

A Buddy Scheme - supporting transition and progression for students with Asperger syndrome

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The Project

The aim of the project is to improve the experience for students with Asperger syndrome by developing a peer support scheme to assist transition and progression. In addition, the project aims to contribute to the employability of students who are recruited and trained to work as potential 'Buddies'.

What is Asperger syndrome?

Asperger syndrome can affect people in many different ways. The National Autistic Society describes it as 'a form of autism, which is a lifelong disability that affects how a person makes sense of the world, processes information and relates to other people'.

Background

Evidence taken from research projects conducted by the National Association of Disability Practitioners (Martin 2006) and the Higher Education Academy (Madriaga et al. 2008; Madriaga and Goodley 2009), suggests that the development of a buddy/befriending scheme would be of value to achieving learner autonomy for students on the autistic spectrum.

During the last couple of years the Disabled Student Support Team has received feedback from prospective students with Asperger syndrome who are keen to join a university run peer support scheme. The development of this project will build upon the success that has already been achieved by the staff led 'Mentor' service, by encouraging students to seek additional support from their peers.

Student Feedback

The 'Buddy Scheme' will be very helpful to new students, to help them navigate the University and to seek information..." **MComp Computer and Information Security**



"The scheme opens up new social opportunities in and out of University life which will provide a more fuller and rounded experience for students with Asperger syndrome here at Sheffield Hallam." **BA (Hons) Education and Disability Studies and Welfare Officer at Hallam Union.**

Successes and Achievements

- Student engagement and participation throughout the initial stages of the project
- Completion of a student led stakeholder event
- The establishment of links across faculties and departments

Potential Challenges

- The timeframe for the pilot scheme during semester two
- The recruitment and training of potential 'Buddies'
- The scope of the 'Buddy' role and its boundaries

Future Plans

- To evaluate the benefits of the scheme
- To implement the scheme as an annual support service for level 4 students with Asperger syndrome
- To promote the findings of the research on a national level

Support Needs

- Assistance to publicise the scheme to students across Sheffield Hallam University who may be interested in volunteering as 'Buddies'
- To establish further links with the Students' Union to ensure on-going student engagement with the scheme
- Support with evaluating the research that has been completed as part of the project

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