

Autism NI is Northern Ireland's main autism charity and works to provide life-changing services for over 35,000 autistic people currently living in Northern Ireland.

Our work wouldn't be possible without the generosity of our supporters. Your donation can help us continue to provide invaluable autism services, and build an inclusive society where autistic people can reach their full potential.

To make a donation, please visit [www.autismni.org](http://www.autismni.org) or call us on **028 9040 1729**.

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## Supporting autistic people in the workplace



## What is autism?

**Autism is a lifelong condition that affects how a person communicates and interacts with others, and how they experience the wider environment.** Autism affects people in different ways, with most people experiencing differences in social communication, interaction, routines and sensory processing. There are over 35,000 people diagnosed as autistic in Northern Ireland, with many other adults awaiting assessment or currently undiagnosed.

Autistic people can be highly skilled and valued members of a team. However, we know that only 3 in 10 of autistic people are in full time employment<sup>2</sup>, even though the vast majority want to be employed and have the skills to be successful in employment. Additionally, only 35% of autistic employees are fully open about their condition at work, highlighting a persistent and well-founded fear of discrimination or lack of understanding<sup>3</sup>.

## Autism and employment: A legislative perspective

The Autism Act (NI) 2011 classifies autism as a Social Communication Disability. This means that existing disability and equality legislation (such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995) protects autistic people from discrimination based on their disability. Employers have a legal obligation to provide reasonable adjustments to an autistic person and to ensure equality of access to employment opportunities. This includes throughout the application process, induction and maintaining employment.

## What is a reasonable adjustment?

A reasonable adjustment is a change that employers must make under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). The law says that disabled people should be treated fairly at work and that employers:

- Must not discriminate against a current or potential employee based on their disability.
- Must make changes to help an employee/prospective employee if they are at a disadvantage because of their disability.

### References:

<sup>1</sup>NI Census, 2021

<sup>2</sup>DWP, 2024.

<sup>3</sup>Buckland Review of Autism Employment, 2024.

## Autistic strengths

Autistic people make excellent employees and are an invaluable asset to a team or organisation. Depending on the person, they can often demonstrate strengths in the following areas:

- ◆ Detail orientated
- ◆ Accurate and precise
- ◆ Hard working, honest and loyal
- ◆ Reliable
- ◆ Enjoy structure and repetition in work
- ◆ Creative thinkers who often view problems from an innovative perspective
- ◆ Knowledgeable about particular interests

## Supporting autistic people at work

Supporting autistic and neurodivergent employees and building a neuro-inclusive workplace makes good business sense:

- ◆ Help employees feel valued and supported at work, which reduces stress, improves motivation and reliability.
- ◆ Enable employees to perform their duties effectively, increasing productivity.
- ◆ Build a strong staff team with diverse experiences and expertise, creating a dynamic and resilient organisation.
- ◆ Create effective recruitment procedures that support you to find talent and expertise across a wide talent pool of candidates.
- ◆ Ensure your organisation is compliant with all equality and disability legislation (including the Autism Act (NI) 2011), and support the social value within your organisation.

## Autism and accessibility training

There are various supports that you can offer autistic and neurodivergent employees, many of which are minor, low-cost adjustments which can improve the workplace for all employees. Autism NI recommends that organisations consider investing in **high quality autism employment training**, to support staff in understanding more about autism and empowering them to offer appropriate adjustments and supports.

Find out more: [www.autismni.org/training-for-employers](http://www.autismni.org/training-for-employers)



Autism NI's Impact Award is an accredited training and support programme that supports organisations to build an inclusive workplace. The training builds staff confidence to support autistic employees and build accessible practices throughout the organisation. Receiving the Impact Award accreditation demonstrates your commitment to inclusion and diversity. Find out more: <https://autismni.org/training-courses/training-for-organisations/impact-award-for-businesses>