

autism&uni



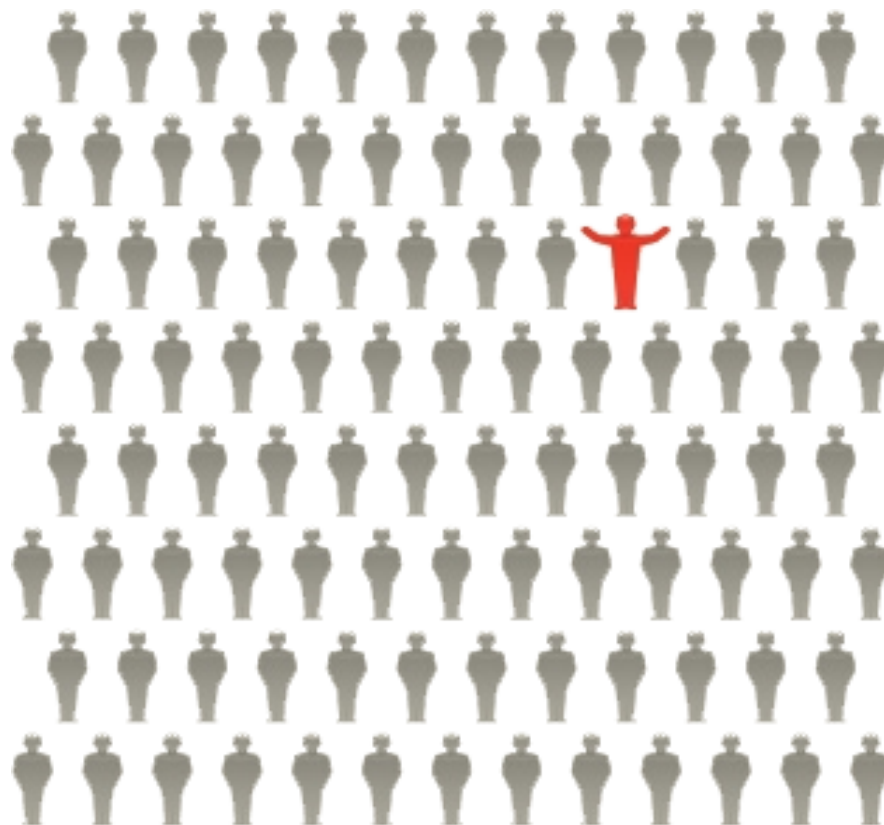
# Supporting autistic students during their transition to university

Marc Fabri, Leeds Beckett University

Penny Andrews, University of Sheffield

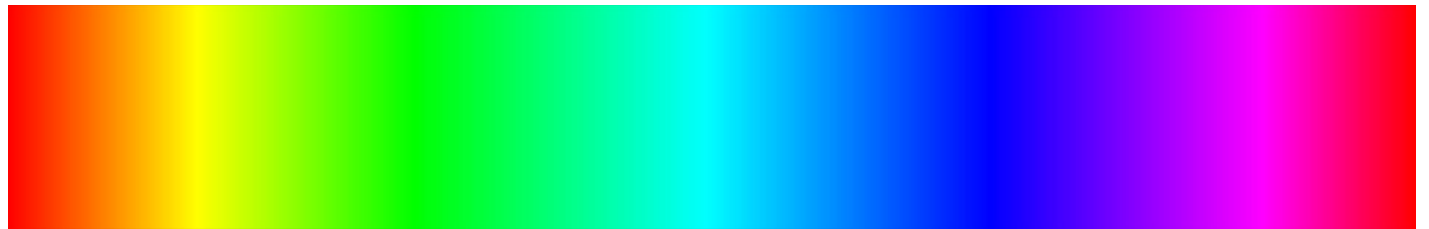
Heta Pukki, Keskuspuisto College, Helsinki, Finland

# Around 1 in 100 people are autistic



# Autism characteristics

- a lifelong developmental condition
- affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and to the world around them
- spectrum condition, which means that it affects different people in different ways.



# The Autism&Uni project

1. Help autistic students navigate the transition from school to university
2. Help academics and other HE staff to support autistic students effectively



# Project Partners



Leeds Beckett University, UK  
TFEI, UK



Keskuspuisto Vocational  
College, Helsinki, Finland



The Academy of Humanities  
and Economics in Łódź, Poland



Autismo Burgos,  
Spain

Technical University  
Eindhoven, Netherlands



---

# Challenges faced by autistic students

## The social and physical environment

- difficulty picking up unwritten social rules when interacting with tutors and fellow students
- difficulty tolerating background noise, lighting, crowding or other sensory aspects of the university environment
- handling the social isolation that often comes with living in a new environment

## Challenges concerning assessment (even when mastering the subject matter)

- difficulty interpreting ambiguous and open assignment briefs correctly
- lack of understanding why something needs to be done
- difficulty planning studies and revision
- uncertainty how much time to spend on a given task

## Lack of appropriate support

- lack of access to appropriate support right from the start
- a focus on the 'deficits' of autism, rather than the strengths students can bring
- lack of consistency in reasonable adjustments, autism-specific services and personal support

## Transitioning to adult life requiring more effort than it would for the average student

- moving away from home for the first time
- time management and establishing routines
- an unfamiliarity with advocating effectively for oneself

## Unrealistic expectations by the student

- what university study is really like
- content of study subject or course
- performing at the same high standard as in secondary education
- fellow students' interests and dedication

# Typical strengths and positive traits

misunderstood

passion for their subject  
attention to be accurate

- a drive to seek knowledge
- adherence to instructions
- ability to focus
- rational and logical thinking
- adopt unconventional problem-solving
- spot errors that others may overlook

belittled

ignored

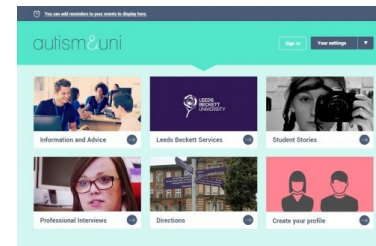




# The Autism&Uni project

1. Help autistic students navigate the transition from school to university

Participatory Design  
of an Online Toolkit



2. Help academics and disability teams to support autistic students effectively

Co-Creation of 3  
Best Practice Guides





- Features interviews with students and professionals
- Practical tips and prompts for reflection
- Encourages positive action and self-advocacy
- Dotted with quotes from our surveys and interviews



Home

Information and Advice

Student Interview

Leeds Beckett Services

Professional Interview

Directions

Switch to

Anxiety 3

Application 6

Arrival 5

Disclosure 7

DSA 3

Getting support 1

You are viewing this in **page view**. Would you like to switch to [slide view](#)?

## Group Work

In this article

Voice

Background

Relevance

What Next

Tips

How to Prepare

Working in a group with other students is part and parcel of university study. Quite a few people worry about it, and some have real problems with it. This activity looks at the main issues people have with group work and gives you some practical tips for your own study.



**GUIDE 1** For HEI managers and senior academics

**GUIDE 2** For HE lecturers and tutors

**GUIDE 3** For professionals supporting autistic students within or outside HE Institutions



# Key recommendations (UDL inspired)

- Adopt inclusive and socially-just approach that understands problems AND desires of students
- Provide suitable support to ALL students by default – not just those with a diagnosis
- This is not “one-size-fits all” – it provides options and multiple paths through learning and assessment
- Avoid retro-fitting the learning experience to individual students (ie. the current model of “reasonable adjustments”)

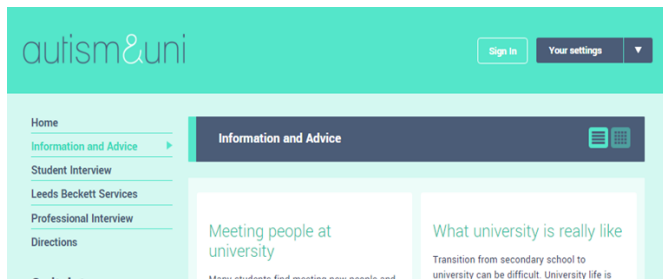


# Thank you



Download our Best Practice Guides  
or take a copy today

[www.autism-uni.org/bestpractice](http://www.autism-uni.org/bestpractice)



Adopt our Online Toolkit

[www.autism-uni.org/toolkits](http://www.autism-uni.org/toolkits)

Contact us

[autism-uni@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:autism-uni@leedsbeckett.ac.uk)



autism&uni

