UWE Bristol University of the West of England

UWE Bristol University of the West of England

Inclusion or Integration? Best practice to support autistic students in the HE sector

Aga Kowalska-Mulholland

Lecturer in Policing and Psychology (UWE)
Program Lead for the Foundation Year in Social Sciences
Co-director of Autism Independence
Senior Teacher Associate (University of Bristol)

Plan for this session

- Challenges experiences by autistic students
- Integration and Inclusion agenda
- Pilot program at UWE
- Lessons learnt and the ways forward
- Questions?

Characteristics of autism /NAS, 2022/

- **Autism** is a lifelong, developmental ***disability*** that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them /NAS, 2022/

- **Autistic people often do not 'look' disabled/different.**
- **Hidden difficulty: associated with a rang of awkward/ unwanted/ ununderstood behaviours.**
- **Persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction**
- **Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests, to the extent that these 'limit and impair everyday functioning.**
- **Sensory difficulties (hyper and/ or hypo)**
- **Speech and language difficulties**

UWE Bristol University of the West of England

#HeldBack campaign

It should be recognised that autistic people are starting at university have often come from a school system that produced the following statements:

“We are stuck in a system that wants the child to fail before help is offered.” (Parent)

“Autistic students are probably the SEN group I need the most guidance with and have received the least guidance on.” (A teacher)

“The school shattered my confidence – they had no understanding … they were unable to provide ‘reasonable adjustments’.” (Young person on autism spectrum) / NAS, 2018/

Challenges faced by autistic students /Gurbuz et al, 2019/

- The social and physical environment
- Challenges concerning assessment (even when mastering the subject matter)
- Lack of appropriate support (a focus on the ‘deficits’, lack of consistency in reasonable adjustments)
- Transitioning to adult life requiring more effort than in would for the average student
- Unrealistic expectations by the student

UWE Bristol University of the West of England

Common Worries Experienced by Autistic Students /Morris, 2011/

- communicating and working in groups
- ambiguous questions in interviews, assignments and exams
- not knowing who to ask for support
- being stressed or distracted by certain sensory aspects
- concern about their level of disability being misunderstood or belittled
- getting lost
- fear of public speaking
- tendency to go off on tangents or talk too long about their special interests

Some voices of autistic students /Gurbuz et al, 2019/

- **“ I don’t tell my fellow students, because I don’t want preconceptions affecting how they see me. I’d rather be a ‘mysterious guy’ than autistic “**

- **“If I can get myself focused on a topic then I will go into much more detail and learn much more about it than other students.”**

- **“Lectures and tutorials are noisy and crowded; I often become anxious and struggle to process the content above the background noise. The biggest challenge was being able to find a quiet place to work and revise (very distracted by noise) but I live near home so moved home during exam time.”**

Some voices of autistic students /Gurbuz et al, 2019/

- **“I disliked secondary school because I never accepted that parents or teachers had authority over me, and I was never willing to obey unreasonable rules. I enjoyed the freedom to pursue a subject I was very interested in, and to be captain of my own ship.”**

- **“Every ASD person is different in how much attention and social enrichment they want or need. Everyone’s experience is different, and no two students will face the same difficulties. Understanding without being patronising is key, and the condition can be both a blessing and a curse at this level.”**

Some voices of autistic students /Gurbuz et al, 2019/

- **“I had difficulty being included in social activities due to other people not understanding you need help being included in activities. Lots of stuff revolves around “going out” and drinking which is often too loud/crowded and may not want to drink. Also can be difficult to attend society events because not enough information is provided so you can’t prepare and it’s too scary.“**

Inclusion ‘vs’ Integration?

- **Inclusion** (Thomas and Loxley, 2001)

- **For the inclusion agenda, the problem is understood as an excluding social context**
- **An ongoing, never ended process**
- **Collective sense of belonging**
- **Equal opportunities to participate in social and professional arenas of life**
- **Removal of the physical, psychological and social barriers to a fully-fledged participation in life**
- **Successful inclusion depends on the ongoing adjustments to meet the needs of a person**

- **Integration** (Warnock Report, 1978)

- **For the integration agenda, the problem is understood as the ‘non-fitting’ individual**
- **Physical placement of a person in a mainstream setting**
- **Exposure of autistic individuals to social interaction**
- **Practical measures associated with participation in selective activities**
- **Placing in less restrictive environments**
- **Successful integration depends on person’s capacity to fit in within a mainstream context**

What can you do?

- Identify the challenges and the opportunities (strength focused approach)
- Encourage a good working relationships between personal tutors and students
- Reasonable adjustments … (fixed, or flexible?)
- Try to ensure that the room is free of visual and auditory distractions
- Ask the students if they would like to disclosure their Autism diagnosis to others

What can you do?

- **Be aware of ways to create accessible physical and learning environments that are important for autistic students (and can benefit others as well)**
- **Be clear and concise at all times! Autistic students are literal / brainstorming session, food for thought, hanging in the air/**
- **Training and awareness**
- **Assistive technology, sensory**
- ***"I might not have dropped out if the amount of group work could have been reduced, or if I could have known my fellow students better, because then group work would not have caused so much anxiety."***

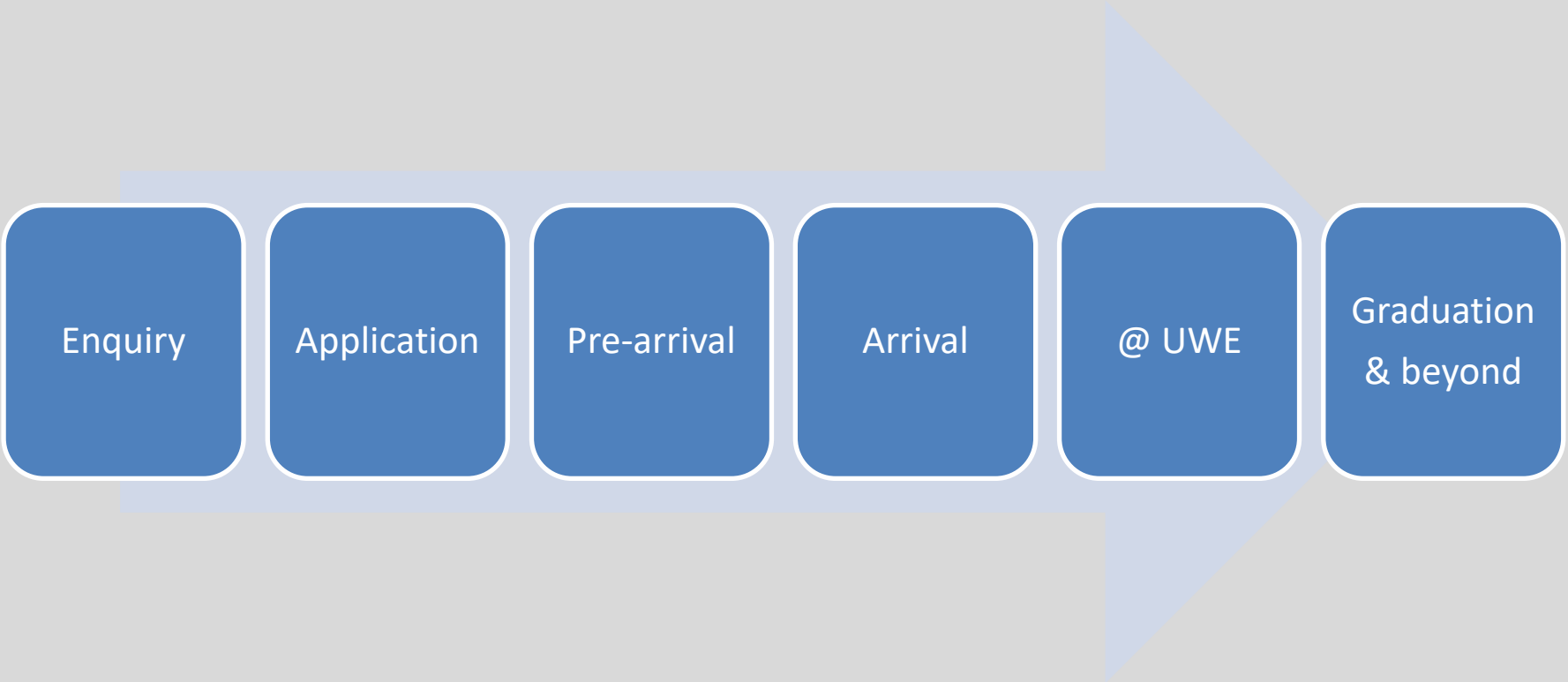
Autistic strengths

- Learning to read at a very early age (known as hyperlexia).
- Memorising and learning information quickly.
- Thinking and learning in a visual way.
- Logical thinking ability.
- May excel (if able) in academic areas such as science, engineering and mathematics as they are technical and logical subjects that do not heavily rely on social interaction.
- Having an extraordinarily good memory (being able to remember facts for a long period of time).
- Being precise and detail orientated.

continuation

- Exceptional honesty and reliability.
- Being dependable in regards to schedules and routines.
- Having an excellent sense of direction.
- Be very punctual.
- Strong adherence to rules.
- Able to concentrate for long periods of time when motivated.
- A drive for perfection and order.

Student Journey



Enquiry, application, pre-arrival

UWE Bristol University of the West of England

		Enquiry	Application	Pre-arrival
All Students		• Enquiries • Open Day • Prospectus	• Application Submission • Offer • Checks • Offer holder events,	• Apply for accommodation • Confirmation / Acceptance • Joining instructions
Students with Neuro-diversity	Current support offer		• Disability Assessment/meeting (pre entry) • Apply for DSA (if not in place) • Study needs assessment (AWE or external) • Report sent to DSA and UWE • Student receives entitlement letter • If not eligible contact Disability services • OH Check • Wellbeing/Safeguarding/UWE carers	• Disability Services • Transition events • Wellbeing • AWE • Co-ordinated support • UWE cares
	We can do more.....	• ASD support "landing" pages on web • Open day sessions for ASD students and parents	• Offer holder events for ASD students • Department Disability Champion • EHCP/Study needs review	• Familiarisation visits (Physical or Virtual)' VR use • Intro to Supporting for Success (ASD) mentor • "Transition" early induction event - virtual sessions run by Wellbeing/Specialist Mentors/disability supported by Autism Ambassadors • Connect with Study Needs Assessor to ensure DSA in place or being applied for and looking at equipment needs

….Arrival, at UWE and beyond

UWE Bristol University of the West of England

		Arrival	@ UWE	Beyond
All Students		• Student Record Created • IT accounts/email etc • Online registration • Module selection • Time table • Welcome event	• Teaching and Assessment • Progression • Placements • Student Reps • APT • Advice • Student support services • Ongoing support	• Alumni Events • Alumni Comms
Students with Neuro-diversity	Current support offer		• Support by AWE (as required) • Contact with disability services (as required)	
	We can do more…..	• "Get started" early induction event • Co ordinated support meeting with disability, academic mentor, specialist Mentor and student to review RA's / assessment map for the year • Connect with Specialist Mentor/Study skills Tutor • Early Lab and facilities inductions	• Employment/placement paired mentoring • "Mentoring for Success" - Termly Tripartite meeting with disability, academic mentor and student to review RA's • Adaptive release of information / assessments • Group meetings to review all RA students across department	• Employment/placement mentoring with Ambitious About Autism • Partnership with employers to support neurodiversity • Role Model Stories

UWE Bristol University of the West of England

The principles of a good practice and 'transitioning' into HE

- Planning and decision-making should be carried out in a person-centred way. A strong emphasis on the provision of individualised teaching, assessment and support to reflect the specific needs of each particular student
- Support should be co-ordinated across all services (teaching, learning, social, accommodation)
- Planning should start early and continue up until study completion
- Supportive and effective transitions and orientation within university building
- Collaborative and multi-disciplinary approaches (parents, collaboration with social services and other institutions outside of university, autistic individuals)
- Transitioning into employment?

Learn, care, empathise share

- Empathy is a two way street /Milton, 2016/
- Students' voices incorporated directly into policies and practices
- Autistic students offer training and are encouraged to share awareness: open days/ students' forums/disability-difference services
- 'Nothing about us without us'

UWE Bristol University of the West of England

Bibliography

- Baines, A.D., 2012. Positioning, strategizing, and charming: how students with autism construct identities in relation to disability. Disability & Society 27, 547–561. doi:10.1080/09687599.2012.662825
- Bublitz, D., Wong, V., Donachie, A., Brooks, P.J., Gillespie-Lynch, K. 2015. Applying Universal Design to build supports for college students with autism spectrum disorder,in Roberta V. Nata (Ed.), Progress in Education, vol 36, Nova Publishing, 1-24 CAST, 2011.
- Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.0. Wakefield, MA. Retrieved from http://www.udlcenter.org/ aboutudl/udlguidelines/downloads
- Davidson, J., Henderson, V.L., 2010. “Coming out” on the spectrum: autism, identity and disclosure. Social & Cultural Geography 11, 155–170. doi:10.1080/14649360903525240 HESA, 2013.
- Huws, J.C., Jones, R.S.P., 2008. Diagnosis, disclosure, and having autism: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the perceptions of young people with autism. Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability 33, 99–107. doi:10.1080/13668250802010394

Bibliography

- Gurbuz, E., Hanley, M. and Riby, D.M. (2019) University Students with Autism: The Social and Academic Experiences of University in the UK. *J Autism Dev Disord* **49,** 617–631 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3741-4
- Kenny, L., Hattersley, C., Molins B., Buckley, B., Povey, C., Pellicano, E., 2015. How Should We Describe Autism? Perspectives from the UK Autism Community. IMFAR conference, Salt Lake City, US
- Madriaga, M., 2010. "I avoid pubs and the student union like the plague": Students with Asperger Syndrome and their negotiation of university spaces. Children's Geographies 8, 39–50. doi:10.1080/14733280903500166
- Morris, C., 2011. The Aspect project: Working together to enhance the learning experiences of students with Asperger syndrome at the University of Brighton, in: Partnerships: Articles from the Learning and Teaching Conference 2010. University of Brighton Press.

Bibliography

- Ratcliffe, R., 2014. Helping students with Asperger's prepare for university life. The Guardian, UK, http://www.theguardian.com/ education/2014/sep/09/students-aspergersready-university-life
- The NHS Information Centre, Community and Mental Health Team, Brugha, T. et al, 2012. Estimating the prevalence of autism spectrum conditions in adults: extending the 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey. Leeds: NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care
- Tobajas, F., De Armas, V., Cabello, M.D., Grijalvo, F., 2014. Supporting students with special needs at university through peer mentoring, in: Global Engineering Education Conference (EDUCON), 2014 IEEE. IEEE, pp. 701–705.