TASO

Supporting disabled students

University of Bath:
Enhanced Theory of Change

June 2024

Enhanced Theory of Change (EToC)

TASO SDS: University of Bath

Supporting transition to Bath for students with lived experience of ASC

Contents

ENHANCED THEORY OF CHANGE DIAGRAM
- [See full Enhanced Theory of Change (PDF)](#)
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ENHANCED THEORY OF CHANGE UNDERPINNING NARRATIVE
VERSION This EToC was developed from October 2023 – March 2023 during the course of the TASO funded 'Supporting Disabled Students 2' project. During the development phase, we carried out two workshops to develop our multi-intervention level EToC for transition support at Bath for students with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC). Workshop 1 focused on identifying our outcomes (short, intermediate, long and impact), and workshop 2 focused on capturing our process (inputs, activities, outputs). We then fine-tuned our EToC over several weeks in collaboration with several stakeholders. This is a multi-intervention EToC considering our overall system of transition support for students with ASC at Bath, and so we have included several interventions within the ToC. Contributors: Jenny Boyle, Walid Daffri, Katie Masterton, Susan Fielding, Joel Staley
NAME Supporting disabled student transitions: Developing evidence-informed transition support for students with ASC at the University of Bath.

WHY IS THE INTERVENTION BEING RUN?

There is an increasing need to provide more accessible and inclusive support for individuals with ASC as the number of students who identify as having ASC continues to rise. The data shows that the number of home students with ASC almost doubled from 6775 to 12815 between 2014 and 2019 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019). This is especially relevant considering that these students are 10 times more likely to drop out of university. Newman et al. (2011) note that less than 40% of students with ASC finish their university studies. The academic and social demands of university can be particularly challenging for students with ASC (Gurbuz et al. 2019); these can include:

- Difficulties with social participation: students with ASC may struggle with social interactions at university, facing challenges in understanding social cues and forming connections with peers.
- Mental health problems: the academic pressure, coupled with the social complexities of university life, can contribute to heightened stress and anxiety levels for students with ASC. The challenges they face in adapting to new environments, managing coursework, and coping with social expectations may exacerbate existing mental health concerns or lead to the development of new ones.
- Lack of support for non-academic concerns: students with ASC may require support beyond academic assistance, such as help with daily routines, sensory sensitivities, or emotional regulation. Universities may not always have comprehensive support systems in place to address these non-academic concerns.

These challenges are among the leading causes of such high dropout rate (Gelbar et al. 2014; Anderson et al. 2017; Jansen et al. 2018). Students with ASC were also reported to face issues with the social skills required to thrive within the university, anxiety, difficulties to make friends, self-advocacy, and managing emotions (White et al. 2016, Elias and White 2018, Jackson et al. 2018).

For this reason, the support services provided by higher education institutions, particularly those concerning transition, are vital for a positive and successful university experience. Chiang et al. (2012), reporting on a study involving over 800 students with autism, state that one of the most effective ways to ensure university attendance is successful transition planning. Achieving a smooth transition is crucial for student outcomes across the lifecycle, in particular when considering our continuation rates for students with ASC. There is a well-established link between successful student transition to university and student retention, and at Bath, we are proud of our high continuation rates for all students. Our 2021/22 continuation rate for students with a declared disability is 96.4%, with a 4-year average gap of 95.3%. However, further analysis of our data identifies a 1.0pp gap in continuation rates between students with a declared disability and without in 2021/22, and 4-year average gap of 2.5pp. The group most at risk of not continuing are students with declared Social or Communication challenges who have a 4-year average continuation rate of 93.5% and a 4.3pp gap to students with no declared disability.

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WHO IS THE INTERVENTION FOR?

The transition interventions considered within this ToC are available for any pre- and post-entry student with ASC, and we do not require a formal diagnosis for students to participate in our transition interventions. Therefore, there are several beneficiaries:

- **Students (new and current):**

o   Prospective students benefit from the interventions within this EToC by increasing their knowledge of support available at Bath for them during their transition journey, and their knowledge of life at Bath. This leads to a higher chance that their applications will be successful, and to more positive post-transition outcomes.

o   Some interventions, such as the Campus Buddy Scheme provides the opportunity for current students to improve their employability skills by providing valuable volunteering experience for second and third-year students, in the role of Campus Buddy. Some Campus Buddies who, because of their disability, may be less likely to undertake placements or obtain work experience during university, also benefit from this opportunity..

- **Staff:**

  o   Staff members will benefit from the training and knowledge on supporting students with ASC and related challenges. This enhances their professional skills, enabling staff to develop more effective strategies for fostering ASC inclusive environments, designing accessible curriculum, and implementing tailored support mechanisms.

- **Institution:**

  o   The implementation of the transition interventions within our ToC also brings about several benefits for the university. Demonstrating commitment to inclusivity and accessibility can lead to attracting a broader range of students seeking support during their academic journey, thereby, increasing applications and enrolment from students with ASC.

  o   Through these transition interventions, the institution also fosters a sense of community among students, contributing to higher levels of student satisfaction and retention.

WHAT IS THE INTERVENTION? Multi-intervention support for students with ASC

The interventions included in this multi-intervention approach ToC are as follows:

- **Autism&Uni toolkit:** Potential neurodiverse applicants and current students can access a wide range of detailed information about UoB via the Autism & Uni Toolkit. Students are signposted to this information during the admissions

process, through contact with the Disability Service or via a pre-entry appointment with a Disability Adviser. This information helps students identify their individual considerations to prepare for University and facilitates awareness and access to the support available. Potential applicants can gauge the suitability of the University without relying on Open Days or in-person activities. The range of content also supports orientation (through student stories about how to prepare for university life, settling into university and accessing reasonable adjustments) and navigation of campus and professional services by providing photographs and detailed instructions on how to locate key buildings on campus.

- **Beginning at Bath:** targeted at autistic learners to aid their transition to UoB. Students identifying on the Autism Spectrum are invited to attend a 2-day residential on campus that involves staying overnight in first-year university accommodation. This programme offers ASC students the opportunity to socially interact with other applicants, meet current students, learn about the support services available to them, and orientate and navigate the University before Welcome Week. Further sessions are also run by University of Bath academics, Students' Union representatives and professional services staff on the following topics: 'Welcome to the SU', Introduction to Moodle and Academic Skills, Social Networking Group Introduction, Disability Advice drop-in sessions, 'Current Students' Experiences of Joining Bath', a library tour, 'Introduction to Assistive Technology' and 'Making the Transition to University a Positive One'. Parents are also invited to attend information gathering sessions on the first day, to hear from current students, ask questions of the Disability Service team and form networks with other parents, with the aim of enabling them to confidently navigate and support their student's transition.

- **Appointment with a Disability Adviser pre-entry**: With the Admissions Progression team, the Disability Service proactively identifies and contacts all students who have shared a declaration of a disability/permanent condition. We recognise that many neurodiverse, international and newly diagnosed individuals may not resonate with the term "disability" but may still benefit from individualised adjustments. During the appointment medical evidence is scrutinised and if relevant

additional diagnostic pathways may be discussed to obtain further evidence, opening the door for further support if required. Consequently, information about the Disability Service is disseminated at numerous contact points and from a range of stakeholders (academic departments, Admissions and Student Support & Safeguarding) to encourage interaction.

We assume that those who engage pre-entry with the Disability Service experience a better transition and implementation of their support because it is put in place from the start. These students may: benefit from discussions and Disability Access Plans (DAPs) being implemented before the start of the academic year; be better engaged with their academic department; have completed more time-intensive and administrative heavy tasks, (e.g. applying for DSA and the Needs Assessment process); and have applied for additional support such as specialist accommodation, funding towards additional ensuite costs, car parking permits or non-DSA funded support. Pre-entry activities enable Disability Advisers to identify and share information with applicants regarding:

- other transition interventions (such as Campus Buddies or Beginning at Bath),
- other key contacts in the academic department or Student Support (e.g. Director of Studies, subject librarian, counselling or Student Money Support etc),
- the Autism Social Group,
- Social Networking Group and SU activities,
- accessing or arranging a pre-entry referral with mental health or retention teams,
- gaining access to the Assistive Technology Room or Sensory Room in the library,
- special accommodation requirements (such as a quiet block or fridge needed for medication),
- how to register with a GP at University,

- how to sign up for our ADHD support group and practical discussions about life skills or activities to prepare for the university environment

The culmination of these pre-entry activities can lead to students' individual needs being met effectively, as they have proactively engaged with tailored support mechanisms.

- **1:1 Campus Tours -** 1:1 tours for any neurodiverse prospective students are tailored to each student's interests and requests but generally include a tour of campus identifying key buildings relevant to the student's interests (e.g. sports training village) and course, meeting with the Student Support team, viewing campus facilities and accommodation, meeting with the Disability Service (to be provided with information and support for applying to DSA) and academic departments. These tours allow students to visit in a calm, quiet way but to experience real life on campus typically during the semester, as the University-wide Open Days can be busy and overwhelming. Students will ideally have their tour with a neurodivergent student ambassador providing them with first-hand experience and information from another autistic student, which can lead to increased wellbeing and confidence, and decreased anxiety as students feel part of a larger community. These are initially arranged via the Campus Events team, with close liaison with the Disability Service. Other Advisers within Student Support may also attend to give more specialist guidance if required.
- **Campus Buddy Scheme** - Students attending Beginning at Bath, and those identified in Disability Service pre-entry work are also offered a Campus Buddy. This scheme is a support intervention activity for ASC and/or socially anxious first-year students transitioning into the University and the outcome is to improve students' confidence by providing the opportunity to build social networks and engaged with peers; give students an increased sense of community, belonging and integration and prevent social isolation during their transition
- **Referrals between Recruitment and Admissions and Student Support and Safeguarding:** An integrated referral process is crucial for a joined-up transition journey and ensuring students can access the support they need throughout

their application process. The Admissions Teams, for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, provide the basis of communication with applicants and disseminate targeted information raising awareness of the Disability Service to both those who have, and those who have not declared a disability. Students who apply via extenuating circumstances are reviewed and information is shared with the Disability Service on a case-by-case basis to ensure that support is highlighted and implemented as appropriate. Regular emails are sent out to all applicants to ensure that there are numerous touch points to encourage engagement with the Disability Service as early as possible.

- **Training of Campus Buddies:** The Disability Support team are responsible for providing four hours of training to our Campus Buddies on topics such as Autism Awareness, Confidentiality, How to Support a Student as a Campus Buddy, Working Boundaries, Language and Terminology, Support for Campus Buddies and Mental Health training. Buddies are also provided with a handbook during their training to remind them of their responsibilities and how to escalate any problems or concerns they may have with the Disability Support team.

- **Training and Awareness raising:** We have an existing programme of training for student facing staff (Pastoral Support Training) which is delivered centrally to raise awareness of the challenges which students with ASC may face. DAPs contain individualised information about students, but fact sheets are also available via the Disability Service (and our web pages) regarding how to support students with a range of disabilities. Departmental training by the Disability Service and discussions with academic staff also take place on regular basis to familiarise staff with how to best support students.

WHO IS DELIVERING THE INTERVENTION?

Interventions delivered by Student Support and Safeguarding are overseen by the Disability Service (including the Disability Support Coordinators and Disability Advisers) with support from Student Ambassadors, Campus Buddies, University of Bath academics and professional services staff (e.g. lecturers in Education, Academic Skills Centre professionals, Assistive Technology professionals and librarians).

Our Recruitment and Admissions team support with referrals to the Disability Service when they identify students who may need additional support.

The APP Impact team has developed monitoring and evaluation systems and processes for training and interventions within this EToC.

HOW/WHERE/HOW MANY TIMES IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED? WILL THE INTERVENTION BE TAILORED?

- **Autism&Uni Toolkit:**
  o As this is an online tool, it is available all year to prospective and current students. Information is updated throughout the year, as required, by the Disability Support Co-ordinators.
- **Appointment with a Disability Advisor pre-entry:**
  o These appointments are offered via email from the Admissions team and directly from the Disability Advice team to all disabled students throughout the spring and summer before they start University. Typically, our Disability Advisers will provide one appointment per student (parents are welcome to also attend). However, follow-up appointments are arranged, both prior to arrival and when the student's course has started, as required, as well as follow-up emails if students have further queries.
- **Beginning at Bath:**
  o This programme occurs once a year during the second or third week of September (about two weeks before Welcome Week) to enable students to return home and utilise the information provided to help prepare for arrival. Around 90 students are invited (up to 40 places are available to ensure participant numbers are not overwhelming) who have been identified through the pre-entry phase if eligible (either as a direct result of a disability advice

appointment, or without contact but where criteria for invitation have been met – e.g. social anxiety or ASC) and they have also agreed they are available and interested in attending.

- **Campus Buddies:**
  - This programme occurs once a year during Semester 1 (5 hours of engagement during Welcome Week and 1 hour of engagement per week of Semester 1 are expected/recommended). In recent years campus buddies have potentially extended support on an ad hoc basis to semester 2 for a small number of individuals. This programme was originally designed to support ASC students but in recent years campus buddies have also supported those with social anxiety and ADHD on a case by cases basis (via internal referral). Campus buddies can also potentially support more than one student.

- **Recruitment and Training of Campus Buddies:**
  - Recruitment and training of Campus Buddies occurs once a year, typically during April. Recruitment takes place from February, and roles are advertised via the SU website, posters, social medial channels, plasma screens in waiting areas, as well as direct contact with some academic departments (e.g. Psychology). Interviews and referencing of volunteers take place in March with training undertaken in April. Two training sessions are provided, one in person and one online to cover autism awareness and practical strategies to support ASC students. These sessions are delivered primarily by the Disability Support team with input and contributions from the Disability Advisers, an external Autism charity or an in-house Mental Health Adviser. All sessions are ideally provided face-to-face; however, there is an online option for students to join these training sessions via Teams. They are provided with a handbook and details regarding escalation for further support to ensure boundaries of their role. Group feedback takes place during the end of Semester 1 and Campus Buddies who participate in further years still undertake the process of recruitment and training each year.

- **1:1 Campus Tours:**

o These tours are offered throughout the year to prospective ASC students and can be booked in around the individual's availability and tailored to their individual interests. 1:1 tours are primarily organised by the campus events team, and would involve interaction with academic departments, professional services and other facilities (e.g. residential life or sports training village) to address the needs of the individual.

HOW WILL IMPLEMENTATION BE OPTIMISED?

Evaluation methodologies have been embedded across all interventions. The Disability Service and Admissions Team have a targeted communications strategy for identifying and inviting relevant ASC students to the programmes during the pre-entry and admissions process. Information for our transition activities is publicised by the Disability Service web pages, during pre-entry Disability Advice appointments and Open Days. Student ambassadors are recruited via the SU, posters, plasma screens in waiting areas around campus, word of mouth and targeted emails to current students.

The Disability Support team are responsible for recruiting new Campus Buddies each year. Campus Buddies are recruited via the SU, posters, plasma screens in waiting areas around campus, word of mouth and targeted emails to current students. Once interviewed, referenced, and deemed suitable for this voluntary role, the Disability Support Co-ordinators then provide four hours of training to the Campus Buddy cohort and provide them with a handbook. Campus Buddies are responsible for helping ASC students with their transition into university by providing them with weekly support during Semester 1 of their studies. This can include orientation of campus, walking the student around their timetable, showing the main facilities (e.g. library gym, places to eat and shop), helping the student getting items such as their library card, registering with the medical centre/dentist, accompanying the student to Welcome Week events, taking the bus into town and learning bus routes and timetables and answering questions about University life. Campus Buddies also provide up to 5 hours of support during Welcome Week to attend activities and events with their student during this busy week.

The Disability Support team are also responsible for recruiting, referencing and training the Beginning at Bath Ambassadors for two hours before the event and providing them with a handbook. We have limits on the number of students who can attend Beginning at Bath due to staffing numbers, as well as the number of Campus Buddies we can provide (currently this takes place only during Semester One, apart from a few exceptions, but this could be extended as a whole programme into Semester 2 for ASC students wanting this continued support).

During this project, we have also developed a set of recommendations to improve our provision and we have included an example workplan for implementation in Appendix 1.

WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS / STAKEHOLDERS?

- The Disability Service team (Disability Support Co-ordinators and Disability Advisers), Campus Buddies, Student Ambassadors, academic and professional services staff
- The wider Student Support and Safeguarding team
- The Student Recruitment and Admissions team, in particular the WP Outreach team
- The Access and Participation Impact team, responsible for monitoring and evaluation all APP related activity
- The SU, and student voice organisations, to ensure student voice continues to be embedded into our provision

CHANGE MECHANISMS

1. Pre-entry comms to students raising awareness of or signposting to Disability Advice webpages and resources **-> accessible online ASC support resources ensure students are aware of and able to access support earlier** -> students identify their support needs and access the right support earlier in their university journey.

- o Pre-entry comms to students raise awareness of Disability Advice webpages and online resources, such as the Autism&Uni toolkit, and signpost to transition activities which students can sign up for
- o This early awareness raising and signposting through accessible online resources ensures students are aware of the support made available to them by Bath. It also ensures they access that support earlier in their journey.
- o This leads to support which more efficiently and effectively meets student needs which builds student confidence in our support services and allows students to engage more with their studies.

2. Development of data collection and monitoring and evaluation systems alongside the use of case studies, testimonials or success stories -> **increased understanding of barriers faced by ASC students and increased staff confidence in meeting student needs** -> Staff members are well-informed and able to provide students with reliable and accurate guidance whenever needed.

- o Emphasising the importance of staff having an in-depth and accurate understanding of the barriers faced by and the needs of students with ASC. This component recognises the need for precise and accurate data collection, and consistent and robust monitoring and evaluation of interventions and resources.
- o By instilling a culture of understanding what works and sharing best practice, the University of Bath aims to establish a support system where staff consistently provide and are provided with accurate and accessible information.
- o This will ensure that staff members are well informed and that students with ASC can rely on staff members for accurate guidance at any time. The commitment to accuracy enhances the overall effectiveness of the support services offered to students throughout their university experience.

3. Providing pastoral care training for student facing staff with an emphasis on the needs of students with ASC and effective training to student-facing staff **-> training equips staff with the skills and understanding to support student needs ->** Staff members are well-informed and able to provide students with reliable and accurate guidance whenever needed.

- o The implementation of systematic training for student-facing staff aims to ensure that the support provided is appropriate and effective in meeting student needs.
- o By equipping staff with the necessary skills and understanding, the training enables them to identify need and confidently and proficiently address student queries.
- o This will ensure that staff members are well informed and that students with ASC can rely on staff members for accurate support at any time, contributing to a more effective and supportive environment during students' transition journeys.

4. Streamlined, early and direct referral processes from professional services teams into the Disability Service team, and pre-entry engagement with Disability Support Services, specifically appointments with Disability Advisors -> **timely and accurate provision of information about tailored support for students in need ->** Students are better informed about what support is available to them early in their journey and are better able to identify their needs.
   - o Direct referral processes between support services ensures that students engage with support early and are informed about the availability of tailored support that is relevant to their needs early in their transition journey.
   - o Integrated referral processes between support services at earliest point of contact with students ensures students know about the support which is available to them earlier in the process and engage with this support early. This allows them to apply for any additional support or funding if needed prior to their arrival.
   - o This leads to support which more efficiently and effectively meets student needs which builds student confidence in our support services and allows students to engage more with their studies.

5. Campus Buddy scheme intervention provides opportunities for students to build social networks and engage with peers -> **increased student wellbeing and confidence, and decreased anxiety as students feel part of a community at Bath ->** increased knowledge of the student experience at Bath leading to a more successful transition.

- o Through our buddying scheme, students are introduced to opportunities to build social networks and engage with peers and communities.
- o This will increase student wellbeing and confidence and combat social isolation by encouraging students to feel part of a community at Bath.
- **o** This will ensure students feel more confident and knowledgeable about the student experience at Bath during their transition journey, and will feel better equipped to become a student at Bath.

6. Interventions which provide early induction, familiarisation and orientation opportunities for ASC students, such as our Campus 1-1 tours or Beginning at Bath **-> increased student knowledge about the different academic and social landscapes at Bath and the different range of support available to them ->** students have increased knowledge of student life at Bath, ensuring a more successful transition and better post-transition outcomes

- o Implementing interventions designed to familiarise students with transition to university ensures that they have increased knowledge about both the social and academic landscapes at Bath and the support available to them.
- o This will increase knowledge about the transition process and equip students with skills to adapt to life at Bath and engage with the different range of support available to them which will ensure they have clear expectations of university life.
- **o** Subsequently, students will be better prepared for transition, leading to improved learning outcomes, better overall well-being and higher satisfaction with the institution.

7. Interventions which provide opportunities for parents, carers or guardians of students with ASC to learn about the support available (to them/students) **-> increased parent/carer/guardian understanding of how the University of Bath will interact with them and their child** -> Parents/carers/guardians have clear expectations and knowledge about the support available at Bath.

- o Implementing interventions designed to familiarise parents, carers or guardians with transition to university ensures that they have increased knowledge about the support available.
- o This will increase parent/carer/guardian understanding of how the University of Bath will interact with them and their child and will ensure they have clear expectations of university life.
- o Subsequently, parents can support their children's transition contributing to improvement in student wellbeing, confidence, and a reduction in student anxiety.

ASSUMPTIONS

- **Assumption 1** – We assume that pre-entry comms or engagement shared with students will lead to engagement with our online resources, and that this will lead to an increase in student sign-ups for our transition activities.
- **Assumption 2** – We assume that those who engage pre-entry with the Disability Service experience a better transition and implementation of their support because it is put in place from the start. These students may: benefit from discussions and Disability Access Plans (DAPs) being implemented before the start of the academic year; be better engaged with their academic department; have completed more time-intensive and administrative heavy tasks, (e.g. applying for DSA and the Needs Assessment process); and have applied for additional support such as specialist accommodation, funding towards additional ensuite costs, car parking permits or non-DSA funded support.
- **Assumption 3** – We assume that if students' needs are identified earlier in their journey and are more effectively met, they will be better able to engage with their studies, which will positively impact their overall wellbeing, attainment, and retention.
- **Assumption 4** – We assume that insights from data analysis and embedded monitoring and evaluation systems will be accurate and will contribute to sharing best practice between student facing staff.

- **Assumption 5** – We assume that staff will engage with training workshops and resources as part of CPD and that this training will lead to a change in behaviours, attitudes, and a better understanding of students with ASC. This is based on feedback from existing training provision.
- **Assumption 6** – We assume that staff who engage with training will feel more confident in their ability to provide the right support for students with ASC, and that this will lead to more students engaging with support services.
- **Assumption 7 -** We assume a streamlined and integrated referrals process will identify students who require additional support throughout each student's individual transition journey and will successfully signpost these students to the appropriate support services. This is based on experience with our existing referrals process.
- **Assumption 8 -** We assume students who attend transition interventions will engage with the material, resources and information provided. This is based on previous experience of delivering these interventions.
- **Assumption 9 -** We assume that, given the opportunity, students will engage with social networks and opportunities provided. This is based on experience of the successful uptake of programmes such as the Autism Social Group and Campus Buddy scheme.
- **Assumption 10** – We assume that students who learn more about life at Bath will feel that they belong at Bath, and will see themselves as part of the community, especially if they learn about social networks and opportunities which they can join, and support which will be available for them.
- **Assumption 11** – We assume that if students engage with social networks and opportunities, this will combat social isolation and to lead to increased student wellbeing.
- **Assumption 12** -We assume that parents, carers or guardians will engage with transition interventions if provided with the opportunity.

- **Assumption 13** – We assume that after parents, carers or guardians engage with transition interventions, they will support student transitions to Bath. This is based on previous experience with similar interventions, and feedback from students and parents, carers or guardians.
- **Assumption 14** – We assume that students who engage with transition interventions will build key skills which can help them adapt during their transition journey, such as communication skills, problem-solving and resilience.
- **Assumption 15** – We assume that our transition interventions will equip students with knowledge about the academic landscape at Bath, which will help to manage their expectations, adapt to the changes more quickly and support a more successful transition and better post-transition outcomes.

WHAT IS THE EVALUATION AIM?

The aim of the evaluation methods embedded across our transition system are:

- To understand the impact of our interventions, and ensure their efficiency, and,
- To estimate the value for money of our interventions.

WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS?

Evaluation questions will vary across interventions:

Referrals Process

Evaluation questions:

- Does a streamlined referral process lead to ASC students being better informed about what support is available early in their journey and are they better equipped to identify their needs?
- Does this lead to students reporting improvements in their needs being better met by support services?
- Do ASC students have improved attainment in their Year 1 exams?

Currently we evaluate this by:

- Process evaluation carried out by individual teams and impact reporting for the APP team on an annual basis.

Plans to improve evaluation:

- More consistent approach to process and impact evaluation. Ensuring same templates are used across all teams.
- Feedback survey embedded into referral process to gauge student satisfaction with referral process.

Training

Evaluation question:

- Does ASC training and resources lead to increased competency of student- facing staff with supporting ASC students' transitions?
- Are ASC students effectively supported and signposted to appropriate support?
- Are students with ASC more equipped to achieve academic and personal success during Year 1?
- Do students with ASC achieve favourable results in their Year 1 exams?

- Are staff members consistently available and well-informed to provide ASC students with reliable and accurate guidance whenever needed?
- Is more accurate and reliable information being provided to students with ASC?
- Are support services offered to ASC students more effective throughout their university experience?

Currently we evaluate this by:

- Online feedback surveys sent to all staff participants.

Plans to improve evaluation:

- More consistent approach to feedback surveys implemented across all teams who complete Disability Awareness training.
- More consistent and accurate tracking of referrals into student support teams by all staff.

Online Resources

Evaluation questions:

- Are students with ASC able to access relevant information to received tailored support from support services and academic departments?
- Is the support put into place effective in meeting ASC students' needs?
- Are ASC students better prepared for their transition into University?
- Do ASC students who engage with online resources have improved learning outcomes?

- Do ASC students who engage with online resources have better overall well-being and higher satisfaction with the institution?
- Do ASC students who engage with online resources achieve favourable results in their Year 1 exams?

Currently we evaluate this by:

- Anecdotal verbal and email feedback from parents/carers/guardians, students and staff.

Plans to improve:

- Formal survey to be sent to all Year 1 disabled students about what online resources they accessed, to find out: what resources were helpful, did they find everything they needed, was anything unclear or missing?

Pre-entry appointments

Evaluation questions:

- Through pre-entry engagement with Admission and the Disability Service are ASC have increased knowledge about the academic landscape at Bath and the different range of support available to them?
- Are ASC students equipped with the skills to adapt to change (transition), develop coping mechanisms and build new habits?
- Are ASC students' needs being met by support services?

- Do ASC students, who have engaged with pre-entry, have improved attainment at the end of Year 1 compared to those who have not?

Currently we evaluate this by:

- Anecdotal verbal and email feedback from parents/carers/guardians, students and staff.

Plans to improve:

- Annual survey to all students regarding effectiveness of all Disability Advice appointments throughout the year (including pre-entry).

Beginning at Bath

Evaluation questions:

- Do ASC students feel more prepared with relevant skills and information, including orientation and academic support and opportunities for social engagement, to transition into their first year at the University of Bath?
- Are ASC students able to build new habits during their transition into University?
- Does participation in Beginning at Bath lead to better-prepared students with improved learning outcomes, better overall well-being and higher satisfaction with the institution?
- Do ASC students have increased wellbeing and confidence and decreased anxiety as they feel part of a larger community?
- Do parents/carers/guardians have clearer expectations and increased understanding of how the University of Bath will interact with and support them and their child during transition?
- Do parents/carers/guardians have increased knowledge about the support available to them and their students?

- Do parents/carers/guardians have a solid foundation established for interaction and collaboration with the University to support their students with ASC?
- Do parents/carers/guardians better support and prepare their ASC students with their transition and encourage more engagement with the support services at University?

Currently we evaluate this by:

- Feedback surveys (in two parts: one survey at the beginning and another survey at the end of the two-day residential) gauging confidence levels of students on various areas.
- A separate feedback survey is provided to parents/carers/guardians to complete at the end of the event, or via a QR code, after the event.
- Verbal feedback from students, parents, guardians and carers during the event (e.g. welcome session, parent session and wrap-up session).
- Anecdotal email feedback from parents and participants often received after the event.
- Beginning at Bath reunion is held two months after the event to gain informal feedback about how students' transition is progressing.
- Anecdotal feedback during Disability Advice appointments and Autism Social Group throughout first semester.

Plans to improve evaluation:

- More formal survey to be sent to participants at the end of Semester 1 and/or end of whole first year to gauge success of transition to University. Comparison of continuation, retention and progression data (e.g. withdrawals of attendees vs non-attendees)

Campus Buddies

Evaluation questions:

- Have ASC students, who participated in the Campus Buddy scheme, built a social network and engaged with peers and communities on campus?
- Are ASC students, who participated in the Campus Buddy scheme, equipped with skills to adapt to change (transition), developed coping mechanisms and built new habits?
- Do ASC students, who participated in the Campus Buddy scheme, have an increased sense of community and belonging and feel less socially isolated?
- Do ASC students, who participated in the Campus Buddy scheme, have increased wellbeing and confidence and decreased anxiety as they feel part of a larger community?
- Do ASC students have improved overall satisfaction, well-being and academic success?
- Do ASC students have an increased sense of trust and confidence in University support services?
- Do ASC students achieve favourable results in their Year 1 exams?

Currently we evaluate this by:

- Two feedback sessions in-person (one for Campus Buddies and one for students) facilitated by Disability Support staff

- Anecdotal feedback from Campus Buddies and students during Semester 1 via telephone, Autism Social Group, email and Disability Advice appointments.

Plans to improve:

- For those Campus Buddies and students who cannot or do not want to attend the in-person feedback sessions, send an online feedback survey to be completed.

Autism Social Group

Evaluation questions:

- Have ASC students, who participate in the Autism Social Group, built a social network and engaged with peers on campus?
- Do ASC students, who participate in the Autism Social Group, have an increased sense of community and belonging, and feel less socially isolated?
- Do ASC students have increased wellbeing and confidence and decreased anxiety as they feel part of a larger community?
- Do ASC students have improved overall satisfaction, well-being and academic success?
- Do ASC students have an increased sense of trust and confidence in University support services?
- Do ASC students achieve favourable results in their Year 1 exams?

Currently we evaluate this by:

- Online survey at the beginning of Semester 1 for all attendees, and then a survey at the end of the programme at the end of Semester 2.

WHAT METHODOLOGY ARE YOU USING?

SDS Project Methodology

- **Objective:** To assess transition support for students with ASC at the University of Bath.
- **Method:** Utilised a mixed methods approach of two components for comprehensive insights:
  - **Qualitative Component:** Structured Interviews
    - Conducted one-on-one interviews with five ASC-diagnosed students.
    - Explored lived experiences, challenges, and successes during university transition.
    - Interviews audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded.
    - Themes developed to inform the Theory of Change (ToC) assessment.
  - **Quantitative Component:** Student Support, Safeguarding, and Engagement Data Analysis
    - Examined data sets provided by Student Support and Safeguarding.
    - Analysed engagement and exam outcomes of ASC-diagnosed students.
    - Identified limited conclusive findings due to small sample size and data access barriers.
- **Conclusion:**
  - Mixed methods approach provided nuanced insights into transition support effectiveness.
  - Proposed actions for improving disability data governance.
  - Recommendations include improving data governance and exploring larger datasets for future analysis.

Future evaluation frameworks for interventions & EToC:

In order to ensure the efficacy and impact of our interventions, comprehensive evaluation processes have been established:

- **Interventions:** as indicated earlier in this report, all intervention will be evaluated as per the questions under the section "What Are the Evaluation Questions?" above. They will be reviewed and monitored annually in alignment with existing Access and Participation Plan (APP) impact reporting requirements. Additionally, theories of change aligned with the individual interventions will also be reviewed annually as part of the APP monitoring and evaluation process. Following that, individual teams will conduct process evaluations of interventions or resources according to their team planning cycles, ensuring ongoing refinement and improvement.
- **EToC**: The project team is currently developing an implementation workplan based on the recommendations from this project. The implementation of this EToC will be reviewed against key indicators of success as detailed in the example Implementation Workplan in Appendix 1. This will ensure alignment between the interventions and the desired outcomes, facilitating adjustments and improvements where necessary.
- **Impact**: The impact of the transition interventions in our EToC can also be evaluated through assessing the successful transition of students with ASC into Year 1, and their academic achievements. Alongside this, analysis of survey data such as the National Student Survey (NSS) and our internal Be Well survey, administered by Student Support and Safeguarding, can provide an indication of student satisfaction, wellbeing, and sense of belonging. This analysis will also inform ongoing adjustments to support mechanisms.

RISK AND LIMITATION	MITIGATION
There is a risk that staff or student ambassadors do not have sufficient knowledge to deliver talks or workshops during residentials.	Training will be delivered and provided to all staff and students.

There are risks handling student personal characteristic data during referrals between teams.	All teams follow University data governance practice and procedures and are fully compliant with data protection requirements
There is a risk that prospective students do not engage with any transition IAG or interventions and are not identified by Disability Support services team.	Targeted communication strategies are implemented by Admissions, WP and Disability Service to direct students who have disclosed to appropriate interventions. Broad wide-scale communications via Admissions, WP team, Student Support and academic departments are sent to all applicants regardless of disclosure status to encourage engagement and highlight signposting at numerous stages (e.g. induction events, pre-entry appointments, information about interventions on university webpages, via Student Support staff and academic staff), prior to arrival to encourage engagement. Disability Service and Student Support contact students and share information about campaigns and interventions for Semester 1.
There is a risk that students without a formal diagnosis of ASC do not sign up to interventions.	Webpages clearly state opportunities are available to students with and without formal diagnosis. Also, pre-entry appointments with the Disability Service are available to students with and without a formal diagnosis to explore potential support opportunities.
There is a risk that there is insufficient resource to run all interventions (e.g. staff and student ambassadors).	Planning with Deputy Director/careful prioritisation of resource by Disability Service Team Leaders and contingency put into place for staff absence or illness. Attendance number is capped to ensure appropriate ratio of students to student ambassadors/staff.
There is a risk that the university lacks appropriate data infrastructure or analyst capacity to draw meaningful insights from data analysis.	There is ongoing work to improve our university data infrastructure led by our Digital, Data and Technology team, and projects are ongoing to upskill staff in data analysis and reporting.

There is a risk that Campus Buddies do not know how to escalate risk or safeguarding concerns.	Training, a Campus Buddy handbook and check-ins by the Disability Support Coordinators team and implemented throughout the programme. Clarity regarding escalation of safeguarding concerns is raise and progressed through the Disability Support Coordinators team. Disability Advisers also check-in regularly with students as part of ongoing case work. Provision of Security, Safe Zone app, Student Support Advisers and SSA Duty Team gives access to immediate emergency support on campus where needed.
Health and safety risks during two-day transition event.	Suitable risk assessments carried out for various activities prior to the event and emergency contact details taken before arrival. Provision of Security, Safe Zone app, Student Support Advisers and SSA Duty Team gives access to immediate emergency support on campus where needed.
Students feel unsafe or don't know where to access support when staying overnight for two-day transition event.	Accommodation blocks each have one ambassador staying overnight to monitor and field any concerns or queries. Provision of Security and Safe Zone app gives access to immediate emergency support on campus where needed.
During two-day transition event students have specific dietary needs and/or health conditions to manage.	Additional requirements for rooms and food are requested and arranged prior to arrival.
Students with struggle with orientation during off-campus activities.	Transport for the group is booked in advance, avoiding public transport, to ensure everyone is safe and travels together. Student ambassadors and Disability Service staff attend all off-campus activities to monitor student safety and to provide reassurance. Register taken and alternative transport arranged when necessary.
Oversubscription to Beginning at Bath transition programme or Campus Buddies programme.	We give clear instructions about deadline to register, and participants are informed that total numbers are capped, and not everyone may be able to participate.

	Campus Buddies are trained to support more than one student if required.

Appendix 1: Example Workplan for Implementation of Recommendations:

Recommendation	Action for Implementation
Recommendation No. 5: Include testimonials and success stories on Disability Service webpages from students with ASC to emphasise the positive impact of support services. As well as a FAQ section for all disabled students, including a specific ASC section and printable check-list (following the University life cycle so students can plan for key events, i.e. placement, exams etc.), topics/strategies that can be focussed on in Mentoring and Study Skills support sessions, or tasks that can be followed up or discussed in a Disability Adviser appointment.	Through collaboration with Student Support's Communication and Events Office we will create an ASC specific resource section on our webpages. **Action 1:** ● In one section, we will add testimonials from students who have participated both in the interviews and workshops for this study **(see examples below).** If needed, we can also follow-up with participants to ask for any further testimonials that ASC students are happy to share on our website and social media. **Action 2:** ● We will also include an FAQ section on the Disability Services webpages (**see examples below**), as ASC students mentioned several times how helpful this could be

Example Student Testimonials - "What University of Bath Students are saying..."
Autism Social Group:

- "It was actually quite good going to the Autism Social Group. It was an easy way of talking… I spoke with someone new, like during freshers week, I made a friend and found out she was also autistic and I was like: "Oh, should we go to the Autism Social Group together?" And then we did the next week. so that was quite nice."
- "I think it was quite positive. It was good to be able to talk to other people with similar experiences and also give myself kind of a space to make me relax."

One-to-One Campus Tours:

- "The one-to-one tour I found really helpful and because it was run by an autistic ambassador who I've previously met. And they showed me the things I was specifically interested in, so it was more tailored to me than a general tour. So we looked at my department like buildings and how to get there and what accommodation I would apply for and all of that, and they also showed me the best places to get lunch on campus, which was useful because I'm quite picky eater."

Campus Buddy Scheme:

- "He [the disability advisor] told me about the campus buddy programme … and that was probably the most helpful thing... [as] I think the main thing I was worried about was not being able to find where I was going, so … when we got the timetable through, and I was like: "Oh my God! What does any of this mean? Where am I going? Help!!" So, the girl that was assigned to me… she basically… the first thing we did was: we went through my timetable, took out all the room numbers, and we went to every single room that I had on my thing. And I was like: "Oh my God, if I didn't have that… I'd probably not leave my room.""

Beginning at Bath:

- "The Beginning at Bath event, I found quite useful ... one of the SU people told us that they were trying to get a sensory-safe study space, and then them showing us all the different study spaces and all the things that were available to us as disabled students was very useful."
- "Beginning at Bath was amazing. It was the first time I'd been around just autistic people and it blew my mind."
- "I think Beginning at Bath was great too - also being able to see my accommodation for first year at the event and speak to current students with disabilities really helped with my anxiety about transitioning."

Example FAQs:

1. **What transition events are available to autistic students?**

We have a variety of transition events that ASC students can participate in. Before you come to Bath you can arrange a one-to-one tour of campus with one of our Student Ambassadors that will be personalised to you and not with a large group of other students.

Once you have accepted your place at Bath, you can choose to participate in our transition event in September, typically two or three weeks before the start of Semester 1, which is called Beginning at Bath. The event is held over two days on campus and ASC students are invited to stay overnight in University

accommodation. You will have the chance to get to know other students, familiarise yourself with the campus, meet key members of staff and chat to some of our current students. Your parents/carers will also be invited to join in a morning session (including a time for Q&As) on the first day of the event, to find out more about the transition to studying at the University of Bath along with the support services available to ASC students.

During Semester 1 of your first year, you can participate in our Campus Buddy scheme, which is for students who have or self-identify as having an Autism Spectrum Condition, Social Anxiety or Social Phobia. This scheme provides informal support with the social and practical aspects of student life during your first semester at University. For example, navigation around campus and town, joining clubs and societies, etc. Find out more on the Campus Buddy webpage including the experiences of former Campus Buddies.

2. **Do I need a formal diagnosis to attend Beginning at Bath or participate in the Campus Buddy scheme?**

No, you do not but please make an appointment with a Disability Adviser so we can ensure you receive an invitation and further information about these programmes.

3. **Do I need a formal diagnosis of Autism to get a Disability Access Plan (DAP)?**

No you do not, however you do need evidence (such as a GP letter) to show that you are awaiting a formal diagnosis or are in the process of being referred. Historical evidence is accepted and so you do not need a reassessment if you were diagnosed at a young age.

4. **Where can I find out more information about navigating campus and finding different buildings?**

The Autism and Uni Toolkit is a great resource for prospective and new students. There are two sections labelled "Locations" and "Directions" with recent photographs of all campus buildings and then specific step-by-step directions about how to get there. Support from a campus buddy can also help with orientation and finding your way around campus when you start your course.

5. **Are there quiet study spaces I can access on campus?**

Yes, we have a Sensory Room in the Library on Level 3 (Room 3.10) which you can access 24/7. The sensory room provides a quiet, sensory friendly space for individuals (registered with or known to the Disability Service) on campus. There are also two smaller adjoining rooms, which are bookable spaces intended for 1:1 mentoring and study skills support sessions. The space contains various seating options and sensory items including colour changing mood cubes, soft flooring, and large oversized cushions. There are also two floor lamps that give soft lighting if needed.