

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH ASPERGER SYNDROME IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Some UK statistics

- › In 2003 UCAS added another category to their disability section of the form to include autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)..
- › In 2003, **165** students disclosed that they were on the autistic spectrum applied for university places through UCAS of that **139** were offered places at universities across the UK
- › In 2006, the numbers rose to **475** students disclosing an ASD and **400** were offered places.
- › In 2010, there were **1,493** applicants and **1,149** were offered places.

Information from http://www.ucas.com/about_us/stat_services/stats_online/data_tables/abusdis



What is Asperger Syndrome?

- › **Asperger syndrome (AS):** Developmental disorder A “high functioning” form of autism, a condition that affects the way a person communicates and relates to others.
- › Intelligence is unimpaired, in fact often above average intelligence
- › 1 in 100 people are on the Autistic Spectrum
- › “Triad of impairment”: (Wing & Gould, 1979)
 1. Communication skills
 2. Social interaction
 3. Flexibility of thought and social imagination



Key Characteristics

Common strengths

- › Attention to detail
- › Methodical approach
- › Accuracy
- › Often a strong work ethic
- › Good with facts/figures
- › Good memory (long term)
- › Technical ability
- › Reliable and honest
- › Motivated
- › Average/above average intelligence



Communication

Common areas of impairment

- › Understanding and using appropriate verbal & non-verbal communication
 - May use formal or stilted language
 - Initiating and sustaining conversations
 - › Processing information
 - › May take instructions or information literally
 - › May misunderstand sarcasm
 - › May only talk about narrow topics of interest
 - › Make factual or irrelevant comments
 - › May use inappropriate pitch, tone, volume & intonation
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Communication

Difficulties that may arise at University

- › Understanding instructions
 - › Giving presentations
 - › May make inappropriate or insensitive comments
 - › Asking for help
 - › Developing and sustaining friendships
 - › Processing information
 - Assignments
 - Plagiarism
 - Exam results and feedback
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Communication

Strategies for supporting students

- › Use language that is clear, precise and concrete
 - › Use less language, both written and verbal
 - › Be clear about rules of behaviour in class
 - › Give time to process information
 - › Be aware of noise level and other distractions
 - › Avoid sarcasm, idioms and hypothetical's
 - › Are words the most effective way to communicate the information?
 - › Check what has been understood
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Social Interaction

Some areas of impairment

- › Understanding the unwritten rules of interaction and relationships
 - › Understanding non verbal signals
 - › May appear aloof or uninterested
 - › Forming and maintaining social relationships
 - › May appear insensitive to others feelings
 - › Exhibit inflexible rule-bound behaviour
 - › Talk at length regardless of the listeners interest
 - › Interrupt or talk over others conversation
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Social Interaction

Difficulties that may arise at University

- › Forming groups and sharing workload
 - › Forming and maintaining social relationships
 - › Misinterpret casual interactions as genuine friendships
 - › Avoidance of social situations
 - › Asking for help or advice
 - › Understanding social rules and expectations in various social settings
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Social Interaction

Strategies for supporting students

- › Use their interests to encourage and extend interactions for example, social networking
 - › Build understanding of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and topics of discussion at university
 - › Facilitate turn-taking in group discussions
 - › Facilitate forming groups for group activities and make rules of behaviour explicit
 - › Does the student need a network of support?
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Social Imagination

Common areas of impairment

- › Understanding other peoples thoughts and feelings
 - › Dealing with change in routine or unfamiliar situations
 - › Rigid ways of thinking i.e. taking on new ideas
 - › Apparent lack of empathy
 - › Using initiative and decision making
 - › Organising and planning ahead
 - › Understanding hypothetical situations
 - › Understanding generalisations
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Social Imagination

Difficulties that may arise at University

- › Adapting to new routines
 - › Time management
 - › Prioritisation
 - › Working in groups that don't follow rule-bound behaviour
 - › Performing tasks outside their area of interest
 - › Understanding others perspective
 - › Interrupting others conversations
 - › Understanding University policies, procedures and expectations
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Social Imagination

Strategies for supporting students

- › Give frequent and immediate feedback
 - › Be consistent in your dealings with the individual
 - › Make rules of behaviour explicit
 - › Prepare for and clearly explain any changes
 - › Support students with time management, for example:
 - › Checklist
 - › Timetable
 - › Reminders
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Additional considerations

- › High co-morbidity of Learning Disabilities such as Dyslexia and Dyspraxia
 - › High levels of anxiety
 - › May experience sensory sensitivities; hyper sensitivity (e.g. sensitive to bright light) or hypo sensitivity (e.g. difficulty processing information through their senses)
 - ✦ Hearing: e.g. a fire alarm
 - ✦ Smell: may have an acute sense of smell
 - ✦ Sight: VDU screens, over head lights and projector glare
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Summary of key points

- › **CLARIFY** – e.g. instructions or requests
 - › **STRUCTURE** – e.g. using timetables
 - › **FEEDBACK** – e.g. inappropriate behaviour
 - › **UNDERSTANDING** – e.g. take the time to understand each students needs and learning style
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