



UNIVERSITY & HIGHER EDUCATION AUTISM TOOLKIT

A Practical Evidence-Informed Guide for Accessible Learning, Student Support, Campus
Participation, Assessment and Transition

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Global Autism Research Center (GARC)

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Publication Information

Purpose and audience

This toolkit is designed for universities, colleges and other higher education institutions seeking to improve access, participation, learning, wellbeing and successful transition for autistic students. It is intended for autistic students themselves, disability or accessibility services, academic faculty, tutors, advisors, student affairs teams, counselling and wellbeing services, residential life staff, librarians, careers teams, placement coordinators, research supervisors, digital learning teams and institutional leaders.

Scope

The toolkit addresses the full student journey: pre-entry information, admissions and transition, disclosure and access planning, teaching and learning, communication, executive functioning, sensory access, digital accessibility, assessment, student life, wellbeing, accommodation, placements, postgraduate study, employment transition and institutional quality improvement. It is deliberately international. Local disability law, reasonable-adjustment duties, assessment regulations, licensing rules, safeguarding requirements and professional-program standards must always be checked in the relevant jurisdiction.

Educational, clinical and legal notice

This publication is an educational and institutional practice resource. It does not diagnose autism, prescribe treatment, determine legal entitlement to adjustments, replace professional judgement, or create a contractual right to a specific accommodation. Universities should apply their own lawful processes while avoiding unnecessary barriers. Urgent physical or mental health concerns, safeguarding risks, abuse, exploitation, serious self-neglect or immediate danger require the institution's relevant emergency, health or safeguarding pathway.

Language, dignity and student agency

This toolkit generally uses identity-first language ("autistic student") while recognizing that individuals may prefer different language. Students should be asked about their preferences. Support should strengthen autonomy, access and participation rather than reward masking, compliance or appearing non-autistic. Communication style, eye contact, movement, sensory tools, focused interests and alternative forms of participation should not be treated as misconduct or deficit when they do not interfere with essential academic or safety requirements.

Evidence approach

The guidance synthesizes international rights and inclusion principles, current autism guidance, Universal Design for Learning, higher education disability-access practice and resources co-created with autistic university students. Key reference points include the World Health Organization, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNESCO higher education inclusion work, CAST UDL Guidelines 3.0, AHEAD disability-access guidance, NICE autism guidance and the Autism&Uni project. Selected references appear at the end of this toolkit.

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REVIEW CYCLE

GARC intends to review this toolkit periodically and earlier if major authoritative guidance, accessibility standards or higher education practice changes. Institutions should separately maintain current local procedures for disability access, examinations, academic integrity, mental health, safeguarding, data protection, housing and placements.



Foreword

Higher education rewards independence, abstraction, rapid transitions and self-management. Those expectations can create opportunity for autistic students, but they can also create avoidable barriers when institutions assume that every student will infer hidden rules, tolerate unpredictable environments, organize complex workloads without explicit structure, communicate in conventional ways, and ask for help at exactly the right time.

Autistic students are not a single group. Some arrive with a diagnosis and a detailed support plan. Others are diagnosed during university, self-identify as neurodivergent, or never disclose. Some require substantial daily support; others mainly need predictable communication, sensory access, flexible ways to participate or a small number of well-targeted adjustments. The same student may appear highly capable in one context and become overloaded in another.

A mature institutional response does not wait for individual students to repeatedly prove difficulty. It designs teaching, information, systems and environments to be understandable and accessible by default, while preserving individualized adjustments where needed. This approach benefits many students without lowering academic standards. It reduces friction so that standards measure the intended learning outcome rather than a student's ability to navigate avoidable barriers.

This toolkit is therefore designed as an operational guide: a common language for students and staff, a framework for institutional practice, and a collection of tools that can be used before, during and after a semester.

Global Autism Research Center (GARC)

Practical Toolkits Series



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HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Students can use individual tools without reading the entire document. Staff teams can use the GARC 10-Point Framework as a common quality standard, then select the sections relevant to teaching, disability services, student life or transition. Institutions should combine universal design with individualized support rather than treating them as alternatives.



Quick Start: The First 30 Days

The first month of a semester is often where small access barriers become cumulative problems. The goal is to make expectations, routes to support and practical routines visible before the student is already overloaded.

For the student

- ☐ Identify one named contact in the disability/accessibility service and one academic contact for programme questions.
- ☐ Confirm how approved adjustments are communicated to teaching staff and whether the student must take any additional action.
- ☐ Walk or virtually preview key locations: lecture rooms, laboratories, library, disability service, quiet spaces, student health, transport stops and residence routes.
- ☐ Put fixed commitments, deadlines and travel time into one calendar. Avoid maintaining several competing planning systems unless they are synchronized.
- ☐ Ask for essential course information in writing when verbal instructions are difficult to retain or interpret.
- ☐ Identify sensory or communication barriers likely to affect attendance, participation, examinations or group work.
- ☐ Clarify how to request help, extensions, absence-related support, assessment adjustments and crisis assistance.
- ☐ Build recovery time into the week rather than using every unscheduled hour for work or social activity.

For the institution

- ☐ Provide clear pre-entry and first-week information about disability/accessibility services, eligibility, timelines, confidentiality and how to request support.
- ☐ Use consistent names for services and routes to support across the website, student portal, orientation materials and staff communication.
- ☐ Ensure course outlines state learning outcomes, assessment formats, deadlines, participation expectations and where students can ask clarifying questions.
- ☐ Provide campus maps and location information that include accessibility, quiet spaces, sensory considerations and transport where possible.
- ☐ Create a rapid route for correcting an access barrier that is stopping a student from attending, submitting work or participating safely.
- ☐ Do not assume that lack of disclosure means lack of disability-related barriers.

URGENT ESCALATION

A sudden major change in functioning, immediate risk of harm, severe self-neglect, abuse, exploitation, medical emergency or inability to maintain basic safety is not simply an academic-performance issue. Follow the institution's appropriate emergency, health or safeguarding pathway while respecting the student's dignity and legal rights.

Minimum student access profile

Question	Useful information to capture
Communication	Preferred contact method; processing time; direct language; meeting preferences; AAC or communication support if used.
Learning access	What helps in lectures, seminars, labs, reading, note-taking and online learning.
Sensory access	Noise, lighting, crowding, smells, temperature or movement factors that affect participation.



Question	Useful information to capture
Executive function	Planning, task initiation, prioritization, working memory, time estimation and transition supports that help.
Assessment	Known barriers and approved or requested adjustments; how to handle unexpected format changes.
Wellbeing	Early signs of overload; what helps; who the student wants contacted if support is needed.
Daily living	Residence, transport, meals, medication routines or other practical factors that can affect attendance or energy.
Strengths and goals	Interests, academic strengths, preferred ways of working, goals and areas where independence should be increased.



SECTION 1

Understanding Autism in Higher Education

A diverse neurodevelopmental profile interacting with academic, social, sensory and organizational environments.



- Autistic students vary widely in communication, sensory processing, executive functioning, learning profile and support needs.
- University demands can reveal needs that were less visible in more structured school environments.
- Performance may fluctuate substantially by context, predictability, workload, health and sensory load.
- Inclusion begins by identifying barriers, not by asking the student to imitate a preferred social style.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

The most useful question is not "How autistic is this student?" but "What is getting in the way of access, participation or wellbeing in this specific context?"

1.1 What may be relevant in university settings

Area	Possible university impact	Helpful response
Communication	Difficulty interpreting ambiguous instructions, implied expectations, rapid discussion or indirect feedback.	Use explicit language, written follow-up, examples and predictable routes for questions.
Sensory processing	Lecture halls, laboratories, cafeterias, residence halls and transport may create overload.	Reduce unnecessary sensory load and permit safe sensory tools, seating or alternative spaces where feasible.
Executive functioning	Long-range assignments, competing deadlines and self-directed study may be harder than subject knowledge itself.	Make timelines visible, break tasks into milestones and support planning without taking over decision-making.
Social interaction	Networking, group work, office hours and informal academic norms may be difficult to decode.	Explain roles and expectations; structure group tasks; provide more than one way to participate.
Need for predictability	Room, timetable, assessment or staff changes can be disproportionately disruptive.	Give advance notice where possible and explain what is changing, what is not, and what the student should do next.
Focused interests / strengths	Deep subject knowledge, precision, persistence or pattern recognition may be strong assets.	Create legitimate opportunities to use strengths while still supporting breadth and core learning outcomes.

1.2 Uneven profiles are common

Academic ability does not reliably predict daily living, organization, social navigation or stress tolerance. A student can write an excellent research paper and still struggle to open administrative emails, travel to an unfamiliar building, prepare food after a long day or explain a problem in real time. Support should be based



on functional access needs rather than assumptions created by grades, vocabulary or apparent independence.

1.3 Masking and delayed identification

Some students consciously or unconsciously suppress autistic traits, rehearse social behaviour or imitate peers in order to fit in. This can make difficulty less visible to staff while increasing fatigue. Other students reach university without a formal diagnosis, particularly those whose strengths allowed them to compensate in structured environments. Universities should avoid gatekeeping general accessibility practices behind diagnosis when the practice can be offered universally.

DO	AVOID
Ask what helps; observe context; respect direct communication; explain expectations; support autonomy.	Treating eye contact as engagement; equating quietness with lack of interest; forcing disclosure; interpreting overload as defiance; assuming high grades mean no support is needed.

1.4 Co-occurring and intersecting needs

Autistic students may also have ADHD, learning disabilities, intellectual disability, epilepsy, sleep problems, chronic health conditions, anxiety, depression or other mental health needs. They may also experience barriers related to language, culture, gender, socioeconomic circumstances, migration, caregiving responsibilities or other identities. Support planning should avoid attributing every difficulty to autism and should use appropriate health or specialist pathways when needed.



SECTION 2

The GARC 10-Point Inclusive Higher Education Framework

A common institutional framework for designing access before problems escalate.

- Use the framework at student, course, faculty and institution levels.
- Combine universal design with individualized adjustments.
- Measure participation, access and outcomes rather than training students to appear typical.
- Review barriers across academic, digital, sensory, social and daily-living environments.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

Inclusive higher education is a system property, not a specialist service located in one office.

Principle	Operational meaning
1. Student agency	Students are partners in decisions about support, disclosure, communication and goals.
2. Clear information	Requirements, deadlines, processes and hidden rules are made explicit and accessible.
3. Anticipatory design	Courses, digital platforms and services reduce predictable barriers before an individual request.
4. Communication access	Multiple appropriate routes exist for asking questions, receiving feedback and participating.
5. Sensory access	Physical and digital environments consider noise, light, crowding, navigation and cognitive load.
6. Learning flexibility	Teaching offers multiple accessible ways to engage with content while preserving learning outcomes.
7. Assessment access	Assessment measures intended competencies and removes avoidable format or environment barriers.
8. Coordinated support	Academic, disability, wellbeing, housing and placement teams know how to collaborate with consent.
9. Belonging and safety	Students are protected from discrimination, bullying and exclusion and can participate without masking as a condition of belonging.
10. Transition and outcomes	Support is planned across entry, progression, placement, graduation, postgraduate study and employment.

2.1 Universal plus individualized support

Universal design should reduce the number of barriers that require a formal exception. It does not eliminate the need for individualized adjustments. For example, publishing clear assessment instructions benefits



everyone, while an individual student may still require a low-distraction examination room or rest breaks. The two approaches are complementary.

2.2 Three institutional questions

1. Can a student understand what is expected without having to infer hidden rules?
2. Can a student access the learning environment without unnecessary sensory, communication or executive-function barriers?
3. If an individual barrier remains, is there a proportionate and timely route to an adjustment or alternative that preserves the essential learning outcome?

QUALITY INDICATOR

An institution should be able to trace a student concern from identification to named ownership, action, review and closure. Repeated problems that affect several students should trigger system redesign, not a sequence of isolated exceptions.



SECTION 3

Transition, Admissions, Disclosure and Access Planning

Make the institution understandable before the student has to navigate it under pressure.

- Pre-entry information should show students what university life and support processes actually involve.
- Disclosure should be informed, voluntary where law permits, and linked to a clear explanation of confidentiality and benefit.
- Access planning should be specific to courses, environments and assessment formats.
- Transition support should continue beyond orientation week.

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The transition problem is rarely a lack of motivation. It is often a mismatch between a complex system and the amount of explicit information provided.

3.1 Pre-entry information that reduces uncertainty

- ☐ Course structure, contact hours and independent-study expectations.
- ☐ Assessment types and examples of typical academic tasks.
- ☐ Campus maps, room photographs or virtual tours where feasible.
- ☐ How disability/accessibility support works, required evidence, timelines and confidentiality.
- ☐ How to access health, counselling, financial, housing and emergency support.
- ☐ What orientation involves and whether quieter, smaller or alternative sessions are available.
- ☐ Information about transport, parking, meal options, residence and common campus routines.
- ☐ Who to contact before arrival with access questions.

3.2 Disclosure is a decision, not a personality test

Students may choose not to disclose because of stigma, uncertainty, previous negative experiences, cost of obtaining documentation, fear of being treated differently, or because they do not yet understand what support is available. Staff should explain what information is needed, who will see it, what support becomes possible, and what limitations exist. Avoid pressuring a student to disclose to classmates or teaching staff beyond what is necessary for implementation.

3.3 Access planning meeting

Discuss	Examples
Academic environment	Lecture, seminar, laboratory, studio, clinical, fieldwork, online and research expectations.
Assessment	Timed exams, oral presentations, viva, practical exams, group projects, continuous assessment, dissertations.
Communication	Email, meetings, office hours, phone, video calls, processing time, written summaries.



Discuss	Examples
Sensory / physical access	Seating, noise, lighting, crowding, queuing, PPE, smells, travel between buildings.
Executive-function demands	Registration, module selection, deadlines, attendance, reading volume, long projects.
Daily living / housing	Meals, sleep, laundry, residence environment, transport, medication routines if relevant.
Wellbeing / escalation	Early signs of overload; preferred support; emergency contacts only as agreed and lawful.
Review	When the plan will be checked and how the student can request a change.

3.4 Transition should be staged

Stage	Priority actions
3-6 months before entry	Accessible course information, support-service contact, documentation planning, housing and transport questions.
4-8 weeks before entry	Finalise adjustments where possible, campus familiarisation, timetable preview, technology setup.
First 2 weeks	Confirm implementation; troubleshoot rooms, digital platforms and communication routes.
Weeks 3-6	Review workload, attendance, assessment access and recovery time before difficulties compound.
Before first major assessments	Check approved arrangements, location, timing, format and contingency procedures.
End of first semester	Review what worked, what failed, and what should be changed before the next term.



SECTION 4

Inclusive Teaching and Universal Design for Learning

Design courses so access is built into ordinary teaching rather than added only after a barrier appears.

- Clarity and structure do not reduce academic rigor.
- Offer multiple ways to engage with information and demonstrate learning when learning outcomes allow.
- Make participation expectations explicit.
- Digital accessibility is part of teaching quality.

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The academic standard should be the learning outcome, not the student's ability to decode ambiguous teaching conventions.

4.1 Course design checklist

- ☐ Publish a clear weekly structure, learning outcomes, required preparation and deadlines.
- ☐ Provide slides, reading lists or key questions in advance where feasible.
- ☐ Use headings, chunking and consistent navigation in the learning management system.
- ☐ Explain what "participation" means and allow appropriate routes beyond spontaneous speaking where the outcome permits.
- ☐ Distinguish required reading from recommended reading and identify high-priority materials.
- ☐ Use concrete examples of assignment quality, marking criteria and common errors.
- ☐ Provide captions/transcripts for recorded media and accessible document formats.
- ☐ Avoid last-minute changes; when unavoidable, communicate them in more than one place and state what students need to do.
- ☐ Build opportunities for low-stakes practice before high-stakes assessment.

4.2 UDL translated into university practice

UDL dimension	Higher education examples
Multiple means of engagement	Choice where appropriate; clear relevance; predictable routines; belonging; manageable challenge; feedback.
Multiple means of representation	Text plus visuals or demonstrations; accessible files; examples; glossaries; explicit concept relationships.
Multiple means of action and expression	Different tools or modes where consistent with outcomes; scaffolds for planning; transparent rubrics; accessible technology.

4.3 Lectures

- Start with an agenda and end with a concise summary of what matters most.



- Signal topic shifts, especially when moving between explanation, examples, discussion and administrative announcements.
- Do not make note-taking depend on copying dense slides at high speed.
- Provide a predictable question route for students who do not ask questions in front of a large group.

4.4 Seminars and tutorials

- Share discussion questions in advance when possible.
- Avoid grading purely on speed of verbal response unless this is an essential learning outcome.
- Allow a pause before expecting answers and provide structure for turn-taking.
- Do not interpret reduced eye contact, movement or use of a sensory item as lack of attention without evidence.

4.5 Laboratories, studios and workshops

- Provide written sequences, safety expectations, equipment lists and role allocations.
- Demonstrate unfamiliar procedures before requiring independent performance.
- Identify predictable sensory loads such as noise, bright light, smells, PPE or crowded benches.
- Ensure adjustments never compromise essential safety requirements, but examine whether the safety goal can be met in a less burdensome way.



SECTION 5

Communication, Academic Interaction and Faculty Practice

Make expectations explicit and provide communication routes that work before, during and after a conversation.

- Direct communication can be respectful communication.
- Written follow-up is often an access tool, not a preference for formality.
- Processing time matters in meetings and feedback conversations.
- Supervision and advising work best when roles and next steps are visible.

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Clarity is a form of accessibility.

5.1 Use clear academic language

CLEAR

"Submit a 1,500-word critical review by 16:00 Friday. Compare at least two theories using evidence from the required readings. The rubric explains how argument, evidence and structure are weighted."

AMBIGUOUS

"Do a short critical piece for Friday. Make sure it is analytical and shows engagement with the literature."

5.2 Email and written communication

- ☐ Use a meaningful subject line and put the action required near the beginning.
- ☐ Include dates, times, room numbers and links rather than relying on context from an earlier message.
- ☐ If there are several actions, number them.
- ☐ Avoid sarcasm, unexplained idioms or language that depends on tone when precision matters.
- ☐ When a plan changes, state both the change and what remains the same.

5.3 Meetings, office hours and supervision

Before	During	After
Share purpose, expected duration and any decisions needed.	Use an agenda; allow processing time; check meaning rather than demanding immediate agreement.	Send key decisions, actions, owners and dates in writing.
Allow the student to bring notes, a supporter or communication aid where appropriate.	Ask one clear question at a time if the conversation is complex.	Confirm the next contact point and how to raise a problem before then.
Offer an alternative to phone calls when possible.	Do not infer attitude from facial expression, eye contact or speaking style.	Correct misunderstandings without blame and invite clarification.



5.4 Feedback

Feedback is more usable when it identifies the specific feature of the work, why it matters, and what the student can do differently next time. Phrases such as "be more critical" or "develop the discussion" may be too abstract without examples. Where possible, link comments to rubric criteria and distinguish a major issue from an optional refinement.

FACULTY PRACTICE

A student may need explicit clarification even when the same expectation seems obvious to peers. Clarifying the hidden rule is not giving the answer; it is making the task accessible.



SECTION 6

Executive Functioning, Organization and Independent Study

Support planning, initiation, prioritization and task switching without replacing student agency.

- Independent learning still requires transparent systems.
- Large tasks become more accessible when milestones are visible.
- Time estimation and switching costs should be planned, not moralized.
- One usable planning system is better than several abandoned systems.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

Executive-function support should make the work more navigable, not make the student dependent on another person to organize every step.

6.1 Common pressure points

Demand	What it may look like	Access strategy
Task initiation	Understands the assignment but cannot start.	Define the first visible action and a short starting block.
Prioritization	Works deeply on one task while missing another deadline.	Use a single deadline map and rank tasks by urgency, weight and dependency.
Time estimation	Plans several hours for a task that takes several days.	Compare predicted vs actual time and build personal estimates.
Working memory	Forgets verbal instructions or multi-step administrative tasks.	Written steps, checklists and calendar prompts.
Task switching	Loses substantial energy moving between classes, environments or subjects.	Cluster work where possible and include transition buffers.
Long projects	Dissertation or capstone feels too open-ended.	Convert the project into milestones with defined outputs and review dates.

6.2 A six-step assignment routine

1. Restate the task in plain language: what must be produced and what is being assessed?
2. Identify constraints: word count, format, sources, method, deadline and submission route.
3. Break the task into research, planning, drafting, revision and submission steps.
4. Put intermediate dates in the calendar, not only the final deadline.
5. Define a "minimum viable next action" for any step that feels too large.
6. Check completion against the rubric and submission instructions before uploading.



6.3 Energy is also a planning variable

A timetable can look empty while still being unsustainable if it contains high sensory load, long travel, intensive social interaction or frequent transitions. Students and advisors should consider both clock time and recovery demand. This is especially important when a student can meet academic expectations only by eliminating meals, sleep, self-care or all non-academic activity.

USEFUL REVIEW QUESTION

"What part of this task is difficult: understanding it, deciding where to start, sustaining attention, changing tasks, tolerating the environment, communicating with someone, or recovering afterwards?" Different barriers require different solutions.



SECTION 7

Sensory Access, Campus Navigation and Digital Environments

An accessible institution includes rooms, routes, platforms and information architecture.

- Sensory barriers can directly affect cognition, communication and endurance.
- Navigation uncertainty increases load before learning begins.
- Digital systems should be accessible, consistent and predictable.
- Quiet space is infrastructure, not a reward.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

When a student uses all available capacity to tolerate the environment, less capacity remains for learning.

7.1 Campus sensory scan

Environment	Potential barriers	Possible responses
Lecture halls	Fluorescent lighting, echo, crowding, fixed seating, heat.	Alternative seating, early entry, sensory tools, recorded/remote access where appropriate, lighting adjustment where feasible.
Libraries	Silent zones may still contain movement, lighting or keyboard noise.	Clearly designated low-stimulation areas and bookable study spaces.
Cafeterias	Noise, smells, queues, unpredictable seating.	Off-peak options, quieter areas, takeaway/alternative meal access where available.
Laboratories	Alarms, equipment noise, PPE, chemical smells, close proximity.	Preview, written procedures, PPE adaptations if safe, planned breaks, defined workstations.
Student services	Open-plan waiting areas, unclear queues, repeated storytelling.	Appointments, queue information, written intake, quieter waiting options.
Events	Crowds, amplified sound, uncertain schedule.	Clear programme, quiet room, early access, online option when appropriate.

7.2 Navigation

- ☐ Use consistent building and room naming across maps, timetables and signage.
- ☐ Provide entrance details, floor level, lift access and landmarks where possible.
- ☐ Offer photographs or virtual orientation for complex locations.
- ☐ Explain temporary route changes before major events or construction when feasible.
- ☐ Allow sufficient transition time between distant classes when timetabling can accommodate it.

7.3 Digital learning environment

- ☐ Use consistent module structure and file naming.



- ☐ Avoid posting critical information only in a recorded lecture or informal chat channel.
- ☐ Ensure documents are readable by assistive technology and do not rely on scanned image-only PDFs.
- ☐ Caption recorded media and provide transcripts where required or feasible.
- ☐ Avoid excessive platform switching for one course.
- ☐ Provide clear instructions for online discussion, attendance, submissions and technical failure.

7.4 Assistive technology and AI-enabled tools

Speech-to-text, text-to-speech, note-support, scheduling tools, visual organizers and AI-enabled study tools may reduce access barriers for some students. Their use must follow institutional privacy, security, assessment and academic-integrity rules. Staff should distinguish legitimate access support from prohibited assistance based on the actual learning outcome and published policy, rather than assuming that every use of AI or automation is equivalent.



SECTION 8

Assessment, Examinations, Adjustments and Academic Integrity

Assess the intended learning outcome while removing avoidable barriers in format, environment and process.

- Adjustments should be linked to an access barrier, not to a diagnosis label alone.
- Assessment instructions should be explicit and stable.
- Alternative formats must preserve essential learning outcomes.
- Academic integrity expectations should be concrete and taught, not assumed.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

Fairness is not always identical treatment; it is equivalent access to the standard being assessed.

8.1 Common assessment barriers

Barrier	Examples of possible adjustment or design response
Time pressure unrelated to outcome	Additional time, rest breaks, reduced-distraction setting, chunked instructions where policy allows.
Sensory environment	Smaller room, different seating, ear protection where compatible with exam security, controlled lighting.
Handwriting / motor or written-production barrier	Computer access or approved technology where compatible with the learning outcome.
Ambiguous instructions	Standardised wording, clarification process and examples provided to all students.
Oral presentation barrier	Structured presentation conditions, smaller audience, prerecorded component or alternative format only where the same outcome can still be assessed.
Group assessment	Explicit roles, individual accountability, accessible communication process and alternative where group interaction is not itself an essential outcome.
Deadline disruption related to disability	Extension or flexibility process that is clear, timely and proportionate within institutional rules.

8.2 Examination-day plan

- ☐ Confirm date, start time, location, permitted materials and arrival instructions.
- ☐ Confirm approved adjustments before the examination rather than asking the student to negotiate them at the door.
- ☐ Explain break procedures and how extra time is calculated.
- ☐ Provide a contact route if an approved arrangement is missing or the room is unsuitable.
- ☐ Avoid unnecessary last-minute room changes; if unavoidable, communicate them directly and clearly.



8.3 Academic integrity

Rules about collaboration, paraphrasing, referencing, AI tools, code generation, translation, editing software and reusable prior work vary by institution and assessment. Students benefit from examples of permitted, restricted and prohibited practice. Where a student has a disability-related technology need, disability and academic-integrity teams should coordinate so that an approved access tool is not accidentally treated as misconduct.

8.4 When an alternative format is considered

1. Identify the essential learning outcome being assessed.
2. Identify the specific barrier in the current format.
3. Determine whether the barrier can be removed without changing the format.
4. If not, consider an alternative that measures the same outcome with comparable academic demand.
5. Document the decision and communicate it early enough for the student and teaching team to prepare.



SECTION 9

Group Work, Social Belonging, Student Life and Mentoring

Structure collaboration and belonging so they do not depend on reading hidden social rules.

- Group work is more accessible when roles, outputs and decision processes are explicit.
- Belonging should not require social performance or masking.
- Mentoring can improve navigation when boundaries and purpose are clear.
- Student life includes clubs, sport, faith, volunteering and informal academic networks.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

Do not confuse social fluency with teamwork, leadership or intellectual contribution.

9.1 Accessible group work

- ☐ Define the task, deliverables, roles and decision process.
- ☐ Use shared written plans and deadlines rather than relying only on verbal coordination.
- ☐ Allow students to contribute through different roles where the assessment outcome permits.
- ☐ Create a route to report exclusion, non-participation or communication breakdown before the final deadline.
- ☐ Mark individual and group contributions transparently when possible.
- ☐ Avoid requiring constant synchronous contact if asynchronous coordination can meet the objective.

9.2 Social belonging without compulsory socializing

Some autistic students want extensive social connection; others prefer a smaller number of relationships or interest-based participation. Institutions can improve belonging by offering structured, low-pressure entry points: interest groups, peer mentoring, study communities, quiet orientation events, accessible clubs and clear information about what happens at events. The goal is choice and access, not a target amount of social activity.

9.3 Peer mentoring

Good mentoring practice	Avoid
Clear purpose, boundaries, contact frequency and escalation route.	Expecting a peer mentor to provide counselling or crisis care.
Practical navigation: routines, campus systems, study habits, student-life questions.	Turning mentoring into surveillance or compliance monitoring.
Student chooses priorities and can end or change the arrangement.	Assuming mentor and student must share the same communication or social style.
Mentors receive training, supervision and referral guidance.	Giving mentors confidential clinical information they do not need.



9.4 Bullying, harassment and exploitation

Autistic students may be vulnerable to exclusion, manipulation, harassment or exploitation, but should not be treated as incapable of relationships or decision-making. Institutions should provide accessible reporting routes, explain consent and safety resources, take complaints seriously, and avoid requiring the student to repeatedly retell distressing events across departments.



SECTION 10

Wellbeing, Stress, Burnout, Distress and Crisis Support

Recognize overload early and connect academic, environmental and health responses appropriately.

- Changes in functioning may appear before a student can explain what is wrong.
- Burnout and overload are not solved by generic productivity advice alone.
- Mental health services should adapt communication and environment when working with autistic students.
- Crisis procedures must distinguish academic difficulty from immediate safety risk.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

When functioning changes, ask what changed in demands, environment, health, sleep, support or recovery - not only why the student is "not coping".

10.1 Early signs that support should be reviewed

Possible change	Questions to explore
Missed classes or appointments	Is the barrier transport, sleep, sensory load, executive function, fear, health, workload or communication?
Reduced communication	Is the student overloaded, unsure what is being asked, or needing a lower-demand communication route?
Late or missing work	Is the issue understanding, initiation, planning, perfectionism, health, burnout or an inaccessible assessment process?
Withdrawal from meals, housing routines or self-care	Is daily living becoming unsustainable and is specialist or health support needed?
Marked distress after apparently minor changes	Has cumulative load made flexibility much harder than usual?

10.2 Support conversation

1. State the observable concern without accusation.
2. Ask whether the student wants to communicate verbally, in writing or with time to think.
3. Identify immediate safety or health concerns first.
4. Separate academic problems, environmental barriers and health/wellbeing needs.
5. Agree no more than a few concrete next steps with named owners and dates.
6. Follow up in writing and review whether the actions actually reduced the barrier.

10.3 Adapting counselling and wellbeing services

- ☐ Use clear, concrete language and explain the structure of sessions.



- ☐ Allow additional processing time and written material where useful.
- ☐ Consider sensory aspects of the room or waiting area.
- ☐ Check understanding rather than relying on conventional emotional expression.
- ☐ Adapt general interventions to the individual rather than assuming autism itself is the problem being treated.
- ☐ Coordinate with disability or academic teams only with appropriate consent or lawful basis.

CRISIS PRINCIPLE

If there is immediate danger or a medical emergency, use the institution's emergency pathway. If there is no immediate danger, avoid automatically escalating every episode of overload into a punitive or coercive response. First reduce demands, improve communication and identify what support is actually required.



SECTION 11

Housing, Transport, Food and Daily Living on Campus

Academic access can fail when basic daily routines become inaccessible or unsustainable.

- Residential environments can create sensory and social demands around the clock.
- Transport and navigation affect punctuality and energy.
- Food access should account for sensory and dietary needs without making assumptions.
- Daily living support should preserve privacy and adult autonomy.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

A student cannot sustainably use all available energy for academics if ordinary daily living consumes the rest.

11.1 Residence and housing

Area	Questions for access planning
Room environment	Noise, lighting, proximity to lifts/common areas, ability to control sensory input.
Shared facilities	Bathroom, kitchen, laundry, queuing, cleanliness expectations and social rules.
Roommates	Compatibility, communication, visitors, sleep, noise and conflict process.
Safety	Fire alarms, evacuation, security access and emergency communication.
Support	Residence staff contact, maintenance requests, lockouts, overnight issues and who can enter the room.
Transitions	Move-in, holidays, room changes and end-of-year storage or departure.

11.2 Transport and commute

- Consider route complexity, reliability, crowding, sensory load and transition time, not only distance.
- Where possible, avoid timetables that require unrealistic movement between distant sites.
- Provide clear processes for parking or transport-related disability access where available.

11.3 Food and meals

Food selectivity, sensory preferences, allergies, health conditions, budget, cultural factors or executive-function barriers may affect eating. Staff should not assume that restricted food choices are behavioural or trivial. Where nutrition or health is at risk, appropriate health or dietetic referral may be needed. Campus food information should be clear enough to support planning.

11.4 Adult autonomy

University students are adults unless local law or individual circumstances indicate otherwise. Family involvement can be valuable, but staff should not automatically communicate with parents or carers without



the student's consent or another lawful basis. Where a student requests family involvement, define what information can be shared and for what purpose.



SECTION 12

Disability Services, Advising, Privacy and Coordinated Support

Build a support system that is easy to enter, proportionate and coherent across departments.

- Disability/accessibility services should translate functional barriers into implementable adjustments.
- Academic advisors need enough information to support access without receiving unnecessary clinical detail.
- Students should not have to repeatedly explain the same barrier to multiple offices.
- Coordination must respect consent, privacy and data-protection rules.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

The student should experience one institution, not a collection of disconnected offices.

12.1 Principles for access services

- ☐ Use a clear, accessible request process with published timelines and contact routes.
- ☐ Ask for information proportionate to the adjustment being considered and applicable local rules.
- ☐ Focus on functional impact in the actual university environment.
- ☐ Document approved adjustments in language teaching staff can implement.
- ☐ Provide a review route when courses, placements or health needs change.
- ☐ Explain what cannot be approved and why, including any appeal or reconsideration route.

12.2 Information-sharing map

Information	Who may need it	Principle
Approved classroom adjustments	Relevant teaching staff / programme team.	Share implementation information, not unnecessary diagnostic history.
Assessment arrangements	Exams/assessment team and relevant academic staff.	Use secure systems and verify implementation before the assessment.
Health or crisis information	Only appropriate health/safety staff as needed and lawful.	Minimum necessary information; urgent safety rules may differ by jurisdiction.
Housing adjustments	Relevant residence/housing staff.	Share what is needed to implement the housing support.
Placement adjustments	Placement coordinator and placement provider where needed.	Plan disclosure, confidentiality and essential competency requirements with the student.

12.3 Case coordination meeting

For complex barriers, a short coordination meeting can be useful if the student agrees or another lawful basis applies. The purpose should be specific: identify the barrier, confirm essential requirements, assign



actions, define what information can be shared, and set a review date. Large meetings without a clear purpose can be overwhelming and may reduce student trust.

12.4 Appeals and complaints

Students should have an accessible route to challenge a denied adjustment, report non-implementation or complain about disability-related treatment. Information should state the steps, deadlines, evidence requirements and who is independent from the original decision where applicable. Retaliation or informal pressure to abandon a request should not be tolerated.



SECTION 13

Placements, Laboratories, Fieldwork and Professional Programmes

Plan access in environments where academic learning intersects with safety, external organizations and professional competencies.

- Placement planning should begin early because external sites may need time to implement adjustments.
- Essential competencies and avoidable conventions should be distinguished carefully.
- Safety requirements remain essential, but implementation can often be individualized.
- Students should know who owns adjustment decisions at the university and placement site.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

A professional standard should describe the competence that must be demonstrated, not one traditional way of demonstrating it unless that method is itself essential.

13.1 Placement planning questions

Question	Why it matters
What are the essential competencies and safety requirements?	Adjustments cannot be planned intelligently until the actual outcome is clear.
What environments will the student enter?	Sensory, social, travel and schedule demands may differ greatly from campus.
Who needs to know about adjustments?	The university, site supervisor and student need a clear implementation plan.
What is the disclosure process?	External sites may have different systems; the student should understand confidentiality and options.
What happens if the placement becomes inaccessible?	There should be an escalation route before failure is recorded.
How will feedback be delivered?	Direct, specific and timely feedback reduces misunderstanding and delayed remediation.

13.2 Clinical and professional programmes

Programmes involving patients, clients, children, vulnerable people, regulated practice or high-risk equipment may have non-negotiable safety and competency standards. Inclusion requires careful analysis of what is essential and what is merely customary. A student should not be excluded because their communication style looks different if they can meet the actual safety, ethical and professional requirements with reasonable support.

13.3 Fieldwork and travel

- ☐ Provide itinerary, transport plan, accommodation details, clothing/equipment requirements and daily schedule as early as feasible.



- ☐ Identify periods of unstructured waiting and social activity, not only formal work.
- ☐ Clarify food, medication, sensory, sleep and communication needs that affect safe participation.
- ☐ Provide a contact route for changes and emergencies.
- ☐ Where participation is essential, explore access solutions before assuming the student cannot attend.

13.4 Laboratory safety

Sensory tools, headphones, alternative PPE or changes in workstation may be helpful, but must be assessed against the specific hazard. Safety staff and disability services should collaborate to avoid both unsafe exceptions and unnecessary blanket restrictions.



SECTION 14

Postgraduate Study, Research, Employability and Graduation Transition

Support the move from taught study to less structured research and then into employment or further education.

- Postgraduate study increases ambiguity, long-horizon planning and supervisor dependence.
- Research environments need explicit expectations for meetings, authorship, deadlines and feedback.
- Career preparation should include workplace adjustments and disclosure decisions.
- Graduation transition should start before the final semester.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

Success after university should be planned as a transition, not treated as a final-week career-service referral.

14.1 Postgraduate and research supervision

- ☐ Agree meeting frequency, usual duration, agenda process and expected response times.
- ☐ Define short-term outputs between meetings rather than relying on "make progress".
- ☐ Clarify authorship, data management, ethics, laboratory or fieldwork responsibilities and conference expectations.
- ☐ Use written summaries of major supervisory decisions.
- ☐ Distinguish academic critique of the work from comments about communication style or personality.
- ☐ Create an escalation route if the supervision relationship stops working.

14.2 Viva, thesis defence and oral examination

Where oral defence is an essential assessment method, access planning can still address environment, breaks, question presentation, processing time, room familiarity and communication of procedures, subject to institutional regulations. Adjustments should not change the intellectual standard being assessed.

14.3 Employability

Career stage	Useful preparation
Exploration	Strengths, preferred work environment, sensory needs, communication style, values and realistic role requirements.
Applications	Explicit examples of competencies; help interpreting broad job descriptions; accessible recruitment information.
Interviews	Practice with actual question types; discuss disclosure; understand permitted adjustments and technology.
Workplace transition	Routine, manager communication, workspace, travel, remote/hybrid arrangements, workload and support contacts.



Career stage	Useful preparation
Sustaining employment	Feedback process, change management, career development and review of adjustments as work changes.

14.4 Graduation transition checklist

- ☐ Confirm access to transcripts, references, portfolios and required professional documentation.
- ☐ Identify which university supports end at graduation and what community or health services continue.
- ☐ Plan housing, finance, transport and daily routine changes where relevant.
- ☐ Prepare a workplace or postgraduate access profile that the student owns and can adapt.
- ☐ Review assistive technology licenses, email access, cloud storage and data that may expire after leaving.
- ☐ Create a 90-day post-graduation plan with no more than a few priority actions at one time.



SECTION 15

GARC Tools, Templates and Institutional Checklists

Reusable tools for students, educators, disability services and university leaders.

- The tools are designed to be copied into institutional workflows or used as standalone forms.
- Use only the information needed for the purpose.
- The student should be able to review and correct any personal access profile.
- Local policies, law and professional requirements take precedence.

GARC PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

A good tool reduces repeated explanation and converts an access need into a clear next action.

Tool 1 - Student Access Passport

Field	Student / team notes
Preferred name and pronouns	
Preferred communication	
Strengths / interests	
What helps me learn	
Sensory access needs	
Planning / executive-function supports	
Assessment access	
Group work preferences	
Early signs of overload	
What helps when overloaded	
What I do not want staff to do	
Key contacts I have approved	

Tool 2 - Transition Readiness Planner

Domain	Ready	Needs action	Next step / owner / date
Course information			



Domain	Ready	Needs action	Next step / owner / date
Disability/access registration			
Housing			
Transport / campus route			
Technology / LMS access			
Health / medication routines			
Financial / administrative tasks			
Orientation plan			
First-week timetable			
Support contacts			

Tool 3 - Disclosure Decision Aid

This tool is not legal advice. It helps a student prepare questions before deciding what to disclose and to whom.

Question	Notes
What barrier am I trying to solve?	
What support or adjustment might help?	
Does the institution require formal disclosure for this support?	
What evidence is requested and why?	
Who will receive the information?	
What will teaching staff actually be told?	
What are the risks or benefits of disclosure for me?	
Can I disclose later if I choose not to now?	

Tool 4 - Course Accessibility Scan

Check	Yes / No	Action
Weekly structure and deadlines are clear		
Learning outcomes are explicit		
Slides/readings are accessible		
Required vs optional materials are distinguished		
Participation expectations are defined		
Assessment rubrics/examples are available		
Changes are communicated consistently		



Check	Yes / No	Action
Questions can be asked in more than one way		
Online materials use consistent navigation		
Contact / support route is visible		

Tool 5 - Lecture / Seminar Access Checklist

- ☐ Agenda or structure visible.
- ☐ Key materials available in accessible format.
- ☐ Important announcements also provided in writing.
- ☐ Seating / exit / sensory needs can be accommodated where feasible.
- ☐ Questions can be submitted without spontaneous public speaking.
- ☐ Breaks or movement do not automatically count as disengagement.
- ☐ Recording or note-support arrangements follow policy.
- ☐ End-of-session summary identifies next actions.

Tool 6 - Assignment Planning Sheet

Element	Plan
What am I producing?	
What is being assessed?	
Final deadline	
Submission route	
Sources / data / materials needed	
Milestone 1	
Milestone 2	
Milestone 3	
Draft review date	
Final check against rubric	
Backup / upload check	

Tool 7 - Weekly Demand and Energy Map

Commitment	Time	Demand: low/medium/high	Recovery needed	Can it be changed?
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				



Commitment	Time	Demand: low/medium/high	Recovery needed	Can it be changed?
Friday				
Weekend				

Tool 8 - Sensory Campus Map

Location	Noise	Light	Crowding	Other triggers	Helpful strategy / alternative
Lecture room					
Library					
Cafeteria					
Lab / studio					
Student service					
Transport route					
Residence					

Tool 9 - Group Work Agreement

Item	Agreement
Shared goal / deliverable	
Roles	
Preferred communication channel	
Meeting schedule	
How decisions will be made	
How work will be stored	
Internal deadlines	
What to do if someone is stuck	
What to do if contribution is unequal	
Who contacts the tutor if needed	

Tool 10 - Assessment Adjustment Planner

Assessment	Barrier	Essential outcome	Adjustment / design response	Confirmed by / date



Assessment	Barrier	Essential outcome	Adjustment / design response	Confirmed by / date

Tool 11 - Exam Day Plan

Item	Confirmed
Date / time	
Location / room	
Arrival time / route	
Approved extra time	
Break procedure	
Technology / equipment	
Sensory arrangements	
Permitted materials	
Contact if arrangement is missing	
Plan after exam / recovery	

Tool 12 - Academic Meeting Planner

Before meeting	During	After
Purpose / questions		
Documents to bring		
Decisions needed		
Notes / clarification		
Actions / owner / date		

Tool 13 - Wellbeing and Overload Support Plan

Field	Plan
My early signs of overload	
Common triggers / cumulative demands	
What usually helps	
How I prefer staff to communicate	
Safe place / quiet option	
Who I want contacted, if anyone	



Field	Plan
What should trigger urgent support	
What staff should avoid	
How we will review this plan	

Tool 14 - Residence Access Checklist

Area	Need / preference	Action / owner
Room location		
Noise / light		
Roommate / visitors		
Kitchen / meals		
Laundry / shared facilities		
Fire alarm / evacuation		
Maintenance / entry to room		
Quiet / recovery space		
Move-in / move-out		

Tool 15 - Placement Access Plan

Domain	Plan
Essential competencies	
Environment / schedule	
Travel	
Communication with supervisor	
Sensory / PPE	
Breaks / recovery	
Documentation / technology	
Disclosure and confidentiality	
Feedback process	
Escalation if access fails	

Tool 16 - Research Supervision Agreement

Item	Agreement
Meeting frequency / duration	



Item	Agreement
Agenda process	
Expected response time	
Milestones / outputs	
Feedback format	
Authorship / contribution principles	
Data / ethics responsibilities	
Conference / networking expectations	
If supervision breaks down	

Tool 17 - Graduate Transition Planner

Domain	Next step	Owner	Date
Career / postgraduate direction			
CV / portfolio / references			
Disclosure / workplace adjustments			
Housing / finance			
Transport			
Health / ongoing support			
Technology / university accounts ending			
First 90 days after graduation			

Tool 18 - Faculty Quick Sheet

- ☐ Make task expectations explicit.
- ☐ Provide key information in writing.
- ☐ Allow reasonable processing time.
- ☐ Do not equate eye contact with attention.
- ☐ Explain changes and next steps.
- ☐ Structure group work.
- ☐ Use rubrics and examples.
- ☐ Refer access questions through the correct institutional route.
- ☐ Protect confidentiality.
- ☐ Ask the student what helps instead of guessing.

Tool 19 - Disability / Accessibility Service Review

Review question	Evidence / status	Action
Can students find the service easily?		



Review question	Evidence / status	Action
Are request steps and timelines clear?		
Is evidence proportionate to the decision?		
Are adjustments written so staff can implement them?		
Is there a rapid route for non-implementation?		
Can placements and housing be included?		
Is there an accessible appeal route?		
Are data-sharing rules clear?		
Do students participate in service improvement?		

Tool 20 - 30-Day Institutional Action Plan

Priority	Action	Owner	Due	Evidence of completion
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Tool 21 - 90-Day Inclusion Review Dashboard

Measure	Baseline	90-day status	Evidence / next step
Pre-entry information accessibility			
Course design barriers			
Adjustment implementation			
Assessment access			
Student-reported belonging			
Support response time			
Placement access			
Student complaints / recurring barriers			



Appendix A - Role Guides

Role	Core contribution
Academic faculty	Teach the learning outcomes clearly; make expectations explicit; implement approved adjustments; refer specialist decisions rather than improvising legal or clinical judgments.
Disability / accessibility service	Assess access barriers, coordinate adjustments, advise staff, maintain proportionate documentation, review implementation and preserve confidentiality.
Academic advisor / personal tutor	Help navigate programme requirements, study decisions and escalation routes; notice changes in functioning without becoming a clinician.
Student wellbeing / counselling	Provide accessible mental health support, adapt communication and coordinate appropriately with consent.
Residence / housing staff	Implement housing access, explain rules and emergency procedures, respond to conflicts or maintenance and protect privacy.
Careers service	Support strengths-based career planning, applications, interview adjustments, disclosure decisions and workplace transition.
Placement coordinator	Clarify essential competencies, plan adjustments early and coordinate with external sites.
Library / learning support	Provide accessible study environments, information literacy, assistive technology and structured study support.
Digital learning / IT	Maintain accessible platforms, consistent navigation, captioning support and secure assistive-technology pathways.
Institutional leadership	Set policy, ownership, data, resourcing and accountability so inclusion is not dependent on individual goodwill.



Appendix B - Common Myths and Better Practice

Myth	Better practice
"If the student got into university, they should manage independently."	Admission shows academic potential, not that every environment or administrative process is accessible.
"High grades mean the student is coping."	Performance can coexist with severe exhaustion, daily-living breakdown or unsustainable masking.
"Adjustments lower standards."	Well-designed adjustments remove unrelated barriers while preserving essential academic outcomes.
"Everyone must participate in the same way to be fair."	Equivalent learning and assessment can often be achieved through more than one form of engagement or expression.
"Autistic students do not want friends or group work."	Preferences vary. The barrier is often unstructured social demand rather than lack of interest in connection.
"A quiet student will ask if they need help."	Help-seeking itself can be a barrier. Institutions should provide clear, low-friction routes to support.
"The disability office owns autism inclusion."	Inclusion depends on teaching, assessment, digital systems, housing, student life, placements and leadership as well as disability services.
"A diagnosis tells us which adjustments to provide."	Access planning should be individualized to functional barriers and course requirements.



Appendix C - Glossary

Term	Meaning in this toolkit
Accessibility	Design and practice that enable people to access environments, information, learning and services.
Accommodation / reasonable adjustment	A change or support intended to remove a disability-related barrier. Terminology and legal tests vary by jurisdiction.
AAC	Augmentative and alternative communication: methods that supplement or replace speech, including symbols, text, signs or devices.
Autistic burnout	A term commonly used by autistic people to describe prolonged exhaustion, reduced functioning and lowered tolerance associated with sustained demands and insufficient recovery. It is not a standalone diagnosis in major diagnostic manuals.
Camouflaging / masking	Strategies used to hide, suppress or compensate for autistic traits or differences in order to fit social expectations.
Executive functioning	Processes involved in planning, initiation, working memory, inhibition, prioritization, time management and switching.
Neurodiversity	The concept that neurological variation is part of human diversity. It is not a synonym for a particular diagnosis.
Sensory processing	How a person notices, interprets and responds to sensory information such as sound, light, touch, movement, smell and internal body signals.
Universal Design for Learning	A framework for designing learning environments to reduce barriers and support learner agency through multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression.
Essential learning outcome	The knowledge, skill or competence that a course or assessment is genuinely intended to measure.



Appendix D - Selected Institutional Resources

Resource	Use	Website
World Health Organization - Autism	Global fact sheet and public-health overview.	https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/autism-spectrum-disorders
United Nations - CRPD Article 24	International right to inclusive education and lifelong learning.	https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-24-education.html
UNESCO-IESALC - Disability inclusion in higher education	Higher education inclusion, rights and policy resources.	https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/breaking-barriers-higher-education-and-students-disabilities
CAST - UDL Guidelines 3.0	Current Universal Design for Learning framework.	https://udlguidelines.cast.org/
Autism&Uni	Co-created transition and university resources for autistic students and institutions.	https://www.autism-uni.org/
AHEAD	Higher education disability-access professional resources and documentation guidance.	https://www.ahead.org/
NICE - Autism in adults	Clinical guidance including communication, environment, autonomy and support considerations.	https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg142

RESOURCE USE

External resources change over time. Institutions should verify current versions, local applicability, licensing and legal status before adopting a policy or required practice.



Selected References

- Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD). Supporting Accommodation Requests: Guidance on Documentation Practices. Professional resource. <https://www.ahead.org/>
- Autism&Uni. Widening Access to Higher Education: resources co-created with autistic students, academics and disability staff. <https://www.autism-uni.org/>
- CAST. (2024). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Autism spectrum disorder in adults: diagnosis and management (CG142), current online recommendations. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg142>
- United Nations. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24 - Education. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/>
- UNESCO-IESALC. (2024). Breaking barriers in higher education for and with students with disabilities. <https://www.unesco.org/>
- UNESCO. (2023; updated online 2025). Revised guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in open and distance learning. <https://www.unesco.org/>
- World Health Organization. (2025). Autism fact sheet. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/autism-spectrum-disorders>

Evidence interpretation

The evidence base on autistic students in higher education continues to develop and is uneven across countries and student populations. Some practical recommendations in this toolkit are institutional design principles synthesized from disability-access practice, autistic student experience, higher education inclusion and broader autism guidance rather than claims that one intervention will suit every autistic student. Institutions should evaluate local implementation using student feedback and outcome data.



Institutional Implementation Summary

A university does not need to redesign every system at once. The highest-value starting point is to remove repeated barriers that affect many students and establish a reliable route for individualized needs that remain.

First 30 days

1. Assign an executive owner and an operational lead for autistic-student inclusion within the wider disability and inclusion framework.
2. Audit the student journey from pre-entry information through adjustment implementation and first assessments.
3. Publish one clear route to disability/access support with timelines, confidentiality information and escalation contacts.
4. Pilot the Course Accessibility Scan in at least one faculty or programme.
5. Identify at least one predictable low-stimulation space and make it visible to students.
6. Review the most common adjustment-implementation failures and fix the underlying process.

By 90 days

- ☐ Faculty quick guidance and training are available.
- ☐ Assessment teams can verify approved arrangements before major exam periods.
- ☐ Placement and housing processes include disability-access planning.
- ☐ Student feedback is collected in an accessible format and includes autistic student voice.
- ☐ Recurring barriers have named system owners and corrective actions.
- ☐ Leadership receives a concise dashboard covering access, implementation, complaints, response time and student experience.

GARC CLOSING PRINCIPLE

The objective is not to create a separate university experience for autistic students. It is to make the ordinary university experience understandable, accessible, flexible where appropriate, safe and genuinely open to different ways of communicating, learning and participating.

Global Autism Research Center (GARC)

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