

A Quick Guide for Supporting Students with Asperger's Syndrome: the AS Academic Contact

What is Asperger's Syndrome?

- ❖ Asperger's Syndrome (AS) is a condition on the autistic spectrum characterised by difficulties with **flexibility of thought**, **social interaction** and **communication**.
- ❖ People with AS are usually of average or above average intelligence with good verbal skills and are often capable of leading full and independent lives.
- ❖ People with AS may become very focused on an activity that they enjoy. This can lead to significant productivity if the activity is related to their work.
- ❖ People with AS may find it difficult to empathise or to know what others are thinking, finding other people unpredictable and confusing. They are likely to experience difficulties functioning in 'our world', which relies heavily on non-verbal communication and the unwritten rules which guide our behaviour.
- ❖ Life can be hard for people with AS; it affects every aspect of their lives. Anxiety and depression are common experiences.
- ❖ Finally, it is important to remember that **every person with AS is a unique individual** with their own strengths and weaknesses. This card provides useful insight into some of the issues that you may face, but **be prepared to learn more** each and every time you meet someone with AS.

What it might mean for you:

- ❖ **Have you been informed of issues concerning a student with Asperger's Syndrome?** As the Asperger's Syndrome Academic Contact for your School/Department, you might be informed of problems concerning the AS student by staff, the student's mentor or the student.
- ❖ **Do you know who to contact in your School/Department or the disability unit?** You will need to make sure the appropriate people are informed of any issues as early as possible, and check that appropriate action is being taken. Knowing who to contact and when will reduce your workload.
- ❖ **Are the AS students behaving 'differently' from other students?** Certain social skills may not be intuitive to some people with AS. Staff need to learn about the issues faced by students with Asperger's Syndrome.



What you can do to support students with AS in your School/Department:

- ❖ Your role is to provide an **important link** between your School/Department, the student, the student's mentor (if applicable) and your disability unit. See 'Asperger's Syndrome: the Hertfordshire Experience' in the accompanying guide for more details about your role.
- ❖ Make sure lecturing/admin/technical staff know **of your role** and how they can contact you. Let them know they need only send a short email to inform you of any issues. Encourage them to contact you as early as possible when a problem arises.
- ❖ Perhaps the best advice is: **Communicate effectively and early!** If the right people are informed of potential problems early enough then steps can be put into place before a small problem becomes insurmountable for the student.
- ❖ Make sure your AS student is **aware of all coursework/exam deadlines**. It may be that the student's mentor takes on this role – but ask lecturing staff to contact you if deadlines are missed.
- ❖ There are some periods in the academic calendar that may pose particular problems (e.g. assignment deadlines, exams or allocation of project topics). Although not every eventuality can be predicted, some **planning for known stress-points in the academic calendar is useful** and may reduce staff workload in the longer term. For example, would additional study skills/exam skills training be beneficial as the exams approach? Would your AS students benefit from additional guidance when project topics are allocated?
- ❖ Every student with Asperger's Syndrome is different. You may have one student who constantly asks for help, whilst another may not admit any difficulties. Therefore be prepared to **adapt your support strategy** to each student.
- ❖ Try to maintain a **thick skin** as a defence against the directness of some AS students. At the same time you may need to suppress your own social etiquette and be direct with them. People with AS do not necessarily learn manners indirectly and would generally prefer to be told (in private) if they are coming over as ill mannered or odd.

For more information about supporting students with Asperger's Syndrome see the booklet and DVD that accompany these Quick Guides!

The Quick Guide for each member of staff has a box like this for your contact details – make sure other members of staff know your role and how to contact you!

Your AS Academic Contact is:

Email:

Tel: