

Transition to higher education for students on the autism spectrum

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A note on language and terminology

Background

- Increasing prevalence of ASD (Baio, 2018)
- Increasing number of students on the autism spectrum enrolling in higher education (Mulder & Cashin, 2014)
- Transition to higher education is a complex process
 - Adult learning environment
 - Requires students to self-disclose and advocate for themselves
- First year of university = increased risk for student attrition or failure (Bell et al., 2017)

Review question

What are the experiences of individuals with autism and/or their family members regarding transition to higher education?

The literature review

- Databases searched: Medline, CINAHL, ProQuest (articles only), PsycINFO, Scopus, and Informit.
- Keywords: Autism spectrum disorder OR Asperger; higher education OR further education OR tertiary education OR postsecondary education OR university OR college; transition.

11 articles for review

- United States = 4
- Sweden = 2
- United Kingdom = 2
- Australia = 1
- Belgium = 1
- Republic of Ireland = 1

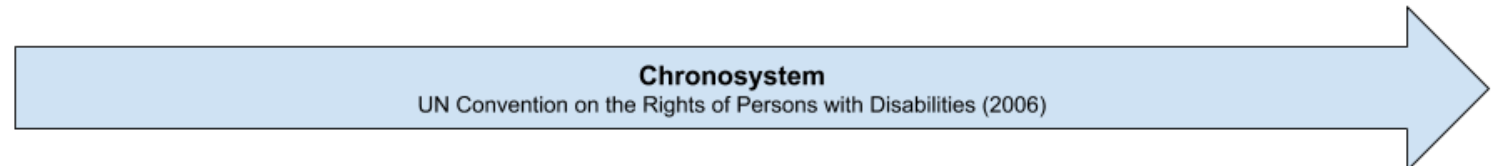
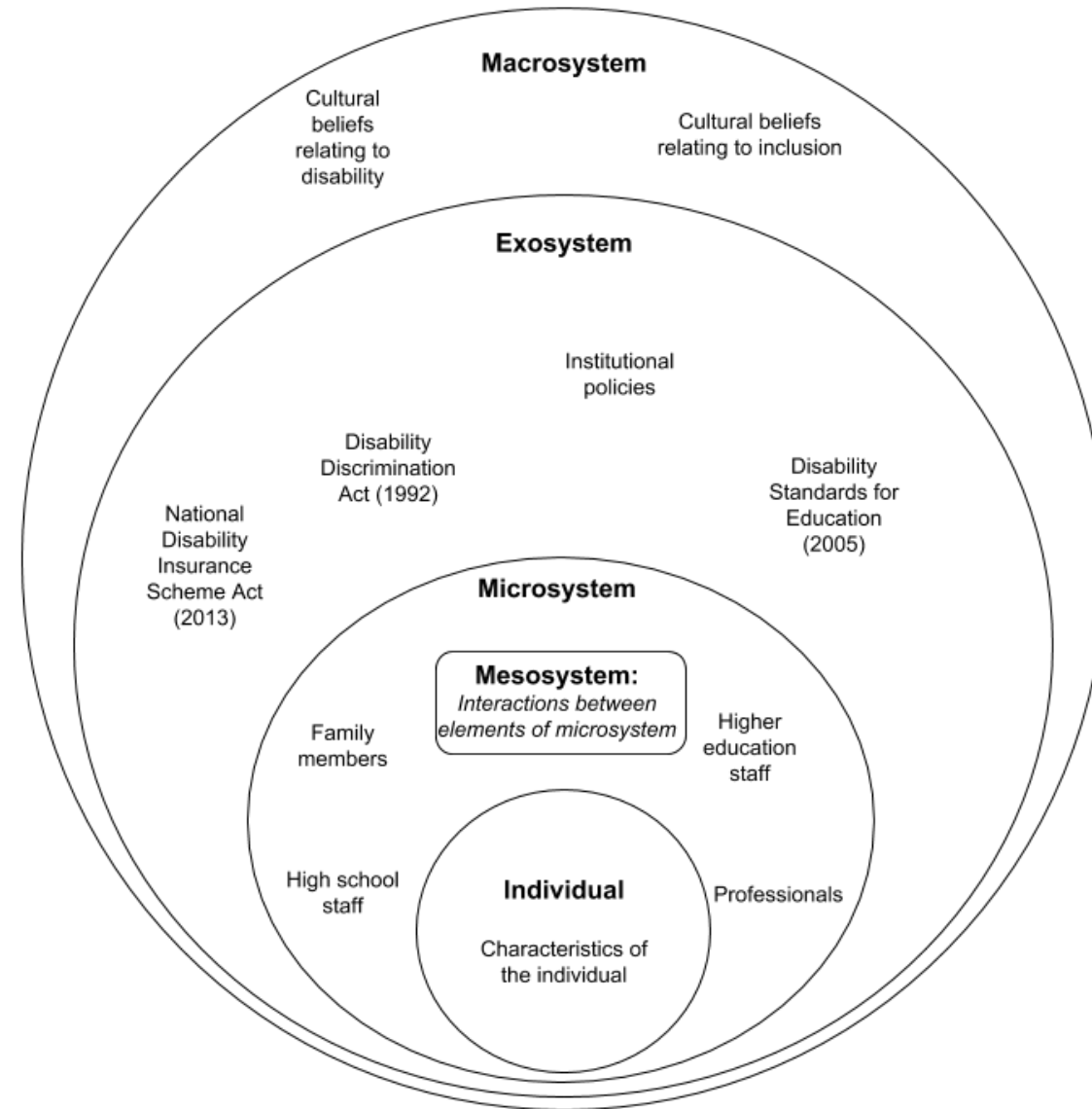
Articles (1-6)

1. Alverson, C. Y., Lindstrom, L. E., & Hirano, K. A. (2015). High school to college: Transition experiences of young adults with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 1-13. doi:10.1177/1088357615611880
2. Anderson, C., & Butt, C. (2017). Young adults on the autism spectrum at college: Successes and stumbling blocks. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 47(10), 3029-3039. doi:10.1007/s1080
3. Baric, V. B., Hemmingsson, H., Hellberg, K., & Kjellberg, A. (2017). The occupational transition process to upper secondary school, further education and/or work in Sweden: As described by young adults with Asperger syndrome and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 47, 667-679. doi:10.1007/s10803-016-2986-z
4. Bell, S., Devecchi, C., Mc Guckin, C., & Shevlin, M. (2017). Making the transition to post-secondary education: Opportunities and challenges experienced by students with ASD in the republic of Ireland. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 32(1), 54-70. doi:10.1080/08856257.2016.1254972
5. Cai, R. Y., & Richdale, A. L. (2016). Educational experiences and needs of higher education students with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 46(1), 31-41. doi:10.1007/s10803-015-2535-1
6. Dymond, S. K., Meadan, H., & Pickens, J. L. (2017). Postsecondary education and students with autism spectrum disorders: Experiences of parents and university personnel. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 29(5), 809-825. doi:10.1007/s10882-017-9558-9

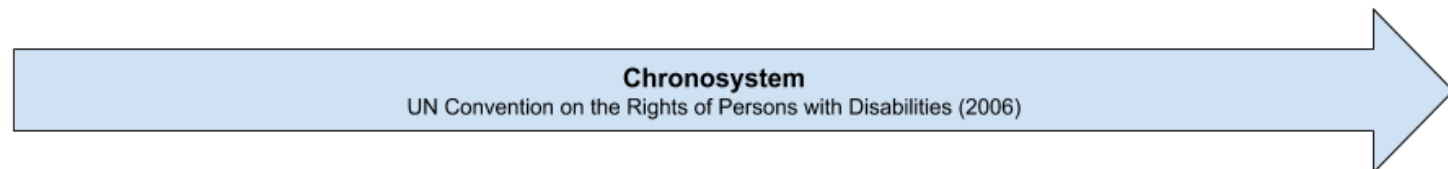
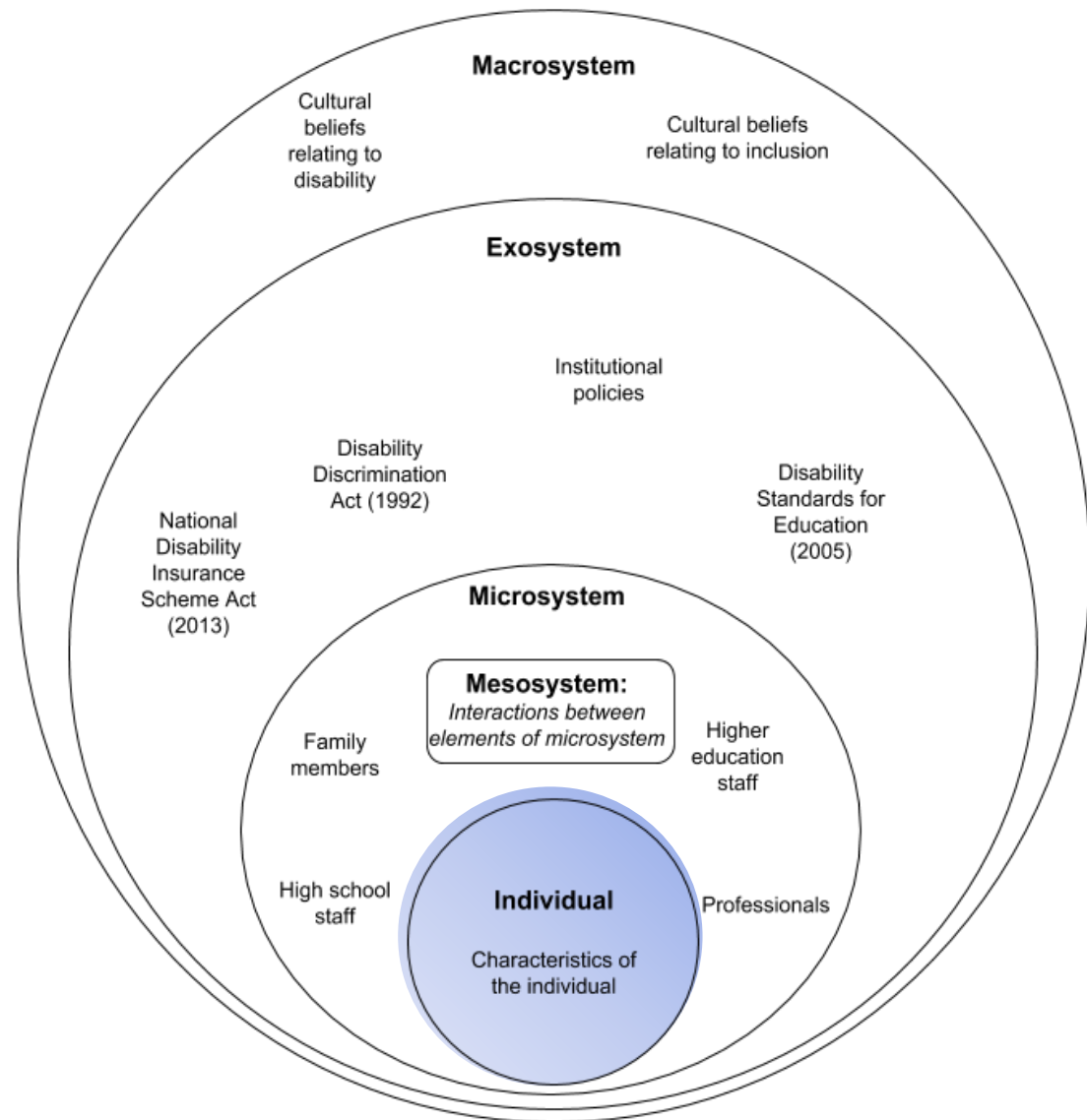
Articles (7-11)

7. Madriaga, M., & Goodley, D. (2010). Moving beyond the minimum: Socially just pedagogies and Asperger's syndrome in UK higher education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(2), 115-131. doi:10.1080/13603110802504168
8. Mitchell, W., & Beresford, B. (2014). Young people with high-functioning autism and Asperger's syndrome planning for and anticipating the move to college: What supports a positive transition? *British Journal of Special Education*, 41(2), 151-171. doi:10.1111/1467-8578.12064
9. Peña, E. V., & Kocur, J. (2013). Parents' experiences in the transition of students with autism spectrum disorders to community college. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, 20(2), 25-32. Retrieved from http://works.bepress.com/edlyn_pena/11/
10. Simmeborn Fleischer, A. (2012). Support to students with Asperger syndrome in higher education—the perspectives of three relatives and three coordinators. *International Journal of Rehabilitation Research*, 35(1), 54-61. doi:10.1097/MRR.0b013e32834f4d3b
11. Van Hees, V., Moyson, T., & Roeyers, H. (2015). Higher education experiences of students with autism spectrum disorder: Challenges, benefits and support needs. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 45(6), 1673-1688. doi:10.1007/s10803-014-2324-2

Bioecological theory model



Individual



Challenges associated with the characteristics of ASD (4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11)

- Social communication difficulties
- Sensory processing difficulties
- Need for structure and routine
- Difficulties with planning, time management
- Independent living skills

Strengths ⁽¹¹⁾

- Strong memory
- Dedication
- Focus
- Eye for detail

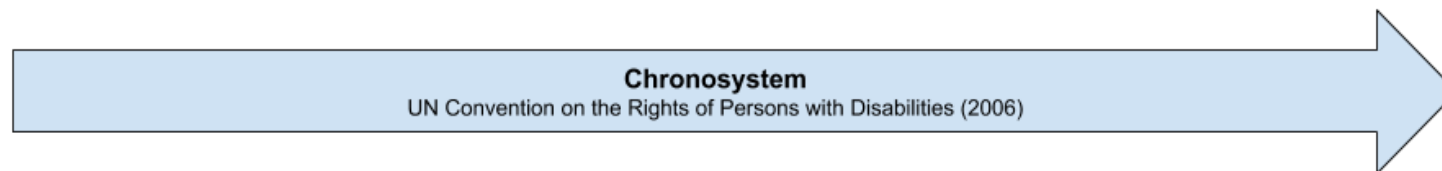
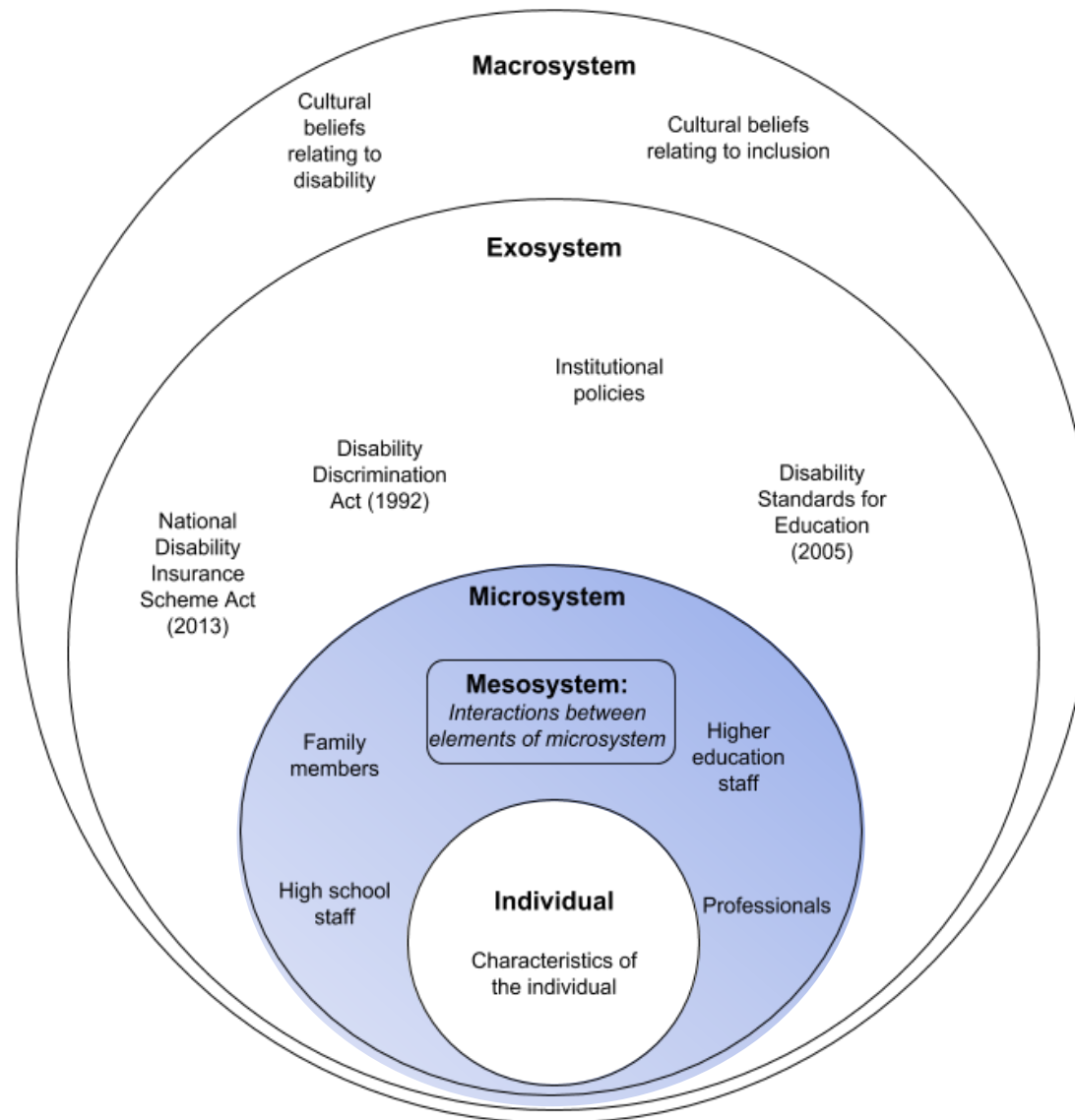
Self awareness and Disclosure (1, 5, 6, 9, 11)

- Self-awareness can vary (may not identify that they need assistance)
- Delay in disclosing/seeking assistance
 - Doubts about disclosure
 - Wanting to “fit in”
 - Deficits in self-determination skills

Mental health and wellbeing (2, 3, 5, 8, 11)

- Increased stress and anxiety
- Stress and anxiety can be improved by timely support and early preparation and planning

Support



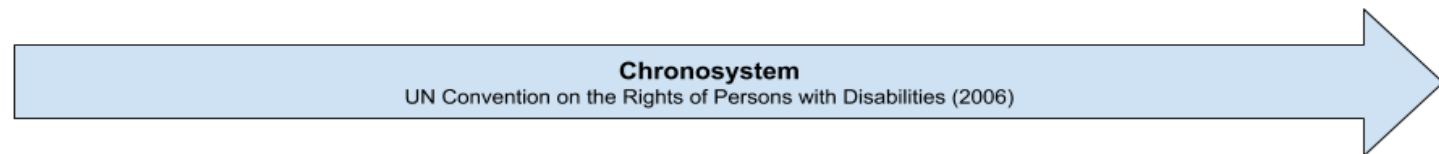
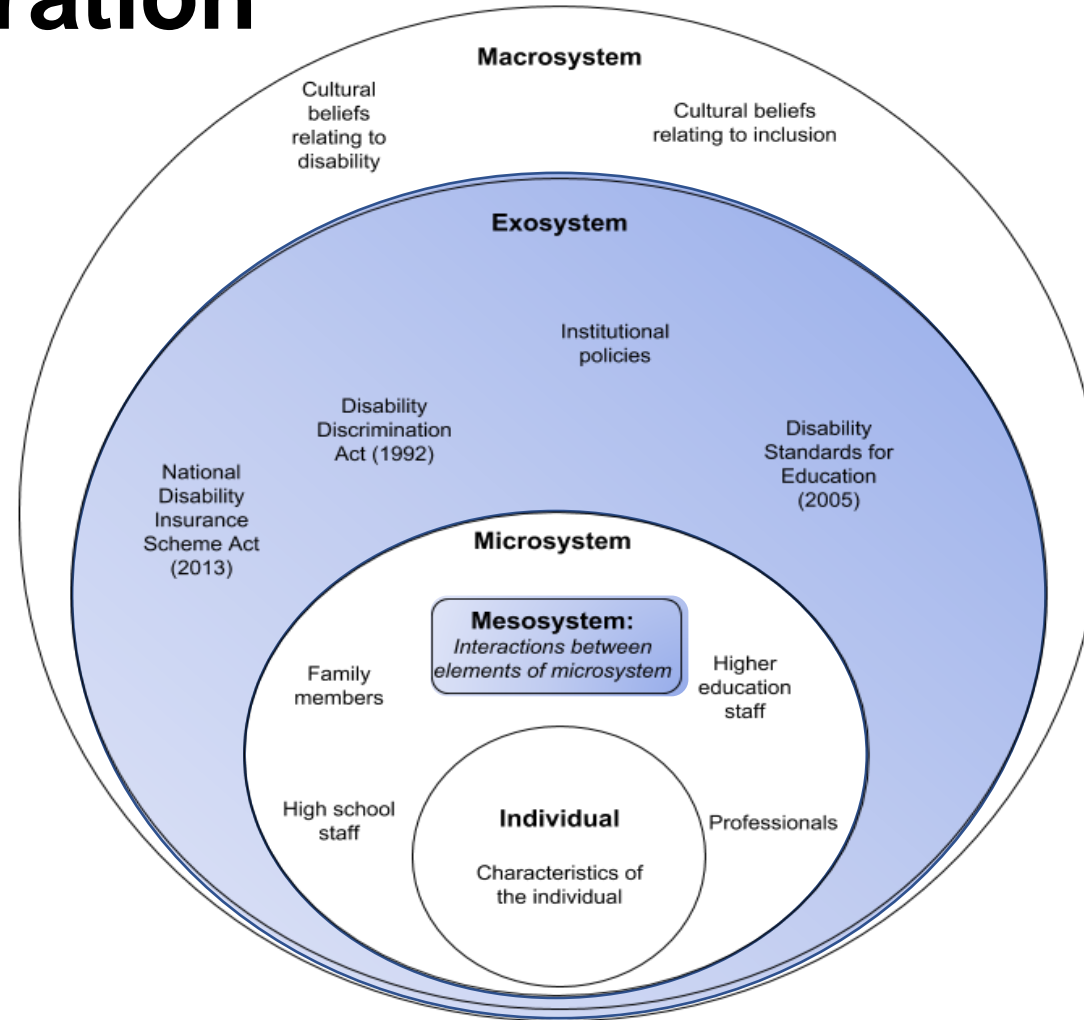
Family support (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11)

- Emotional and psychosocial support
- Often take on active role in disclosure or initiating access to support services

Professional support (4, 5, 8, 9)

- Support
- Help with planning, providing information
- Need knowledge and understanding of ASD
- Honest, reliable. Provide clear and easy to understanding information

Support and Collaboration



Collaboration (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10)

- Transition should be a collaborative effort
- Pre-planning from school years

Challenges to collaboration (5, 6, 9)

- Awareness of rights and responsibilities as outlined in relevant legislation
- Privacy legislation
- Adult learning environment

Important considerations

- Early access to services and accommodations
- Delay in disclosure/disclosing
- Role of family support
- Impact of privacy legislation and “adult learning environment” expectations
- Staff knowledge and understanding of autism spectrum disorders
- Individualised planning

The current study

Research question: *What are the facilitators and barriers to transition to university for individuals on the autism spectrum?*

What the current study hopes to achieve

- Understand the experiences of students on the autism spectrum and their family members during transition
- Examine the experiences, understanding and knowledge of university staff.
- Evidence-base to ensure the development of best practice
- Inform recommendations for training and staff development

Inclusive research practices

- Input on research tools → advisory group

Autism CRC's Inclusive Research Practice Guides and Checklists for Autism Research

- Available at: <https://www.autismcrc.com.au/knowledge-centre/resource/inclusive-research>

Advisory group

- Feedback on
 - interview questions, planned methodology, terminology
 - decisions regarding changes in direction for the study
- Expected involvement of a maximum of one or two hours a month on an ad-hoc basis (via email, phone, face-to-face)
- Role is voluntary
- Input to be acknowledged in final thesis and in there may be opportunities to contribute to peer-reviewed journal articles

Components of the study

Phase one: an online survey + case studies

Phase two: focus groups (online and face-to-face)

Online survey

- Students on the autism spectrum who have completed at least one semester (6 months) of undergraduate study at an Australian university
- Family members of students who have completed at least one semester (6 months) of undergraduate study at an Australian university who provided support during the transition period or first year of university
- University staff members who have had interactions with students on the autism spectrum

Further information

On the [ADCET news page](#)

Available at: <https://www.adcet.edu.au/resource/10077/students-on-the-autism-spectrum-seeking-experiences-of-transition-to-university/>

Results and findings

- A summary of the results will be shared on the [Transition to University for students on the autism spectrum](#) Facebook page.
- Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/AutismTransition2Uni/>
- We will also look to present our findings at conferences and webinars beginning in late 2020.

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Thank
You!