

Autism and employment



Donard, Knockbracken Healthcare Park
Saintfield Road, Belfast, BT8 8BH

Tel: 028 9040 1729
Email: info@autismni.org

www.autismni.org



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 (to a greater or lesser extent) in the areas of social communication, social skills, routines and sensory processing. One in 21 children and young people in Northern Ireland have a diagnosis of autism¹.

Autistic individuals can be highly skilled and valued members of a team. However, we know that only 21.7% of autistic individuals are in full time employment², even though the vast majority want to be employed and have the skills to be successful in employment. Like with most people, it is important to match the job role with the person's strengths, skills and areas of development.

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 individuals 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:

¹DHSSPS NI, 2022. 'The Prevalence of Autism [including Asperger's Syndrome] in School age Children in Northern Ireland'.

²ONS, 2021. 'Outcomes for Disabled people in the UK'.

Autistic strengths

Autistic individuals make excellent employees and are an invaluable asset to a team or organisation. Depending on the individual, 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

Support at work

Providing reasonable adjustments makes good business sense:

- ◆ Ensures employees feel valued and supported at work, which reduces stress, improves motivation and reliability.
- ◆ Enables employees to perform their duties effectively, increasing productivity.
- ◆ Promotes an inclusive and diverse workforce ensures that staff can bring their varying experiences and expertise to the team, which can have a substantial positive impact for everyone within the organisation.
- ◆ Ensures that your organisation is compliant with all equality and disability legislation (including the Autism Act (NI) 2011).

There are many ways to support autistic people in employment. These are often 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**. This training will support their staff in understanding more about autism and reasonable adjustments. It builds staff confidence to support autistic employees, creating an inclusive workplace.

As Northern Ireland's autism-specific accredited training provider, we have several training options available for businesses. For further information about training options and support available, please contact Autism NI's Training Department.