence or reduce wellbeing. The specialist works with the students' supporters such as family, friends, or mentors to gain greater insight. They will also understand whether a student has a preferred learning or communication style, and will adapt sessions to be as inclusive and accessible as possible.

Planned events supports students in managing their daily routine, timekeeping, organisation and keeping their day on track. The diary function can break each individual task down into its smallest parts. Within each diary event students can use the subtitles activity, problem, solution. Students can break things down in here as much as they feel they need and add links to solutions as in the example below.

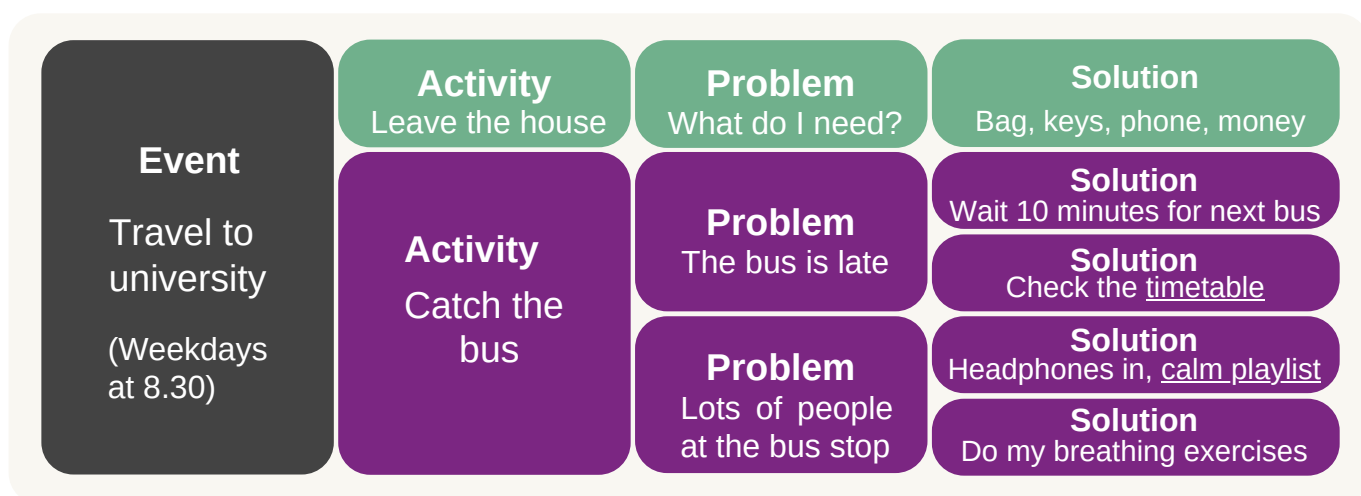


Figure 2 Example of the ways students can break down events in the diary

Unplanned events can be stored for when the unexpected happens. Each event can be broken down into its individual parts, just like with planned events. These are stored within each unplanned event so students can plan for every eventuality. An example of this might be a changed lecture or social occasion they were not expecting, which could cause anxiety. Students can prepare for these stressful situations by planning for these in a solution focussed way, thinking about what to do when these situations occur and how to still be able to participate. Students write in their own thought-out solutions which work best for them, so they can recall their best thinking in the moment.

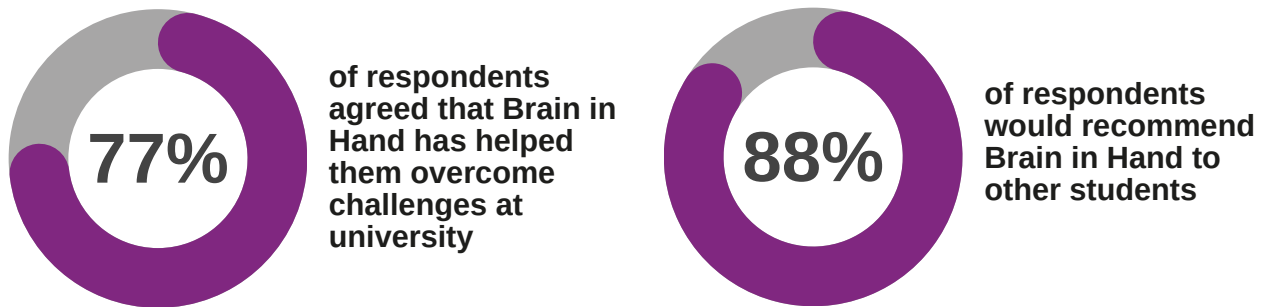
Students can track how they are feeling using the **traffic light system**. This can be accessed through the app and can be set to remind students to check in with themselves regularly. This can help students reflect and understand how they're feeling in the moment.

Other ways students have used the traffic lights are energy accounting and tracking their sleep. It can be used for any purpose students feel will be the most beneficial for them.

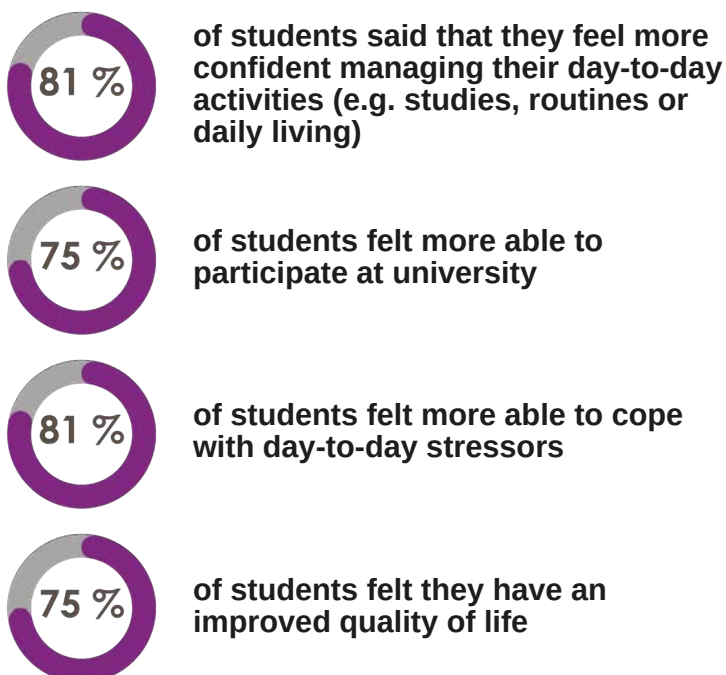
Students can also **access extra human support** in the moment through the traffic light system, either from a Brain in Hand Responder or a personal supporter of their choice, such as a family member or friend.

Summary of outcomes

As part of the evaluation, Brain in Hand reached out to all the current DSA funded students in July 2022 to complete an online survey. This survey was created to evaluate the effectiveness of Brain in Hand in helping students overcome barriers in their day-to-day life. There were 233 students who responded to this survey.



Since using Brain in Hand...



“Brain in Hand has been a lifesaver for me in coping with the complex daily schedules at university and with giving me a support structure in the way of coping mechanisms for handling stressful busy lectures”

Figure 3

What areas of life does Brain in Hand impact?

There are many areas that Brain in Hand positively impacts for student. Students could choose multiple answers. The data below demonstrates both the versatility of the system and the consistency with which it enables students to manage daily routine, remember things, organise and manage anxiety. Each of which we review in detail along with themes from qualitative interviews.



Managing daily routine

The highest proportion of user's highlighted that Brain in Hand supported them with planning and organisation, including organising study time, managing their course, home life, and keeping focused on routines. Users build their Brain in Hand to include their schedules, daily routines and set reminders to keep them on track focusing on the things that are important to them.

"I now have a proper defined structure, for my new routine. It has also helped me to monitor my moods and realise when I am becoming in danger of being overwhelmed and knowing what works to regulate my mood again."

Remembering things and organising myself

Students use the diary to remember things, such as appointments, lectures, and activities outside of university. This function is highly used and something that students have highlighted as one of the biggest areas of improvement with 53% of our students saying it has helped them remember things and 50% saying it has improved organisation. Some students said it helps them organise their time, so they are able to do more outside of university and plan for stressful situations inside of university.

“I add reminders on the times I need to be at Uni and add solutions to problems I might encounter during my time there... I was able to travel to an art exhibition on my own with the help of adding reminders & solutions to guide me how to get there by train.”

Brain in Hand has also helped students to feel better able to manage their time and workload effectively, improving their organisation skills through helpful reminders and a well-organised diary that keeps them on track with completing tasks.

“Since using it, I haven’t needed extensions for deadlines because I have actually done work before the deadline.”

As well as improving students’ organisation skills, it has positively impacted their time keeping in some cases, particularly with the help of the diary and helpful reminders.

“I haven’t been late for anything in the past year since using Brain in Hand. I almost missed my first day of Uni when I didn’t have brain in hand. Which looking back at, I can’t believe it happened.”

Managing anxiety and mental health

Students often find starting university overwhelming. 45% felt Brain in Hand helped them in managing anxiety and a similar number said it helped with their mental health. Many students mentioned transitioning to university and managing new situations. Solutions are built into their Brain in Hand to support them in periods of anxiety and stress to recall their ‘best thinking’ strategies in the moment.

“Knowing it’s there, is reassuring and made a big difference to my anxiety levels”

“I found starting university very difficult when I entered the building for the first time, I nearly had a panic attack so opened the app and looked at strategies for the situation. That helped me calm down... knowing it's there, is reassuring and having it set up for university this year made a big difference to my anxiety levels.”

“... Getting overwhelmed by social demands can result in stress-induced headaches and migraines is a challenge I am always having to manage as it's related to my disability. With Brain in Hand, I felt more able to monitor and handle my wellbeing, which helped with recovery.”

Knowing what to do in stressful situations

Another commonly cited theme was problem-solving; students can work with their specialist to build their Brain in Hand system with step-by-step solutions to problems or activities they may need support with during periods of anxiety. It allows them to have easy and discrete access to their best thinking during times they may be unable to recall this.

“Initially, it helped me to understand how to structure my day. Now it helps me to monitor my moods, to understand when I am slipping down and to discover what activities lift my mood and what activities or events lower my mood. Overall, Brain in Hand has been an excellent way for me to self-regulate.”

“When I have become over-whelmed before or during lessons, looking at the steps I've given myself to follow and the solutions to problems have been very comforting and grounding.”

As a personalised system, Brain in Hand works to support users to identify their skills and strengths as well as their own individual challenges and barriers. With this information, a Brain in Hand specialist will support a user to set their own goals and build their Brain in Hand system in a way that provides them with the support and solutions to build their confidence and independence in overcoming these challenges and barriers. 77% of users agreed that Brain in Hand had helped them overcome challenges at university.

Managing emotions and spotting patterns in mood

With the help of Brain in Hand's traffic lights feature, students have felt better able to manage their mood throughout the day; these helpful reminders to check-in with how they're feeling have also been useful for some students in monitoring energy levels and ascertaining when a break is needed.

“Last year without it; It would be like sleepless nights; I would have my dinner and that would be the only break I would have”

"I use the diary to plan daily tasks, even if tasks are overdue, this is useful indicator to let me know I am maybe not back to full capacity."

Moreover, the timeline, where all traffic light presses are recorded, has been an important visual tool for a number of students in communicating to others how they have been feeling recently, particularly when verbalising their progress may be challenging.

"Explaining to others where I am with my mood can be stressful, traffic lights help a lot with this. It gives me evidence to support what is happening to me day to day."

Increased independence, resilience and confidence

Students have found that Brain in Hand has helped them to develop their independence, becoming less reliant on those around them for support with completing everyday tasks or dealing with problems that arise.

"It has helped me be more independent and living on my own, and not having to ask my mum questions every two minutes."

"Brain in Hand gives me the ability to operate when I don't have my support network around"

"It's like having an invisible buddy that can help you and get you through it. It takes the strain off my support network"

Whilst helping students to grow in independence and reduce their reliance on those around them, students have really valued the way in which Brain in Hand works alongside their existing support networks.

"Asking for help in the past has been such a big thing, and to have it now where it's built into the app and it just leads straight to my family on the other end, amazing."

Being equipped with Brain in Hand as a portable support tool has enabled these students to grow in confidence. They feel more able to venture outside of their comfort zone and grasp opportunities they might have previously hesitated to take, as they can rest assured that they always have solutions at their fingertips to fall back on. As a result of this increased confidence, some students have been able to embrace the social side of university life more and are seeing the benefits of reaching out to their peers.

"I have surprised myself that I have joined a few societies and I am making friends."

"Before Brain in hand I would write lists down, then I would lose those lists so having it on my phone made it easier as I would look at and see I have done that, I'm not failing - I have done it. And it would build my confidence up as it proved to myself, I can do it and I need to stop doubting myself."

Brain in Hand features review - Human support

Students were asked about the various features in Brain in Hand, across both human support and the software features. Students do not need to use every feature to gain benefit and each student mentioned different areas that had helped them the most.

We asked which features they found most helpful, these are broken down into five themes, however many user's answers expressed that these overlapped, and they found multiple parts of the human support and software helpful working in conjunction.

Human support

Users get human support from specialist coaches, trained in a solution focussed approaches, who have experience in a variety of professional backgrounds including mental health, education support and neurodiversity. Users have the option to schedule review sessions with their Brain in Hand specialist coach on a regular basis, dependent upon need and circumstance, throughout their license period. These review sessions are there to discuss their strengths, skills, goals and the challenges they face.

Students can also choose to access extra support from a person, 24/7 if they are struggling in the moment. This is covered in detail later in this document.

Users feel this is a valuable part of Brain in Hand as it can help them problem solve situations; having human support can help users talk through situations with someone to understand them further. Talking to a real person was very valuable to them. They felt that the specialist's understood them and developed deep rapport, as well as supporting them with problem-solving and personalisation.

"It helped to have someone to talk to even briefly about why I was struggling. It made me feel less alone with my feelings."

"I actually found the support sessions the most helpful aspect - I found having the opportunity to talk through with another person the solutions I had already found helpful and encouraging."



**"The specialist was there
for me and that gave
me a sense of value"**

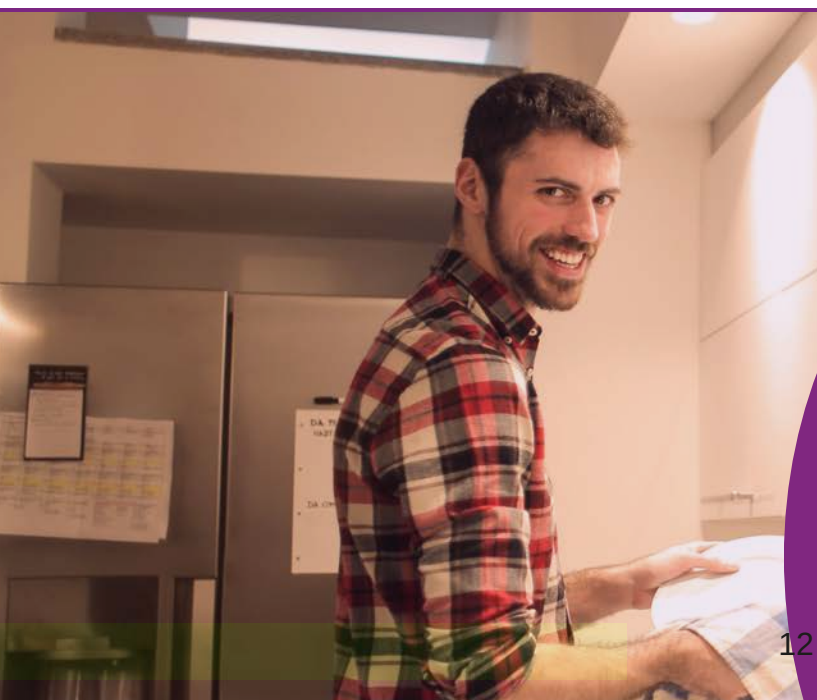
“I found it helpful that the person carrying out the specialist support was knowledgeable about Autism and was open about being Autistic. She provided clear information about how to use the software. I liked that I was asked to prepare information before the session. Brain in Hands support has been much more autism informed than any other support that I have accessed as part of my DSA which has been so much better.”

“I also very much valued speaking with a supportive and non-judgemental person who had background knowledge of my disability, while still being open to learn about my individual needs. This then meant we could develop effective, tailored strategies for my needs which were then used with the Brain in Hand app to ensure my user experience would be personalised and helpful.”

Students feel that they really benefitted from attending specialist sessions when getting set up with Brain in Hand, not only to enable them to obtain a good grasp of how to use the technology, but also the person-centred style of the sessions allowed them to consider the different ways in which Brain in Hand could support them.

“Engage in the sessions because the sessions really teach you new ways of... you know. Interacting with the programme and I think it's brilliant.”

“I like having one to one support as I like going through things and get a deeper understanding what is available with brain in hand. I find it hard to retain the information so having the specialist support and being supported as I do tasks helps me to focus more easily.”



“Thanks to Brain In Hand, I’ve been able to live independently at university”

Brain in Hand features review - digital tools

Planned events: In the moment solutions

One of the most stated positives of using the diary function was that many users felt they had more time. Many students also said that planning events and breaking them down helps them prepare for situations which could cause anxiety and feel more able to cope with them.

“The calendar function was very useful because it made me less nervous about missing things which gives me more time to get things done rather than spending time worrying.”

“I like the calendar feature the most along with sorting out various problems for the day because it can help with preparing myself for what is to come at that specific point in time.”

Unplanned events: Managing the unexpected

Students felt that the unplanned section is a valuable part of Brain in Hand due to being able to handle unexpected situations that life brings by planning for these events. Students felt they could prepare for “worst case scenario” events and felt they could more independently help themselves when emotional situations occur.

“I have been able to use this quite flexibly to remind me of strategies to manage my anxiety and help me to develop my emotional awareness.”

“I like the unplanned features too because they help me think about the next steps that I need to take methodically so then I feel prepared to solve unexpected challenges.”

“...they allow me to plan out my time allowing for study and personal time while also giving me the ability to handle the unexpected situations that life brings.”

“Thanks to Brain In Hand, I’ve been able to live independently at university... and I’m much more confident at managing my mental health and dealing with any unplanned situations that may cause me stress.”

Students said that the unplanned solutions help them in the moment when they can't recall what to do in a difficult situation and help them cope. They also said using these solutions "helps... learn to apply these strategies to other scenarios as well." Many students said it prevents a "freeze panic" response by being prepared with "practical step by step advice when faced with a situation."

"I've used it a lot over the past three years to input strategies for helping me to overcome problems that might pop infrequently but might cause me stress and anxiety when they occur, such as sensory issues or problems to do with completing assignments. I've been doing this both on my own and with support from my Specialist Mentor.

When a similar situation has popped up, I've been able to review the solutions that I'd already inputted on Brain in Hand, so that I can remind myself of what I can do which helps me to cope with that situation and I'm gradually learning to apply these strategies to other scenarios as well."

Traffic lights: Mood monitoring and self-awareness

Students said by using the traffic lights they felt more aware of how they were feeling in the moment. It helped them regulate their emotions and know whether to implement solutions they had worked on, before they needed to press red. Some students said it helped them be able to express how they were feeling and be able to reach out for help more. Some said It helped them notice patterns and triggers which cause anxiety.

A lot of students mentioned emotional self-management and reflection when speaking about the traffic lights.

"It makes me unafraid to express how I'm feeling by simply choosing a colour."

"Helps me keep an eye on how I am feeling. The ability to comment on my moods and what has triggered a collapse or what has made me feel good. This enables me to self-manage my moods."

We've also seen anecdotal evidence of students using their traffic lights for energy accounting. This is where a student can create a list of "green events" or "red events" in their unplanned section, indicating how much energy that event might require. Then they can use their traffic lights to reflect on how much energy they have and choose an event which will help them to recharge if they are feeling "red" (low energy) or an event which might take up a lot of energy while they are feeling "green" (high energy).

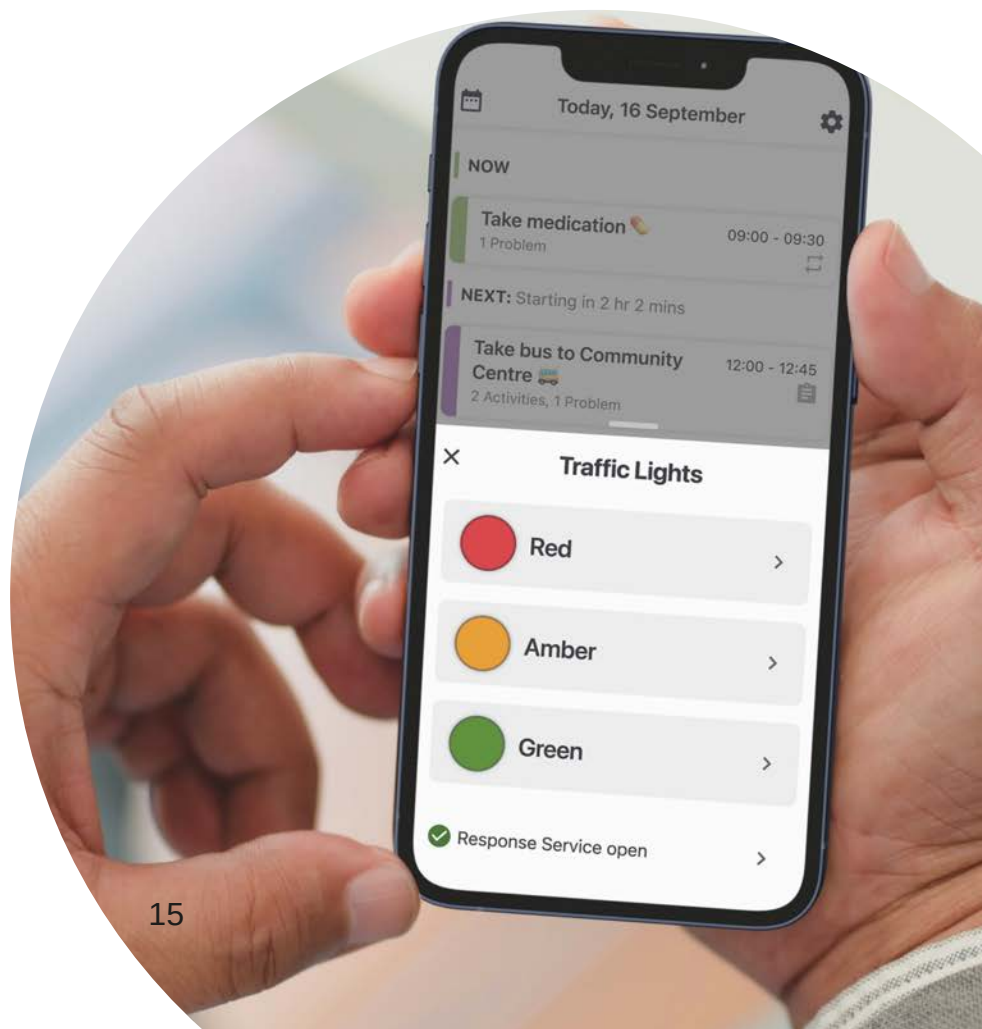
The themes that came up in the survey about in the moment human support were around having a “safety net” or a “feeling of security.” Many students felt that it gave them time to think about how they were feeling and reflect on this before they pressed red.

Students described using the traffic light system as a “check-in” and reminder to stop and think. Students did not often use the red button, but it is clear from the survey that having on demand support is important to students as a “safety net” and this is just as valuable as using it.

“Brain in Hand is great because the traffic lights allow me to track how I’m feeling (and consider why) and have solutions at my fingertips. Knowing the response service is there gives a great feeling of security.”

“The app reminds me every hour of the working day to take time to check-in with myself to see how I am doing. This little reminder has been invaluable.”

“Knowing the response service is there gives a great feeling of security”



Supporter feedback

Identifying and understanding important areas where Brain in Hand supports students is paramount to its ongoing success and gaining insight from both professional and personal supporters is key for continuous improvement and advancements. Supporters are encouraged to come to the online specialist coaching sessions with students - supporters can be parents, guardians, friends, or professionals.

As part of the DSA evaluation both personal supporters and professional supporters were asked whether they felt that supporting a user using Brain in Hand had helped them with a better understanding of the students' specific needs and whether using Brain in Hand had assisted with the student's various life transitions. Below are the key outcomes from the feedback.

Professional Supporter Feedback

Transition from school/college to university

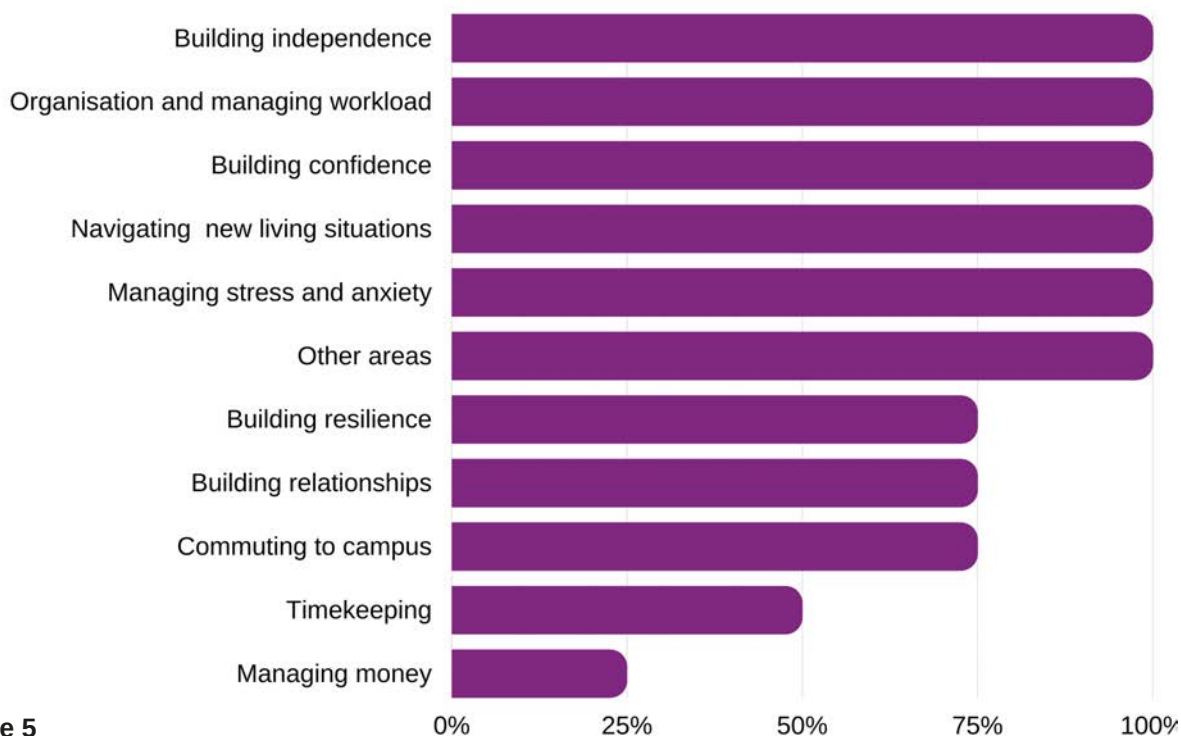


Figure 5

As you can see on Figure 5 professional supporters were asked about a range of areas in which Brain in Hand can support in transitions, and 100% of the professional supporters asked agreed that Brain in Hand supported their students with building independence, organisation, confidence, navigating new living situations and managing anxiety.

In all other areas professional supporters were asked about, many of them agreed that Brain in Hand supports the students they work with.

Professional supporters were also asked about transitions in other areas, such as semester to semester and transition to placement or the workplace. Figure 6 & 7 below show that professional supporters feel that Brain in Hand can support students in transitions.

Transition from semester to semester

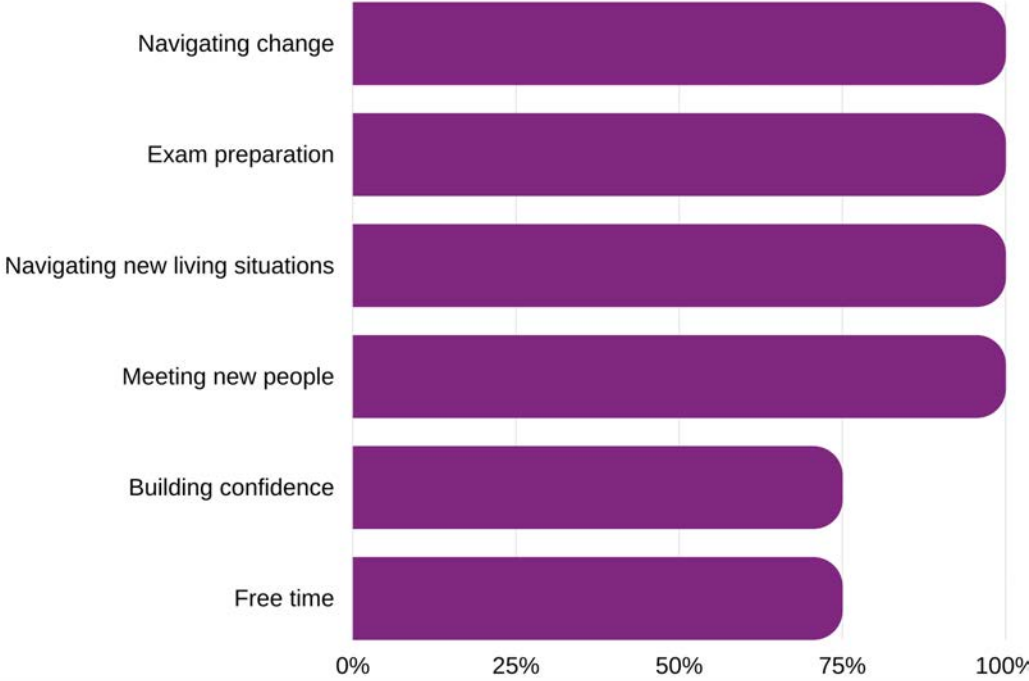


Figure 6

Transition from university into placement/workplace

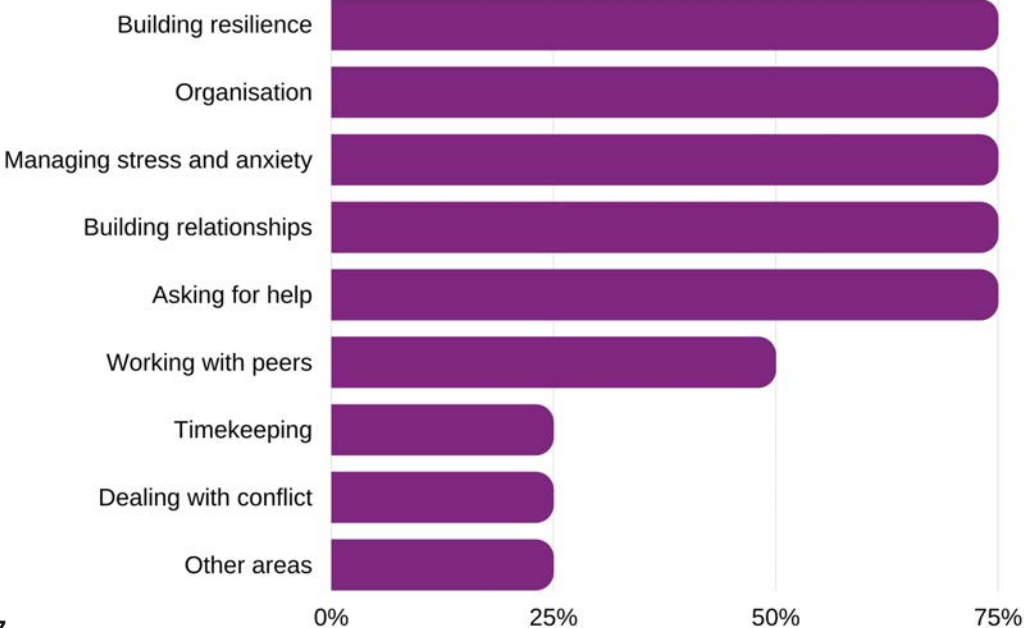


Figure 7

Supporters also gave further written feedback about how Brain in Hand has improved students time at university. Supporters not only explained the areas of life students had improved in but also reported gaining a better understanding of the student's specific needs and challenges through supporting them with their Brain in Hand.

"I better understood the range of contexts when the student might face difficulty and possible strategies (we were able to brainstorm a wide range of strategies in a calm setting, working through the training workbook, rather than during a mentoring session when the student might be in crisis)."

"Supporting the access to Brain in Hand has allowed me to gain greater insight to individual needs of the student."

"Yes, absolutely, saw how they could refer to past strategies that had worked, reflect on what works/what doesn't etc."

Personal Supporter feedback

Gaining valuable feedback from personal supporters affords us the opportunity to gain a greater insight into how those closest to the student observe any specific changes and reflect on progress throughout the users' Brain in Hand journey. From the feedback we can see that personal supporters also felt that Brain in Hand helped them gain a better understanding of the student's specific needs. The outcome most discussed by personal supporters was improvement in independence.

"He is now able to make a short bus journey (3 Stops) he couldn't of done this before, he was also able to manage the corner shop, as before he got extremely anxious but following his Brain In Hand and knowing he had the traffic light system made him feel a bit safer... I would definitely recommend this to other parents"

"in-the-moment support that Brain in Hand offers to students in challenging situations has been particularly reassuring to their loved ones, reducing the need for them to worry about their child when they are away from home."

"...just making everything run smoothly and it's taken a lot of the pressure off him which takes the pressure off us as well."

Top 100 users

We also surveyed our top 100 DSA-funded users by app usage. These students demonstrate the highest usage levels of Brain in Hand based on their frequency of clicks. However, students can successfully use Brain in Hand without frequently pressing in the app and reading their solutions. Their solutions often become embedded in their behaviours. This survey therefore is only based on usage and not based on outcome.

The survey included multiple choice questions and open questions. The students were studying a variety of different degrees including engineering, creative writing, biomedical science, psychology, and history. All the students who responded to the survey were at different universities, but many were experiencing the same day-to-day difficulties. There were 4 key themes from this survey:

Reducing meltdowns and panic attacks

“I have been able to avoid and get past panic attacks better.”

“It has made a positive impact as instead of sitting all anxious or sad I will have a look at what I can and do something to help.”

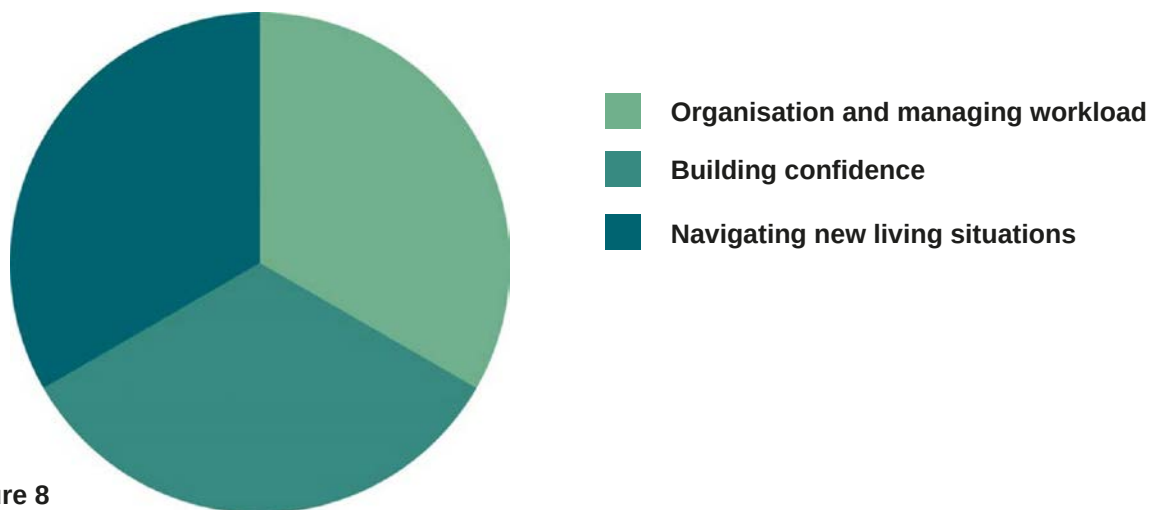


Figure 8

Organisation and time management

“It has definitely helped to organise me and manage my work at university, stopping me from becoming so overwhelmed with tasks. “... It’s also really helpful in terms of being organised, being able to view my whole day, see how long tasks take and having reminders has been really helpful to keep me on track.”

“Planning and organising my time so I don’t feel as overwhelmed anymore.”

Reducing stress and anxiety

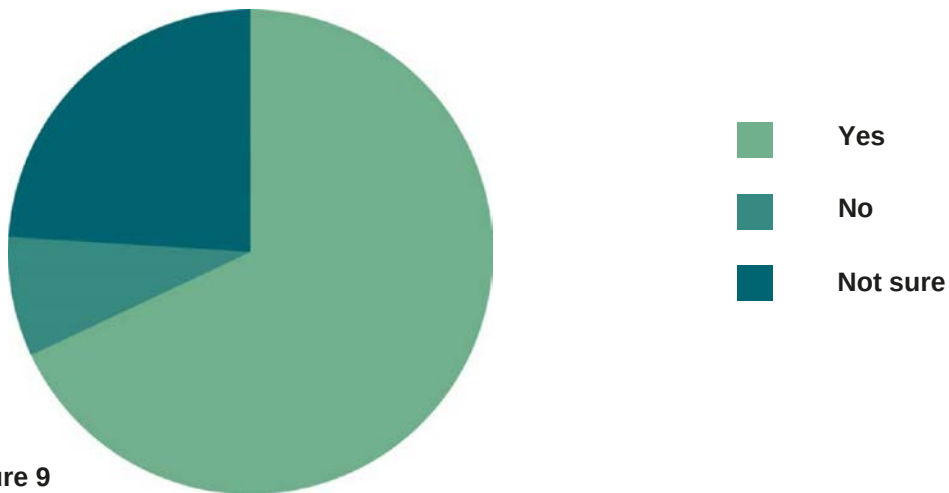


Figure 9

"...offers me go-to support when I am anxious or need help."

"Managing my anxieties and getting back on track when things go out of routine."

Feeling more independent and confident



"My family have noticed that I am more organised, independent and resilient."

"I feel more confident in how I can handle situations and I'm less likely to catastrophise about situations, instead I'm more able to be methodical and work through potential solutions in my head, even when I don't have the app with me. An example is one time when I thought I had lost my phone, I was able to calmly think through the situation and the potential places it might be, it turned out I'd left it at home but the strategies that I'd developed through using Brain in Hand helped me to stay calm and helped me to get back on track soon afterwards."

Transition and continuation

As stated above by Brain in Hand users and supporters, Brain in Hand can help with transitions and changes that can cause anxiety and stress. However, some students find that it can be a long-term solution to help overcome future barriers and stay organised. Brain in Hand passporting enables individuals who benefit from using Brain in Hand on a more long-term basis to continue to be funded, so they are able to transition from school to college, then throughout their university career and for some students, continuing into employment through access to work funding.

For some students using Brain in Hand is a short-term transitional intervention to help them consolidate new learning and different ways of approaching situations, with students saying that it helped them “change their thought processes”, which in turn might mean they no longer need to use the app, as it has changed their mindset when approaching new situations. A student in the survey explained a situation in which this happened:

“... one time when I thought I had lost my phone, I was able to calmly think through the situation and the potential places it might be, it turned out I'd left it at home but the strategies that I'd developed through using Brain in Hand helped me to stay calm and helped me to get back on track soon afterwards.”

In this scenario, the student didn't use Brain in Hand in that moment, but the process of using Brain in Hand previously and having the specialist support sessions helped them in overcoming a challenging situation, which before Brain in Hand they would have approached differently.

This student also stated that they are using it less and can be more independent without the app. For this student and many others, Brain in Hand was a short-term but effective intervention which changed the way in which they approach barriers and got them thinking in a more solution-focused way. For other students it's a long-term adaptation that enables them to succeed in a variety of situations and transitions in their lives.

This subscription model ensures that people can access Brain in Hand for as long as they are finding it beneficial to them. This funding is only utilised where there is a need and is confirmed annually.

Conclusion

"It's been life changing I use it all the time and don't know what I would do without it!"

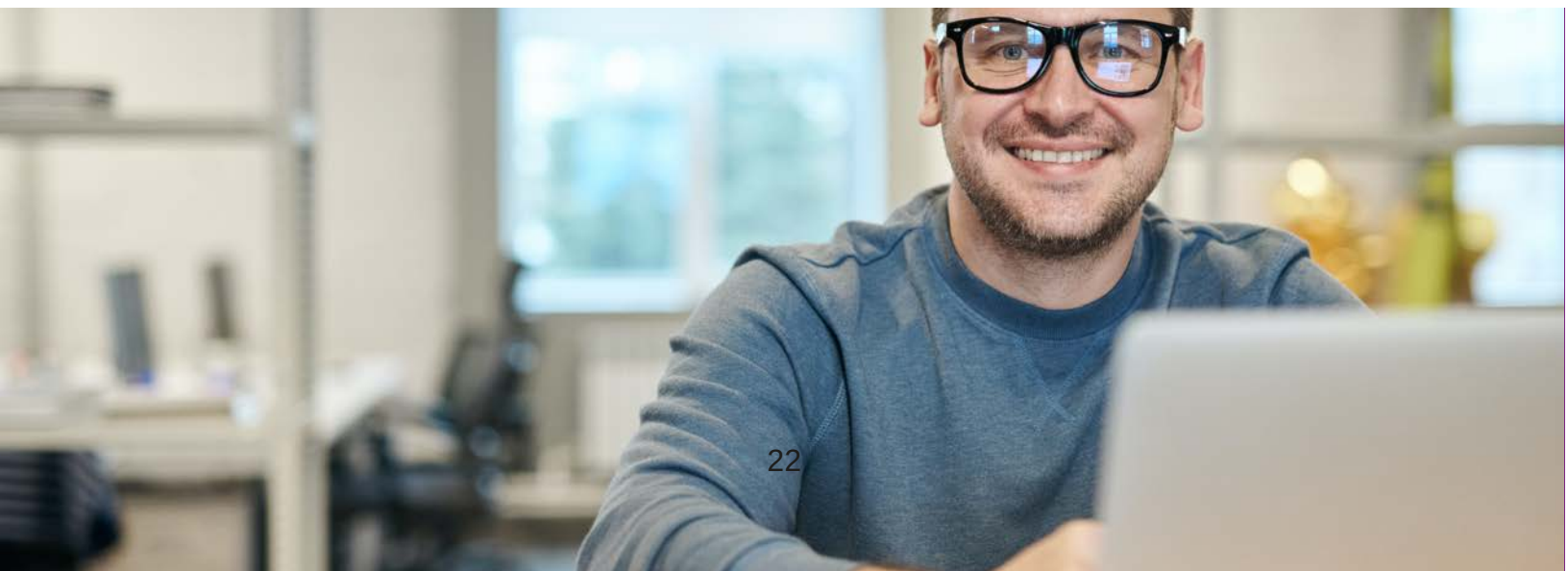
The purpose of this evaluation was to evaluate the effectiveness of Brain in Hand in supporting students to overcome barriers and increase overall wellbeing specifically in areas of life which the neurodiverse population may find challenging, such as transitions, anxiety, independence, and participation.

Students' feedback in both surveys and the semi structured interviews talked about the unplanned elements being helpful. Many students said it helped them with their anxiety by being able to plan for unexpected situations, which in turn reduced their anxiety. This was one of the most popular features of the software according to user feedback and many students said it helped them with a variety of situations and problem solving for these situations.

The unplanned section seems to support students to think of new ways to engage in situations with which they might have previously struggled, such as an unexpected change with no plan or anxiety preventing them from being able to think of what to do in the moment. Looking at all the feedback and data the unplanned section has made a positive impact on student's wellbeing, helped students overcome barriers and increased participation at university.

The other element of Brain in Hand which was mentioned in all areas of this evaluation is the diary for organisation and time keeping. Students stated that they feel more organised and in turn students said this reduces stress and the feeling of being overwhelmed.

Many students also stated they felt more able to meet deadlines and attend university. Much of the feedback was around knowing how much time they have and the feeling of having more time due to being more organised. There is a clear correlation to the diary and students being able to attend university, meeting deadlines, remembering things, and reducing anxiety.



The traffic light feature was also mentioned in a lot of the feedback from students as one of the most helpful functions, many students stated that “it keeps me on track and in the moment”. Other students stating it made them more “self-aware” and gave them time to reflect on why they were feeling that way. Both students and their supporters mentioned the traffic lights when speaking about feeling “safer” and being able to go to new situations because they have a “safety blanket.” Many students also said it helped them “reach out” and speak about how they were feeling, which many students said was previously difficult.

Not only have the features of Brain in Hand helped students’ transitions, it has reduced anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed, increased organisation and increased attendance. It has also improved relationships with supporters, with supporters saying they understand the students they are supporting more. Supporters said that attending sessions has been insightful in terms of learning more about what the student finds challenging and understanding the barriers in the student’s day-to-day life. This is important, as users’ feedback clearly states that many of the things affecting them outside of university, correlate to their performance in university, which professional supports may not have a great understanding of.

Students stated that feelings of anxiety and being overwhelmed affects their performance at university, therefore knowing what is happening outside of university is important for professional supporters. Students also mentioned organisation and meeting of deadlines and feeling that there is not enough time or being unable to do anything due to anxiety and thoughts of apprehensive expectation, which can prevent students being able to function in their day-to-day life and mentioned that the diary made them feel like they have more time.

The areas Brain in Hand has supported with are confidence, independence, reduction of anxiety, organisation, and time-management. A high percentage of students were able to transition to university, become more organised and overcome barriers using Brain in Hand. Students have also changed their mindset when approaching new situations, potentially due to having specialist sessions supporting users to think in a more solution focussed way and using their solutions in new situations.

Even students who did not use all the features benefitted from the system. Just using one element has made an impact for some students, with students stating that just using the traffic lights alone gives them time to stop and reflect on how they are feeling, changing the outcome of their day and in turn changing the outcome of their time at university by overcoming barriers and increasing their overall wellbeing.

Appendix 1

Limitations

Brain in Hand has been shown to be an effective support while students transition into university or higher education – however we do know from experience and anecdotal information that some students continue to use Brain in Hand throughout their university career and then onwards into the workplace. We do not currently have the ability to analyse these figures, and so we have not been able to speak to this population and how they use Brain in Hand over a longer period of time. It might be something we analyse in the future, if we do gain access to this information.

This evaluation does not cover the effectiveness of the response service in detail or the details of what it has been used for and does not assess the quality of the support delivered. Response service does undergo regular quality assurance and calls are monitored.

Due to the timing of this evaluation - during the summer months, only a small percentage of professional supporters responded to the feedback questionnaire and we had lower than expected student responses. The next evaluations will run in February 2023 to capture higher response rates.

There are several limitations to be highlighted in relation to the case studies which formed the basis of some of the qualitative data included in this report. Firstly, eight case studies were collected, which cannot represent the vast population of students currently using Brain in Hand entirely. Nevertheless, the sample comprised students studying at a range of different universities and so it is likely that the feedback given reflects a range of experiences and backgrounds, increasing its transferability to the rest of the population of DSA-funded Brain in Hand users.

Another limitation of the data collected is that it is often the case that students who agree to give feedback in this way tend to be individuals who have had a particularly positive experience of Brain in Hand and so it is possible that their responses are slightly biased.

However, the questions asked in these feedback sessions were open and non-leading to allow the students to freely express their views on Brain in Hand, thus reducing the pressure to answer in a certain way or give a certain response, which will have increased the likelihood of the responses being a true reflection of the students' experiences.

Additional to the limitations, some students outlined some improvement suggestions in the survey when it comes to software features. This was outlined at the end of the survey when we asked users for any other feedback, so they can support us with continuous improvement.

The six areas our users felt needed improvement were: more features, integrated app and website, the ability to automatically combine existing calendars into Brain in Hand, more traffic lights options to track moods, the cost of the self-funded response service extension (past 1 year) and the delay in improvements on the iOS system compared to Android.