

Support for Students with Autistic Spectrum Condition at Heriot-Watt University

All applications to study at Heriot-Watt University are judged on academic and personal merit. The opportunity to engage with a subject of interest is often well suited to students who have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition and many are extremely successful in their chosen subject. In some cases, support measures may be needed to help students achieve their academic goals. Some students settle in well to University life but others can experience difficulties with some aspects of independent living and studying. We would like to highlight the positive aspects of University life whilst acknowledging that some students experience difficulties. This information sheet details the support that is made available in order to deal with any challenges faced.

Studying at University is less structured than in school or college. It involves an emphasis on the ability to study independently. This makes demands on a student's planning, organisation and time management skills.

Other skills that are developed at University include:

- working in partnership with other people in groups, laboratories or on projects
- working on major pieces of work such as a dissertation
- giving presentations individually or as part of a group
- doing work based or language based placements
- the opportunity of travel to study at our campus in Dubai or Malaysia
- the need to regularly work to deadlines

HWU Staff and Resources

HWU offer a range of resources designed to make students feel as supported as possible during their studies. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Disability Advisor** - the student's Disability Advisor is the primary point of contact for assessing/arranging support for the student.
- **Our [Study Toolkit](#)** resource helps prospective students to prepare for university.
- A **Transition Event** and [Get Ready for Success](#) programmes are offered as an introduction to student life.
- A **student volunteer** to accompany the student at Welcome week (Freshers) events.
- **School Disability Contact (SDC)** - the SDC liaises with School staff to ensure that the recommended support is put in place. The SDC can advocate on behalf of the student if they are experiencing any problems.
- **Personal Tutor** - each student is assigned a Personal Tutor who is their first point of contact for any academic or personal issues they may experience throughout their time at university.
- **Peer mentoring** – advice, guidance and support provided by someone who is following a similar course to the student but has the benefit of greater experience.
- **One to One study strategy sessions** - help for students to build on their academic study skills
- **Counselling Service** - if you need support for your mental and emotional wellbeing
- **Wellbeing groups** - developed by Heriot-Watt Counselling and Disability Services to support mental and emotional health
- **Academic Skills Workshops** – there are a range of workshops which are free to attend and are available throughout the academic year. These include practical strategies appropriate for a range of topics including referencing, academic writing and critical thinking.
- Library and Information Services support
- [Canvas](#) (our virtual learning environment) **Support** – support is available online to help you to navigate and personalise Canvas.
- Training and access to **assistive software** which offers support with the organisation of notes and ideas, proof reading and concentration issues.

It is important that prospective students contact the Disability Service as early as possible after accepting the offer of a place at HWU.

We need time to assess your needs and arrange any relevant support. Support doesn't happen automatically; students have to speak with a

Disability Advisor to implement it. You can bring someone with you to meetings if you choose.

Usually we will arrange an initial meeting with you. We will ask you to send a copy of evidence of your Autistic Spectrum Condition diagnosis from a professional, such as a psychiatrist or a GP. We will discuss your experience of learning so far and any support that has been useful. If you had a support plan at school, please let us have a copy.

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) - available to UK domiciled students only.

This is additional funding which may be available to meet any additional study related costs that a student may incur because of their disability. If you require any funded support, we will arrange another appointment to have your needs assessed for funding through DSA. Further information on DSA can be found on our [website](#).

Exam and coursework adjustments

Any adjustment recommended is based on the needs and entitlement of the individual. Examples follow but the list is not exhaustive:

Exam adjustments:

- Extra time in exams and timed class tests
- use of a PC
- a quieter exam room to minimise distraction and aid concentration
- a scribe, reader or a prompter to help the student stay focussed.

Coursework adjustments:

- Lecture notes and slides provided in advance of the lecture
- Ability to record lectures
- Support finding other students to work with, e.g. paired work in labs or group work
- Agreed guidelines for working in groups, such as everyone having a clearly defined role
- Guidelines for presentations such as presenting one to one or to a smaller group

Learning profile

In cases of particularly complex support only, this document provides teaching and other relevant University staff with additional background information about you and details of the adjustments that need to be made for you in classwork and exams. The wording of the learning profile is agreed and approved by you.

Other support

Study skills:

- help with organisation, time management, avoiding procrastination, studying effectively, pacing and managing the workload

Life skills relating to you being a successful student:

- orientation around the campus
- self-care
- shopping
- sharing kitchen facilities
- hygiene; including personal, laundry, tidy living environment
- sharing University accommodation with other students
- managing mood, emotions and sleeping patterns
- support with taking part in activities, clubs and societies

Autism Initiatives – University Support Team

We also work in partnership with Autism Initiatives' University Support Team to provide support as detailed below

Overview

The University Support Team provides support for Adults with Autistic Spectrum Condition without a Learning Disability. The support received is person centred and tailored to the individual needs of the student. The extent of support from them is dependent on the recommendations made by a Disability Advisor at Heriot-Watt University or by a Needs Assessor. Funding for support may be allocated from the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) or provided by the university.

Our overall aims are:

- To support students in reaching their maximum potential during their studies
- To support students to create and maintain effective organisational skills
- To support students in the independent development of life skills
- To support students to create and maintain effective coping strategies appropriate to the university environment
- To support students to become independent learners as far as possible

Key Working and Support Teams

Students who required this support will be assigned a support team that suits both the hours provided and the student's needs. This will allow for the student and support team to build up good working relationships and instil confidence and familiarity within the partnership.

Within the support team, there will also be a key worker allocated to the student. This person will be the main point of contact for the student and will also pass on their support rotas as they are made available, including which team members they will be working with each day. Notice of holidays, necessary changes and communications etc. can be passed on to key workers who can then make the arrangements required. The key worker will also review the support after each support session and write a monthly report with the student to look at their progress and identify future goals.

Examples of Support Offered by Autism Initiatives – University Support Team

Autism Initiatives works in partnership with people with autism, their families and professionals, enabling the people we support to become increasingly successful in daily activities through the development of their communication and thinking skills. We work in a Person Centered manner to support people to develop skills and strategies using personalised approaches.

The University Support Team can provide support with:

- Lectures/Tutorials/Practicals - support students to attend classes, maintain concentration, take detailed and effective notes, and use equipment and software to record lectures.
- Examinations and Assessments - support students to create and follow a revision timetable. They may also be asked by HWU to accompany the student in an exam, scribe for them, read the questions and exam papers, or act as a prompter if this support has been recommended. Support workers will be briefed by HWU about the key requirements for this role.
- Planning and Time Management - support can organise study times into a regular and manageable routine with the student. This would be created to fit around the commitments and activities of the student. Support workers can explore different methods of time management and organisation with the student.
- Communication and Correspondence with academic staff – support students to compose emails to HWU staff, e.g. regarding queries relating to lecture content or to check understanding, and ask for clarification of instructions regarding coursework.
- Communication and Correspondence with Disability Advisor – support to make contact if any issues arise regarding coursework and exam support, such as the provision of lecture notes in advance or arrangements for class tests. The Disability Advisor will be able to take this up with the relevant member of teaching staff. Any changes to the support required, such as exam adjustments or the amount of support provided by The University Support Team, should always be discussed with the student's Disability Advisor. Support staff will also attend review meetings with the student and their Disability Advisor.
- Lunch times/Breaks – support during lunch or breaks between classes can be provided at the start of a student's studies.
- The University environment, accommodation, life skills, student experience, social interactions - students may wish to discuss these, and other issues which may arise, with their support worker.
- Anxiety and stressful situations, how to deal with concentration difficulties, time management, prioritising workload and creating a suitable work-life balance.

The University Support Team can check with the student that they have all their exam requirements in place and support them to contact their Disability Advisor if they need to discuss the arrangements.

Communication

Communication between students, families and Autism Initiatives – University Support Team can be adapted to the individual preferences of each student. Communication can be made via text message, phone call, email or face to face. Communication books can also be put in place to help record useful information and dates for future reference.

Further Information

Autism Initiatives – University Support Team
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