



50 years ago, we started as a small group of friends, frustrated at the lack of help available for us and our children. That day, we decided to act for ourselves, and now, 50 years later, our small group has grown into a national society of friends and the UK's leading autism charity.

Over 500,000 people in the UK have autism. Together with their families they make up over two million people whose lives are touched by autism every single day. From good times to challenging times, we're there at every stage, to help transform the lives of everyone affected by autism.

We're proud to have been making a difference for 50 years.

The National Autistic Society
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Illustration by William Exley

The undiscovered workforce

**Increasing employment opportunities for
people with autism**

Making a difference for 50 years

Information Centre
The National Autistic Society
393 City Road
London EC1V 1NG
Registered Charity No. 269425



Dear MP,

Welcome to The National Autistic Society's new campaign: *The undiscovered workforce*.

For 50 years, The National Autistic Society (NAS) has campaigned for a future where everyone with autism can live the life they choose. Together we can achieve this, by making sure the right specialist support is available for children at school, and for adults wishing to work and become independent.

One of the biggest challenges we face is the need to increase the number of adults with autism in sustainable employment. Because autism affects people's communication skills, some struggle to understand the unwritten rules of the workplace, to manage professional relationships and to interpret instructions. Currently only 15% are in full-time work and 60% are financially reliant on their families.

As an MP, you can play a crucial role in your community, by bringing together the local authority, businesses, individuals with autism, their families and groups representing them. An ongoing dialogue can help tackle the barriers to employment for people with autism, increase awareness and understanding and unlock opportunities.

This folder contains the tools you need to start making a difference:

1. A guide for MPs
2. A guide for local authorities
3. A guide for employers

For more information about taking action to support the *undiscovered workforce* into sustainable employment, or about other issues affecting adults and children with autism, please contact campaign@nas.org.uk or call 020 7923 5799.

Thank you for your support.

With kind regards,

Mark Lever

Mark Lever
Chief Executive, The National Autistic Society

Making a difference for 50 years



The undiscovered workforce

A guide for local authorities
with autism

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Background: a

Autism¹ (including Asperger's syndrome) is a serious, lifelong condition that affects how a person communicates and interacts with other people. It is a condition that affects the sense of the world and how a person experiences it. People with autism share certain characteristics, but they also have different strengths and challenges. Some people with autism are able to live independently but others may need specialist support.

Around 1 in 100 people have autism. In the UK, that means around 1 million people across the country.

A National Autistic Society survey found that only 15% of adults with autism are in full-time employment.² This is because of communication skills and other challenges.



The undiscovered workforce

A guide for MPs on increasing employment opportunities for constituents with autism



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Illustrations by William Exley

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The undiscovered workforce

A guide for MPs on increasing employment opportunities for constituents with autism

Making a difference for 50 years



The National Autistic Society (NAS) believes that everyone with autism¹ should have as full and independent a life as possible. That's why our new campaign, *The undiscovered workforce*, is about supporting people with autism (including Asperger syndrome) into sustainable employment.

NAS research indicates that only 15% of people with autism are in full-time work. Yet 79% of people with autism on out-of-work benefits want to work.² They just haven't had the right support and opportunities to make their ambitions a reality.

Autism affects people's ability to communicate: some struggle to comprehend and respond to questions in interviews, and once in employment, they may find it difficult to understand the unwritten rules of the workplace, to form relationships with colleagues and clients and to follow instructions.

Three things you can do

1. Write a letter to the local authority, asking:

- > How it is implementing the adult autism strategy for England, *Fulfilling and rewarding lives: evaluating progress*, published as a result of the *Autism Act 2009*?
- > Has it identified how many working-age adults with autism live in the area, and their current economic status?

- > Has it made an assessment of local services available to support people with autism into employment and consulted local job-seekers with autism about their needs and experiences?
- > Will they work with you to bring together relevant stakeholders to develop appropriate local solutions and support for people with autism?

Along with the letter, you can send our guide for local authorities on autism and employment (contained in this pack).

¹ The term autism is used throughout this document to refer to all conditions on the autism spectrum, including Asperger syndrome

² Redman, S. et al (2009). *Don't Write Me Off*. London: The National Autistic Society

Employment and autism

- > One in 100 of your constituents has autism.³
- > Over 60% of adults rely on their families for financial support and 40% live with their parents.
- > Just 15% of adults with autism are in full-time employment and only 9% are in part-time employment.⁴
- > 26% of graduates with autism are unemployed, by far the highest rate of any disability group.⁵
- > According to the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), investing in supported employment for adults with autism is cost-effective.⁶



"I have learnt how to work independently and to try and solve problems myself and only to ask questions when I am really unsure. I gained in confidence and self-esteem and learned lots of new skills. I also go out

socially more now because I have the confidence. I go to various clubs such as the snooker club and I have made new friends."

Leon, an adult with autism who used the Autism Centre for Supported Employment, Sheffield

³ The Information Centre for Health and Social Care (2012). *Estimating the prevalence of autism spectrum conditions in adults: extending the 2007 adult psychiatric morbidity survey*. Leeds: The Information Centre for Health and Social Care

⁴ Rosenblatt, M. (2008). *I Exist: the message from adults with autism in England*. London: The National Autistic Society

⁵ AGCAS Disability Task Group (2010; 2011). *What happens next? A report on the first destinations of 2009/2010 disabled graduates*. Sheffield: AGCAS

⁶ National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (2011). *Autism in adults: full guideline DRAFT*

2. Hold a meeting in your constituency

Points to discuss

Are there local employment opportunities available to people with autism?

Are people with autism getting the right support to enter the workplace and stay in long-term employment? Is there expert advice and support available for employers?

Who to invite

- > Representatives of the five biggest local employers.
- > The Director of Adult Social Services at the local authority.
- > The Chief Executive of the primary care trust or relevant commissioner at the Clinical Commissioning Group(s).

- > Jobcentre Plus.
- > Adults with autism and their families.
- > Local charities.

What will it achieve?

- > Increase awareness among local employers of the skills and talents people with autism can bring to their workforce, as well as some of the straightforward but essential adjustments employers can make to support employees with autism.
- > Facilitate valuable connections between people with autism looking for work, potential employers, public and third sector service providers.
- > Ultimately this could help create more opportunities for people with autism to enter sustainable employment.

"Parents in my constituency fear their sons and daughters with disabilities will not achieve the independent life and sustainable employment they have worked so hard for at school. That's why I have set up a working group of the local authority, employers and charities, to make sure there

is expert advice available for both jobseekers with autism and for employers taking on staff with autism. Because autism is a spectrum condition, we need to make sure a variety of roles is there so that as many people with autism as possible can be supported into work." **Lee Scott MP**

"I have undertaken a number of initiatives in the autism area because we do not look after people with autism and Asperger's properly. I also strongly believe that it would not take a huge effort to make sure that we look

after those people much better... Currently only around 15% have jobs, which is ludicrous, and I am determined to double that figure."

Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare

Reform, Lords Hansard

17 Jan 2012, Column 495

3. Ask local businesses to offer work experience to people with autism

Create opportunities

Ask five employers in your constituency to offer internships or work experience to people with autism. This will help to build people's confidence as well as their CV, and get them used to the workplace.

The NAS's specialist employment support service, Prospects, can advise employers on easy ways to make the working environment accessible. Many people with autism will need ongoing support in the workplace from a local specialist agency.

Lead by example

Encouraging employers to take this step can set a positive example for others in your constituency.

Publicising your support for the *Undiscovered workforce* campaign in the local paper, on your website, or through Facebook and twitter may encourage others to consider work experience or internships aimed specifically at people with autism or other disabilities.

This will help local people with autism to fulfil their aspirations, and change attitudes towards employing people with the condition.

"This is an admirable campaign that should command very wide support. People with autism want to work, and many have a great deal to offer to employers. The practical

steps identified by the NAS to support people with autism into work can make a real difference."

Stephen Timms MP, Shadow Employment Minister

Grateful thanks goes to Research Autism, KMPG, Thomson Reuters, Employers' Forum on Disability, Goldman Sachs, Norton Rose, National Autistic Society, MITIE, New Discovery and Hao2 for their support in producing this leaflet.

Goldman
Sachs

NORTON ROSE

MITIE

CANOLFAN DYSCOVERY CENTRE



Untapped Talent

A guide to employing people with Autism

Foreword

Research by The National Autistic Society indicates that there are currently just 15% of adults with autism in full time employment. This compares with around 31% for all disabled people in full-time employment and 57% for non disabled people of working age in full time employment in Great Britain.¹ Given the many talents and skills that adults with autism can bring to a business I am determined to work with businesses and other partners to increase this figure.

We need to be clear to employers that making business environments more 'autism friendly' is not about meeting corporate social responsibility objectives, but about tapping into and seeking out the most talented individuals for a role. That is why I am delighted that a range of employers and organisations have worked with The National Autistic Society and Department for Work and Pensions to produce this leaflet.

People with autism can have exceptional talents and by making some straightforward adjustments can prove to be a tremendous asset to business. We need to do more to make use of those talents.

My thanks go to the businesses and organisations who came together to produce this leaflet. I hope that businesses will consider their advice carefully and look at adapting practices to attract and support adults with autism into the workplace, making the most of the skills of people with autism and untap their potential to the benefit of business.

Lord Freud
Minister for Welfare Reform



¹The employment rates for all disabled and non disabled people are taken from Labour Force Survey Quarter 2, 2011.

Employing people with Autism: Untapped Talent

People with autism have a great deal to offer the world of business and may have unique skills and abilities that will help an organisation thrive. As well as their individual strengths and talents, candidates with autism may demonstrate above-average skills in some or all of the following areas:

- > **Problem-solving skills and attention to detail:** people with autism tend to prefer logical and structured approaches to their work, and often think in a very visual way. They may enjoy problem-solving and can bring new ideas and take fresh approaches to their job.
- > **High levels of concentration:** people with autism may often find focusing on detailed work rewarding, and can tend to work persistently and without being distracted, paying great attention to detail.
- > **Reliability and loyalty:** people on the autism spectrum can be very conscientious and committed to their work, often with good levels of punctuality, honesty and integrity. For example, employers tell us that they notice that absenteeism is lower.
- > **Technical ability and specialist skills and interests such as in IT:** people with autism may develop highly specialist interests and skills, which can be very valuable in the workplace.
- > **Detailed factual knowledge and an excellent memory:** people with autism may develop highly specialist interests, which will mean that they develop very detailed factual knowledge in that area.
- > **Retention:** people with autism have a preference for routine and once settled in a job will often stay in that role considerably longer than others.
- > **Resourceful:** people with autism may also have had to find ways to overcome challenges and so can be resourceful.



What is Autism?

Autism², including Asperger syndrome, affects the way people relate to and communicate with the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, meaning that the support people will need will vary from individual to individual. It is a non-visible disability, and some people may be highly intellectual, while others may have additional learning disabilities.

Many people with autism have a variety of skills that can enable them to thrive in roles ranging from sales assistant to computer programmer and journalist to statistician, to name a few. However, they are often disadvantaged when it comes to getting and keeping a job because of difficulties with social skills and employers' lack of experience in how to assess and manage individuals with this kind of impairment.

Everyone on the spectrum has difficulties in three main areas:

- > Social interaction: difficulty establishing relationships, not reciprocating socially or emotionally or appearing indifferent.
- > Social communication: difficulty with verbal and non-verbal communication, including facial expressions and tone of voice.
- > Social imagination: difficulty with flexibility of thought, affecting sequencing, organising, planning ahead and thinking in abstract ways.

In addition, many people with autism have sensory over- or under-sensitivity, for example to light, sounds and touch. However, with the right support, people with autism can thrive and some may excel in particular tasks.

The range of jobs someone with autism might undertake.

Prospects, The National Autistic Society employment service, has supported people into wide ranging types of jobs. These include:

Librarian	Visual merchandiser	Bookshop assistant
Gardener	School science technician	Cinema assistant
Music studio technician	Community Support Officer	Traffic warden
Firework company director	Retail assistant	IT Support
Florist	Artist/Illustrator	Software Tester
Costume designer	Journalist	Business Analyst
Theatre usher	IT assistant at train station	Data Analyst

²Through this publication, we use the term "autism" to refer to all conditions on the autism spectrum including Asperger syndrome, high functioning autism and Kanner autism. Individuals can have other Hidden Impairments such as Attention Deficit Hyper-Activity Disorder, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia

Additional benefits to the organisation as a whole:

Organisations that are effective at managing people with disabilities (including autism) are usually better at managing their whole workforce. Becoming disability confident and employing people with disabilities positions disability as an issue to do with maximising talent, enhanced productivity, and investment in human potential. Being disability confident means you also understand that you need to treat people differently in order to treat them fairly, and this involves every part of your business not just your Human Resources department.

The disability confident business will attract and deliver:

- > **The right people** – a disability confident approach will help to ensure that recruitment is undertaken on merit rather than convenience.
- > **Higher productivity, reduced costs** - the effective line management and investment in reasonable adjustments that disabled people need in order to do the job, is shown to help the wider workforce make the most of their capabilities.
- > **Innovative products** and service offerings disability confident companies have demonstrated that products that can be used easily by older and disabled people are being adopted by wider customer markets.
- > **Outstanding customer relationships, satisfaction & retention** – 66% of disabled people choose businesses where they have received good customer service related to their disability.
- > **Stronger stakeholder relationships & reputation** - Government bodies are increasingly using procurement to promote good practice in diversity. A disability confident approach to procurement should therefore be considered by businesses as a means of developing stronger and more beneficial relationships with suppliers and partners.



For a more detailed overview of the business case for disability confidence visit: www.efd.org.uk/disability-business-case

What are employer's experiences?

Ciaran at Norton Rose LLP

"Ciaran has an unflagging eye for detail which is perfect for his role in compliance. He is also as focused at the start of the day as he is at the end of the day, which is very rare for most people!"

Ciaran is Master Data Manager in the Compliance section of Norton Rose's Partnership Office. When he first started in his role, his employers used a different pace to ensure that he was happy with the different aspects of his work. At first, he was uncomfortable using the telephone and so his managers carried out role-play exercises to show him how to deal with different types of call. He always had the option to forward calls through to his mentor but now rarely needs to. Ciaran has been praised for his eye for detail and ability to concentrate, as well as for his relationships with his colleagues: "Ciaran has an excellent sense of humour and is a great team member, lunching with his team and attending and contributing to team meetings and so on. He has fitted in very well and is a much valued member of the team."

Sarah at Goldman Sachs

"Sarah was a highly valued member of the Internal Support team. She quickly demonstrated that she was very conscientious and thorough so the team had complete faith in her to deliver work on time and to a high standard. This meant that we were able to increase her responsibilities and, in turn, Sarah added more value to, and gained more from, her time with us."

Sarah spent a six month placement with Goldman Sachs as an Administrative Support Officer. Before she joined the team, Goldman Sachs held an awareness raising day for those who would be working with and around Sarah, so that they were aware of issues she might have in the workplace and ways to avoid these. "We had scoped out core functions we needed Sarah to perform and then adapted that by adding responsibilities, based on her comfort level, capacity and capability."

Sarah's placement was a great success, she fitted in well with colleagues and she was able to increase her duties as she settled into the role.

George at Hao2.eu Ltd

George first joined Hao2.eu as a trainee Digital Project Assistant. Within a year George was promoted to a Sub Group Team Leader position, managing two other members of staff. The company put in place practical support structures for George including offering him flexible working hours and location; providing structured SMART objectives, frequent feedback and personal development sessions; and training on presentation, teamworking and networking skills.

We have been particularly impressed by George's ability to rapidly acquire new creative and technical skills and pass these abilities on to other staff. He also acts as a role model, "leading by example in terms of productivity, commitment and willingness to learn".

All Hao2.eu staff were given training around autism and working with colleagues with autistic spectrum conditions which has been supportive for George but also helped us improve quality and customer service.

Guidance for Managers

The recruitment process

Recruitment procedures often inadvertently create barriers for people with autism. Many of the minor adjustments that will help candidates with autism apply for jobs may also benefit other candidates and enhance overall efficiency in recruitment. By taking these simple steps, your organisation will also be meeting the Equality Act 2010 requirement for employers to make 'reasonable adjustments' for people with disabilities.

The job advert

Job adverts and job descriptions should be concise, clearly presented, and written in plain English. They should list essential skills, and avoid jargon or unnecessary information. Be objective about what abilities and

experiences are genuinely essential for the job to be done well, and leave out any that are not.

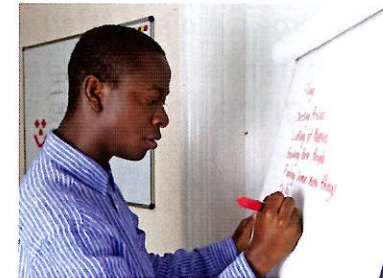
The interview process

Interviews rely heavily on social and communication skills, so candidates with autism may well struggle to 'sell themselves' in an interview, even if they have all the right skills. In particular, they may face difficulties with:

- > understanding body language and maintaining appropriate eye contact;
- > demonstrating enthusiasm for the role;
- > knowing how to start and maintain conversations;
- > judging how much information to give, especially if questions are open;
- > thinking in abstract ways, or considering 'what if?' scenarios;
- > varying their tone of voice and finding the appropriate level of formality.

Before the interview

- > Give clear information about what will be expected at the interview, what needs to be brought along and email/post this information to the candidate. Send clear instructions on how to get to the interview.
- > Tell the applicant approximately how much time the interview will take and do your best to stick to this.
- > Describe any tasks that will be asked of the candidate and give some indication of the content/types of questions that may be asked.
- > Asking each applicant exactly the same question does not always equate to equality of opportunity. Consider offering an adapted interview in which you ask 'closed' questions, based on the applicant's past experiences, rather than 'open' (generalised or hypothetical) questions.



Tips for the interview

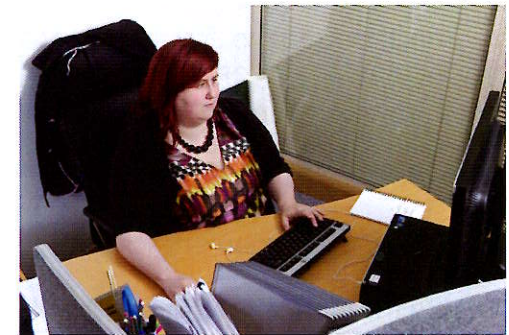
- > Avoid open questions. Instead of "Tell me about yourself", try: "Tell me about your last job and what it involved."
- > Hypothetical ('What if?') questions can also be confusing. Instead of "How would you cope with lots of interruptions?", use "In your last job how did you cope when people interrupted you?"
- > Be prepared to tactfully prompt the candidate if they give too much or too little information.
- > The candidate may interpret language quite literally. A question like "How did you find your last job?" may invite the response "I found it in the newspaper."
- > Be aware that the candidate's eye contact and other body language may appear different from that of other candidates so do not use this as an indication of how they feel about the job.

Are there alternatives to the traditional interview?

Yes. If you feel that a standard interview might not be the best way to gauge the person's suitability for the post, there are other options:

Inviting a supporter to accompany the person

Many people with autism perform much better in interviews if they have a supporter with them. This person can act as a go-between to ease communication between the interviewer and the candidate, rewording any unclear questions for the candidate and helping them understand exactly what the interviewer wants. This does not only benefit the candidate: it can also help employers understand what the candidate has to offer.



Two-way placement evaluation

Some employers find that a two-way placement evaluation - a period of work experience - is a better way of assessing individuals' talents than a formal interview. This approach may also help if you think that a person with autism is likely to do well in the job but you have concerns about how well they will adapt to the workplace.

Working with someone with autism

Working with someone with autism can be an enriching experience for managers and colleagues alike. This section explains how to avoid or overcome any difficulties, in order to ensure enjoyable and effective working relationships. It should also be highlighted that much of what is described below is good practice for managing any individual, but is much more important for people with autism.

Before the first day

Any induction-related information should be sent out before the start of the job with clear expectations of the working day and breaks, holiday provision, time frames, dress code and social expectations. Consider having a pre-start date orientation to introduce the employee to their new colleagues and the organisation. This may reduce anxiety and enable the individual to understand the corporate set-up.

Getting started

Make sure instructions are concise and specific. Give the person clear instructions about exactly how to carry out each task, from start to finish, as this will lay the foundations for good working practices. Don't assume the person will infer your meaning from informal instructions – for example, rather than saying 'Give everybody a copy of this', say 'Make three photocopies of this, and give one each to Sam, Mary and Ahmed'. You may also choose to provide written instructions. It can be helpful to ask the person to repeat back instructions so you are sure they have understood.

You may need to be more explicit about your expectations for a member of staff with autism. Make it clear that any adaptations for them in the workplace are there to help them keep doing their job well, not because they are not good enough.

The working environment

Ensure the work environment is well structured. Some people with autism need a fairly structured work environment. You can help by working with them to prioritise activities, organising tasks into a timetable for daily, weekly and monthly activities, and breaking larger tasks into small steps. Some people will appreciate precise information about start and finish times, and help with getting into a routine with breaks and lunches. You should also consider the workplace setting; a workspace area that is away

from general office traffic and visual distractions such as clutter may be beneficial to the employee.

Provide sensitive but direct feedback

People with autism often find it difficult to pick up on social cues, so make sure your feedback is honest, constructive and consistent. If the person completes a task incorrectly, don't criticise – instead, explain tactfully but clearly why it is wrong, check that they have understood, and set out exactly what they should do instead. Be aware that the person may have low self-esteem or experience of being bullied, so ensure that any feedback is sensitive, and give positive comments wherever appropriate.

Regularly review performance

As with any employee, line managers should have regular one-to-one meetings with the person to discuss and review performance and give overall comments and suggestions. When managing a person with autism, brief, frequent reviews may be preferable.

Help other staff to be more aware

If the person with autism consents to their condition being disclosed, then providing colleagues with information and guidance on autism can benefit both parties. Sometimes an employee with autism may find it helpful to write a document for managers and colleagues explaining how their autism affects them and what kind of things they find hard.

You may choose to distribute some specialist resources to your staff, or to provide training in disability confidence in general, or specifically in autism. The person may also benefit from having a mentor or buddy – an empathetic colleague they can go to if they are feeling stressed, anxious or confused. Having someone to turn to at times of stress may help to nip any problems in the bud, and is a valuable experience for the mentor.

Provide reassurance in stressful situations

People with autism can be quite meticulous, and can become anxious if their performance is not perfect. Situations such as IT failures can therefore be very stressful. Give concrete solutions to these scenarios – for example, by explaining "If the photocopier breaks, use the one on the third floor." Similarly, reassure the person that if they occasionally arrive late due to transport problems or other unpreventable factors, this is not a problem.

Case studies

Below are more examples of local projects to increase employment opportunities for people with autism and other disabilities.



Lynx Resource Centre, Weston-Super-Mare

The Lynx Resource Centre is an autism-specific service in Weston-Super-Mare that provides on-site work tasters, job-hunting and leisure support. People's places are usually funded through personal budgets, Access to Work, or their local authority.

The centre provides vocational opportunities in woodwork, metalcraft, horticulture, administration, IT, sales and art. It houses a purpose-built workshop, office and computer suite. Staff work to improve people's understanding of their condition, introducing coping strategies and building confidence. Alongside this, a job coach provides one-to-one training, helps people to access work tasters and volunteering opportunities, and decide what type of role they might be best-suited to. The job coach acts as an advocate when people find paid employment.

The centre is run by The National Autistic Society and works in partnership with local employers, Weston College, Connexions, Jobcentre Plus and other agencies.



EmployAbility, Surrey County Council

Beth is a 21-year-old woman with autism from Surrey. When Beth met her employment support officer at EmployAbility she was clear she wanted a job working with people. A natural extrovert, Beth's hobbies include singing in a local choir and amateur dramatics. It was obvious that with her chatty and friendly nature, a customer-facing role would be ideal.

Starbucks offered Beth a position at their Woking branch. Working as part of a small staff team means Beth gets the support she needs and variety in her work. As well as providing Beth with job coaching, her employment support officer worked with the other staff to show them how to get the best from Beth, give clear instructions, and make sure any difficulties are addressed quickly.

Beth catches a bus to work and this – along with having a job she enjoys – has been a big step towards more independent living and leading a full and active life.



Redbridge Borough Council

In Redbridge, the borough council has joined forces with local MP Lee Scott to create a model for an employment service for people with autism and other disabilities.

Lee Scott has taken on the role of facilitator in a local 'employment market', bringing together interested parties such as the local authority, employers, parents' and support groups, and charities to create programmes to improve the chances of disabled jobseekers.

The Redbridge SEN and Disability Division is leading on delivering this project, with input and ideas from Lee Scott, and particular assistance from local parents' groups. The proposals focus upon developing a disability employment network in Redbridge, which will contain elements of work preparation and social enterprise. It will also develop a way to co-ordinate the different employment initiatives already underway in the borough, and make sure they are accountable to the central authority.



The undiscovered workforce

A guide for local authorities on increasing employment opportunities for people with autism

Background: autism and employment

Autism¹ (including Asperger syndrome) is a serious, lifelong disabling condition that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while all people with autism share certain difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways. Some people with autism are able to live relatively independent lives but others may need a lifetime of specialist support.

Around 1 in 100 people has autism – if you include their families, autism touches the lives of over two million people across the UK.

A National Autistic Society (NAS) survey indicates that only 15% of adults with autism nationally are in full-time employment and 9% are in part-time employment.² Because autism affects communication skills, people may struggle during

job interviews and find it difficult to understand the unwritten rules of the workplace. This can make relationships with colleagues or clients more difficult and a literal interpretation of instructions may mean that tasks are not completed as expected.

According to our research, however, some 79% of people with autism on out-of-work benefits want to work.³ This guide for Directors of Adult Social Services will suggest ways local authorities can work towards improving employment rates among people with autism in their area.



Autism and employment: checklist for local authorities

- > Identify local need.
- > Consult local people.
- > Engage the community.
- > Take action.
- > Report back.

¹ The term autism is used throughout this document to refer to all conditions on the autism spectrum, including Asperger syndrome

² Rosenblatt, M. (2008). *I Exist: The message from adults with autism in England*. London: The National Autistic Society, p5

³ Redman, S. et al (2009). *Don't Write Me Off*. London: The National Autistic Society, p6

The Autism Act 2009

The *Autism Act 2009* was a landmark piece of legislation. It was the first ever disability-specific law and led to the production of the adult autism strategy for England and statutory guidance for local authorities and the NHS. Employment is a key priority for the strategy and it calls for local action to make sure this happens:

"[the employment rate for autism] is not acceptable, and it is clear that action needs to be taken locally, regionally and nationally to lead change."⁴

In December 2010, the Government issued statutory guidance for local authorities and the NHS, setting out key duties they needed to fulfil in order to implement the strategy, including:

- > the collection of adequate data about the needs of adults with autism (including employment needs) to inform local planning
- > the appointment of a lead commissioner or senior manager to oversee the implementation of the strategy at a local level
- > the development of local commissioning plans and mechanisms such as local autism partnership boards to involve adults with autism and their families in service planning
- > making training in autism available to all staff, especially those who work most closely with adults with autism.



In order to help local authorities and the NHS to implement the strategy and statutory guidance, and to set out clearly the outcomes that they should be seeking for adults with autism in their area, the Government published *Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives: Evaluating Progress*. It said:

"To help maximise the opportunities to offer adults with autism relevant support to get a job, or develop their skills, local areas should have a full picture of the services available. Where there are no services, localities should consider commissioning to meet local need."⁵

Ensuring that more adults with autism are in employment will also help local authorities perform well in wider outcomes frameworks. Indicators related to employment and disability are included in the Public Health outcomes framework, the NHS outcomes framework and the Adult Social Care outcomes framework.

The Department of Health has published a self-assessment questionnaire for local authorities and the NHS to help them measure whether they are achieving appropriate outcomes for adults with autism. Employment comes under Quality Outcome 2: 'Adults with autism are included and economically active'. The key questions are:

- > Are you engaging with local employers to examine and increase employment levels for adults with autism?
- > Have you mapped the local employment services that support adults with autism, eg voluntary organisations, employment services funded by local authority or DWP?⁶

- > you are taking the lead locally! Is your authority an autism-friendly place to work?

The NAS provides resources and advice about making reasonable adjustments at work for adults with autism.

"Effective transition planning should include career preparations up to age 16 and plans for education, employment, training, transport, housing and leisure from 16 to 19 and beyond."⁷

5. Report back



Have you completed your autism strategy self-assessment questionnaire?

Make sure that you have completed this questionnaire, including Quality Outcome 2: Adults with autism are included and economically active.



Have you spoken to the NAS?

We are always keen to learn about and promote good practice, and to provide support where we can. Do get in touch to let us know what you are doing so we can use it as an example for others.

Email campaign@nas.org.uk or call 020 7923 5799.



Support and information services

Policy and Campaigns Team

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The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity for people affected by autism.

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Access to Work

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Email: www.direct.gov.uk/accesstowork

⁴ Department of Health (2010). *Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives: The Strategy for Adults with Autism in England*. London: Department of Health, p15

⁵ Department of Health (2011). *Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives: Evaluating Progress*. London: Department of Health, p22

⁶ Local self-assessment form, p3

⁷ Department of Health (2010). *Implementing Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives*. London: Department of Health, p20

Local authorities were asked to submit their answers to the self-assessment questionnaire to the Learning Disability Public Health observatory along with how many adults with autism (aged 18 or over) were in paid employment, including both full- and part-time work (if known), by 10 February 2012. You can find out more at www.improvinghealthandlives.org.uk.

Supported employment services

Supported employment services provide targeted support for disabled jobseekers. The draft guideline from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) on supporting adults with autism to manage their condition includes provision for providing supported employment services to those who are having difficulties finding and maintaining employment.

In the draft guideline, suitable supported employment services include help with CVs and job applications, preparing for interviews, appropriate training and support before and after starting work, and advice to employers before and after the person with autism starts work.

Once this guideline is published it will be important for local authorities and NHS bodies to consider it carefully to ensure that cost-effective employment services are available locally.

Hertfordshire County Council runs the Work Solutions programme, an eight-week course that provides confidence-building activities and job-hunting advice to adults with autism. Afterwards they are matched with a work taster opportunity with local employers, or with the council itself.

Advisers from Work Solutions accompany adults with autism on the work taster to make sure they have the support they need – for example, with learning tasks. Once participants decide what sort of work they would like to do, advisers search for appropriate jobs. Sometimes work taster placements go so well that people are offered permanent jobs.

What should local authorities be doing to increase employment opportunities for adults with autism?

1. Identify local need

The *Autism Act* statutory guidance states that local commissioning plans should be developed in every area and that adequate data on local need should be collected to inform these plans.



Do you know how many working-age adults with autism live in your local authority area, and their current economic status?

Use local data sources, alongside population averages in PANSI, to inform an estimate of local need.



Do you know what services are available locally to support people with autism into employment?

Carry out a skills audit of the local authority and existing supported employment agencies in the area to identify what is already available, and who could be involved in future projects.

2. Consult local people

The *Autism Act* statutory guidance is clear that adults with autism, their families and carers, and other stakeholders, are involved in developing local plans for services and support.



What do you know about the experiences of local job-seekers with autism?

Consult with people with autism and their families in the area to find out more about their experiences of looking for work and the support they have received from Jobcentre Plus and other agencies.



What are the needs and experiences of local businesses and employment providers?

Talk to local businesses and providers to gain an understanding of the current realities of finding suitable local jobs for people with autism.

3. Engage the community

We know that over half the local authorities in England have established an autism partnership board or similar to help plan services for adults with autism. These boards can support plans to improving employment levels of adults with autism in the area. Wider consultation with the local community may also be helpful.



Does your autism partnership board (or equivalent) have a strategy to improve employment prospects for people with autism?

Ask someone on the partnership board to become specifically responsible for employment. Invite a Jobcentre Plus representative to join the board, too. Consider setting up a sub-group of your local partnership board to look specifically at employment issues and take appropriate action.

Gloucestershire County Council works in partnership to establish job clubs and hold jobs fairs for disabled people. The council has placed particular emphasis on upskilling employment advisers in mainstream services so that they can better support people with autism. The Autism Coordinator for Gloucestershire has delivered a full-day training session to the area's Jobcentre Plus disability employment advisers and Connexions staff. She also provided half-day autism awareness training to groups of local authority staff.

Meanwhile, the Council commissioned the NAS Prospects employment team to deliver training to voluntary organisations that provide employment support to people with autism. The partnership board is hoping to extend this training to agencies contracted by the Department for Work and Pensions to provide the Work Programme.



Have you provided a forum for stakeholders to discuss the availability of local employment opportunities for people with autism?

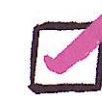
Hold a local meeting to bring together the key local influencers, including:

- > representatives from the five biggest local employers and the local chambers of commerce
- > adults with autism and their families
- > the chief executive of the local primary care trust or relevant commissioner at the clinical commissioning group
- > a representative from the local Jobcentre Plus
- > local employment support providers
- > relevant (local) charities.

You may want to work with the local MP to help to bring together the relevant people.

4. Take action

Local needs assessments and discussions with local people will determine exactly what action you might take to improve employment prospects for adults with autism in your area.



Have you made sure that:

- > transition plans for young people with autism include employment as a key outcome?
- > the care planning process for adults with social care needs considers employment as a desired outcome, as appropriate, and looks particularly at whether personal budgets can be used to support adults with autism to become 'work ready'?
- > assessment for adult social care includes signposting, as appropriate, to Access to Work for interview support, other appropriate benefits and other agencies that could help adults with autism find and keep a job?
- > where support is provided through the local authority to help those with a disability prepare for work and find employment (such as Connexions services), advisors that work in these services have training in how to support people with autism?