From surviving to thriving
A study of autistic students and the online learning experience.

- education is designed to address the expectations of a predominant (non-autistic) group (Chown & Beavan, 2012; Fabri et al., 2020)
- autistic students face disadvantages due to negative perceptions (Lipson et al., 2020)
- academic staff fail to action student support plans (Hector, 2020)
- significant disparity between achievement of ‘non-disabled’ and autistic students (Office for Students, 2019)
- fail to achieve potential due to lack of specific support policies for autistic students (Chown et al., 2018)

20 autistic students took part in my pilot study, sharing personal narratives of their experience of learning and support at the Open University.

- “online forums: “easier to communicate...as I have time to think about my responses” (*S1.08)
- “we can use transcripts for videos or audio instead of having to listen” (*S1.03)
- “learning is based on a pace that I can set” (*S1.11)
- “easier to handle things when I’m at home in a safe environment” (*S1.10)

Pilot study participants’ online learning preferences

- being able to study at home (87.5%)
- being provided with course study materials (92.9%)
- working with other students (6%)
- knowing that study skills is available (50%)

Pilot study participants are positive about learning online. They offered insights into their core needs and that opposed current provision.

By addressing course structure and support issues raised by the participants, autistic student experiences could move from ‘surviving’ to ‘thriving’.

PGRs: Marilyn Long
Supervisors: Dr Tim Coughlan
Dr Paco Iniesta
Faculty: IET