**Supporting autistic students undertaking group work**

## Context

Lab or practical work in standard settings can present several difficulties for autistic students. **Please bear in mind that every experience of autism is unique, and not all autistic people will find group work challenging. No guidance can replace talking with your students and finding out what works for them.**

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| **Issue** | **Impact** | **Recommended adjustment** |
| Working with unfamiliar people | May be anxious working with unfamiliar people and find social interaction challenging.  May find it difficult to ask for help or initiate discussion. | Consider asking the group to introduce themselves quickly at the start of the session, or wear stickers with their names on to help identify each other. |
| Being able to leave the room if required | May need permission to leave the room, but sometimes this is practically difficult to do. | Enable student to sit at the front of the room, or close to the door, and reserve space accordingly. |
| Understanding instructions | May find it difficult to understand from the instructions given **how** something should be done, not just **what** needs to be done.  More detail may be required, with the option to seek clarification. | Give written instructions with additional detail where possible.  Identify a key contact for questions (see below).  Ensure instructions are in plain English and clearly formatted.  Consider a Specialist Practical Assistant if this is a particular issue; contact Disability Services to discuss. |
| Unfamiliar environments | Labs may be unfamiliar environments, and this may cause anxiety.  Student may not instinctively know where items are, and it can be difficult to ask. | Arrange for a brief individual tour or familiarisation session in advance where possible so that the student can become familiar with the environment and ask questions.  Allow the student to sit at the same workstation/seat/bench.  Consider creating a separate small, quiet place for the student to work if required.  Keep equipment in labelled cupboards. |
| Working within time restraints | May process information differently and may run out of time as a result.  This increases anxiety | Additional instructions may help the student work out the requirements more quickly.  Identify a key person who can introduce themselves to the student at the start of the session and be available for questions or clarification.  The student may also need support in catching up on anything missed as a result of running out of time, or missing sessions for disability-related reasons. |
| Unclear rules and expectations | May not intuitively understand all requirements or may find important rules around health and safety increase anxiety. | Explain what the rules and expectations are, why these are important, and the consequences of not following them.  Consider a bullet pointed list for reference. |
| Sensory overwhelm | May have heightened senses and process senses differently, leading to overload, anxiety and distress. | Identify the prevalence and impact of the following:   * Bright overhead lighting (especially strip lighting). * Noisy equipment * Unusual and/or strong smells * Unusual and/or loud sounds * Uncomfortable lab wear such as lab coats, goggles and masks   Consider alternatives such as angle poise desk lamps, ear defenders or ear plugs, masks or seating. |