

THE
undiscovered
WORKFORCE



LOOKING FOR STAFF?





1 Right person – right job

“

Mark joined Max Fordham's in March 2002 as a drawing filer, quickly grasping the complex procedure. He applies care and attention to detail, constantly using his initiative to improve efficiency. He regularly attends progress meetings where his input is invaluable and he supervises temporary cover within his group.

”

M Jones, Partner/Head of Administration,
Max Fordham LLP



“

I have been very impressed with the way that Katherine has approached and completed her work. As a direct result of this I offered her a full time position as a Data Administrator at Circle 33.

”

S Lewis,
Technical Audit Manager, Circle 33



“

I have always been impressed with Reggie's enthusiasm, zeal and product knowledge – particularly the latter, which is much better than mine.

”

N Johnston,
Virgin Megastore Receiving Department



These individuals have two key things in common – they are highly valued employees and they have a form of autism. They thrive in their workplaces because of their individual strengths and experience, their enjoyment of their jobs, and because they have a particular aptitude for their role.



What are autism and Asperger syndrome?

Autism is a condition which affects the way a person sees the world, processes information and interacts with other people. People who have autism typically find it difficult to develop social relationships, to communicate with ease and to think in the abstract. Although a minority of people with autism have learning disabilities, others have average or higher than average intelligence and are often highly educated. People who fall into the latter group usually have a form of autism called Asperger syndrome.

Employees with autism and Asperger syndrome

People with autism and Asperger syndrome often have numerous (and sometimes exceptional) skills which enable them to make excellent employees. As well as their individual abilities, some traits associated with autism can, when well channelled, be a considerable benefit in the workplace. For example, many people with autism are good at paying close attention to detail and are meticulous about routines, rules and accuracy – meaning they are often extremely reliable, and can excel at jobs such as accounting, where consistent procedures and precision are vital. Other people with autism enjoy repetitive tasks (whether basic or complex) and perform very well in fields such as IT or administration.

In spite of these abilities, people with autism and Asperger syndrome often find the work environment hard to deal with because they face difficulties in transferring skills and knowledge to new tasks or environments. Where a person without the condition can usually see readily what is required of them and draw on their experience to complete tasks, a person with autism may not immediately see how they can adapt their skills to a new role or activities. Because of this, they often need some level of support in the workplace.

Much of this support can be very straightforward and easy to provide, such as ensuring that instructions are precise, or that a person's day is structured with clear priorities. Some individuals, and their employers or colleagues, may need more intense or specialised input, with a supporter working alongside the employee until they feel comfortable in the job. Once settled in, people with autism and Asperger syndrome often become highly valued staff members and many managers who work with them find that the skills they develop as a result – particularly in prioritising work and in communicating what they expect from staff – benefit the workplace as a whole.

The 'autism spectrum'

Autism is called a 'spectrum' condition meaning that it can range from scarcely perceptible difficulties to severe disability. There are some traits that impact on most people with the condition to some degree or other. These include:

- difficulty with using imagination or abstract thought, including empathising with other people or situations
- difficulty with 'reading' non-verbal communication, such as body language, facial expression or tone of voice

- following particular routines (and possibly a resistance to change in these routines)
- strong personal interests and hobbies
- a tendency to take words literally (for example, phrases like ‘you look like a million dollars’ or ‘he’s all fingers and thumbs’ or ‘she must have eyes in the back of her head’ may be very confusing)
- difficulty with and a dislike of eye contact
- sensory issues – hypersensitivity to noise, smell, taste or touch.

The kinds of work a person with an ASD can do

People with an ASD are individuals, so the jobs and tasks for which they are suited will vary from person to person, just as it does for other members of the workforce. They succeed in a huge range of different jobs. The National Autistic Society’s employment consultancy, Prospects, has recently worked with people with an ASD in roles as varied as sales assistant, computer programmer, gardener, journalist, catering assistant, statistician and photographic technician.

Although it is always difficult to generalise, there are areas where people with an ASD may excel. These include:

- tasks where attention to detail and accuracy is required
eg: research work, data input or word processing
- tasks involving numbers, statistics and facts
eg: finance or accounting
- tasks where there is a clear procedure to follow
eg: dealing with incoming and outgoing post, archiving, library work or filing
- highly structured tasks with a right and a wrong way of doing something
eg: IT support, computer programming or systems testing.

It is commonly thought that because people with an ASD typically experience problems with communication, social interaction and changes in routine, they are unlikely to do well in jobs which require these skills. However, while many people with an ASD don’t feel comfortable in environments where there are unexpected changes, or in jobs which involve a lot of face-to-face with customers, there are others who thrive in these roles, including some in senior positions. Prospects has supported people with an ASD taking on jobs such as tour assistant, project leader and after school club worker, all of which involve a high level of communication and adaptation.



The successful employment of a person with an ASD, as with any member of staff, relies on focusing on an individual's strengths, abilities and skills. The key is to treat each person as an individual and avoid assumptions about their likely performance because they have an ASD.

This pack is designed to help employers understand the benefits of employing a person with autism or Asperger syndrome, how the employee can be supported in the workplace and what support is available to employers throughout this process.

Contents

Right person – right job	Leaflet 1
The benefits of employing someone with an ASD	Leaflet 2
Recruiting a person with an ASD	Leaflet 3
Supporting a person with an ASD in the workplace: tips for managers and colleagues	Leaflet 4
Support for employers	Leaflet 5
The <i>Disability Discrimination Act</i> and people with an ASD	Leaflet 6
Further advice and information	Leaflet 7

Because autism is a spectrum condition, people are often described as having an 'autistic spectrum disorder'. In this pack, the words 'autistic spectrum disorder' or 'ASD' are used to cover the whole range of the condition, including people with Asperger syndrome. Contact details for further information appear throughout the pack. To the best of our knowledge they are correct at the time of going to press, but The National Autistic Society cannot guarantee their accuracy.



The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7833 2299 Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004 Minicom: 0845 070 4003
Fax: 020 7833 9666 Email: nas@nas.org.uk Website: www.autism.org.uk



2 The benefits of employing someone with an ASD

Good employees

People with autism or Asperger syndrome can make a valuable contribution to company workplaces, bringing benefit to employers with the qualities they bring to a job in their company. They very often make particularly reliable, hard working and motivated employees. Many are good at paying close attention to detail, are highly meticulous and maintain a high level of accuracy.

In addition, jobs of a repetitive nature, whether basic or highly complex, often appeal strongly to people with an ASD, meaning that they may excel in areas where other employees lose focus and concentration. There is also strong evidence that people with an ASD are often extremely keen workers who thrive in a structured, well organised work environment, leading to high attendance records and potentially a lower staff turnover.

Many people with an ASD are highly intelligent and well educated. In addition, they often display the following characteristics:

- ability to concentrate without distraction on one particular task for lengthy periods
- reliability
- accuracy (often 100%)
- close attention to detail and an ability to identify errors
- technical ability (many have excellent IT skills and qualifications)
- detailed factual knowledge (often encyclopedic)
- excellent memory
- conscientiousness and persistence.

In short, a person with an ASD may be better at a particular job than someone without. Where people with an ASD have learned and settled into a job, they are often very highly regarded and valued by both management and colleagues.

Improving the skills of managers and other staff

Having a diverse workforce brings benefits to staff and business alike. Managers who have worked with people with an ASD have commented that they have learned to communicate with their whole team more effectively and to organise and prioritise work better. Immediate colleagues are likely to benefit in similar ways, bringing advantages and greater efficiency to a whole team.

Good PR and corporate image

Thousands of people in this country have disabilities. They may well be clients or customers of your business. Employing a person or people with an ASD sends a message that you are positive in your attitude to disabled people, value the qualities they have to offer and are a socially responsible employer.

Meeting legal obligations

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1995* (DDA) stipulates that employers have a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' in the workplace and in the recruitment process for people with disabilities. Since 1 October 2004, this Act applies to all employers regardless of the number of people they employ (except the armed forces).

Reasonable adjustments in the case of a person with an ASD can often be made both readily and economically. For example, people with an ASD may process information and instructions more easily if they are written down rather than spoken or if a task is broken down into component parts. Similarly, asking clear, specific questions in an interview will make it easier for a person with an ASD to provide the information you are looking for.

If you are interested in the potential benefits a person with an ASD could bring to your workplace, you may well find you need to make relatively minor adjustments to ensure they can work effectively and efficiently.



The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7833 2299 Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004 Minicom: 0845 070 4003
Fax: 020 7833 9666 Email: nas@nas.org.uk Website: www.autism.org.uk



3 Recruiting a person with an ASD

When looking for staff, an employer hopes to find the person with the best skills for the job, and it makes sense to appeal to a wide range of people in the recruitment process. Yet people with an ASD are often hugely disadvantaged in typical recruitment processes. Many find getting a job much harder than doing or keeping it – meaning that employers are missing out on a potential pool of talent.

There are many minor adjustments which can be made to the recruitment process which help people with an ASD apply for jobs, and improve the chances of employers recognising their skills as potential employees. Many of these may also benefit other candidates and enhance overall efficiency in recruitment.

Job adverts

Job adverts often contain confusing ‘jargon’ and extraneous information or complex design which may be confusing to many applicants, including people with an ASD. It may be better to use clearly worded adverts listing essential skills.

Focusing on key skills

It is relatively common for employers to include in a job description or advert skills which are not essential for the job to be done effectively. Typical examples are ‘excellent communication skills’ and ‘good team player’, which are often included as ‘default’ skills when they are not actually necessary. Many people with an ASD do not apply for jobs demanding these attributes as they are aware of their potential difficulties in these areas and assume themselves to be ineligible for the job (even where they have strong, directly relevant skills). When drafting adverts and job descriptions, it is helpful to make a conscious effort to consider objectively what abilities and experience are genuinely essential for the job to be done well, and to omit those which are not.

Application forms

It may be helpful to people with an ASD to include a section on an application form which gives applicants the opportunity to highlight any help or adjustments they may want at an interview. Clear guidance about what information the employer needs on the application form can also be helpful.

Interview tips

Interviews are one of the most difficult areas for people with an ASD. Even a person with all the right skills for the job is likely to struggle in an interview if they have an ASD. Essentially this is because the difficulties people with an ASD face in communicating means that they are unlikely to put themselves forward well in an interview situation, regardless of their ability in other areas.



Some of the problems people may face are:

- difficulties with understanding body language and with eye contact
- difficulty with starting and maintaining conversations
- difficulty in judging how much information to give, especially if questions are ‘open’
- finding it hard to think in abstract ways and being more comfortable with facts than hypotheses
- their voice sounding formal, and not varying much in tone
- a general difficulty in ‘selling themselves’ to potential employers.

There are many things employers can do to make it easier for a person with an ASD to give their best in an interview, and to find out if they are the best person for the job. For example:

- Ask closed, rather than open questions. For example, asking: “Tell me about yourself” is very vague and a candidate with an ASD may not be able to judge what you want to know. A better question may be: “Tell me about your last job and what it involved.”
- Ask questions based on candidates’ real experience or which relate specifically to skills needed for the job they are applying for. For example: “In your last job did you do any proof-reading? What procedures did you use to do this efficiently?”
- Avoid hypothetical or abstract questions, such as: “How do you think you will reach a deadline if there are a lot of interruptions?” A better question would be: “Think back to your last job. How did you deal with people interrupting you and still reach your deadline?”
- Be prepared to prompt candidates and ask supplementary questions.
- Let interviewees know if they are talking too much, as they may find it hard to judge how much information you need. Simply say: “Thank you, you’ve told us enough about that now, and I’d like to ask you another question.”
- Be aware that a person with an ASD may interpret language literally. For example, asking: “How did you find your last job?” may result in an answer like: “I looked in the A to Z,” or: “I found it in the paper and sent off for an application form.”
- Be aware that eye contact may be difficult for the person, so may be either fleeting or over long.



Supporters

Because it is hard for an employer who does not have experience of autism or Asperger syndrome immediately to adapt their questions, many people with the condition perform much better in interviews if they have a supporter with them who can, if required, reword questions for the candidate and help them to understand exactly what the interviewer wants. A supporter should not answer for the person with an ASD, but simply rephrase questions or help them communicate with the person or people conducting the interview, so that the interviewee's relevant knowledge and skills can be clarified. Many employers have found this invaluable in understanding what the person with an ASD may have to offer. Allowing a person to have a supporter with them will help an employer assess their ability fully and is also likely to be a 'reasonable adjustment' under the terms of the *Disability Discrimination Act*.

Work trials

Because of the difficulties people with an ASD often face in communication and social interaction, you might well find that a work trial is a better way of assessing their skills than a formal interview. Organising a work trial or work experience may also help if you think that a person with an ASD is likely to do well in the job, but have concerns about how they will cope in the workplace.

Case study: work trials

Thomas Milner applied for a position as a filing clerk at Camden Council. He was short-listed and invited for an interview, which included a short filing test.

During the interview Thomas did not come across well. Because of his Asperger syndrome, he tended to take questions very literally and answer 'yes' and 'no' to questions rather than elaborating about his experience. However, his prospective employers were extremely impressed when Thomas scored almost 100% in the filing test, which was significantly higher than other candidates.

Following discussions with The National Autistic Society's employment consultancy, Prospects, which was supporting Thomas in his job search, Camden agreed to offer Thomas a work trial as an alternative method of assessing his ability to do the job. Thomas completed this with great success and was offered a four-week contract, working ten hours a week.

At the end of this time, Thomas's managers were delighted with the accuracy and reliability he displayed, and his contract was extended.

Three years later, Thomas is still working for Camden as a filing clerk, enjoying and performing consistently well in his job.

References

Warman, R. (2003). *A guide to supporting employees with Asperger syndrome*. Berkshire Autistic Society. Available at: www.autismberkshire.org.uk/employment.htm



The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7833 2299 Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004 Minicom: 0845 070 4003
Fax: 020 7833 9666 Email: nas@nas.org.uk Website: www.autism.org.uk

© The National Autistic Society 2004



4 Supporting a person with an ASD in the workplace

Tips for managers and colleagues

There are many ways of supporting a person with an ASD in the workplace to ensure that they reach their full potential and perform highly in their job. Many of these techniques may also be beneficial for other staff. Managers and colleagues who work with a person with an ASD have often reported that supporting them has helped them to communicate better with other staff, or to think more clearly about how to organise and prioritise their own work.

Much support to a person with an ASD can easily be given informally. Other support can range from a job coach to formal state funded schemes to help with extra costs such as transport or adaptations in the workplace. Both formal and informal support may be considered ‘reasonable adjustments’ under the *Disability Discrimination Act (1995)*.


Below are some informal strategies and ‘reasonable adjustments’ which can help employers, managers, and colleagues to support a person with an ASD in the workplace.

Feedback

As people with an ASD usually find it difficult to pick up social cues, many may assume their performance is acceptable unless explicitly told otherwise, while others will need reassurance that they are doing well. Because of this, line managers and possibly other colleagues need to be prepared to give feedback which is honest, constructive and consistent.

For example, if a person completes a task incorrectly, you should explain tactfully but clearly why it is wrong, and what they should do instead. Telling the person how to do something differently (rather than just pointing out what they are doing wrong) is particularly important as people with an ASD are often good at following specific, clear instructions but may struggle with grasping an implied suggestion. In addition, if somebody has done something well, it is helpful to give positive feedback.

As with other employees, regular one-to-one meetings between an employee with an ASD and their line manager or a supervisor to discuss and review performance are important and usually the best way to give overall comments and suggestions. Brief, frequent one-to-one sessions may be better than long sessions at less frequent intervals.



Most people with an ASD welcome clarity and constructive comments. However, some people have a history of bullying or have low self-esteem, so it is vital to give feedback in a way that is tactful. It should be clear that any adaptations being made for them in the workplace are there to ensure they are doing the job well, not because they are not good enough.

A workplace mentor

As well as having structured training and feedback, it may be helpful for the person with an ASD to have a mentor or 'buddy' in the workplace, who they can go to if they are feeling stressed, anxious or confused. This person does not need to be a line manager, but simply a colleague who is empathetic and can provide moral support or a point of contact between the person with an ASD and other colleagues. Having somebody that the person with an ASD can turn to at times of stress may well help to head off problems and prevent them escalating.

Make it clear

Many people with an ASD take things literally and find generalisations difficult to deal with, so clear guidance of what is expected of the employee is essential. When giving instructions or explanations, be concise and specific – if an employee or colleague is being asked to complete a task or gather some information, say exactly what you require rather than assume they will infer what you want them to do. For example, instead of saying: "Make sure everybody has a copy of this," say: "Photocopy this three times and give the copies to Mary, Sam and Ahmed."

It may be helpful to break a large task up into steps. Many people with an ASD like to have a plan of the order in which tasks should be done and/or a timetable indicating what to do when. It is often best to back up verbal instructions with written ones which the person can refer to if and when they need. It may also be beneficial to ask the employee to repeat back instructions they have just heard. You may have to reinforce instructions over a period of time until you are satisfied the employee has fully assimilated them.

Be patient

People with an ASD may find it harder to master a task immediately, and may need repetition. But once the task is learnt, they are likely to perform it consistently well. Remember that a person with an ASD may find some things that seem perfectly straightforward to others very hard to learn, but conversely master a complex task with unusual ease.

Explain reasonable margins of error

Because people with an ASD are often highly meticulous, they may become very anxious if they are unable to perform perfectly. For example, a person with an ASD may become much more stressed than a colleague if something like an IT problem prevents them working the way they usually do. It may be helpful to explain ways to overcome potential difficulties. Give concrete solutions as and when necessary, such as: "When you have filled in the form, photocopy it and file the copy. If the photocopier is broken, use the one on the 1st or 2nd floor instead." People may also become stressed if transport problems such as bus or train delays cause them to arrive at work after the time they are meant to start, and may need reassurance that this is not a problem.

Organisation in the workplace

Some people with an ASD are highly organised and organisation in the workplace may well be a strength. However, others may have difficulties in this area, so guidelines can be helpful. For example, if someone is doing an office-based job, a plan saying who sits where may be useful, and a written list of the stationery a person should have in their drawer can help to reduce the amount of 'clutter' they collect. Another simple strategy might be to label trays for 'work to be done', 'work completed' and a 'check' tray for work that needs checking or where there is an outstanding query.

Helping somebody organise his or her workspace can help to reduce stress, lead to more efficient working and present an altogether more professional image. Monitoring progress with this may be helpful, and many other colleagues are also likely to benefit from these strategies!

Structure the day

Some people with an ASD (and quite a lot of people without) find it difficult to plan their own time or like to have a clear idea of exactly what they should be doing when, and the deadline for it. To help with this it might be helpful to have a regular timetable for tasks, or to spend a short time at the beginning of each day to help a person plan their work.

Creating a working file

Some people with an ASD are prone to over-checking and asking numerous questions about tasks which have already been explained. This is often a person's tactic for ensuring they are doing their job properly, so should not be taken as a sign that somebody has not understood a task. However, it can be both distracting and time consuming if not dealt with well and a 'working file' can help enormously.

A typical working file could contain any appropriate information, such as lists of extension numbers or instructions on how to file documents. This gives the person with an ASD a resource to refer to for reassurance that they are doing a job correctly without disturbing colleagues. If a work-related question is asked, colleagues can remind the person of the file. As well as cutting down on interruptions, this can help the individual gain confidence. The information in the file can obviously be adapted and updated as the person learns their job and takes on new tasks.

Compiling information about the job and the workplace in this way may also result in an equally useful resource for other staff and new team members.

Unwritten rules

All jobs have mutually understood expectations attached to them, which could be social or work-related. For instance, in an office environment the members of a team may make tea or coffee for everybody if they are having one themselves. These expectations may not be grasped by a person with an ASD if it has not been explained to them – they may consider their job tasks to be exactly what is written in their job description or daily plan. Explaining these unwritten 'rules' can help to avoid any misunderstanding and help the person with an ASD fit in with their colleagues.

Breaks, lunchtime and socialising

Often employees with an ASD find breaks and lunchtimes more difficult to manage than the actual work tasks they are employed to do. This is because these times are usually unstructured social times, when colleagues chat, laugh and relax over coffee or lunch. For someone with an ASD, this type of social interaction is exactly the area where they may lack skills or be unsure of what is expected of them.

If people prefer to do their own thing during these times but is not sure whether this is OK, you could suggest activities such as crosswords, reading a magazine, listening to a personal stereo or going for a short walk. Alternatively, if the person has a 'buddy' or mentor, they could tactfully ensure the person is included in workplace conversation, which may help the person gain the confidence to take part.

Sometimes people with an ASD may say or ask things which other colleagues may judge to be inappropriate, too personal or even bizarre. It is important to be aware that this is not done on purpose, but is merely part of the condition of autism. It may be a help to provide some suggestions for topics of conversation, so that the person with an ASD gains a better understanding of what people expect from socialising with colleagues.

It is also helpful to remember that people with an ASD may not always be able to tell when you are joking or being sarcastic. This does not mean that they do not have a sense of humour, but colleagues may need to bear in mind that some elements in day-to-day conversation may be 'lost' on someone with an ASD, and be ready to explain if necessary.

Strong personal interests and rituals

Many people with an ASD have strong personal interests or rituals which are part of their everyday life. This is fine unless it affects their work or irritates their colleagues. Strategies can usually be introduced to overcome any problems. For example, one person supported by the NAS employment consultancy Prospects had a tendency to pace up and down the office. He was helped to deal with this by restricting it to walking to the toilets and back. Another person who talked obsessively about dog racing was set clear boundaries about when he could do this (five minutes at the beginning of the day and five minutes at the end). Through reminding him of the boundaries when necessary, his manager and colleagues were able to help him establish a pattern which was satisfactory to everybody.

Don't patronise

The need to give clear instructions and support with social conversations does not mean that the person with an ASD has limited understanding or needs care. Employees with an ASD are adults and it is important not to talk down to them or to treat them like children.

Training and mentoring

Providing clear and structured training when a person starts a job or takes on new responsibilities is invaluable to a person with an ASD. This can be provided informally on the job by a manager, colleagues or a mentor. If necessary, there are various organisations and schemes which can offer a job coach. A grant for this may be available under the government Access to Work scheme. There is more information on job coaches on the leaflet in this pack: **Support for employers**.

Training for other staff

Explaining an ASD and how it impacts on people to other staff is often invaluable. An organisation like The National Autistic Society's employment consultancy, Prospects, can help with this. You can also get information on this from the NAS Helpline or website. Sometimes the employee with an ASD may want to write a document explaining how their ASD affects them and what kind of things they find hard, which other staff can read. Providing general disability training to other employees may help and is likely to provide benefits to them beyond simply working with one member of staff.

If problems arise

There may be occasions when problems do arise, either for the person with their job tasks or between the person with an ASD and their colleagues. Many of these are easy to deal with swiftly and tactfully. For example, if a person seems aloof or uninterested in talking to colleagues, or says the wrong thing, remember (and remind staff/colleagues if necessary), that this is unlikely to be intentional, but is simply a manifestation of the difficulties that person has with communication. Similarly, a person may try too hard to fit in and irritate colleagues by seeming to 'muscle in' on a conversation. Such situations can usually be defused by patience, understanding and a clear explanation of boundaries if this is necessary. Remember that boundaries may not be necessary just for the person with an ASD – other staff may also need reminding that their attitude may have a strong impact on the job performance of their colleague with an ASD.

If a person with an ASD is becoming anxious, try to find out what is causing the problem. One-to-one sessions are probably the best place for this. You may need to think laterally. For example, the stress may not be caused by a difficulty in the job, but by a colleague not being explicit in instructions, by things not working (such as IT breakdowns), or by difficulties in getting to work. Trying to think around the immediate issue may help, as will supportively asking the employee specific, though not invasive, questions to try to get to the root of the problem.

The person as an individual

Remember that each person with an ASD is an individual, so not all of these techniques will be necessary or appropriate for every employee with an ASD. These guidelines provide hints and ideas, but you will need to work with the employee (and if appropriate, their supporter) to find out what particular difficulties they may encounter and what adjustments and techniques will help them in the workplace.

Contact details

The National Autistic Society

Head Office

393 City Road

London EC1V 1NG

Tel: 020 7833 2299

Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004

Website: www.autism.org.uk

Prospects employment consultancy

Employment service for people with ASD
and training and consultancy for employers

Main office:

Studio 8, The Ivories

6-8 Northampton Street

London N1 2HY

London

Tel: 020 7704 7450

Email: Prospects-London@nas.org.uk

Glasgow

Tel: 0141 248 1725

Email: Prospects-Glasgow@nas.org.uk

Manchester

Tel: 0161 998 0577

Email: Prospects-Manchester@nas.org.uk

Sheffield

Tel: 0114 225 5695

Email: Prospects-Sheffield@nas.org.uk

References

Warman, R. (2003). *A guide to supporting employees with Asperger syndrome*.

Berkshire Autistic Society. Available at:

[www.autismberkshire.org.uk/](http://www.autismberkshire.org.uk/employment.htm)

[employment.htm](http://www.autismberkshire.org.uk/employment.htm)



The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7833 2299 Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004 Minicom: 0845 070 4003
Fax: 020 7833 9666 Email: nas@nas.org.uk Website: www.autism.org.uk



5 Support for employers

Regardless of the potential benefits of employing a person with an ASD, many employers are concerned that difficulties may arise, or that they lack the experience and ability to support a person with an ASD in the workplace.

If you employ a person with an ASD, there are various forms of support available to you as an employer. These range from practical support and advice to financial schemes which may be able to relieve any extra costs the employer or employee could face, such as the costs of employing a job coach for the first few weeks of employment.

Specialist employment agencies

There are various employment agencies across the UK which specialise in working with disabled people, including those with autism. These include:

Prospects employment consultancy

Prospects employment consultancy is run by The National Autistic Society. It works exclusively with people with an ASD, particularly those with Asperger syndrome, helping them to find and keep jobs and offering support to their employers and colleagues.

Prospects can help employers by providing professional advice, support and training to managers and their teams, and by offering training and on the job support to people with an ASD.

Prospects employs a team of specialist employment consultants who work with people with an ASD who have demonstrated a strong motivation to get and keep a job. It works intensively with candidates to get to know their skills and abilities and provides tailor-made training courses before matching the person to an appropriate job.

The consultancy has helped hundreds of people with an ASD to get jobs ranging from administration and IT support to customer reception work and an after school club assistant. Other posts individuals have taken on include writer, postman, proof reader, tour assistant, seamstress, librarian and statistician.

Prospects can help employers maximise the skills of employees with an ASD by assessing the work environment, advising on any adaptations or adjustments, and advising on the recruitment process. It can help employers set up:

- work experience placements
- job tasters
- short term contracts
- permanent contracts.

The Prospects employment consultants can also provide:

- training in autistic spectrum disorders
- support and training for line managers and colleagues
- team briefings
- one-to-one support for the employee with an ASD in the workplace
- follow up support and on call services for line managers, colleagues and the employee with an ASD
- career progression for the person with an ASD.

The cost of a Prospects employment consultant to support the employee in the workplace is usually met by the Department for Work and Pensions. Prospects can also provide a one-off workplace assessment at a charge.

Prospects has offices in London, Glasgow, Sheffield and Manchester and also undertakes consultancy work in other parts of the UK. Contact details are at the end of this sheet.

Case study – Alex – systems analyst

Alex is a systems analyst for PruTech, the IT branch of Prudential. Alex applied to Prudential for their graduate fast track management scheme. Although he was not selected for this, Prudential were so impressed by his technical knowledge and ability that he was offered a job in the technical support team. An employment consultant from Prospects worked alongside Alex full-time during his first week to assist with orientation, organising his day, to advise on social issues and to provide information and training to colleagues and his new line manager. Support from Prospects was gradually reduced as Alex settled into his role and the organisation.

Alex's former line manager says: "I admit to a sense of unease as I had not come into contact with any form of autism in my previous work career. At the introductory meeting with Alex and the Prospects team member I was pleasantly surprised and grateful for the level of detail they provided, and they soon put me at ease with respect to an understanding of the condition and its effect on Alex. Alex soon proved to have a high degree of technical ability and a phenomenal memory for detail and fitted into his new environment with ease." Peter Brown, former line manager.

Other employment agencies

There are various other agencies working in the UK which support people with an ASD. You will be able to get information on these from the Disability Employment Adviser at your local Jobcentre or Jobcentre Plus. The availability of these services varies in different parts of the UK.

Government support and schemes

Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs)

Most Jobcentres or Jobcentre Plus offices have a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) who specialises in supporting people with disabilities to get work, and advises both disabled job seekers and employers. They will be able to provide information on financial assistance and incentives to employers and any support which is available in the local area.

Access to Work

Access to Work (AtW) is a government scheme which is available to help overcome practical problems when recruiting and employing a person with a disability. It can provide information to disabled employees and their employers, and grants towards extra employment costs which may arise because of a person's disability.

AtW applications are assessed by Access to Work Advisers. Disability Employment Advisers can provide more information about AtW and how employers can apply for it, and put you in touch with an AtW Business Centre.

New Deal for Disabled People

New Deal for Disabled People is a national scheme aimed at helping disabled people on certain disability benefits into work. Specialist job brokers from employment agencies provide assistance with securing employment, and offer support and advice to both employer and employee. The NAS Prospects employment consultancy is a New Deal job broker.

WORKSTEP

WORKSTEP is a national scheme which provides support to disabled people to enable them to get and keep a job. It supports both employee and employer with practical (and sometimes financial) assistance and by implementing a development plan agreed by both parties. The scheme aims to enable disabled people to work in ordinary workplaces and to move from a supported work placement into open employment. There are no restrictions on the kind of work an employer can offer through the scheme.

WORKSTEP is managed by Jobcentre Plus and involves a three-way partnership between the employer, a WORKSTEP provider (the agency which provides support to employer and employee) and the disabled person. Jobcentre Plus contracts with local authorities and voluntary and private employment agencies to become WORKSTEP providers.

Job Introduction Scheme (JIS)

Please see overleaf for details of this scheme.



Job Introduction Scheme (JIS)

The Job Introduction Scheme (JIS) enables an employer to take on a person with a disability for a trial period. The employee is paid the going rate for the job and the employer receives a grant of £75 per week for the first six weeks to help with employment costs, such as training (this can be extended to 13 weeks in some circumstances). The job can be full or part-time, but must be expected to last at least six months.

There are some restrictions on JIS, but it can be helpful in cases where the employer believes the person has the skills to do a job, but has concerns about any potential problems and practical difficulties. It provides both employer and employee with the opportunity to decide whether a particular job will work for a particular individual.

Disability Employment Advisers can provide more information on New Deal, WORKSTEP and the Job Introduction Scheme.

Please note that although we have provided information on the various national schemes outlined above, The National Autistic Society and Prospects cannot specifically recommend any of these schemes as different employers and individuals have their own needs, concerns and experiences.

Contact details/further information

Jobcentre Plus

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/

Prospects employment consultancy

Employment service for people with an ASD and training and consultancy for employers

Main office:

Studio 8, The Ivories, 6-8 Northampton Street, London N1 2HY

London

Tel: 020 7704 7450

Email: Prospects-London@nas.org.uk

Glasgow

Tel: 0141 248 1725

Email: Prospects-Glasgow@nas.org.uk

Manchester

Tel: 0161 998 0577

Email: Prospects-Manchester@nas.org.uk

Sheffield

Tel: 0114 225 5695

Email: Prospects-Sheffield@nas.org.uk

Other supported employment projects

See leaflet 7 in this pack: **Further advice and information.**



The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7833 2299 Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004 Minicom: 0845 070 4003
Fax: 020 7833 9666 Email: nas@nas.org.uk Website: www.autism.org.uk



6 The *Disability Discrimination Act* and people with an ASD

The *Disability Discrimination Act (1995)* (DDA) aims to end discrimination faced by disabled people. Part of the Act creates obligations on employers to ensure that they do not discriminate against disabled people either in their recruitment processes or their employment practices. Although businesses employing fewer than 15 people were not previously covered by the Act, from 1 October 2004, the Act applies to all employers except the armed forces.

While employers may feel that legal obligations such as those created by the DDA can be a problem, employing people with disabilities can create numerous opportunities. Many people with an ASD have skills that are keenly sought after in the workplace. Making adjustments necessary for them to carry out their job is often easy and can bring benefits other than simply avoiding claims of unlawful discrimination.

What are the obligations on employers under the DDA?

Essentially the DDA states that employers:

- must not treat an employee or job applicant less favourably than anybody else because of their disability
- must make reasonable adjustments in the workplace to accommodate a person's disability
- must not harass or victimise a person because of their disability.

What reasonable adjustments can an employer make for someone with an ASD?

Reasonable adjustments for someone with an ASD are usually simple to make and seldom costly. The following are examples of adjustments which may be helpful:

- making instructions and manuals more accessible (eg: by writing instructions down or splitting a job into specific tasks)
- re-allocating work so that tasks difficult for the person with an ASD are taken on by someone else (eg: if the person with an ASD finds it difficult to make phone calls, another staff member could do this where necessary, and the person with an ASD take on some of their tasks in return)
- providing structured training
- using a job coach or support worker (if necessary, the employer may be able to get funding for this from the Access to Work scheme)
- transferring a person to another workplace (for example, an office closer to their home if the person has difficulty making long journeys by public transport)
- being flexible about hours of work (for example, allowing a person to start and finish their work earlier or later than others if a person finds it stressful to travel in the rush hour).

More information

For more information, contact the Disability Rights Commission or the Department for Work and Pensions.

Department for Work and Pensions

www.disability.gov.uk/

Email: enquiry-disability@dwpgsi.gov.uk

Disability Rights Commission

Tel: 08457 622 633

Textphone: 08457 622 644

Fax: 08457 778 878

DRC Helpline

FREEPOST MID02164

Stratford upon Avon

CV37 9BR

www.drc-gb.org/



The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7833 2299 Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004 Minicom: 0845 070 4003
Fax: 020 7833 9666 Email: nas@nas.org.uk Website: www.autism.org.uk

7 Further advice and information



NAS Autism Helpline

The National Autistic Society
393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 0845 070 4004
Monday to Friday 10am-4pm
Fax: 020 7833 9666
Email: autismhelpline@nas.org.uk
Website: www.autism.org.uk

British Council of Disabled People

Litchurch Plaza, Litchurch Lane
Derby DE24 8AA
Tel: 01332 295 551
Email: general@bcodp.org.uk
Website: www.bcodp.org.uk

Careers Scotland

Head Office, 150 Broomielaw
Atlantic Quay, Glasgow G2 8LU
Tel: 0845 8502 502
Email: hq@careers-scotland.org.uk
Website: www.careers-scotland.org.uk

Connexions

Connexions Service National Unit
Department for Education and Skills
Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PQ
Email: info@dfes.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.connexions.gov.uk

Employers' Forum on Disability

Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street
London SE1 2NY
Tel: 020 7403 3020
Fax: 020 7403 0404
Email: website.enquiries@employers-forum.co.uk
Website: www.employers-forum.co.uk

Jobcentre Plus, Department for Work and Pensions

Website: www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/

RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation)

Head Office, 12 City Forum
250 City Road, London EC1V 8AF
Tel: 020 7250 3222
Fax: 020 7250 0212
Email: radar@radar.org.uk
Website: www.radar.org.uk

SKILL (The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities)

Chapter House, 18-20 Crucifix Lane
London SE1 3JW
Tel: 0800 328 5050
Tue 11.30-1.30pm and Thurs 1.30-3.30pm
Email: info@skill.org.uk
Website: www.skill.org.uk

SKILL Scotland

Norton Park, 57 Albion Road
Edinburgh EH7 5QY
Tel: 0131 475 2348
Fax: 0131 475 2397
Email: admin@skillscotland.org.uk
Website: www.skill.org.uk/scotland/index.asp

Legal advice

Disability Law Service

39-45 Cavell Street, London E1 2BP
Tel: 020 7791 9800
Monday to Friday 10.30am-1pm and 2-4.30pm
Email: advice@dls.org.uk

Disability Rights Commission

DRC Helpline, FREEPOST MID02164
Stratford upon Avon CV37 9BR
Tel: 08457 622 633
Textphone: 08457 622 644
Email: enquiry@drc-gb.org
Website: www.drc-gb.org/

Supported employment agencies

Prospects Employment Consultancy

Studio 8, The Ivories
6-8 Northampton Street
London N1 2HY.
(NAS employment service for people with an
ASD and training and consultancy for
employers)

London

Tel: 020 7704 7450
Email: Prospects-London@nas.org.uk

Glasgow

Tel: 0141 248 1725
Email: Prospects-Glasgow@nas.org.uk

Manchester

Tel: 0161 998 0577
Email: Prospects-Manchester@nas.org.uk

Sheffield

Tel: 0114 225 5695
Email: Prospects-Sheffield@nas.org.uk

Asperger Norfolk

Upper floor, 2 Lower Goat Lane
Norwich NR2 1EL
Tel & Fax: 01603 620 500
Email: info@asperger.org.uk
Website: www.asperger.org.uk

ASpire Employment Service

Unit 415, The Green House
Gibb Street, Digbeth
Birmingham B9 4AA
Tel: 0121 244 7844
Fax: 0121 244 7845
Email: aspire@autismwestmidlands.org.uk
Website: www.autismwestmidlands.org.uk

Mencap Pathway Employment Service

Mencap, 6 Nightingale Court
Nightingale Close, Rotherham
South Yorkshire S60 2AB
Tel: 01709 830 956
Email: jill.bates@mencap.org.uk
Website: www.mencap.org.uk

Remploy Interwork

Stonecourt, Siskin Drive
Coventry CV3 4FJ
Tel: 0845 845 2211
Email: interwork@remploy.co.uk
Website: www.remplo.co.uk

Intowork

Norton Park, 57 Albion Road
Edinburgh EH7 5QY
Tel: 0131 475 2369
Website: www.intowork.org.uk

The King Ecbert Resource Charity Supported Employment Project (Sheffield only)

Meadowhall, Sheffield
Tel: 01142 263 5635
Email: SEP@fsmail.net

Employability

Surrey County Council White Lodge
Adult Centre
Holloway Hill
Chertsey
Surrey KT16 0AE
Tel: 01932 567 075

General resources

Hesmondhalgh, M. and Baggott J. (2002). *Autism and employment – building bridges*. Sheffield: King Ecgbert School. Video. Available through NAS Publications (See overleaf)

Key 4 Learning website

www.key4learning.com

Resources for people with an ASD

The Undiscovered Workforce: looking for a job? – an information pack about getting and retaining work for people with an ASD.

Available from the NAS Autism Helpline or download at www.autism.org.uk/workforce

SKILL (2003). *Help for disabled jobseekers from Jobcentre Plus*. London: SKILL. Available from SKILL or download at www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets/emp_service.doc

SKILL (2003). *Looking for work: disclosing disability*. London: SKILL. Available from SKILL or download at www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets/emp_disclose.doc

SKILL (2003). *Using recruitment agencies as a disabled jobseeker*. London: SKILL. Available from SKILL or download at www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets/emp_recruit.doc

SKILL (2003). *Careers and work for people with disabilities*. London: SKILL. Available from SKILL or download at www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets/emp_careers.doc

SKILL (1999). *Get that job*. London: SKILL. Available to download at www.skill.org.uk/info/getthatjob/getthatjob.asp

Jobcentre Plus, Department for Work and Pensions, website:

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/cms.asp?Page=/Home/Customers/HelpForDisabledPeople

Provides information for and enables users to search for their nearest Jobcentre Plus office.

Warman, R. (2003). *Finding and sustaining employment: a guide for people with Asperger syndrome*. Available at www.autismberkshire.org.uk/employment.htm

Resources for employers

The Undiscovered Workforce: looking for staff? – this information pack for employers working with or interested in recruiting people with an ASD. Available from the NAS Autism Helpline or download at www.autism.org.uk/workforce

Jobcentre Plus, Department for Work and Pensions, website: www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/cms.asp?Page=/Home/Employers/DisabilityServiceshelpforEmployers

Provides information and advice on good practice in employing people with disabilities.

Information for employers, Prospects. Available at: www.autism.org.uk/prospects

Warman, R. (2003). *A guide for supporting employees with Asperger syndrome*. Available at www.autismberkshire.org.uk/employment.htm

Resources for advisers

Prospects (2003) *Student support information*. London: The National Autistic Society. Available from the NAS Autism Helpline.

Resources for parents, carers or other supporters

Warman, R. (2003). *Helping someone with Asperger syndrome to find employment: A practical guide for parents, carers and advocacy services*. Available at www.autismberkshire.org.uk/employment.htm

Further reading

Fast Y. et al (2004). *Employment for individuals with Asperger syndrome or non-verbal learning disability: stories and strategies*. London: Jessica Kingsley. Available from the NAS Publications Department.

Jobcentre Plus Disability Support (2003). *Getting and keeping a job: how the Jobcentre Plus office can help you if you have a learning disability*. Sheffield: Jobcentre Plus Disability Support.

Meyer, R. N. (2001). *Asperger syndrome employment workbook*. London: Jessica Kingsley. Available from the NAS Publications Department.

SKILL (2003). *Into work experience: positive experiences of disabled people*. London: SKILL.

Membership of The National Autistic Society

The NAS has over 12,000 members who regularly receive the leading magazine *Communication*, giving information on autistic spectrum disorders and updates on the work of the NAS. Membership helps us to provide our essential support networks and information to people affected by ASD throughout the UK. If you are interested, please contact:

membership@nas.org.uk
Tel: 020 7903 3563

If an item is marked as available from the NAS Publications Department please contact:

Publications Department Distributors:
Barnardo's Despatch Services
Linney House, Tanners Lane
Barkingside
Essex IG6 1QG
Tel: +44 (0)20 8498 7844
Fax: +44 (0)20 8498 7801
Email: beverley.bennett@barnardos.org.uk
Website: www.autism.org.uk/pubs

To the best of our knowledge this list is correct at the time of going to press, but The National Autistic Society cannot guarantee its accuracy.



The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7833 2299 Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004 Minicom: 0845 070 4003
Fax: 020 7833 9666 Email: nas@nas.org.uk Website: www.autism.org.uk



The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
Tel: 020 7833 2299 Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004 Minicom: 0845 070 4003
Fax: 020 7833 9666 Email: nas@nas.org.uk Website: www.autism.org.uk

Prospects Employment Consultancy, Studio 8, The Ivories,
6 – 8 Northampton Street, London N1 2HY
Tel: 020 7704 7450
www.autism.org.uk/prospects