

Appendix 2: Recommendations for student support in Further Education and Higher Education (Martin, 2006)

Prior to entry to Further or Higher Education

How does the institution market itself? Is it known for having an understanding of the potential requirements of a person with AS? If so, is the information about the sort of support which can be offered accurate and reliable? Organisations which over promise and under deliver are not effective in supporting students with AS who rely heavily on people being reliable.

Before entry to FE/HE, is some sort of transitional planning possible for the student?

Is there an opportunity to carry out a Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) needs assessment early so that support can be put in place from the beginning of the course? (Recent changes to DSA regulations mean that it is possible in theory to do this from the April of the year of entry). The challenge is to secure appropriate diagnostic information to satisfy the student's local authority, and to find an Assessment Centre with a short enough waiting list and a sufficiently detailed understanding of AS.

Does the person carrying out the DSA assessment liaise closely (with the students permission) with the Disability Officer in the FE/HE when making support recommendations? A note-taker may be recommended, for example, who can also help the student to organise his or her work. A buddy may be made available to assist with social activities. In each instance, roles, times and boundaries must be clear to avoid ambiguity. How is communication organised in the DSA assessment, to make sure that the student has the opportunity to put their view across? Ensuring that permission is gained to talk to the parents and having some time with the student without them in the room during the assessment is recommended.

Is the FE/HE experience considered holistically over 24 hours, 7 days a week (as Disability Discrimination Act, Part 4 requires) when the DSA assessment is carried

out? The potential for social isolation and possible lack of independent living skills, such as cooking and managing money, are important considerations and support with these aspects of life can mean the difference between success and failure.

Are arrangements set up so that the student can make contact with the FE/HE, and receive an appropriate informed response if necessary during the summer holiday after leaving school /college and before starting as a student? Anxiety may build up during this phase because of the uncertainty.

Is it possible for a named person at the FE/HE to make contact with the student during the pre-entry summer holiday to make sure they know what is going to happen on the first day? A brief phone call can make the difference between worry escalating and diminishing.

Once on a programme of study

Is there a method of helping the student to generate a clear timetable as early as possible so they can develop a sense of security about where they are supposed to be, when and what for?

Is it possible to put some sort of regular recreational activity in place and provide appropriate backup to facilitate attendance? Can Fresher's week be planned really carefully to assist the student to develop a social timetable by joining clubs and societies?

Help to arrange health care, dentistry, bank accounts etc. may also be required. What sort of strategies can be employed to ensure that this is provided and monitored, and that the student is taking care of their health (e.g. by eating regularly?).

If a student is adamant that they do not require assistance and do not want FE/HE staff to know they have AS, what can be done to ensure that their right to confidentiality is not compromised? The situation is most complex when a learner is unable to relate to the effect of their behaviour on other people because of their own lack of empathy, or does not understand why aspects of course work are falling

below standard. Often, very direct advice which describes the impact of an action on the student and do not contain a great deal of emotional content is required (e.g. 'You have to go on the field trip because if you don't you will fail the course). This response presents factual information without unnecessary emotional overload.

Is it possible to support students without labelling them? Arguably, if staff suspect that someone has AS, a low-key approach to enabling the person to access reliable support services is likely to be more empowering in some instances than an approach which requires a diagnosis. Very careful consideration is vital before any interaction which involves mentioning AS to a student who has not disclosed. They may have a diagnosis which they do not wish to share and view a clumsy approach as highlighting their failure to blend in.

Are support arrangements made absolutely clear to the student, reviewed regularly and amended if necessary.

Are systems for communicating with the student made clear so that they know for example to expect email instructions, electronic versions of handouts in advance of lectures, a text to warn of a room change or similar. Sometimes electronic communication is less stressful and has clearer boundaries than face-to-face interaction.