Strategies to support people with autism, including Asperger syndrome

NAS HE/FE and Employment Training Service
HE/FE & Employment Training Team

• Training for FE employability professionals and HE careers advisers
• Partnerships with colleges, universities and supported employment organisations
• Handbook for careers and employment professionals
• Training for HR Professionals
• Workplace assessments
• Training for employers (managers and colleagues)
• Training for employees with autism
• Workplace support for employees with autism
• Only 15% of people with autism are in full-time employment compared to 48% of people with disabilities (DoH, 2009)

• 43% have left or lost a job because of their condition (NAS, 2012)

• 53% of people with autism say they want help to find work. But only 10% get the support they need (NAS, 2012)
Young people and employment

• Young people with autism have the lowest rates of participation in employment out of any disability group (Shattuck, P. et al., 2012)

• 33% of 16-24 year olds with autism are not in education, employment or training (NEET) – more than double that of the general population (NAS, 2012)
What is autism?

- Life long developmental condition
- 1.1% of UK has diagnosis affecting 2.8 million families
- Difficulties in two main areas
  - Social Communication and Interaction
  - Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities (RRBI)
- 4:1 ratio (male/female)
- Ongoing research into causes of autism
- There is no ‘cure’ and many people with autism do not want one
- Hidden disability
The autism spectrum

Classic autism

Asperger syndrome
High-functioning autism

Mild learning disability

Average I.Q.

Moderate learning disability

Above average I.Q.
Strengths

Might have strengths including…

• Accuracy and attention to detail
• High levels of concentration
• Reliability and loyalty
• Technical ability
• Depth of knowledge around specialist topic
• Resourcefulness
• Strong sense of justice
• Different way of thinking
“Not all autistic people are like “Rainman” or the character from the “Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time”. They may not all hate being touched or might not all hate talking to strangers. There are lots of stereotypical images of people with autism but we are actually a lot more varied than the media would have you think.”
Job finding Barriers

• Occupational choice
• Unrealistic expectations
• Job searching and job description
• Application form
• Interview
• Disclosure
• Lack of experience
• Anxiety
“When I did disclose, it worked really well. I applied for summer work in an office and told them I had Aspergers before my interview. They asked me if I needed any adjustments and they were really helpful in the interview. I got the job and they re-employed me the next summer because I was so quick and accurate.”

“When I was doing one of my first jobs my boss thought I was a bit rude and stand-offish and I didn’t really do what she said. But when I told her I had Aspergers and explained some of the support I needed it really helped. She moved me to an office which was quieter and where I could concentrate properly. I did really well after that.”
Explaining Autism

- Employee consent
  - Explain benefits of disclosing and who to disclose to
  - Re-visit disclosing
- Discuss employee’s specific difficulties and how they relate to the workplace
  - Social communication and interaction
    - Unwritten rules
    - banter and small talk
    - literal language
  - Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities
    - Dealing with change
    - Sensory Sensitivities
    - Perfectionism
Explaining Autism Strategies

• Give benefits of disclosing with examples
• Support the job seeker to develop an autism blurb – focusing on how people can support them and identifying strengths
  – Clear communication
  – May need all things explaining about a task
  – May task slightly longer to complete some tasks than my colleagues
• Explore when appropriate to disclose for that individual
• Support job seeker to disclose, or contact employer on their behalf
• Provide autism information and advice on adjustments to give the prospective employer
Strengths an employee with autism may bring

• Accuracy and attention to detail – *data entry, tidying displays, filing, following procedures*

• Reliability and loyalty – *always on time, sticks to the rules, does what is asked*

• Technical ability – *computers, fixing things, art, sports*

• Depth of knowledge around specialist topic – *museums, libraries, computers, product range, train timetable*

• Resourcefulness – *taking logical steps to work through a challenge*…
Employer’s Perspective

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.

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.
Common placement difficulties

Social communication/interaction
• Understanding instructions
• Asking for help
• Relationships with colleagues/manager/customers

Organisation and time management
• Taking too long to do tasks
• Forgetting to do things
• Multitasking

Anxiety
• Social anxiety
• Getting things wrong
• Specific tasks or environments
Strategies for placement supervisors

• Be clear and precise – make sure the employee knows EXACTLY what is required of them – use checklists if necessary
• Be aware that things may be interpreted literally, employee may not pick up jokes/sarcasm.
• Be aware that non-verbal communication may be missed or not clearly understood
• Give clear and honest feedback but don’t forget to tell employee what to do differently.
• Regular and frequent meetings
• Give advance warning of any changes whenever possible, including when new people are joining the team or leaving
• Check understanding
Placement support

- On-going workplace support
- Organisation skills
- Support with appraisals/PDR
- Professional/personal development support
- Facilitate communication between employee and manager
- Ensuring employee and line manager develop an effective working relationship which is based on honest, constructive feedback
- Structure – breakdown and organisation of the day – timetable/plan etc
- Job analysis – break down tasks, provide clear guidelines. If needed – create a working file
**Placement support**

- **Training** – help identify what training is needed, and assist with any additional training. Take notes, then produce clear guidelines/checklists.
- **Social skills/awareness** – explain ‘unwritten’ rules in the workplace/team dynamics/how to deal with ‘unstructured time’.
- **Communication skills** – advice about appropriate/inappropriate topics of conversation.
- **Who to ask for help when things go wrong**.
- **Record experience and skills throughout the placement**.
Services for job seekers and employees

• Access to Work
• NAS Employment Training Partners
• Welfare to work providers
• Finding work – a handbook
• Work skills training courses
• Workplace support (NAS, Employment training partners, other providers)
• Factsheets
• Online community
• NAS helpline
Services for Employers

- Workplace assessments
- Colleague Awareness training
- Managers training
- Lunch and Learn
- Employer helpline
- Online factsheets and resources
Access to Work

• Government scheme aimed at helping individuals with disabilities overcome barriers in work

• [www.direct.gov.uk/accessstowork](http://www.direct.gov.uk/accessstowork)

• Fund reasonable adjustments including support at interviews and in employment
Network Autism

Join to:
• connect with professionals in similar situations
• share expertise and knowledge.
• access useful resources
• develop and contribute professional skills

• [http://network.autism.org.uk/welcome](http://network.autism.org.uk/welcome)
• University Careers Advisers - training participants
Further Information

Autism and Asperger Syndrome
NAS website: www.autism.org.uk
NAS helpline: 0808-800-4101
autismhelpline@nas.org.uk

The National Autistic Society
HE and Employment training and consultancy service
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hefe.training@nas.org.uk
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