

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (Asperger Syndrome)

Information pack for students



Definition of a Disability

The Equality Act (2010) replaced the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) in providing protection and legal rights for disabled people. It uses the following definition of disability:

“The Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term (i.e. has lasted or is likely to last for at least twelve months) adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

More information on the Act can be found at

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG_4001068

▶ Asperger Syndrome as a Disability

The Autism Society of America describes Asperger Syndrome as being “characterized by impairments in social interactions and the presence of restricted interests and activities, with no clinically significant general delay in language, and testing in the range of average to above average intelligence.” In practise any student with an autistic spectrum disorder or social communication difficulty may:

- Find difficulty with interacting with other students.
- Be reliant on routines and dislike sudden changes to these routines.
- Misunderstand or be naïve in social interaction.

but also may:

- Have the ability to study an area in great depth.
- Be very motivated to investigate a particular topic.
- Be very focussed in working towards set goals.

Asperger Syndrome is a neurological disorder that shares many of the same characteristics of autism. Asperger syndrome tends not to be diagnosed until later in life, as many aspects of development are normal or above average e.g. language, maths and reading. People diagnosed with this syndrome have difficulty understanding what other people think and feel. This affects the way a person communicates and relates to others and as a result they may behave inappropriately in social situations and appear to be rude, unkind, eccentric, etc.

The causes of autism and Asperger Syndrome are still being investigated. Many experts believe that the pattern of behaviour from which Asperger's Syndrome is diagnosed may not result from a single cause. There is strong evidence to suggest that Asperger Syndrome can be caused by a variety of physical factors, all of which affect brain development - it is not due to emotional deprivation or the way a person has been brought up.

▶ **Common traits**

A number of traits of autism are common to Asperger Syndrome including:

- Socially and emotionally inappropriate behaviour
- Peculiar voice characteristics
- Formal pedantic language
- Misinterpretations of literal / implied meanings
- Marked impairment in the use of multiple non-verbal behaviours such as eye-to-eye gaze, body postures and gestures to regulate social interaction
- Peculiar, stiff gaze
- Repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g. hand or finger flapping or twisting or complex whole-body movements)
- Limited use of gestures
- Obsessive, ritualistic behaviour patterns

- Persistent preoccupations with parts or objects
- Difficulty with planning and coping with change
- Overly sensitive to sounds, tastes, smells and sights
- Depressions and anxiety

People with Asperger Syndrome usually have fewer problems with language than those with autism, often speaking fluently though their words can sometimes sound formal or stilted. People with Asperger Syndrome do not usually have the accompanying learning disabilities associated with autism; and in fact are often of average or above average intelligence. Because of this many children with Asperger Syndrome enter mainstream school and, with the right support and encouragement, can make good progress and go on to further education and employment.

▶ Possible arrangements

As each student is different, individual centred solutions need to be considered. **A student with Asperger Syndrome may request the following** although there may be **other individually specific requirements** requested and / or required:

- **Visually based approach** to presentation of material
- **Peer support and awareness training**, so that **fellow students can understand** and be sympathetic to an individual's behaviour
- A **note-taker or scribe** to write in lectures, tutorials or when producing coursework
- A **support worker** to help manage resources, to plan study routines and to develop a better understanding of local social skills
- A **word processor or computer** to produce work and to help organise study

- It may be necessary for the student to make **regular trips to their vacation home** to be in an environment in which they are more familiar.
- Extra time during examinations, the use of a separate room

▶ **Strategies during teaching and learning**

Some of the follow points may help facilitate the teaching of a student with Asperger Syndrome:

- Be prepared for managing interactions where the student may exhibit behaviours that can be naïve, pedantic, obsessive and inappropriate
- Where guidelines and arrangements are to be followed they should be written down, be prepared to allow flexibility in their application where required
- Routines should be kept as consistent as possible, when changes are envisaged they should be announced and information supplied in writing
- Visual learning material is particularly valuable
- Avoid figurative speech
- Be alert for the potential for anxiety and depressions and the effects on learning of medication
- If possible ensure a consistent approach is applied to teaching throughout the course

▶ **Requesting special examination arrangements**

Information about applying for special exam arrangements can be found at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/exams/>

Requests for examination concessions must be applied for via the college office.

▶ Financial Assistance

Information about applying for **funding** can be found at:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/funding/>

▶ Useful Contacts

The Disability Advisory Service (details below)

Oxford University Student Union (OUSU)

Thomas Hull House, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford, OX1 2HU.

Tel: 01864 (2) 88461. Email: welfare@ousu.org

Web: <http://www.ousu.org/welfare>

OUSU has an active Disabilities Action Group, which works to raise awareness of disability issues in the University.

National Autistic Society

393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG. Tel: 020 78332299. Fax: 020 7833 9666.

Website: <http://www.nas.org.uk/>

OASIS: Oxfordshire Autistic Society for Information & Support

Voirrey Carr (Chair),

Email: voirrey@aol.com

Phone: 01865 750160

Provides information & support to parents of autistic children and professionals

working in the field of autism. Meets 7.30pm, first Tuesday of the month, at Community Hall, Cheney School, Cheney Lane, Oxford.

Autism Family Support

Gita Lobo (Project Co-ordinator)

Email: gita@childrenintouch.freeserve.co.uk

Phone: 01844 338696

Website: www.autism-fs.org.uk

www.autismandcomputing.org.uk

Disability Advisory Service

E-mail: disabililty@admin.ox.ac.uk

Website: www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das

Tel: +44 (0)1865 280 459

Fax: +44 (0)1865 289 830