



National
Autistic
Society

Professionals Conference:

Improving Practice,
Improving Every Life



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Introduction to this guide

Why have the National Autistic Society produced this guide?

We wanted to ensure that all delegates have as much information as possible ahead of the conference to allow for planning and preparation, this guide was also designed to provide autistic delegates and speakers with as much sensory information as possible from an autistic perspective to allow for managing expectations and planning around known needs.

This guide will 'walk' you through the ICC levels and the individual rooms that are being used for the conference, as well as giving key information on toilet facilities, lifts/stairs and transitioning between rooms.

Information relating to registration is on page 8 – further information will be available closer to the time on the conference website. On registration all delegates will receive a delegate book that also contains the programme along with their lanyard stating their name and job title (if given when booking).

An explanation about terminology

The language we use is important because it embodies and can therefore help change attitudes towards autism. To reflect the findings of recent research, the National Autistic Society has begun to gradually increase the use of the term 'autistic' – particularly when talking about and to adults in that group. We will also use 'on the autism spectrum' as the default way of describing people on the autism spectrum.

Within this guide we will use the language that the ICC uses to describe rooms, facilities and floors of the building as this will reflect the wording on the signs in the building.

Why did the National Autistic Society chose Birmingham ICC?

We chose Birmingham for our venue this year as we wanted to try a new locations from previous years but were mindful of the need to keep the venue outside of London but in a central location that was not too difficult for a lot of people to get to by car or public transport as this is something that came up in post-event feedback from delegates.

We felt Birmingham offered the best solution to our criteria as it has direct trains to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Liverpool, Leeds, York, Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Coventry, Bristol, Cardiff, Plymouth, Bournemouth, Exeter and London

The International Convention Centre (ICC) was chosen as it is in a central location, near to Birmingham New Street station and several hotel chains. The ICC is a frequently used venue for major events, including political party conferences, and is set up to host large numbers of people in a very professional manner.

The upper levels of the ICC are restricted access to event attendees/conference delegates which allows us more control over the space and facilities near the halls we are using, and the room we are using for the Quiet Space has soundproofing materials embedded in the walls to reduce external sounds.

Throughout this guide we have endeavoured to point out any potential issues that may arise for delegates who are disabled, particularly noting any possible sensory issues that may affect autistic delegates or speakers.

We want all of our delegates to feel comfortable during the conference and having plenty of information in advance is one way we can help autistic delegates plan and prepare.

This guide is one of the first of its kind we have done, and everything written is from the perspective of an autistic staff member, and is done with the intention to inform, not scare, if anything written in this guide causes you concern or raises any questions please contact one of the team on either conference@nas.org.uk or Disability.Confident@nas.org.uk

Autism Access Information

Please see below for details about the specific accessibility arrangements we have made for autistic delegates at the conference. If you have a specific requirement that is not listed, please contact us on conference@nas.org.uk and we will do our best to meet your needs.

Registration and site familiarisation

Registration is often a busy time, so autistic delegates will have the opportunity to register between 4.30 and 5.30 pm on the evening prior to the conference to avoid the crowds; this will take place on Level Four in the same location as it will on Thursday morning.

Interaction badges

You can request these when you register or at any other time during the conference. These allow you to indicate how you would like to interact with other delegates: red badges indicate that a delegate or speaker would like to be left alone and not have contact initiated, yellow badges indicate that people who are already known to the delegate/speaker may approach and initiate conversation, green badges indicate that the delegate/speaker is open to anyone initiating conversation and purple badges will be displayed by delegates who are offering themselves as support to others.

We will ask other delegates to respect the badges, but please be aware that we cannot enforce this.

Quiet lunch space

There will be refreshments and lunch available in the quiet room so that autistic delegates can have refreshments and lunch in a less crowded environment if they wish. You do not need to pre-book this in advance and there will be a range of plain lunch options laid out

in the quiet room ahead of the lunch session. If you would like to know what the menu is in advance, please contact us to ask.

Seating and reservation signs

We will have seats reserved for autistic delegates, if you don't like to be near people or need to be able to get out easily. You can choose to sit in these or use any other available seat if you prefer.

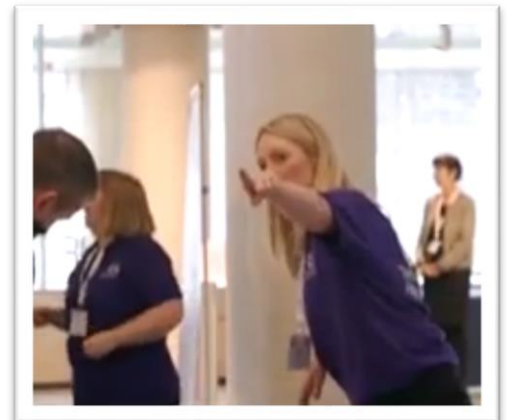
Reservation signs will be available if you want to reserve a particular chair to sit in or if you need to be able to leave your chair and come back to it later. You can request these when you register, or at any other time during the conference from one of the National Autistic Society staff.

Questions for speakers

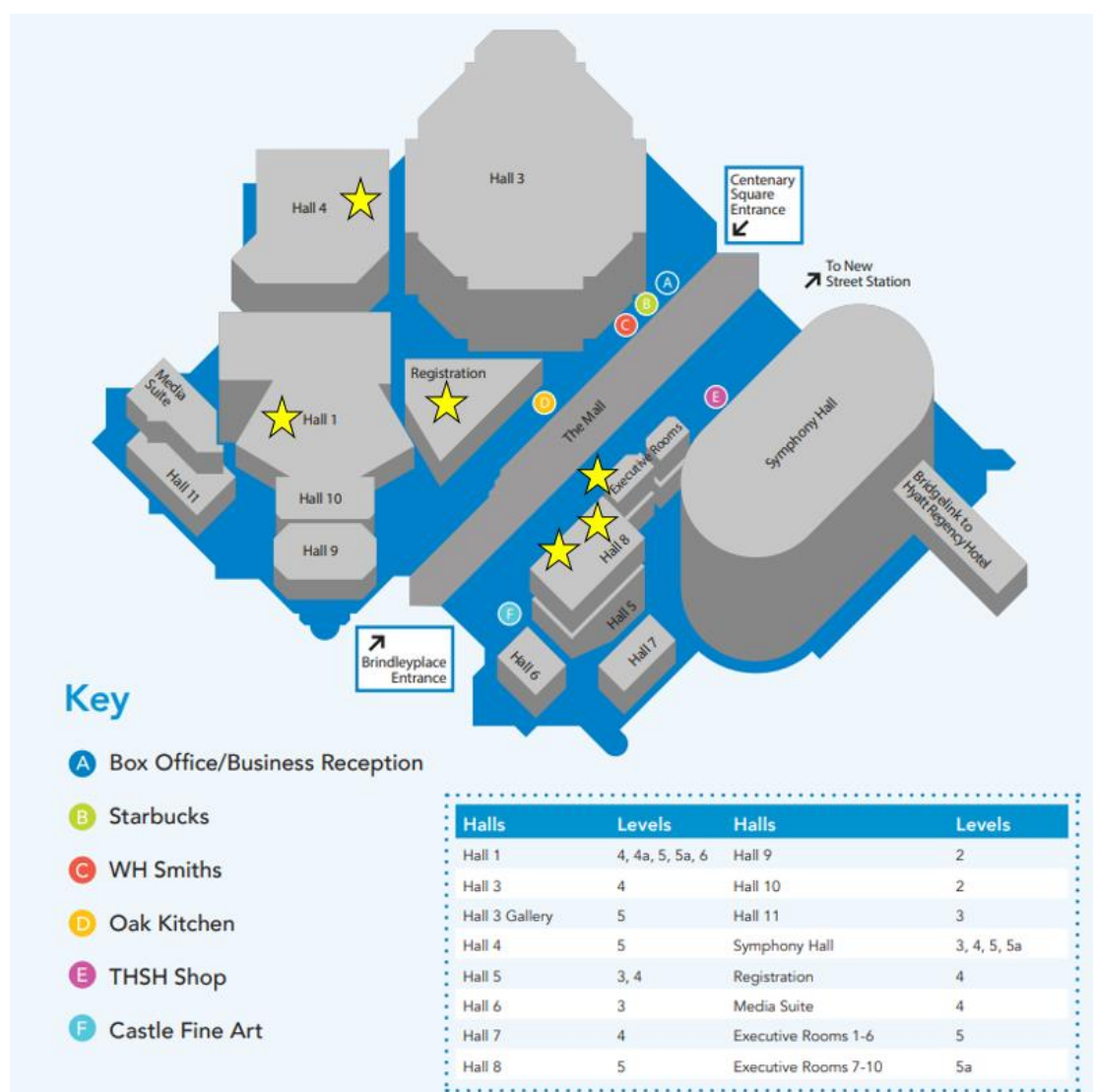
If you prefer not to ask questions aloud, you can leave written questions in advance of the session and we will pass them onto the Chairperson or the session speaker. We cannot guarantee that they will select your question to answer, however. Please leave your written questions at the registration desk at least 1 hour prior to the applicable session.

Staff

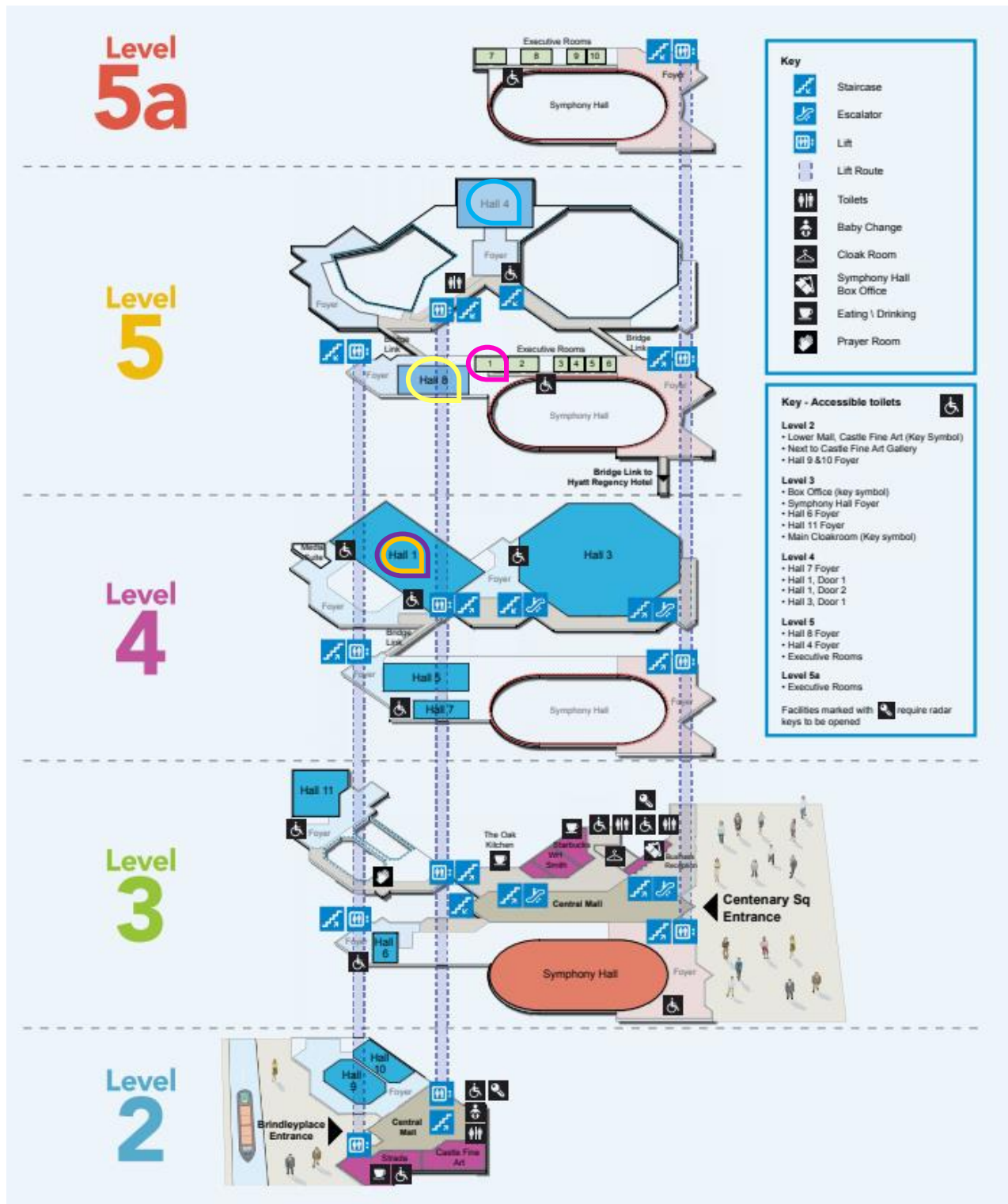
The National Autistic Society conference staff and volunteers will be wearing **purple** polo shirts with our new spectrum logo in white on both sides ↓



International Convention Centre Layout and Room Allocation



| | | |
|-------------------------|---|---------|
| Registration | Conference registration Refreshment breaks Lunchtime catering | Level 4 |
| Hall 1 | Welcome addresses Keynote Speakers Stream sessions A Closing remarks | Level 4 |
| | Entrance to reserved seating for autistic delegates | Level 5 |
| Hall 8a | Stream sessions C | Level 5 |
| Hall 8b | Stream sessions B | |
| Executive Room 1 | Quiet Space | Level 5 |
| Hall 4 | Exhibition Space | Level 5 |



Please note that there are no hoist-enabled toilets in the conference centre

If any delegates require a RADAR key to access the lower level facilities please ask the Reception desk or find Helen Ellis (National Autistic Society staff)

Level Two

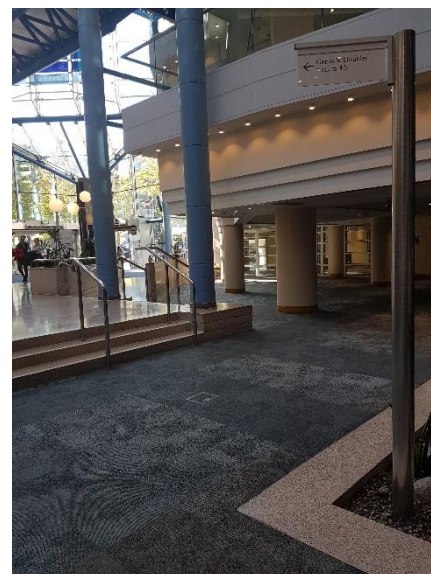
Entrance from Brindleyplace

The entrance from Brindleyplace (next to the canal) leads into Level 2 where there is a mixture of blue marl carpet and polished beige floor.

There are both steps and ramps to different raised areas of the floor, with a number of blue narrow pillar columns, some wider beige toned pillars and signposts to facilities.

This part of the building is public access and so will not be restricted to delegates only.

There is one accessible toilet that is RADAR locked, a ladies, a gents and a baby changing/feeding facility (this can also be used by anyone needing a quiet place for medical purposes) – if you require access to this facility and do not have a RADAR key please ask Reception for access to this space.



Level 3 (ICC Reception, Cloakroom, Starbucks and WH Smiths) is accessible from Level 2 via stairs, the glass lift or a ramp.

The clear glass lift that runs through the ICC is accessible from this level, to go above Level 3 however delegates will need to ask a member of the conference team for the instructions as otherwise the lift stops at Level 3 to prevent members of the public from reaching privately hired spaces.

The main lift is reasonably large and should comfortably fit a wheelchair plus two other delegates or several standing individuals.

Level Three

Outside – Centenary Square entrance

The immediate outside of the ICC is brickwork path, laid in patterned effect of white, orange and grey brick.

The outside of the building has a large amount of reflective glass and blue scaffold-type posts.



Entrance Foyer

The entrance is double automatic sliding doors and presents onto blue carpet immediately inside, leading to a slope or steps down to a shiny mottled beige/grey flooring.



To the right hand side on entering the building is a cloakroom that is free to use for conference attendees – please drop off any large bags or coats here before proceeding to the next level up for registration.

The main entrance foyer (leading into The Mall) can be very bright when the sun is shining due to the glass roofing and large windows in the building; the ceiling is a mixture of glass panels and blue 'pipes' that connect together.



As there are a large amount of reflective surfaces and a number of members of the public passing through the ICC the main Entrance Foyer can be very overwhelming visually.

The majority of the flooring is not carpeted and echoes noises from shoes and background sounds. There will be lots of noise as footfall increases, particularly as there is a Starbucks situated further on from the escalator in The Mall, near the lift, which creates vocal noise as well as machine based sounds, and lingering coffee-based tastes and scents.

There is also a WH Smiths next to the cloakroom that is open to the public that can also create additional footfall and noise from checkout tills and general shopping acoustics.

The main toilets for the public are by the Cloakroom, to the right of the main entrance from Centenary Square; accessible via ramp or stairs.

As these are public use facilities the separate accessible toilet is locked and RADAR enabled.

The main facilities are multi-cubicle, with solid white doors and a white/grey colour scheme. Lighting is ceiling spotlights and under mirror/over sink lighting.



The sinks are oval basins embedded in light grey surfaces with push-down taps.

The hand dryers are Dyson Airblade (very noisy) and there are lots of mirrors lining the walls opposite the cubicle doors.

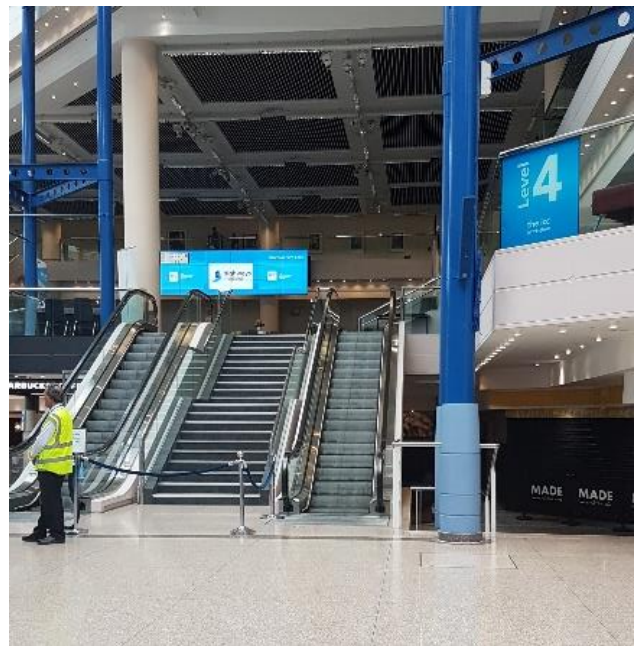
These are public-accessible toilets and as such are in regular use throughout the day, including being cleaned by male and female members of ICC cleaning staff.



To reach further levels of the ICC delegates must pass security guards at the bottom of the escalators or be escorted by a member of staff in the lift; once you have registered your conference lanyard will give prove your delegate status to security.

If you are carrying oversized bags you may be asked at this point to check them into the cloakroom for the duration of the day's events.

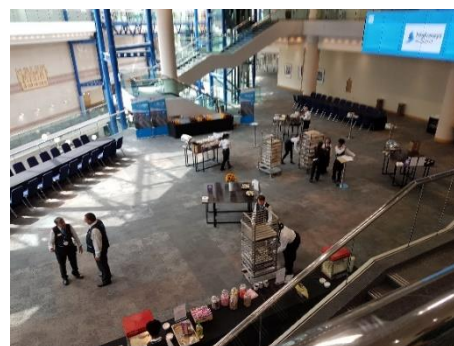
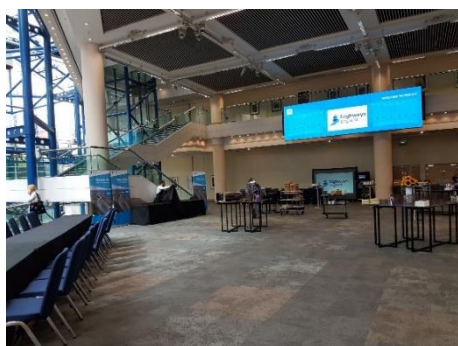
Please note that conference attendees are not required to sign in with Reception as we have our own registration process, however please be mindful of other members of the public using The Mall and the other Halls and rooms in the building, and of ICC staff who may be carrying out duties not related to the National Autistic Society booking.



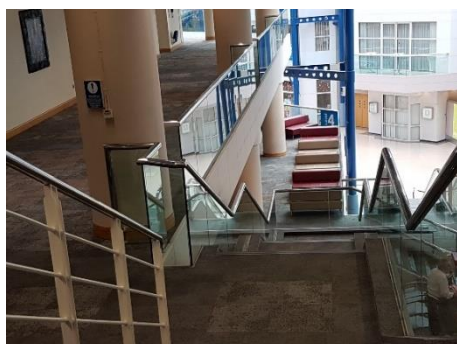
Level Four

Registration/Refreshments

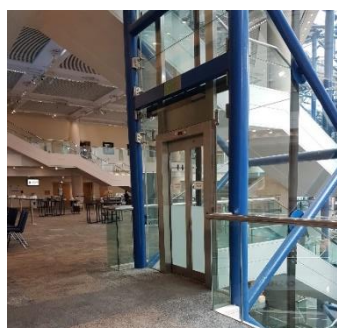
Registration takes place on the Level 4 which is one level up from The Mall and Centenary Square entrance. At the top of the escalator is a large open space foyer where the registration desks will be, along with tea/coffee and catering at various points during the day.



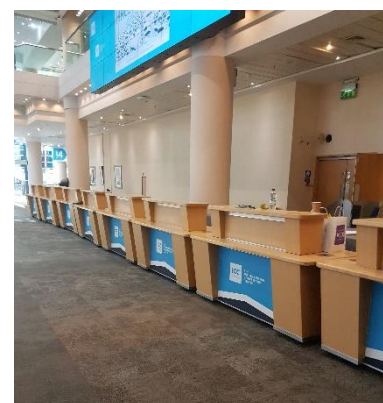
To the right of the lobby are stairs to Level Five, along with a walkway space with soft couches and empty spaces for delegates to use during refreshment breaks and lunch time – however as these spaces are on a balcony overlooking the main reception area of the centre they may be exceptionally noisy at times as sound travels through out the open spaces of the ICC.



Registration will take place at the back of the foyer (underneath the electric display screen), registration will be split across several desks alphabetically by surname (this will be signposted); it may take some time as we anticipate a lot of delegates arriving at the same time for registration on Thursday morning.

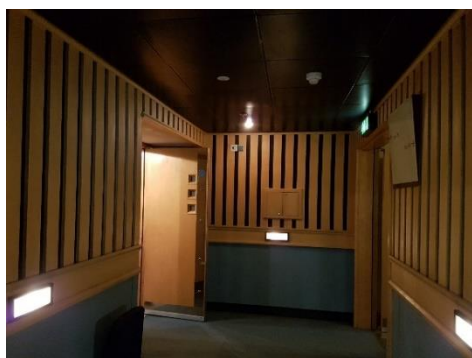


There will be a separate desk slightly off from the main registration to the left towards the lift (the glass column structure) that disabled delegates can use to register in a less stressful manner, it would help greatly if this preference could be made known to the organisers in advance of the conference so the set-up for registration can run smoothly.



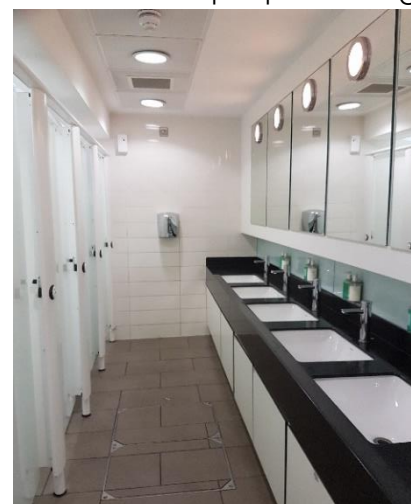
There will also be a brief opportunity on Wednesday evening for disabled delegates to register for the conference in advance, details of the timings and location of this pre-registration will be available on the website in the run up to the conference.

From the left side of the Registration Foyer follow the corridor to the main entrance to Hall 1, the inside is wood panelled with dim lighting, with the doors to Hall 1 off the left of the corridor and a corridor leading to toilets off to the right.



Most of the standard ladies and gents facilities in the ICC are styled with cubicles in white or opaque frosting doors.

There are wall mirrors above the sinks with additional wall lighting near the top.



The individual sinks being square and embedded in black surfaces, the taps are generally motion detecting but the soaps are separate and freestanding.

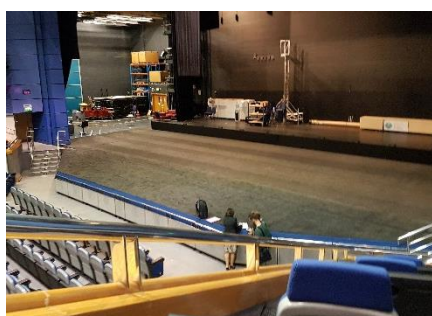
Hand drying is wall mounted electrical hand dryers. The lighting is generally ceiling and wall based circular lights.

Toilets through the ICC are cleaned regularly through the day, we will request that scented cleaning products are not used for the duration of our conference however we cannot guarantee that this will be adhered to on the day due to circumstances beyond our control.

Main Stage (Hall 1)



Hall 1 is a multi-level hall that can hold over a thousand delegates at full capacity. The main entrance for delegates is from Level 4, with an additional quieter entrance from Level 5 leading directly to the reserved section of seating for autistic delegates.



Autistic delegates are free to sit anywhere they wish that is not reserved for speakers or staff, the area reserved has been chosen as it allows for a quieter entrance to be used to access the seating.

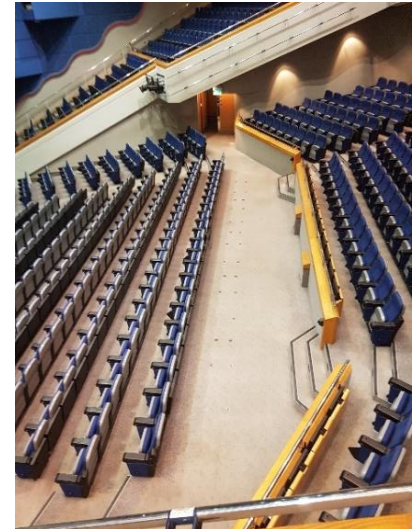
← View from the reserved wing seating



The entrance to the Hall brings delegates out in the middle section of the main seating, with approximately 250 seats to the right (heading towards the stage) and 300 seats to the left (further away from the stage).

There is space allocated and marked (silver spots on the carpet) level with the entrance door for wheelchair users to position themselves – the last row of the seating in front of the wheelchair

space will be reserved for those accompanying/attending with wheelchair users. Staff will be on hand during change over times to assist if needed.



Sections of the front row of seats will be reserved for speakers and conference staff including photographers.

There is further seating available up the stairs to the sides (the wings), the seating viewable as delegates come in is available to be used by any delegates, while the seating above the entrance (to the right as viewed from the audience) is reserved for autistic delegates with a

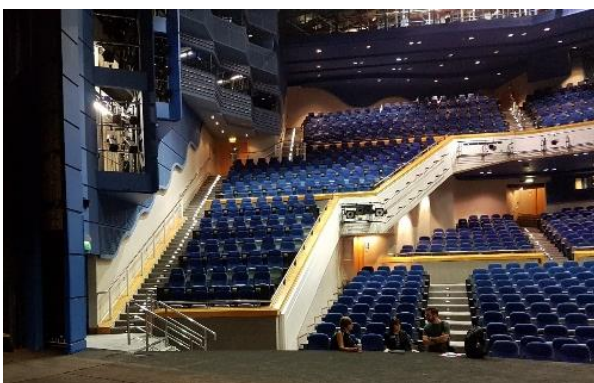
separate entrance/exit that can be used from Level 5, at the top of the stairs down the side of the wing.



Seating is blue cushioned spring pull-down seats, with plastic armrests between the individual seats.

The stage has heavy pile carpet that absorbs a lot of sound and allows speakers to move around without creating footfall noise.

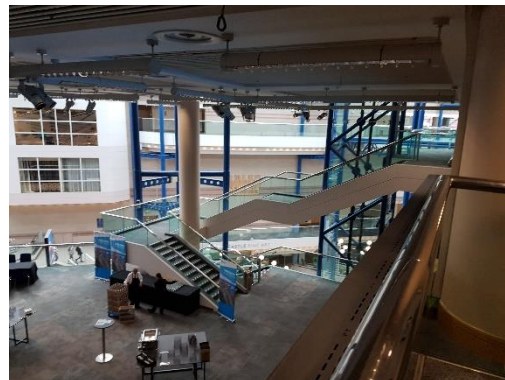
Lighting is focused on the stage from a series of spotlights above the main section of the seating, with supplementary lighting coming from lights mounted on the sides of the wings.



 The wing of reserved seating for autistic delegates

Level Five

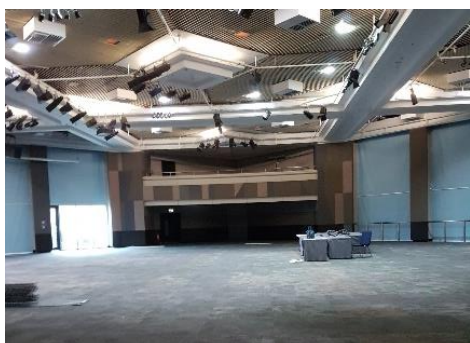
Level Five is accessible via stairs or the lift; there are stairs on both sides of the Registration Foyer, those by the lift come out by the walkway across to Hall 8 and the Executive Rooms and the corridor round to the additional entrance to Hall 1 (to the autistic delegates reserved seats), the stairs on the other side of the Registration Foyer come out by the doors to Hall 4 (Exhibition Space).



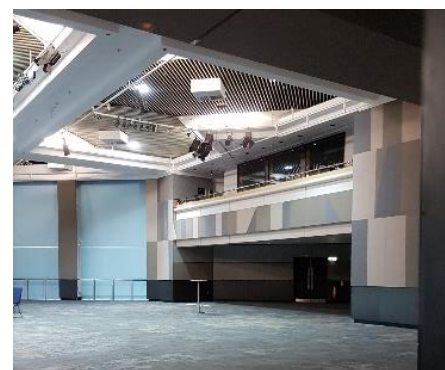
Exhibition Space (Hall 4)

Hall 4 is a large high ceiling room that is coloured in shades of blue, grey and white.

The majority of the room is open space to hold exhibition stands with doors leading out to a small foyer.



There is some natural light via an external window as well as ceiling spotlights and additional stage lighting that can be focused on specific areas of the room.



There is a balcony area to the right hand side (on entry to the hall) for ICC staff to control the lights and other systems – this is not accessible to delegates or exhibitors.

For the Exhibition Space the layout of Hall 4 will look very similar to the stock image below:



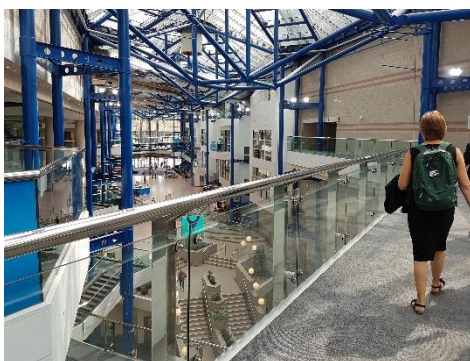
We are expecting between 30 and 50 exhibitors to attend the conference on both days, so the hall will be fairly busy and tight for space – if you are planning to attend the exhibition then please be aware that it is likely to be very noisy and crowded.

Outside of Hall 4 there is a small foyer with ladies and gents toilets in the same general style as the previous facilities, with electric hand dryers and circular wall lighting on the mirrors above the black square sinks. Across the foyer a separate accessible toilet with paper towels and high ceiling lighting.



Walkway across The Mall

From Hall 4 follow the corridor around to the glass lift/stairs – next to these (and directly above a similar walkway connecting the sides of Level Four) there is a sofa bench and a walkway across The Mall to Hall 8 and the Executive Rooms.



The walkway is approximately 3 people wide and is the same grey mottled carpet as the rest of the Level Four and Five flooring. The sides are glass panels with silver metal rails.

The walkway finishes with a split path – left leads to the Executive Rooms and one of the entrances to Hall 8, the right to the other Hall 8 entrance and a small foyer with a lift/stairs to the lower levels.

Breakout Room 1 and 2 (Hall 8a and 8b)

To reach Hall 8a or 8b delegates need to cross the walkway and enter the Hall 8 corridor – this is a dimly lit wood panelled corridor that has the two entrance doors for the divided Hall 8.

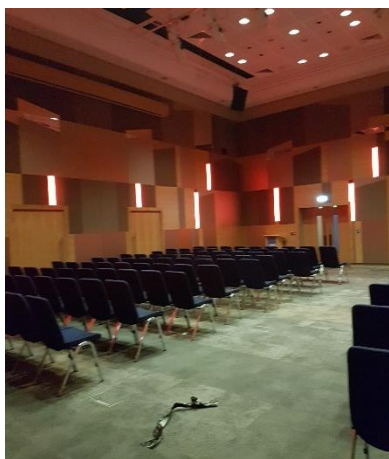


For the conference Hall 8 will be split in two rooms for the breakout sessions, 8a and 8b, by way of a folding room divider.

Both rooms are recently redecorated and have coloured panelling on the walls.



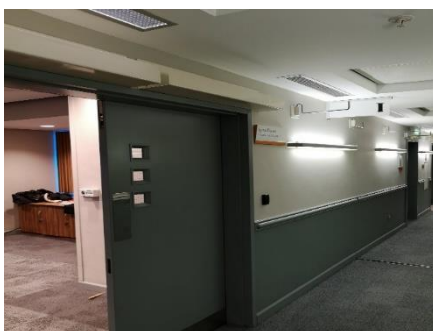
The lighting is ceiling spotlights and the rooms have a muted grey tones carpet. The seating is individual hard back chairs, covered in blue fabric.



There will be space reserved at the back for wheelchairs and seats reserved on the aisles and in the second row for autistic delegates – the first rows will be held for speakers and National Autistic Society staff responsible for time-keeping and media.

Quiet Room (Executive Room 1)

Executive Room 1 is the first room reached in the corridor along from the Hall 8 doors; there are steps down from this direction but there is step free access from the other end of the corridor which is reachable via lifts from the main entrance/theatre or the walkway from Level 4 past the benches.



From Hall 8/walkway from Registration Foyer

From Centenary Square entrance

The Executive Room 1 set up will be casual for its purpose as a Quiet Room – the tables will be split apart with spaces between the few of them that remain to make it feel less like a formal meeting space; we will have a variety of sensory aids in the room as well that can be used by delegates in distress.



The room itself is fairly bright due to the expansive windows in the wall opposite the door – this overlooks The Mall including Starbucks and the escalators.

The lights (which are spotlights and larger hanging circles) will remain off for the duration of the conference unless delegates themselves turn them on when sensory seeking (please check with others in the room at the time before altering the lighting level)



The colour scheme is similar to the rest of the conference, muted blues and greys with some wood panelling.

The room is soundproofed and we will have staff monitoring the sensory conditions in the room and providing assistance if needed.

The Executive Rooms have their own facilities within the corridor, a single occupancy accessible toilet and cubicles for ladies and gents.



The cubicles seem slightly more spacious than in other areas of the ICC and there are less reflective surfaces as the mirrors are individual to the sinks not across the whole wall.

On exiting the Executive Rooms corridor the hallway leads out to an open space with a sofa bench, directly above the Entrance Foyer from Centenary Square. The hall way follows round the right to the Symphony Hall entrance and internal bridge to the Hyatt Regency Hotel (pictured).



Travel and Accommodation

Getting to Birmingham ICC

Direct wording from the ICC website:

Trains

If you're jumping on the train you'll find three stations to choose from, all in the city centre, and all just a short walk from the ICC with New Street Station the closest. And because we're part of the NEC Group you can get 20% off pre-booked ticket prices thanks to our fantastic partnership with Virgin Trains *

From New Street walk up to Victoria Square and follow the signs to Centenary Square, the ICC and Arena Birmingham. Enter Centenary Square and walk straight towards the ICC, passing the stunning Library of Birmingham and Rep Theatre on your right.

Airport

Birmingham Airport is the only UK airport with a train station connected to the terminal, which means it takes just a ten-minute train ride to get into Birmingham New Street. If you'd prefer to jump in a taxi, you'll find a rank directly outside the airport.

Car

If you're driving to the ICC, you'll have no problems finding us as Birmingham is at the heart of the UK's motorway networks, close to the M6, M5 and M42. And when you get here, you'll find parking's a walk in the park thanks to the thousands of spaces near to our venue. Our closest spaces are at our sister venue Arena Birmingham (King Edward's Road, B1 2AA). You can reserve your space in advance to save you the hassle of paying when you arrive. Mobile payments can be made via www.parkjockey.com/pay and quote location code 5020.

** (Please note this must be booked through <https://www.virgintrains.co.uk/nec/> and needs to have the specific destination of Birmingham New Street – you will be asked to show your ticket for the conference at the ICC to any ticket inspector during your journey)*

Hotels around Birmingham

http://www.reservation-highway.co.uk/conference_info.php

[Professionals Conference - ICC\HotelListforNationalAutisticSociety2019.doc](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

For more general questions about the conference, including pricing, content and speakers please visit <https://learn.autism.org.uk/ehome/professionals-conference-2019/home/> or contact conference@nas.org.uk

Q) Where is the reserved seating for autistic delegates and do I have to sit there?

A) In the main hall (Hall 1) the reserved area is the wing of seats to stage right (from audience perspective) and is accessible via Level 5 which is quieter than the main entrance on Level 4. (See page 10 and 11 for more details)

You do not have to use this seating, it is completely optional to autistic delegates, you may prefer to sit in a different area of Hall 1 depending on your preference for view of the stage and height of seating.

In Halls 8a and 8b there will be reserved seating along the aisles and some in the front two rows, again this is non-compulsory and delegates can choose to sit anywhere they like that isn't reserved for speakers/staff.

Q) Will the audience be allowed to clap speakers or will there be a rule about using the BSL applause ('flappause') only?

A) We encourage all our audiences to be mindful of the sensory needs of others and advocate for the use of BSL applause, however we cannot control the audience response and there are autistic speakers who want the auditory applause for sensory input.

Q) What happens if I have a sensory overload during a talk?

A) Please feel free to use whatever communication method works best for you:

- There will be a conference phone on the day that you can call or text if you need help, this number will be given out at registration
- If you are able to get out of the room yourself then please make your way to the Quiet Room on Level 5
- Find one of the National Autistic Society staff in branded t-shirts or anyone displaying a light purple "Ask Me For Help" interaction badge

We will do our best to help you at the time but please think carefully when planning your day and have sensory aids or stim toys with you if this normally helps

Q) Can I leave the conference venue for a break during the day?

A) Absolutely, just make sure you take your lanyard with you so the ICC staff know you are a conference delegate

Q) I'm concerned about the food at lunch – what are my options?

A) Lunch will be served in the Exhibition Hall (Hall 4) or plain options in the Quiet Room (Executive Room 1), if you have any specific dietary requirements please let us know in advance via conference@nas.org.uk

There are also food and drink establishments within the ICC that lunch can be purchased from, should delegates prefer, this cost will not be reimbursed however.

Q) I need a support worker with me at all times, can they sit in the seats reserved for autistic delegates or do I have to sit elsewhere?

A) Yes, they can sit with you in the reserved sections, however we would ask all support workers to consider the needs of the other delegates when choosing seats in those sections

