

Tapping into the unique skills of students with autism

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Credit: Science Network WA

In what's believed to be an Australian first, Curtin University is tapping into the unique skills of students with autism to help them find careers in the software testing industry.

The Autism Academy for Software Quality Assurance ([AASQA](#)) aims to provide training and employment opportunities for students on the

autism spectrum.

AASQA's deputy director, Associate Professor Tele Tan, says students with autism have distinctive skills—such as reliability and task focus—that are ideal for finding and fixing bugs in software.

"Software testing is an art form where you require a knowledge of coding as well as attention to detail, and the ability to do repetitive tasks with high accuracy," he says.

"The last two characteristics are found in some people with autism, not necessarily all of them, but there is anecdotal evidence that people with autism have these skills that can translate into employment in the [software testing](#) area."

AASQA has several programs including an outreach program with 26 primary school students that aims to develop their technology and software skills via a coding club.

"The youngest is in Year 7, he's probably about 12 years old and we were going to have a few [primary school](#) children joining us this term, as young as Year 2 and Year 3," says Assoc Prof Tan.

Another program involves training tertiary students.

"We have a certification scholarship that we offer to students who want to take on software testing certification," he says.

"That way, they can then decide if software testing is something they want to pursue after university."

A third initiative involves working with the Australian Computing Society (ACS) Foundation to provide ICT internships, such as three

interns who did a stint with Bankwest.

"They were very happy with the outcome of the internship, to the point where I think one of the interns was given full-time employment after graduation," says Tan.

The academy was launched in April 2016 and recently won a WA Information Technology and Telecommunications Alliance (WAITTA) INCITE award.

Assoc Prof Tan says the aim for the academy is to develop a self-sufficient model to help people on the autism spectrum get a head start in finding a job in the software testing industry.

"We're possibly looking at whether we can create a business model around an enterprise that can further engage industry with providing software testing services utilising the pipeline of students coming through the academy," he says.

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Provided by Science Network WA

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