

Supporting people with autism in the workplace

Strategies and support for
employers and employees

BeyondAutism

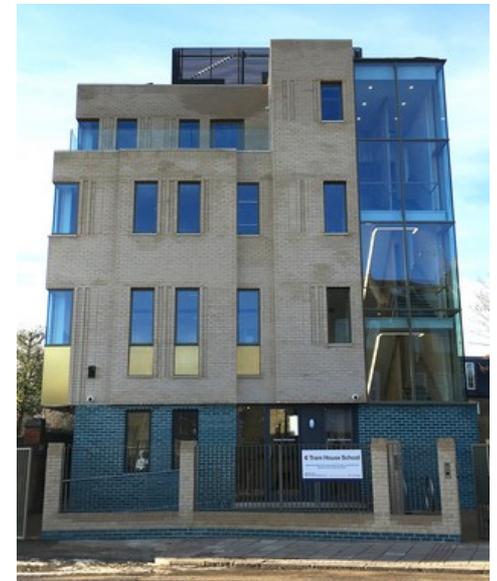
Everyone with autism accesses an education which empowers a life full of choice, independence and opportunity.

- Reducing school placement breakdown
- Increasing employability
- Developing the life skills to live your ideal week
- Increasing the resilience and confidence of families
- Supporting communities to include people with autism

Our charity and services

Founded in 2000, we deliver services to those with autism aged 15 months to 25 years old.

- Early Years
- Outreach & Training
- BeyondAutism Schools: Park House School & Tram House School
- Post-19 Service



David Anthony

Head of Research and Learning

David's experience includes Headship of an independent specialist college and secondary provision for people with autism. He has also worked as a SENDCo in specialist primary and secondary settings as well as mainstream provisions. David started his career as a teacher of English and Media, working with pupils who had a diagnosis of autism, ADHD and dyslexia.

In his current role, he oversees several projects and services including: Outreach and Training for parents and professionals, development of research projects within the field of autism and overseeing the Employment Project across BeyondAutism's services.

Agenda

What I hope to cover in today's webinar:

- A brief introduction to autism
- Respectful terminology
- Communication
- Sensory needs
- Person-centred planning
- Strategies for recruitment and long-term employment
- Questions and Answers

Employment and autism

- 16% of adults with autism are in full time employment
- 32% of adults with autism are in paid work

- 80% of non-disabled people are in work
- 47% of disabled people are in work

- 60% of employers would worry about getting support for an adult with autism wrong
- 60% also said they did not know where to go for support or advice about employing someone with autism

Why is work important?

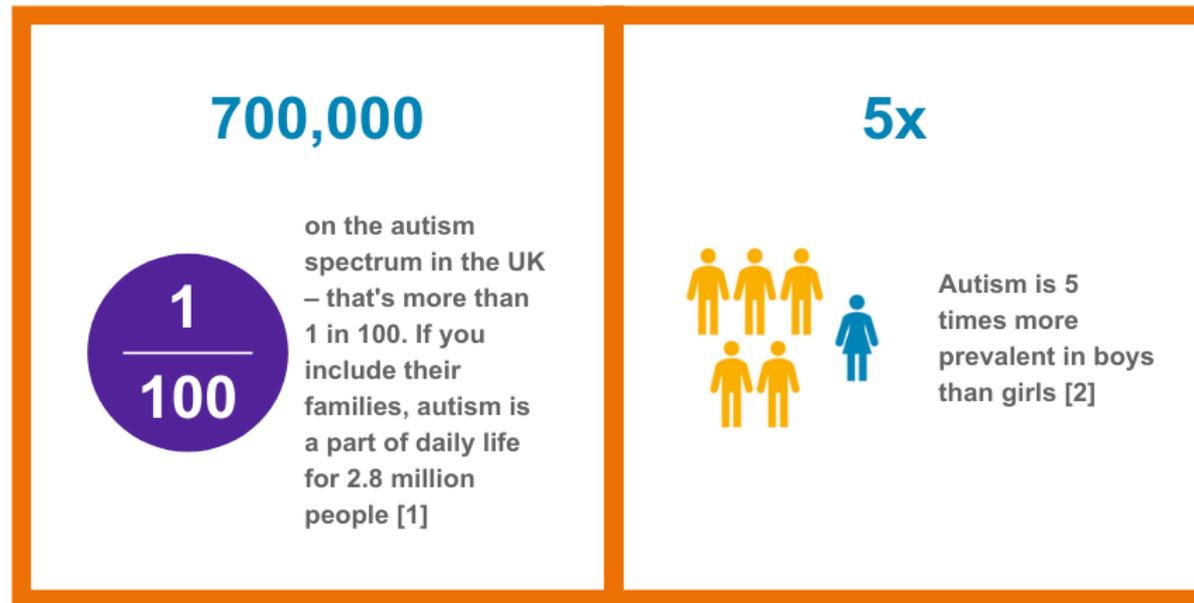
- It can be therapeutic;
- Engaging in work will help to promote recovery and rehabilitation;
- Work leads to better long-term health outcomes;
- Minimises the harmful physical, mental and social effects of long-term sickness absence ;
- Reduces the risk of long-term incapacity;
- Promotes full participation in society, independence and human rights;
- Reduces poverty;
- Improves quality of life and well-being.

A brief introduction to autism

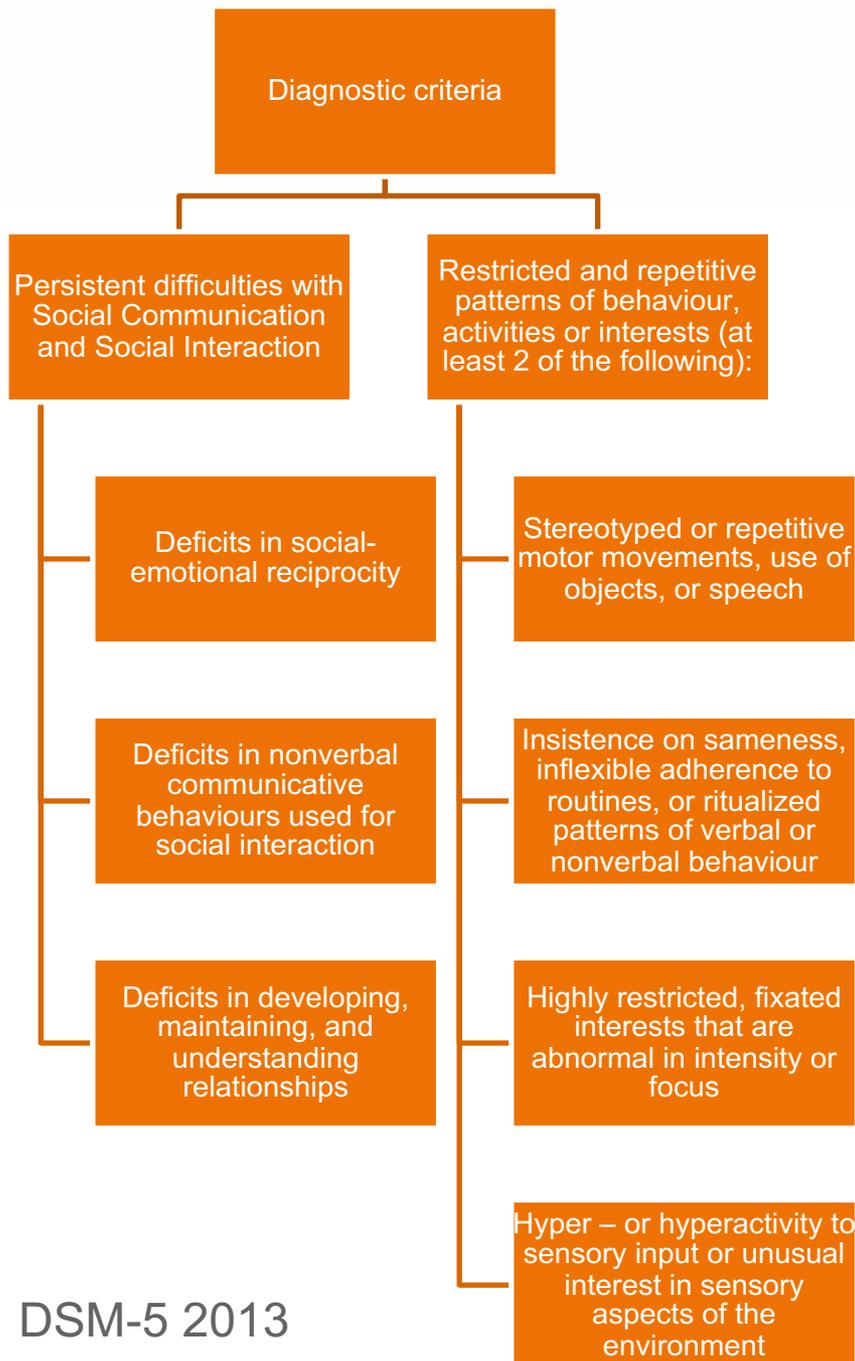
- Autism is lifelong.
- It is not an illness or disease so cannot be cured.
- Autism is a developmental disability that impacts how people perceive the world and communicate with others.

‘Persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction’ and ‘restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests’ (this includes sensory behaviour), present since early childhood, to the extent that these ‘limit and impair everyday functioning.’

How common is autism?



1. The NHS Information Centre, Community and Mental Health Team, Brugha, T. et al (2012). *Estimating the prevalence of autism spectrum conditions in adults: extending the 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey*. Leeds: NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care
2. The NHS, [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England](#), (2017)



DSM-5 2013

Autism is a spectrum condition and affects people in different ways. People with autism have their own strengths and weaknesses.

These are some difficulties people with autism may share:

- Social communication and social interaction challenges
- Repetitive and restrictive behaviour
- Over-or-under-sensitivity to light, sound, taste or touch
- Highly focused interests or hobbies
- Extreme anxiety

NAS

Spectrum condition:

The DSM-5 established three levels of autism based on the amount of support required.

| Level | Description |
|--|---|
| Level 1: Requiring support | Difficulty initiating social interaction. Organisation and planning problems can hamper independence. |
| Level 2: Requiring substantial support | Social interactions limited to narrow specialist interests. Frequent restricted / repetitive behaviours. |
| Level 3: Requiring very substantial support | Severe deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication skills. Great distress / difficulty changing actions or focus. |

Hidden disability

Autism is often described as a ‘hidden disability’.

This can cause difficulties for those with autism when interacting with others, and can lead to misunderstandings, confusion and frustration.

Everyone with autism is different.

A person-centred approach is required when designing and implementing support.

Not every person with autism will have the same weaknesses or strengths.

How do we talk about autism?

Respectful terminology and language

Research was conducted in 2015 (Kenny *et al.*, 2016) to determine what terms were preferred by those on the spectrum, their families, friends and professionals. They found there is no clear consensus.

However, there is a move towards more positive and assertive language.



How do we talk about autism?

Respectful terminology and language

Through the research, there were strong views against the term 'classic autism'.

Remembering that everyone with autism is unique, it is important we get an individual's view on how they talk about their autism.

Organisations use different language and terms. All of them are based on respect.

At BeyondAutism, we favour person-first language (**people/child/young adult with autism**) rather than identity-first language ('autistic') to refer to someone who has an autism diagnosis.

Recognising that the preference of some is to celebrate their diagnosis, we are keen that the experiences of those requiring very substantial support aren't marginalised.

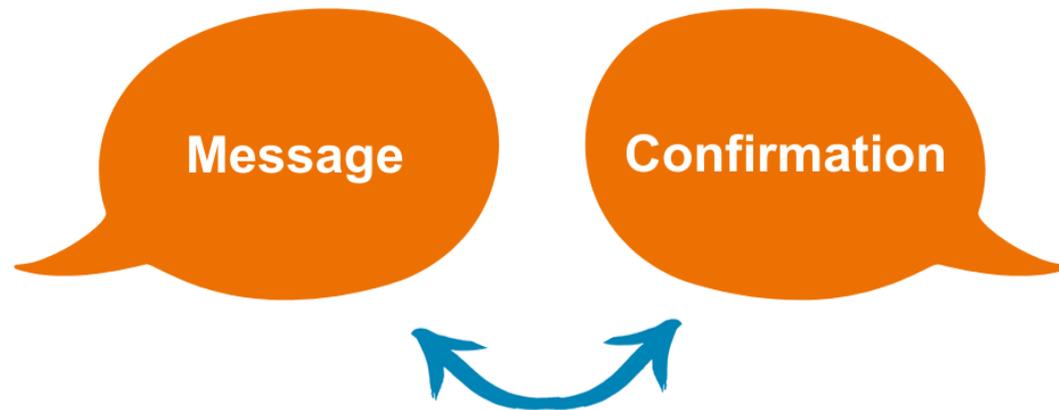
Many of the learners we work with don't have the ability or comprehension to explain their choice so our preference is to advocate for them as individuals and not to define them by their autism.

The education sector largely uses person-first language.

Communication

Actively including people with autism

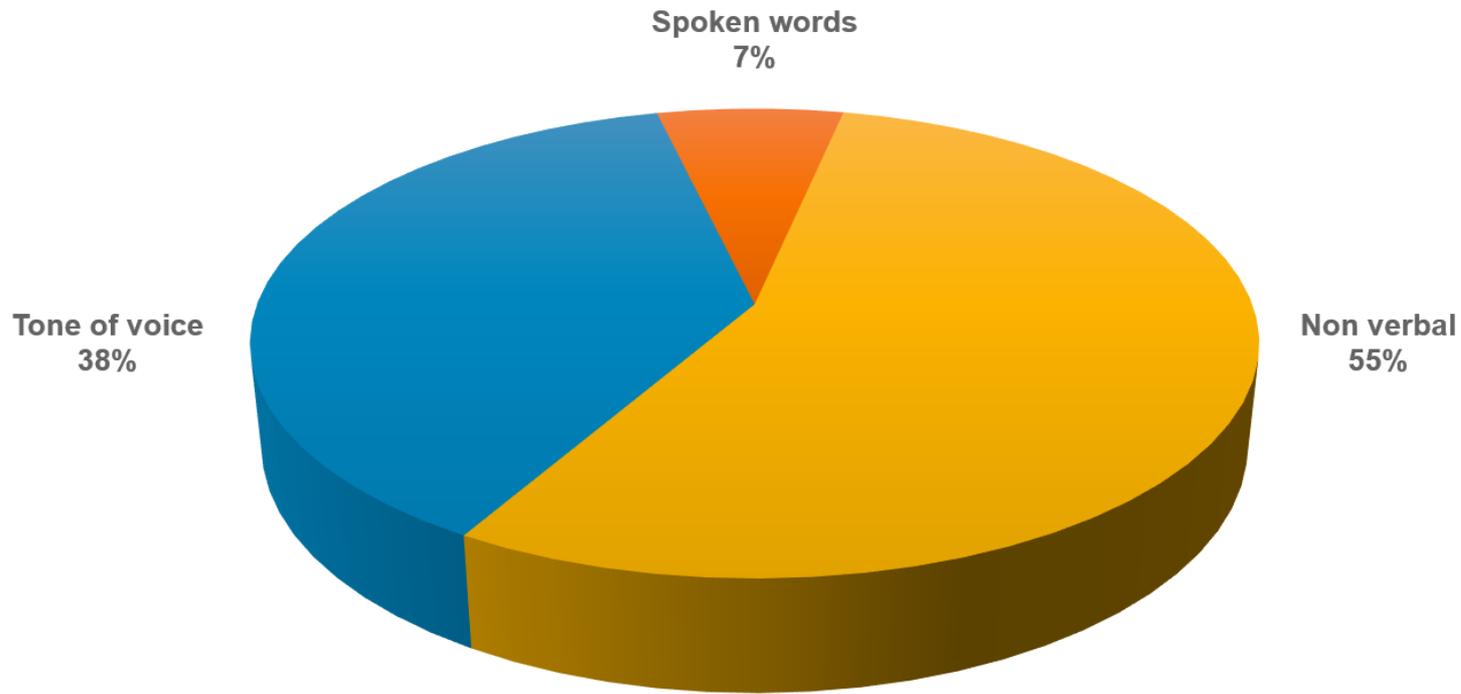
Communication is more than just expressing needs and wants. It is a two way process, which involves one person delivering a message to another, who in turns gives some form of confirmation.



It involves understanding and expressing language.

Communication is more than just words

It is suggested that over 50% of communication is non verbal.



Using language

Receptive and expressive language

| Receptive language | Expressive language |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The ability to understand verbal or written information: words, sentences and meaning• The receptive language abilities of those with learning difficulties are often under or over estimated | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The ability to put thoughts into verbal or written words and sentences• Those with learning difficulties often find it hard to use language accurately |

Difficulties in receptive and expressive language can lead to anxiety and confusion. Take time to know someone's level of understanding and support their expressive language.

Problems with speech and language

- Using a loud voice without realising
- Having an unusual voice
- Sometimes being unable to explain what they want to say
- Sometimes not understanding what people are telling them

Problems with social skills

- Difficulties understanding body language
- Unable to talk about anything other than their interests
- Sometimes not understanding social 'rules' and appearing rude

You Are Special Too: A Book for Brothers and Sisters of Children Diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, J. Santomauro (2009)

Means to communicate

When considering expressive language and successful communication, a person needs:

Means to communicate – how can someone communicate?

*A **reason** to communicate – why does someone communicate?*

*A viable **opportunity** to communicate – where, when, and with whom do we communicate?*

(Money, Thurman 1994)

Means

Signs
Symbols
Gestures
Body language
Facial expression
Pointing
Objects
Pictures

Reasons

Attention
Greetings
Wants / needs
Request
Information
Give information
Protest / deny
Feelings
Choices
Preferences
Negotiation
Discussion
Planning

Opportunities

Partners
Time
Place
Shared language
Shared communication System
Shared interests
Friends
Colleagues
Authority figures
Carers

Tips for communication:

Processing information and time to respond

- limit how much you say
- slow down your delivery
- use specific words and emphasis
- allow time between what you have said and the expected response
- limit the number of questions posed
- be aware of the impact of the environment (sensory input)

Total communication

There are many alternative ways in which we augment our communicate with each other:

- **Speech**
- **Symbols** – think about all the App symbols on your phone!
- **Hearing**
- **Body language** – shrugging, folding arms, turning away
- **Facial expression** – smiling, frowning, laughing
- **Sign & gesture** – e.g. gesturing for a drink
- **Objects of reference** – using items to indicate your wants and needs
- **Written words**

Sensory needs

Sensory needs

Identifying our senses

Vision / Touch / Smell / Hearing / Taste

- **Body awareness**
 - Information is received from our muscles, tendons and joints, and provides our brain with an awareness of our body's position in relation to our environment, gravity and space
- **Movement and balance**
 - Information is received from the inner ear, and relates to movement, gravity and balance
- **Interoception**
 - The sense telling us what our internal organs are saying, for example, thirst and hunger

Sensory difficulties

- Sensory information goes into the brain but does not get organised into appropriate responses. Instead it is perceived and/or responded to differently.

Sensitivity to stimuli

Less sensitive or more sensitive?

People who are **more sensitive** only need a little bit of sensory input before their brain responds. This means that there is often an over-the-top response.

A little feels like a lot.

Children who are more sensitive tend to respond in two main ways:

1. Stay away or avoid (active response)
2. Get upset or emotional (passive response)

What might more sensitive look like?

- Avoiding touch of others
- Covering ears in response to noise
- Becoming overwhelmed in a busy environment
- Reduced diet e.g. range, flavours or textures of foods
- Refusing to let someone touch their hair

People who are **less sensitive** need a lot of sensory input before the brain responds.

A lot feels like a little.

Children who are less sensitive tend to respond in two main ways:

1. Seek out the sensory input they need (active response)
2. Appear dreamy or spaced out (passive response)

What might less sensitive look like?

- Missing information e.g. not noticing different colours
- Chewing on multiple different items
- Crashing into walls or people
- Staring outside or looking at nothing for long periods of time
- Looking at screens very closely
- Listening to music very loud
- Eating a range of bold or spicy food

What is sensory overload?

This is when a person's brain is being overloaded with more sensory information than it can process at one time. Each person's capacity for how much sensory information they can process before they go into overload is different.

What might sensory overload look like?

- Difficulty focusing
- Irritability
- Restlessness or frustration
- Covering eyes or ears
- Moving away from people or sounds
- Stress, anxiousness, fear
- Difficulty regulating breathing

Important to remember

Not every person with autism will experience sensory input in the same way. Individual experiences will vary, for example, when a person is tired sensitivities may become more significant.

Sensory sensitivities can change over time.

How can we support people with sensory needs?

Be aware of a person's sensory sensitivities wherever possible.

Ensure you adapt yourself and your environment to meet a person's sensory needs e.g. providing headphones in loud spaces or allowing a person to leave a room if they become overwhelmed.

Consistently put key adaptations into practice

- Don't spring surprises
- Don't touch without consent
- Slow down and pause
- Create or find a calm, quiet environment
- Explain first, then do

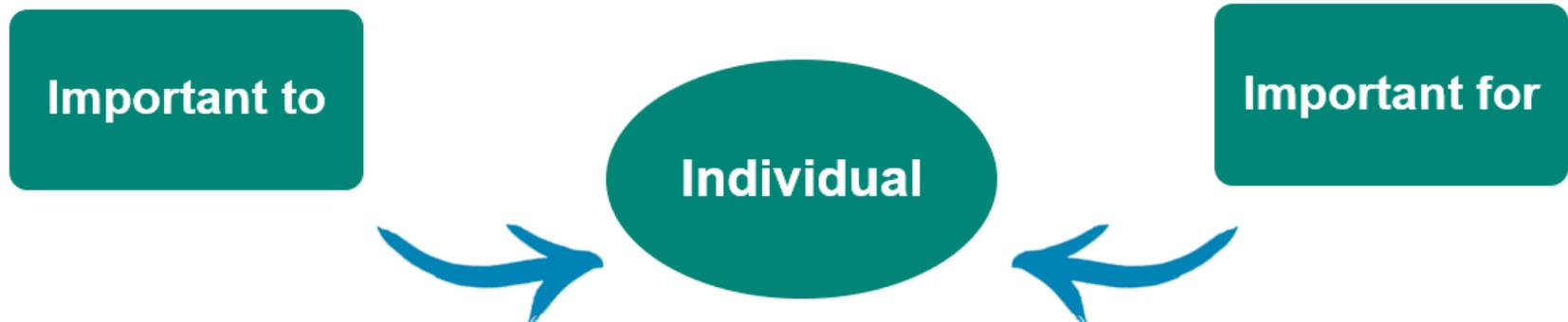
Person-centred approaches to support

How should we plan when supporting someone with autism?

When planning support of any kind, person-centred planning provides a way of supporting a person to plan any aspect of their life. It ensures that the individual remains at the centre of all planning that affects them.

Person-centred planning is not an assessment – instead it is a way of involving a person in planning for the future and making changes in a person's life. It is being used more frequently when supporting people with autism, and particularly those with additional needs.

When providing support, it is important to consider:



Person-centred plans can be used as the foundation for creating a vocational profile.

Person-centred planning tools



| | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| My details | |
| This plan belongs to (preferred name): | The date the plan was first made: |
| Date of birth: | Full name: |
| My allergies: | My intolerances: |
| My snack and lunch time routine: | How I travel in the community: |



Person-centred planning tools



| | |
|---|--|
| Planning my day: | |
| A good day for me looks like: | Good times of the day for me are: |
| Things that need to happen during the day to meet my needs: | Who will support me with travel and transitions: |

Internship Vocational Profile

This profile belongs to: NAME

It should not be shared without permission.

| | | | |
|----------|----------------------|----------|----------------------|
| Written | <input type="text"/> | Reviewed | <input type="text"/> |
| Reviewed | <input type="text"/> | Reviewed | <input type="text"/> |

Preferred name:

Intolerances / dietary needs

Allergies / health conditions

What's important to me about my employment?

What good support looks like for me in employment

Previous experiences

Work activity:

How I contributed:

Job Roles / Duties

The types of job role or duties I am suited based on my qualities and abilities

This is what I can do to show I am engaged

Possible strategies and reasonable adjustments

Reasonable Adjustments

Employment

When making a reasonable adjustment for an employee with autism, you might find that it is best practice for all employees.

In the Equality Act 2010 employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for anyone who is at a disadvantage due to their disability.

They are about providing individuals with an advantage – they are in place for equality.

Thinking differently

- When considering reasonable adjustments, it is often useful to ask the question **‘why not?’**
- Just because things have always been done a certain way, doesn’t mean they always need to be done that way. Reasonable adjustments can open a wide range of ways of assessing ‘talent’
- For example: *A traditional interview might not be the best (and most inclusive way) of recruiting for a role which is highly physical or hands on*

Job advert

Application

Interview

Recruitment

Thinking differently

Sustained Employment

Role / training

Line management

Day to day activities

Travel*

Reasonable Adjustments

Interview

Individuals with autism could benefit from the following reasonable adjustments at interview:

- **Seen questions** – *allowing candidates to have the questions before the interview so they can be prepared*
- **Work trials** – *allowing candidates to show what they can do in real terms by giving them a trial in the role*
- **Extra time** – *having longer than the standard set time, so candidates can process questions and process their answers*
- **Job coach** – *allowing candidates to have a job coach or employment adviser attend interview with them. This could be either to prompt them with their answers, or just to calm their nerves by having a familiar face*
- **Minimising sensory overload** – *reducing bright lights and/or conducting the interview in a quiet place can help candidates who might have sensory issues*

Reasonable Adjustments

In the workplace

- **Clear instructions**

- Set tasks with clear instructions that are easy to follow
- Setting clear success criteria is very helpful in understanding what is required
- Consider how instructions are presented – modelling a task is likely to be the most successful way of training someone new, supported by written or visual support
- Creating tasks lists will enable an employee to keep track of what they are doing, what they have done and what they need to do next

Reasonable Adjustments

In the workplace

- **‘Contracting’**– For meetings, consider spending time ensuring everyone knows what the expectation is for a meeting. For example: levels of contribution; if virtual, expectations regarding appearance, camera on or off?
- **Regular feedback** – hold regular 1:1 sessions with the employee so they can discuss any concerns and receive feedback for their work. Setting agendas or using a form will help keep the meeting on track and embed a coaching approach to support

Reasonable Adjustments

In the workplace

- **Extra time** – allow an employee extra time to learn and complete their task. Spending more time at the start with an employee will likely have better outcomes for ‘business’ and the retention of the individual
- **Quiet space** – allow employees a chance to take a short break in a quiet space when needed. Agree where this space is
- **Buddy systems** – consider developing a buddy system for new employees. Pairing an experienced employee with a new one. Be careful regarding the sharing of personal information without permission

Future developments at BeyondAutism

This year we received a grant from The City Bridge Trust to recruit a full time Specialist Vocational Advisor. **Emily Ross**, our SVA has established an Employment Committee, focused on creating a toolkit for stakeholders.

The toolkit, due to be launched in 2021 will feature resources for employees and employers.

2020 has also seen the launch of our own paid internship programme, beginning with 2 candidates and increasing to 6 every year from 2021.

More information:

www.beyondautism.org.uk

BeyondAutism has a Professionals section on its website, which offers a range of face-to-face and online training, free resources, advice and guidance.

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