Effective Support and Understanding for Autistic Students in Higher Education

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**The problem & the solution**

- The autistic student experience is complicated
  - Major life transition
  - Under diagnosis
  - Mental health
  - Masking or camouflaging
- Poor post-graduation employment stats

- **REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS!**
  - Changes that can benefit everyone
  - Ongoing process not a one-off event
  - Actually enforce / apply the adjustments

[dart.ed.ac.uk/supporting-autistic-people-in-he](dart.ed.ac.uk/supporting-autistic-people-in-he)
They don’t seem to need adjustments...

- Don’t judge an autistic student by their capacity to seem to cope
  - Effective and skillful masking
  - Burnout and collapse at the end of the day / term / etc.

- Adjustments are there for the bad days - if effective they appear less necessary
- These are still NEEDS, even if they’re also WANTED by other folk

- What if you think you’re being taken for a ride?
  - This is a great time to seek advice from an autistic colleague!
Who identifies reasonable adjustments?

- Not just you & not just them - it’s an ongoing process
- If resources are an issue, be **honest** but also commit to finding that resource - it’s the law!
- They are not trying to catch you out: open and honest communication will always help

- Sometimes they will know
- Sometimes they won’t know:
  - Help autistic students connect with other autistic people
  - Connect with University services (but maintain a critical eye)
  - Social media has loads of ideas - prioritise autistic experiences
  - **Read our web page!**
Furthermore…

TAKE HOME: Make adjustments in partnership with your student and enforce them

- Not all autistic students will be diagnosed, or disclosed
- Many of your colleagues will be autistic too!
- Create an environment where differences are respected and support is freely given
- Understanding trumps awareness
- Autistic experiences trump your degree

Thank you!