

Autism: A Guide for Further Education Institutes



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November 2019

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Learning Environment**

1

What is Autism?

What is Autism?

Advice sheet for staff

An autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neuro-developmental condition which affects the way a person communicates with and relates to other people and the world around them. Current estimates suggest that around 1 in 100 people have autism.

The causes of autism are yet unknown. It is only since the 1980s that autism spectrum disorder has been a recognised condition within the diagnostic assessment manuals and initially the diagnostic assessments were focused on children especially those displaying the signs of 'classic' autism.

As more research into autism has been undertaken it has become evident that there are many people, both children and adults, who are autistic but this has not been recognised as they are unaware of their condition or have been misdiagnosed with other conditions like anxiety, mental health issues etc.

Many people report that 'they knew that they had difficulties but did not know why'. There are a significant number of adults who are now being diagnosed with autism.

Autistic people can be affected by their condition in a variety of ways and to very different degrees. This is why it's called 'the autism spectrum'. However, increasingly research tells us that people can have a range of different needs and abilities which results in them having a 'spikey profile' for example, they may have high intellectual capacity but lack social interaction and planning skills.

Autism can affect people with any level of intellectual ability, but it is not a learning disability, although some autistic people may have a co-occurring learning disability. Or they may have other co-occurring conditions such as ADHD, depression or anxiety. The cognitive strengths of some individuals may mean that they can focus on tasks without breaking their concentration.

A Person Focused Approach

An autistic person deserves the same rights to learn, engage and reach their potential as anyone else, and has potential to play an active part in the college community.

The way in which an autistic person presents and the difficulties they experience varies from one person to another. However, all autistic people will need some adjustments to be made in order to maximize their learning potential and reduce distress.

From experience it is evident that as a result of the range of difficulties that autistic students experience, more structure, adapted communication and increased understanding will need to be applied across all college activities.

Each person is an individual and therefore, it is essential that their Individual Learning Plan (ILP) accurately captures the unique strengths and needs of the person.

Many of the suggestions outlined in this guide are no or low cost, and colleges have a duty to make these reasonable adjustments in line with **The Equality Act**, and curriculum requirements.

What are the Signs and Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder?

People have significant issues in the following areas to receive a positive autism diagnosis:

Social interaction

Difficulty understanding social rules, social behaviours and relationships, for example, difficulty taking turns during a conversation, being unable to adapt behaviour to suit different situations.

Social communication

Difficulty with verbal and non-verbal communication, for example, not understanding the meaning of facial expressions or tone of voice, interpreting language literally.

Rigidity of thinking and difficulties with social imagination

A preference for consistency and sameness, difficulties with predicting outcomes to situations and planning ahead.

It is usual that all individuals with a diagnosis of autism have some difficulties in all of these areas. However, the ways in which they manifest themselves vary enormously. For example, some people are very aloof, some passive and some may want interaction but may lack the expected social 'norms'.

Also many autistic people have special interests and repetitive behaviours that can often preoccupy their attention.

Sensory issues

Increasingly research has shown that 90% of autistic people experience issues with processing sensory information as a feature of their condition.

Many of the tips within this pack relate to reducing identified sensory issues within the college environment (where possible).

For autistic people the brain tries to process everything at once without filtering out unimportant things like background noise, wallpaper, people moving about and the feel of clothes on their skin. This results in sensory overload.

If this happens you may find the individual either has a 'meltdown' or even 'shut down' which is beyond an autistic persons control as it is an involuntary fight, flight or freeze response. Both 'meltdown' and 'shut down' can result from this situation.

Meltdown

“It literally feels like my head is imploding. Building up to it gets overwhelming, but an actual meltdown is just like... like your brain is ceasing to exist.

Of course, it doesn't actually, but I lose control of my muscles and ability to talk, I can't modulate my voice or really send any signals from my brain to my body to calm down. It's as though my brain, as a last-minute thing, sends a bunch of energy to the rest of my body, but there's no instructions for how that energy should be used, so it just goes all over and is out of my control.”

Shayna G

Shut Down

Some autistic people describe that they sometimes enter 'shut down' after a 'meltdown' – kind of during recovery mode. It is important to understand that the autistic person may be unable to communicate, move, or interact with you, or the environment.

They may feel incredibly vulnerable in this state and hypersensitive to touch. You should reduce sensory input including keeping communication as brief and calm as possible.

“Shutdowns are hard for me, I become extremely hypersensitive to sensory input, to people in my environment, I even lose my verbal ability. It's hard for my loved ones too, because they want to comfort me, but any social demand, like speech, is unwelcome, and physical touch, like hugs or a tap on the arm can be excruciating.

If an autistic person is consistently stressed and overwhelmed for a long period of time, they can enter an extended shutdown sometimes referred to as 'autistic burnout'. This can drastically reduce an Autistic person's ability to function for weeks, months or even years.”

Emma D

For further information, please look on : www.ASDinfoWales.co.uk/further-education where you will find resources that relate to this topic.

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Transition

Transition

Going to college:

The transition from school to college or just starting in college can be an exciting but anxious time for students. It can be particularly unsettling for autistic students who often find change very difficult. However, there are things that you can do to make the transition as smooth and as positive as possible.

Helping the student decide on a college and a course

- Provide opportunities to meet a key contact from college at an agreed familiar venue such as school. Ideally this 'key contact' will be a consistent link person for the student throughout the transition process.
- Ensure website information is easy to read and contains factual information, including visual information where possible.
- Allow time for students to process information by providing an opportunity to ask questions after transition events and not only during. Provide opportunities for non-verbal communication.
- Offer additional transition visits to college, starting at quieter times of the day/week/term and building to include busier sites and times of day.
- Offer additional support for attending course interviews, open days/evenings and course keeping in touch days.
- Provide a Transition Guide to clearly outline the support services offer available to autistic students.
- Provide opportunities for site familiarisation, allowing students to plan how they will navigate around the college. Provide clear maps to facilitate this process.

Putting support in place

- Support the prospective student in producing/developing a 'One Page Profile' to be used to help develop a personalised package of support.
- Ensure support planning meetings are person centred and capture what is important to, as well as for the student.
- Ensure all relevant prior medical information / education based support plans / Learning and Skills Plans are used to appropriately meet the needs of each individual student.
- Involve parents/carers in the transition process as appropriate, whilst supporting the student to gradually experience training and work independently, in order to minimise anxiety around parental/guardian separation.
- Make an advanced plan for managing unstructured time during break and lunchtimes, this may include making use of designated quiet spaces.
- Try to provide course timetables and other process information in advance wherever possible.
- Provide opportunities for students to meet with other students in order to help facilitate social interaction. This may include other students with an ASD diagnosis if appropriate.
- Ensure students know how to access additional wellbeing support services and counselling if needed.
- Share personalised support plans with teaching staff, support and specialist assistants and pastoral support staff as appropriate, with guidance on how to best support the student to achieve specific outcomes.
- Offer travel training/ opportunities for journey planning. Use social stories to support this process if appropriate.

Reducing the student's anxiety

Prior to beginning their course

- Organise a visit before the term starts to look around the site/campus and show key places such as reception, canteen, toilets, chill out room. Give the student a map of the college so they can find their way round easily on their first day. This can help with coping with the environment, dealing with large, noisy crowds, trying to find their rooms.
Or they could produce their own with your help.
- The student could use a video film or take photos of key places and build up their own map.
- Introduce key staff before term starts.
- Show the student where key activities happen.
- Provide a time out / safe base for stressful situations.
- There should be clear labelling around the college.
- Clearly explain the procedures for break times and lunch time and how to cope with meeting others.
- Travelling to college by bus – Allowing time to get to the bus, where to wait, times of the bus, what happens if the bus is late.

Transition from college

The transition from college can again be an exciting but anxious time for students. It can be particularly unsettling for autistic students who often find change very difficult. However, there are things that you can do to make the transition as smooth and as positive as possible.

- Preparation and early planning are fundamental to a successful move onto another setting.
- Up to date and accessible information is the essential for a student being able to make an informed choice.
- College Transition Workers are key in supporting the student in making the right choice.
- Helping the student choose a preferred destination which may be university, employment or further training (including apprenticeships).

University

The transition from college can again be an exciting but anxious time for students. It can be particularly unsettling for autistic students who often find change very difficult. However, there are things that you can do to make the transition as smooth and as positive as possible.

- about the application process
- about the university and the courses available

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- on what qualifications they will need to access their chosen course
- how they can arrange visits and who will support them with this
- how to get to the university and access accommodation
- links to the student support services
- how to plan for unstructured time
- an up to date one page profile
- what to do if they do not get the grades for their first choice university
- what to do if things start going wrong once at university

Employment

If a student wishes to find employment they may need some assistance with:

- information on employment advice services e.g. careers
- help with mock interviews, complete application forms, etc if appropriate link with Supported Employment Services
- what careers are realistic with the student's current aspirations and qualifications? Do they have the required qualifications? Will they need to do further qualifications? Are they unlikely to reach to the desire qualification level?
- there are a whole range of resources available on www.ASDInfoWales.co.uk/working-with-autism that can help with employment choices, employment preparation and planning.

Training including traineeships and apprenticeships

Some students may wish to undertake further training and may require assistance with:

- information on training advice services e.g. careers, work based learning advisors
- help with mock interviews, completed application forms etc.
- if appropriate link with Supported Employment Services
- what careers are realistic with the student's current aspirations and qualifications? Do they have the required qualifications? Will they need to do further qualifications? Are they unlikely to reach to the desired qualification level?
- there are a whole range of resources available on www.ASDInfoWales.co.uk/working-with-autism including those on work based learning.

3

Creating an Autism Friendly College

Creating an Autism Friendly College

Navigating the building and the day

- Starting in a new place can be really challenging for anyone. However, for autistic people it can be especially difficult. There are things you can do to ensure that their experience of college is as positive as possible and they can achieve their full potential.

Sensory differences

- Autistic students often process sensory information differently – they may be hypo sensitive or hyper sensitive. If hypo sensitive they may display sensory seeking behaviours, or they may not feel pain. If an autistic person is hyper-sensitive, they can be overwhelmed by too much sensory input. This can cause increased anxiety and impaired ability to focus. Sensory input can include noise, visuals, smells, taste, touch, texture and people.

Communication

- If an autistic student does not look at you when you are talking to them, it does not mean that they are not listening. Eye contact can be uncomfortable (or even painful) for some autistic people. They will be able to take in what you are saying far easier if they do not look directly at you. Avoid telling a student to look at you when you are speaking to them. This does not apply to every autistic person.
- Ensure that instructional language is explicit and unambiguous. Avoid idioms, metaphors, similes, long questions and explanations. Break down instructions and support with visual information or lists (for some students e-communication may be more appropriate).
- A students' vocabulary is sometimes more advanced than their understanding of words; check that the student understands what you have asked of the class.
- Break down tasks to make them easier to understand, even provide a writing framework if necessary.

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- Autistic students often have auditory processing difficulties so you may need to give them time to process your question, rather than expecting an answer immediately.
- Autistic people may also give the appearance of being compliant and willing to do any task they are asked and not may not give a verbal indication they have not understood your request.
- They may sometimes mask that they have problems by deflection or not being able to stick to tasks. This may manifest itself by the student not being able to complete tasks, varying the task given and/or just concentrating on the elements they find interesting or drawn to.

Visual

- For autistic students who are hypersensitive to light, try to keep the surroundings plain, with pastel coloured display boards and keeping distracting displays to a minimum. This may be difficult when sharing rooms with a lot of tutors but your campus could adopt this as a policy.
- Avoid fluorescent lighting. Aim for dimmed or natural lighting with no flickering lights.
- Dim lights where possible, especially when displaying information on screen to ensure there is limited glare on the board.

Sound

- Be aware that students may be over sensitive to noise; allow students to wear headphones/noise reducers as needed.
- Reduce and eliminate background noise.
- Provide quiet spaces to work, any noises can appear amplified. Autistic students can sometimes concentrate more effectively when working alone.

Stimming

- Do not try and prevent students from engaging in 'stimming' behaviours such as hand flapping and pacing as they rely on these behaviours to self-regulate and avoid going into shut down or meltdown when they are feeling overwhelmed.

Reducing the Student's Anxiety

Once they have started on their course

- Explain the rules clearly and maintain boundaries consistently.
- Stay calm if the student is pushing the boundaries.
- Expect to repeat or recheck the students' understanding of tasks.
- Do not expect the student to read your facial expression.
- If appropriate use social stories in pastoral time to explain appropriate behaviour.
- Be aware that a student may use a lot of energy trying to fit in and may get tired and agitated at certain parts of the day such as before getting a college bus/public transport.
- Warn in advance of changes/room change/change of Tutor.

Managing the environment

How to deal with unstructured time in college

Unstructured time can be particularly stressful for autistic students. Many autistic people may find it hard to build and sustain friendships/ relationships/ social rules and therefore break times can be a difficult time. They can often feel isolated or become socially isolated.

Autistic people often find it hard to cope with change, and imagine what to do during unstructured time and are unable to plan their free time – therefore they often find sameness, a structured activity or structured time easier to cope with.

This can lead to the autistic person experiencing high levels of anxiety. You can help to alleviate some of their anxiety by making some simple adjustments. Some top tips of how to do this are outlined below:

- Make a timetable of things to do during each unstructured time – break times and lunch times or free periods of the day. Help to structure chilled time depending on the student interest.
- Organise some structured groups/clubs – could be a special interest club. Create accessible social opportunities.
- Create a project – like a photo project which involves a small group - something which can be done during unstructured times but gives real focus.
- Here are some ideas for suitable clubs – Warhammer, cards, board games, xbox, art, photography.
- Use social stories, where appropriate, to develop practice scripts to use in specific social situations.

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- Provide opportunities for non-verbal communication if required, such as participating in shared non-verbal games and hobbies, which encourage turn taking.
- Sign post to external activities, events and clubs which provide supported opportunities for social interaction with peers such as targeted social groups.
- Use peer mentors to support students in developing social skills and practicing social interaction.
- Help raise awareness of how neuro-typical people may use language that may be confusing i.e.
 - a) Idioms (e.g. save your breath)
 - b) Double meanings
 - c) Sarcasm (e.g. saying 'great' when you have spilled ketchup on the table)
- Raise awareness of how autism can affect social interaction and encourage acceptance of diversity amongst their peers.

Appendix 1

Inclusive teaching and learning checklist

Some students with ALN may not need additional support, if the learning environment is inclusive.

These strategies can benefit all students not just those with ALN.

Name:	
Date:	
Class:	

Inclusive Checklist	Progress Towards	Evidence Planning
Planning		
Tutors plan differentiated activities and outcomes.		
Tutors plan the role and expectation of the learning assistants.		
Individual learner targets are used to inform teaching strategies.		
In lesson		
Greet all students and settle group effectively.		
Introduce the lesson giving the big picture and link to previous and future lessons.		
The lesson content aligns with the objectives and assessments.		
Lesson objectives displayed and explained. Check students are clear on objectives. Refer to objectives during and at end of lesson.		
Teach study skills and emphasise when they are being used. Support students when applying study skills, progressing to independent use.		

Inclusive Checklist	Progress Towards	Evidence Planning
In lesson (continued)		
Pair and group work used effectively for support and activities.		
Speak clearly, rephrase and give specific examples (real life).		
Differentiated learning resources are readily available.		
Scaffolding used to support learning.		
Regularly reflect, recap and consolidate during lesson to maintain pace and assess learning.		
Plan questioning to challenge all students. Allow processing time before responding to questions.		
Activities are explained clearly (step-by-step) or modelled (show a good one).		
Transitions between activities are clearly explained and managed.		
Use alternatives to written tasks.		
Effective use of IT.		
Present and assess in different ways to engage and motivate learners.		
Provide positive feedback that is specific and constructive.		
Environment		
The classroom areas are well organised and free from clutter.		
Clear classroom rules and routines are established. Behaviour management is consistent.		

Inclusive Checklist	Progress Towards	Evidence Planning
Environment (continued)		
Classroom seating and layout planned in advance.		
Key vocabulary displayed and used.		
“Resource boxes” should be available for numeracy, literacy and topic.		
Teaching materials		
Provide electronic copies of presentations and handouts (prior to lesson).		
Limit the amount of text on resources, use bullets.		
Use suitable font, spacing, colours.		
Use visual displays – images, charts, diagrams.		
Learning assistant/ peer-to-peer		
Helping, explaining, and simplifying information.		
Help student focus.		
Provide encouragement.		
Support organisational and study skills.		
Notes :		

**This checklist was provided by Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Department, Coleg Cambria*

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Supporting the Student in the Learning Environment

Supporting the Student in the Learning Environment

Sensory differences

- Autistic students often process sensory information differently – they may be hypo sensitive or hyper sensitive. If hypo sensitive they may display sensory seeking behaviours, or they may not feel pain. If an autistic person is hyper-sensitive, they can be overwhelmed by too much sensory input. This can cause increased anxiety and impaired ability to focus. Sensory input can include noise, visuals, smells, taste, touch, texture and people.

Visual

- For autistic students who are hypersensitive to light, try to keep the surroundings plain, with pastel coloured display boards and keeping distracting displays to a minimum. This may be difficult when sharing rooms with a lot of teachers but it would be good practice if your campus could adopt this as a policy
- Avoid fluorescent lighting. Aim for dimmed or natural lighting with no flickering lights.
- Dim lights where possible, especially when displaying information on screen to ensure there is limited glare on the board.

Sound

- Be aware that students may be over sensitive to noise; allow students to wear headphones/noise reducers as needed.
- Reduce and eliminate background noise.
- Provide quiet spaces to work, any noises can appear amplified. Autistic students can sometimes concentrate more effectively when working alone.

Stimming

- Do not try and prevent students from engaging in 'stimming' behaviours such as hand flapping and pacing as they rely on these behaviours to self-regulate and avoid going into 'shut down' or 'meltdown' when they are feeling overwhelmed.

Communication

Effective communication is essential in supporting autistic students. Many of the difficulties and problems experienced by autistic students are underpinned by poor communication. Increased anxiety may reduce the ability to communicate verbally.

- Ensure you have the student's attention, say their name before beginning.
- Use a clear, calm voice.
- Ensure that instructional language is explicit and unambiguous. Avoid idioms, metaphors, similes, long questions and explanations.
- Break down instructions and support with visual information or lists.
- Break down tasks to make them easier to understand, even provide a writing framework if necessary.
- Ask specific questions.
- Do not overload the person with lots of verbal information.
- Use facts to explain things, avoid analogies and never use sarcasm.
- Don't rely on body language, gestures and tone of voice.
- A student's vocabulary is sometimes more advanced than their understanding of words; check that the student understands what you have asked of them.
- Autistic students often have auditory processing difficulties so you may need to give them time to process your question, rather than expecting an answer immediately.

Space

- It is useful to have a conversation with the autistic student regarding where they would like to be seated e.g. where they can easily see the tutor and the board without having to frequently turn around.
- Ensure that students have enough space around them. Physical proximity can be overwhelming and uncomfortable for some.
- When talking to an autistic student try not to stand too close or lean over their shoulder.
- Try to sit left and right handed students so that their writing arms are not adjacent and bumping as they write.
- Try to maintain a tidy and clutter free learning area. Resources should be kept in a set place and clearly labelled.
- Monitor displays. 'Busy' visuals of many colours can be overwhelming and cause distraction to autistic students.
- Allow movement breaks and opportunities to get up and stretch, sitting in one position can become uncomfortable.
- Think about the physical structure of a learning environment to create a non-distracting area for learning.

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- Be aware of students' anxiety levels. Have an agreed safe and quiet place for pupils to go to when they feel anxiety building or are overloaded by sensory stimuli. Pre-arrange that students can leave the classroom area if they are feeling anxious or overwhelmed.
- Allow students to leave the lesson five minutes earlier so that they can move to their next location before all other students start moving around the centre. They may find this less distressing.

Supporting the student with their work

- If meeting a student to discuss work, give a brief beforehand so that they can prepare for the meeting. Explain what your role is and the purpose of the meeting beforehand.
- Encourage the student to sit in a place avoiding visual and sensory distractions, such as noise, bright lights and busy rooms.
- Provide regular mentoring and ask very specific questions rather than rely on the student to tell you what they are struggling with.
- Autistic students may rarely offer more information than they have been asked and there could be something essential that you are missing.
- Email students rather than face to face if it works better.
- Use a variety of teaching styles and use one that suits.
- Make information visual, use pictures to help explain things.
- It will be helpful to provide printed notes/handouts for autistic students as note taking can be challenging due to auditory processing difficulties and sometimes difficulties with fine motor skills involved in handwriting. They may struggle to keep up with dictation in class.
- Support the student in advance of controlled assessments - providing details of the room, its layout.
- Encourage students to develop visual aids to help understand their timetable. Ensure that students know which days to bring specialist equipment.
- Reinforce teaching with a podcast, a multi-sensory game.
- Use visual timetables, students will know what they are doing so that there are no unexpected surprises.
- Use task boards and other visual instructions - this can reduce the anxiety around forgetting what needs to be done.
- Explain the rules and expectations. Tell students exactly why certain rules are in place and the benefits of following them.
- Ensure that written information on the board is clearly displayed.
- Encourage students to access Learning Support for help with developing visual strategies. Autistic students are usually visual learners and can use visual information to their advantage when being able to schedule information and learn effectively.

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- Provide structure for your students; try to avoid sudden changes to routine. If possible, give advance warning to any changes of structure or routine.
- Help students deal with any unstructured time (lunch/study hours).
- Be mindful that autistic students are often the target of bullying, as they are often perceived as being 'different'. This can have devastating effects on their confidence and self-esteem and can lead to mental health problems. Be observant to how others are treating the autistic student.
- A buddy system can sometimes be successful. Often autistic students will have special interests, such as gaming or chess. Encourage these students to join groups with like-minded individuals where they can form friendship bonds over a common interest.
- Be flexible about rules: chewing gum may prevent a student from muttering in class.
- Autistic people may also give the appearance of being compliant and willing to do any task they are asked and not may not give a verbal indication they have not understood your request.
- They may sometimes mask that they have problems by deflection or not being able to stick to tasks. This may manifest itself by the student not being able to complete tasks, varying the task given and/or just concentrating on the elements they find interesting or drawn to.

When producing worksheets:

- Use a clear font.
- Use font size 12 or 14.
- Use line spacing of at least 1.5.
- Have clear spaces between paragraphs.
- Use bullet points or numbered lists for tasks.
- Avoid narrow columns.
- Remove any unhelpful pictures and distractions, any visuals should be relevant and aid understanding.

Planning time and workload

- Autistic students may find it hard to ask for help or to say that they have finished a task.
- Poor executive functioning is a key feature of autism, so autistic students may find it hard to plan and problem solve. As a result they may struggle with organisation, time management and meeting deadlines.
- General questions are especially difficult for autistic students to cope with – they may become engrossed in one aspect of an assignment or task and fail to answer the question. How can you help?

Organising their work

- Provide a clear timetable. This may be a visual/pictorial one if more suited to the student's needs.
- Give the student advanced warning of any timetable or venue changes.
- Develop a clear work schedule showing what work needs completing and by when. The student may find it useful to use planner, diaries, virtual timetable, phones, iPads to plan ahead and put deadlines and events in diaries in advance. It is helpful for staff to support students to do this on a weekly basis.
- Ensure assignment hand in dates are clear and written in their diary, set reminders on their phone at intervals.
- Help students to prioritise their workload – planning is really difficult for them. Make to do lists. Use apps such as evernote / google keep to make lists and reminders.
- Students may also find it helpful to have a colour file for each subject at home but take a cardboard file to college in the same colour to put loose paper in. They can then sort the papers out when they get home and things don't get lost
- It is also useful for the student to print on the same colour paper (e.g homework always on green paper).
- Students should also be taught how to organise their time to plan and meet deadlines – this should form part of their individual learning plan. It may be useful to use visual timers for this.
- Provide a tick sheet to support work that needs to be completed either in a workshop or between reviews in the work place.
- Help provide structure for work to be done independently in-between reviews/workshops/assessments.
- Help students to develop a clear structure at home as well.
- Students can get upset if they are told that they have made a mistake
- Teach them how to self-correct.

Understanding the task

- Break long tasks/questions into manageable sections – using flow charts may be particularly useful.
- Teach how to deconstruct a written question.
- Use writing frames to support the completion of tasks.
- Give written instructions rather than a verbal list.
- Give a clear idea of how much time a student is expected to spend on a task/study
- Put clear time limits when asking for written work, support students to stay on topic e.g rather than ask 'write everything you know about the beginning of the 1st world war' ask the student to 'give 10 reasons why the war started' etc.
- Give a clear assignment plan with key questions.
- When asking for a goal or a preference for something, provide options as autistic students have difficulties making a free choice.
- Link the questions/work to student special interest if possible.
- Give extra time for a physical task if fine or gross motor skills are an issue.
- Allow the use of pictures /diagrams in assignments to show understanding if possible.
- Students may find it hard to move from topic to topic so allow plenty of time to finish one and introduce a new topic.
- Ensure one task is finished before introducing a new one.
- Explain how they will know when they have completed the task.
- Use visual cues to show change of task.
- Autistic people may also give the appearance of being compliant and willing to do any task they are asked and not may not give a verbal indication they have not understood your request.
- They may sometimes mask they have problems by deflection or not being able to stick to tasks. This may manifest itself by the student not being able to complete tasks, varying the task given and/or just concentrating on the elements they find interesting or drawn to.

Appendix 2 - Case Studies

Case Study 1

A student was becoming increasingly anxious about their course examinations. Whilst they were happy with the revision timetable and preparing academically for their examinations, they were worried about the logistics of the examination day. They knew the start time for the exam but was worried that their bus would be late and they were uncertain of the process, where would the exam be held, where would they sit etc.

Feedback

Learning support staff were able to work with the student to develop a plan for the exam day. They were reassured that the exams would not start until all of the buses had arrived. This might mean that the exam could start late but all of the allocated time would be allowed. The student visited the exam hall and was shown where they would put their belongings and where they would be sitting. The student was also prepared for the process of the exam, end time and duration of the exam and what they should do when the exam had been completed.

Lesson Learned

Staff need to be aware that unfamiliar situations make the student anxious; therefore, it is important to make situation feel familiar by preparing the student for the event, showing them where they need to go. Communication, planning and strategies can help reduce the threat of unpredictability and anxiety.

Case Study 2

A student was becoming very stressed about completing her course; in particular, the practical element of a work placement. The College had provided some additional hours on a weekly basis but the Level 3 student had calculated that she would not gain enough hours with the current provision.

She felt unable to ask her tutor again for more hours feeling that the lecturer 'must' have calculated that it would not have been enough and was worried as to why they did not 'see the problem'. She was beginning to worry that there was a reason why they had not spoken to her about the hours.

I was able to speak to her tutor and the assistant in charge of the animal care centre to organise more hours. They then liaised and provided a visual timetable which allowed the hours to be signed off weekly and submitted by the student.

The student needed reassurance that the issue wasn't personal and her need to fulfil the criteria of the course to the 'letter' was absolutely fine.

Feedback

The student has now completed the course and did not feel that she needed further support since a strategy was put in place.

Lesson Learned

Staff to be aware of:

- A student's need to fulfil a piece of work or a project to the exact criteria set
- The need to fulfil criteria, a piece of work, a project before starting the next task- they may refuse/be unable to start the next task

Case Study 3

Tom was the centre of much attention since he was the only male in his class. Initially, Tom had enjoyed the attention and was pleased to have made so many friends. Unfortunately, within a few weeks he seemed to be caught up with friendship fallouts and struggled to focus in class. Tom felt much anxiety about not understanding the 'ins and outs' of the new relationships.

By half-term, Tom was making excuses to leave the classroom and on occasions did not return. The LSA attached to the class would find him in the library or outside.

Tom's pastoral tutor had a good relationship with him and discussed a number of solutions- three of which were written onto cards. The possible pros and cons were also written down. The strategy Tom chose was to use was a 'one-liner' that he could use to avoid being distracted in class- 'Sorry, I've got to finish this, I've got work tonight'.

Tom also decided who he wanted to spend most of his time with and was able to see that he did not have to be friends with everyone.

It was also agreed that if he needed time-out then he would ask his lecturers if he could go to see the ALN specialist lecturer and work in their base. That lecturer would email the tutor to say he had arrived.

Feedback

Since a strategy was put in place, Tom has been able to avoid being drawn into arguments. And has only occasionally sought to work in the quiet ALN area

Lesson Learned

Staff to be aware of:

- That students may need the reassurance that they have access to a safe base to prevent/ manage anxious feelings.
- The student is then able to be more independent in managing the impact of social communication difficulties.

Case Study 4

A level 1 student was failing to complete work in class or at home. He was easily distracted in class and the tutor felt that he was not focussed on 'achieving' on the course.

In discussion with the student, he said he was falling behind because instructions were only 'written' on the assignment sheet and it was not always easy to find on google classroom. In addition, the student was unable to listen to the verbal instructions, make notes, process information from the power point and relate this all to an assignment sheet that did not have enough structure for him to organise his work.

When he asked for help the tutor only reiterated what he had to do verbally and did not check for understanding.

The specialist ALN lecturer delivered a training session for the team, highlighting the challenges faced by ASD learners and providing a number of simple strategies that could be used in the classroom.

Feedback

Two months later the student felt that the lecturers were excellent at giving him processing time, structuring what was expected from the assignment visually and sometimes modelled the finished task (so that he could see what was expected of him).

Going forward he was also going to book an appointment with the study skills team to learn how to organise his google account but would have liked more checking that he actually understood the task.

Lesson Learned

Staff need to provide:

- Visual instructions that are chunked into simple well organised tasks.
- Some students may need a scaffolded sheet when they first start the course until they become used to a new style of working.
- This might include more side headings, key words, or sentence starters.
- Students with ASD often benefit from seeing a finished example.
- Check for understanding by asking the student to describe what they have to do and how they were going to achieve the task (noting also how long the assignment/task has to be).