

TRANSITION PACK

Advice for Students with Autistic Spectrum Conditions



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For many students leaving school or college, and starting university is both an exciting and a daunting time. It can involve lots of change including moving away from home, meeting people, getting used to new environments and ways of doing things. This pack is designed to help you to manage some of these challenges and includes tips from current students and advice about how to access support, so that you can make the most of your time at university.

Student Top Tips

Probably the best people to give you advice about how to adjust to university life are students with autistic spectrum conditions who have lived through it recently. Here are some top tips from Exeter students:

Remember, everyone is as nervous as you are about making friends. Nobody knows anyone.

You might not make great friends in fresher's week – so don't feel pressured to do so – but you could meet people at society events or during your course.

Talking to people on my course helped me because it turned out that they found the assignments challenging and the lecture content confusing when I did.

Smile and say hello to people.

University, even the first year, is hard. Getting to know how everything works and looking after yourself can be difficult but just know that you won't be the only one to feel that way.

Explore the support options available and visit the area beforehand so that you feel comfortable with living here by yourself.

Don't expect too much of yourself. It's ok if Fresher's isn't the best week of your life.

Get to know the campus, so that you know where you're going when there's an event.

It takes time to get to know people. If you don't instantly get along, it doesn't mean that you won't.

Don't feel pressured to drink alcohol if you don't want to. I hardly drink any at all and I know other people who don't drink either.

Skyping my family a lot was helpful; they'd sometimes eat dinner whilst I was Skyping, and I'd do the same.

Bring things that you found comforting at home, like a favourite tea, or even teddies.

Things to do when you arrive

There are lots of things that you can do to make sure you are well supported during your degree. Here's a checklist of some important things to do when you arrive. You may have done some of these things already in which case you don't need to worry about them. There are also some FAQs and answers below to provide advice about what to do next.

Tell the University that you have a disability (if you didn't do this on your UCAS form)	
<i>Why do I need to declare that I have autism? How do I do it?</i>	
<p>You can declare a disability at any point during your studies but the sooner you do the better. This means that your support can be set up in plenty of time for when your exams and coursework begins which can reduce anxiety. Support might include an individual learning plan (ILP) with exam adjustments.</p> <p>Some people will already have declared a disability on their UCAS form before they arrived. The easiest way to declare your disability is to make an appointment with an AccessAbility Advisor and to bring some evidence with you such as a copy of a diagnostic letter or one from your GP.</p>	
Book an AccessAbility Advisor appointment	
<i>Why do I need an AccessAbility Advisor Appointment? What will happen at it? Where will it take place?</i>	
<p>AccessAbility Advisors can set up support within the University such as an Individual Learning Plan (ILP), which often includes exam adjustments such as extra time. They can also advise on other support that you might be eligible for and signpost you to the right service if you are stuck about where to go. You may have had a pre-arrival appointment either in person or on the telephone. You can book an appointment at any point in your studies, even if you've had one before, if you need advice or are finding something difficult.</p> <p>The advisor will chat to you about the things you might find challenging at university and will make suggestions about what might help.</p> <p>AccessAbility are based in the Forum. They use quiet interview rooms, mainly, in the Career Zone.</p>	
<i>How do I book an AccessAbility Appointment?</i>	
<p>SID (the Student Information Desk) book and manage the AccessAbility Advisors' appointments. You can arrange an appointment by contacting SID:</p> <p>Telephone: 03005 550444 from UK (or +44 1392 724724 if calling internationally.)</p> <p>In person: Or visit the desk on the ground floor of the forum</p> <p>Or, you can email accessability@exeter.ac.uk and give the days and times you are available, if you prefer to use email.</p>	

Apply for Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA)	
<i>What are Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA)?</i>	
<p>Disabled Students Allowances are funding from the government, which you can apply for, which provides extra help to students with a disability. They sometime fund specialist mentoring for students on the autistic spectrum. They sometimes pay for assistive technology such as computer software. DSA is not means tested so any student with a diagnosis of a long-term condition and appropriate medical evidence can apply.</p> <p>You can apply at any point in your studies but it can take up to 14 weeks for it to be processed during busy times so it is worth applying as early as possible. If you apply before you arrive at university, it will be one less thing to worry about and your support can be put in place as soon as you arrive. An AccessAbility Advisor can help you to apply so book an appointment if you are unsure about what to do.</p>	

Set up your DSA-funded support once you have received your entitlement letter	
<i>I have received my DSA entitlement letter but am unsure what to do next?</i>	
<p>If you are confused about how to set up the support you are eligible for, an AccessAbility Advisor can help. You may have been told you can have mentoring but are not sure how to set it up. All of this can be covered in an AccessAbility appointment or you can email accessability@exeter.ac.uk to ask for advice.</p>	
<i>What is ASC Mentoring? What can I expect?</i>	
<p>ASC Mentors support students to get the most out of being at university. They will help you to explore how your condition affects your university studies and to develop helpful strategies for overcoming these challenges. They can meet you regularly, for the duration of your studies, and can help with managing change, difficult situations and emotions, as well as developing skills and confidence.</p> <p>Your allocated mentor will work with you on a one-to-one basis in a quiet, private room. The first session will focus on getting to know you and finding out how your ASC affects your studies.</p>	

Register with the student health centre	
<i>How do I register with the Student Health Centre?</i>	
<p>You can register by filling out an online form: www.campusdoctor.org.uk/exeter/reg.html</p>	



What to do if you need help

There may be times when you need help or advice. Moving away from home means that you will be further away from your home support network. You will need to develop a new one for your life at Exeter. There are many services at the University of Exeter who you can turn to for support. This is our guide to the main services you might need:

AccessAbility

AccessAbility support students who have physical disabilities, long-term health conditions, specific learning difficulties, sensory impairments and autistic spectrum conditions. The team is made up of advisors, ASC mentors and study skills tutors. They offer advisor appointments and a drop-in service which runs during term-time on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, 1–3pm. Go to the SID desk in the Forum to book an appointment or to check in for a drop-in.

SID

The Student Information Desk are there to answer any questions you might have and to signpost you to other services that might be able to help you. They can be found on the ground floor of the Forum and can also be contacted by phone and email.

Wellbeing Centre

Mental Health Team

The Mental Health Team support students with long-term mental health conditions. The team is made up of advisors and mental health mentors. They offer advisor appointments and a drop-in service. You can find out more information about how to book an appointment or attend a drop-in here: www.exeter.ac.uk/wellbeing/mental_health

Psychological Therapies Team

The Psychological Therapies Team support students who need some short-term support; this could be because of stress, low self-esteem or anxiety. They provide therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and counselling, and also run groups and workshops. If you want to find out what support you can access, you can arrange a short appointment, by telephone or face to face. To book an appointment, contact the Wellbeing Team on: **01392 724381** or wellbeing@exeter.ac.uk and ask for a TRA (telephone referral appointment). You will need to tell them if you would prefer to have this appointment face to face.

Student Health Centre

It is important to register with the Student Health Centre when you arrive: www.campusdoctor.org.uk/exeter/reg.html. They should be your first contact for any concerns about your health. You can make an appointment to see a GP and access advice about your health and wellbeing.

Residence Life Team

Residence Life provides support to students living in University accommodation. Every student in University accommodation is allocated a Residence Life Mentor who has experience of university life. Find out which team represents your residence here: www.exeter.ac.uk/accommodation/contact/residencelifeteam

Team leaders are on duty every evening from 6pm during term time.

Estate patrol

If you have concerns about your safety or someone else's on campus you can call the Estate Patrol who are the University's security team. However, if it is an emergency you should always call 999 and ask for the police.

Students' Guild Advice Unit

The Advice Unit are independent of the University and can offer advice on a wide range of issues including finance and funding advice. They provide a telephone, email and face to face service and run drop-ins from the Forum.

Nightline

Nightline is a confidential listening and information service run by students for students at the University of Exeter. Nightline is open from 20:00–08:00 every evening during term time.

For contact details of these services and some external agencies please see the back page of this booklet.

Your College

Each Hub has a Welfare Advisor who can act as a point of contact for any welfare concerns that you feel are affecting your studies. They can liaise with your tutors within the College on your behalf, and, with your permission, arrange a meeting to discuss any challenges you are facing. You can ask to speak to the Welfare Advisor by visiting the Info Point in your Hub.

Troubleshooting

Your ASC mentor will be a good person to help you to manage day to day problems. You can talk to them about a wide range of issues. They will also be able to advise you about the best people to help with specific problems. Here are some other suggestions:

Academic issues

- Finding it hard to understand what is expected of you or don't understand the feedback you have been given for an assignment? Speak to your module tutor or personal tutor. You can book a time with them, drop in during their office hours or email them your questions. If this doesn't resolve the issue make an AccessAbility appointment and talk to an advisor.
- Have a question about mitigation, an administration or timetabling concern? Ask for help at your College Info Point.
- Worried that welfare concerns are having an impact on your studies? Go to the Info Point in your Hub and ask to speak to the Welfare Advisor.

Wellbeing Issues

- Feeling lonely or homesick? Talk to a Residence Life Mentor. It can also be useful to phone someone, perhaps a parent or a friend. You could phone Nightline and speak to a student volunteer.
- If you have been feeling low in mood for some time and feel that you need some support, you could book a TRA (telephone referral appointment) with Psychological Therapies and they will suggest appropriate support.
- Worried about your wellbeing? You should contact your GP. If you feel that you are at risk of harming yourself you should tell your GP immediately, and even call 999 if you feel that you need urgent help.
- If you are worried about your safety, or someone else, you can call the Estate Patrol or the Police.

Accommodation Issues

- Having difficulties with your flatmates or your neighbours are being very noisy? You can talk to a Residence Life Mentor for advice.
- Have a problem with your accommodation? E.g. something is not working properly; you can go to the nearest accommodation reception to let them know.
- If things really aren't working in your university accommodation, there is always the possibility of moving flats. Talk to the Accommodation Office about your options.

Wellbeing's Top Tips

- Don't panic if you feel that you haven't made friends in the first week – there's no time limit on getting to know people.
- Friendships can develop from different sources, such as your course, your accommodation and your interests.
- When you meet new people, introduce yourself and ask the other person's name.
- You shouldn't feel pressured into going out if you don't want to.
- You don't have to stay out really late at night to have fun and it's OK to go home when you're ready to.
- When you go out, it's up to you whether you have a soft drink or alcohol. Going out doesn't mean that you must drink alcohol. It's your decision.
- If you're in a shared flat, spend time in the living room and kitchen, so that you can say hello to people. If it helps you to feel more comfortable, you could take your laptop, so that you can work from there and chat to people as they come and go.
- Attend AccessAbility events in Freshers' Week and sign up for the social meetings available to you.
- You may find the first week at university quite hectic, but try and make a list of tasks to complete (such as registering with a GP), and another list of activities that you would like to do if you have time (such as finding out about sports clubs at the university).
- If you haven't declared a disability, and are seeking support, make an appointment with an AccessAbility Advisor.
- If you have support from a Specialist Mentor, discuss any concerns that you have with them, as they will be able to offer useful advice.

*'You already worked hard enough to get here,
so there's no doubt that you deserve to be here'*

– current student with ASC

Meeting People

Many students find meeting new people and starting conversations challenging. Unwritten social rules can be particularly confusing for students on the autistic spectrum and this can cause anxiety in social situations.

It can help to have some ideas of things to talk about in advance, either when starting a conversation, or moving a conversation on. Meeting people at university is often easier than meeting people in other situations because you immediately have things in common. You are probably both there for the same reason: to study.

Topic 1 – studies

- What are you studying?
- Are you enjoying it?
- What made you choose that subject?
- Do you know what you want to do with your degree?
- Do you have a lot of work already?
- How are you finding the work?
- Where do you tend to work?

Topic 2 – home

- Where is home?
- Do you miss it?
- What do you miss about being at home?
- What university accommodation are you in?
- What is it like?
- Do you get on with your flatmates?

Topic 3 – socialising

- Have you joined any clubs or societies yet?
- Which ones?
- Why did you decide on those ones?
- Do you tend to socialise with your flatmates?
- Where do you go out?

These are just ideas. With each question and answer, whether they ask you the same question back or not, you have an opportunity to share your opinions/feelings, applying the same question to yourself.

Top tips

Remember to listen to what someone is telling you. Often people are so anxious about thinking of a new question they don't listen to the detail of what someone is saying to them. There is usually something else you can ask to develop the conversation. For example, if someone is telling you that they like music, you could ask them:

- if they play an instrument
- who their favourite bands are
- if they are planning to see any gigs in Exeter

Don't be afraid of silence. Gaps are a natural part of the ebb and flow of a conversation. Often people panic when there is a pause in a conversation and feel a pressure to fill it immediately. Try looking around and talking about something you observe. That might be:

- a poster for an event that you can see
- you might comment on something about the room you are in

Don't worry if you find it difficult to understand body language. You can always check with someone if you need to clarify something or wait for them to make their feelings clear.

Make sure you appear interested. People like to be listened to and showing interest encourages them to continue talking to you. There are various ways to show you are listening that include making eye contact, nodding and responding with appropriate questions.

Try smiling at people. Giving out positivity tends to draw people to you. Smiling makes someone look welcoming and friendly which helps the other person to relax in your company.

Self-help

Often people find it easy to put themselves down when we are feeling stressed, and harder to build themselves up again. Sometimes when we are in the middle of a problem it is difficult to remember the things that can help us most. Here are some self-help top tips:

Remember your strengths

Everyone is different and has different strengths but here are some examples of positive qualities that many students with autism can relate to.

How many do you have?:

- Attention to detail
- In-depth knowledge of your subject areas
- Deep focus on your area of interest
- Creative thinking
- Honesty and loyalty
- Passion
- Determination
- Visual skills
- Non-judgemental of others
- Good at remembering facts
- Analytical thinking
- Novel approaches to problems
- Observational skills

SilverCloud

SilverCloud offers secure, immediate access to online cognitive behavioural therapy programmes, tailored to your specific needs. The programme can help with depression, anxiety and stress and also has a programme on body image. CBT helps you to identify and change those thought and behavioural patterns that have a negative influence on how you are feeling, helping you to make changes for the better. You can work through the resources at your own pace and in your own time.

You can access this for free through the University. Find out more here: www.exeter.ac.uk/wellbeing/self-help/online-therapy/silvercloud

Talk to someone

It is easy to think that we are the only one feeling a certain way but when we manage to speak to others about the things that are causing us stress, we often find they can relate or are even experiencing the same feelings. Try sharing a problem and see what happens.

For professional support please refer to 'What to do if you need help' on page 3.

Useful contacts:

AccessAbility

The Forum
Tel: 01392 723880
Email: accessability@exeter.ac.uk

Chaplaincy – Multi Faith

In person: In the Forum and room 110 in the Old Library.
Email: chaplaincy@exeter.ac.uk

Estate Patrol

Northcote House
Queen's Drive
Ext: 2222

Mental Health Team and Psychological Therapies

Wellbeing Services
Reed Mews Wellbeing Centre
Tel: 01392 724381
Email: wellbeing@exeter.ac.uk

Student Health Centre

Reed Mews
Streatham Drive
Tel: 01392 676606
Email: studenthealth@ex.ac.uk

Students' Guild Advice Unit

The Forum
Tel: 01392 723520
Email: advice@exeterguild.com

Nightline

Tel: 01392 724000
Skype: [exeterstudentnightline](https://www.skype.com/user/exeterstudentnightline)
Email: exeternightline@gmail.com

Residence Life Team

Tel: 01392 722875
Email: residencelife@exeter.ac.uk

Samaritans

Tel: 116 123
Text: 07725909090
Email: jo@samaritans.org

NHS Direct

Tel: 111