**Supporting autistic students undertaking field work**

## Context

Autistic students may find working in other settings, such as on residential and field trips, more challenging than their peers, due to issues related to changes to routine and environment, requirements around planning and organisation, and often an increased need for social interaction.

Some simple strategies and planning can ensure that autistic students are able to participate fully in field trips.

## Strategies

* **Talk with the student**

Autistic people are the experts on their autism and the requirements they have. They know what works and what doesn’t work for them, and what they will need to participate in the trip. Your starting point should always be to meet with the student to discuss the proposed trip and to understand any anxieties or requirements the student may have, and to involve Disability Services as required.

* **Plan ahead and share information**

Autistic students will benefit from additional information about all elements of the trip. Think through every aspect of the trip, from travel arrangements to preparatory work, accommodation requirements and group work elements. Provide clear, written information with instructions, including what the student is responsible for arranging, and what will be arranged by the School. Give students as much notice as possible of impending trips or activities; invite questions and make yourself available to talk through concerns. You may need to do this multiple times to alleviate inevitable anxieties around field trips.

* **Travel arrangements**

Many autistic people find using public transport difficult due to its unpredictability and having to travel in overwhelming environments with lots of other people. If students are expected to make their own way to venues, ensure you provide as much detail as possible regarding locations, routes, and alternative methods of travel. If students are travelling together, for example by coach, allow autistic students to select which part of the coach they would like to sit in and give full details of the journey (timings, scheduled stops, pick up and drop off points). It can help to provide photos of pick up and drop off points, and details of the coach company, to help students to identify where they need to be.

* **Accommodation**

Autistic students may find it difficult to share a room or bathroom facilities with other students. This is often due to sensory differences and the need to ‘decompress’ away from other people. Where possible, allow autistic students to be accommodated in separate rooms, with access to private bathroom facilities where possible. Where this is not possible, try to limit numbers. Provide photos of accommodation and facilities where possible, to allow students to build familiarity with new venues.

* **Food and catering**

Autistic people often have requirements around food and the eating environment. They may not be able to eat the food provided, or to eat with large groups of people. Where possible, provide students with full menus and details of meal arrangements to assist with planning. Allow students to eat earlier or later than the large group, or to eat separately if wished. Some students will also benefit from the option to self-cater if there are the facilities to do so.

* **Field trip activities**

Give some thought to the activities students will undertake on the trip. Group work is often an issue for autistic students (see the separate guidance on group work). Ensure instructions are clear and written down, with someone available to answer questions or give reassurance. Build rest breaks into the day as autistic students may find working in a different way, in a different location, more tiring than other students. Provide details around starting and finishing times, the location of toilet and other facilities, arrangements for travelling to and from the venue, the timings of meals and breaks, information about what to do if something goes wrong, and details of key contacts for the day.

* **Structuring ‘down time’**

Residential field trips often include unstructured social time, perhaps in the evenings, which can be difficult for autistic students to manage as the focus is on social interaction. It may help to plan some activities to structure the time. Alternatively, students may need time away from the group to decompress and recover from the day, and they should be allowed to do this in a way which does not impede their integration with the group. It is also important to allow autistic students time to switch off, rather than expecting them to complete additional work in the evenings.