# CONSULTATION ON 'IMPROVING LIVES'

**Response from The National Autistic Society**
**February 2017**

**Autism** is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while there are certain difficulties that everyone with autism shares, the condition affects them in different ways. Some people with autism are able to live relatively independent lives, while others will need a lifetime of specialist support. It affects more than one in 100 people in the UK.[1]

**The National Autistic Society (NAS)** is the UK's leading charity for people affected by autism. We have around 20,000 members and 100 branches, who are at the heart of what we do. We provide advice, information, support and specialist services to 100,000 people each year. We also campaign for lasting, positive change for people affected by autism, and empower people to influence change at a local level.

## INTRODUCTION

> *We need more positive messages about autism so that people in general and more specifically employers don't view autism as a problem, but more that people with autism have some wonderful gifts which could be utilised in the work place. For example, often an incredible dedicated and focused attitude to work, often showing great perseverance in problem-solving tasks. With the right support in the work place, a person with autism may have a huge amount to offer and be a real asset to their employer. We just need to hear more positive messages about autism so that employers begin to understand the benefits of employing a person who has a lot to offer.*
> [From online response to consultation]

The National Autistic Society welcomes the opportunity to comment on *Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper*. Autistic people and their families are clear that access to employment is one of their top priorities for change.

In 2016 we carried out an online survey that was completed by 2,080 autistic adults, or people (parents or carers or family members) responding on their behalf. We identified a significant autism employment gap, with the skills and abilities of many autistic adults overlooked by both policy-makers and employers.[2]

In preparing this response to the proposals contained in 'Improving Lives', we also sought additional views and experiences from more than 1,000 people living with autism, both online and through two discussion events held in London and Manchester in January 2017.

A full list of our key recommendations is included at the end of the consultation.

[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 National Autistic Society (2016), *The Autism Employment Gap.*

## 1. TACKLING A SIGNIFICANT INEQUALITY – THE CASE FOR ACTION (CHAPTER 1)

Too many autistic people are unemployed or under-employed, and not by their own choice. The overall disability employment gap is well documented.[3] However, our research suggests this gap is even wider for autistic people, just 16 per cent of those who responded to our survey are in full-time paid work. This figure reflects the results of a similar survey we carried out in 2007, suggesting that little may have changed in a decade. Overall, only 32 per cent of autistic adults in our survey were in some kind of paid work. While paid employment will not be appropriate for everyone on the autism spectrum, our most recent survey showed that the vast majority of unemployed autistic people want to work.

Closing the disability employment gap, as the Government has pledged to do, will require taking particular action to create opportunities for autistic people, who make up a substantial proportion of unemployed disabled people. Meeting the pledge will mean *doubling* the number of autistic adults who are in paid employment.

**In October 2016, our organisation launched its *Autism Employment Gap* report. Speaking at the launch in Parliament, the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, committed the Government to trying to achieve this ambitious goal, ensuring access to autism-specific support and encouraging more employers to recruit autistic people.**

To achieve this, action is needed on a number of fronts simultaneously. Autistic people need support throughout their lives to help them access and prepare for employment opportunities. Employers need information and incentives to encourage them to recruit autistic employees and make necessary reasonable adjustments. Everyone – including Jobcentre Plus advisers, work coaches, benefits assessors, employers and colleagues in the workplace – needs better information to enable them to understand how autistic people experience the world and relate to it so that they can better support them.

Of course, although our research shows that a vast majority (77 per cent) of unemployed autistic people want to work, some people on the autism spectrum will not ever be able to work. It is vital that they receive the support – including benefits – they need to live a fulfilling and rewarding life.

Autistic people say that the key to success for them – as for everyone, whether on the spectrum or not – is to work out what they are good at, where they can contribute and how they can make the most of their personalities and talents. For each individual, it is about finding their place in the world. This is affected by public policy and by what society's expectations are about how disabled people will live their lives and what support should be provided for them.

### 1.1 Sufficient funding for employment support

We note that the budget for the Work and Health Programme will be £130m per annum by 2019/20. This is just one fifth of the current Work Programme budget. Given the ambitious goal of halving the disability employment gap, we have concerns that this drop in spending will undermine – and potentially preclude – progress towards that goal.

[3] TUC (2016), *Disability and Employment.*

### 1.2 Autism within DWP data collections

We note that the Green Paper highlights the high numbers of people with mental health conditions who are represented in out-of-work figures. It is important to note that, under current data collections for out-of-work benefits, this category will include people on the autism spectrum, as well as those with a learning disability. Many autistic people will also currently be counted within mental health condition figures in the Labour Force Survey.

The barriers faced by these very different groups of people – while similar in requiring support that understands their needs – will be necessarily very different. Solutions which seek to improve the employment prospects of people specifically with mental health conditions, will not address the specific difficulties that an autistic person will face. The way this important information is collected inhibits the Government from fully identifying the employment needs of disabled people, including autistic people. Put simply, the Government will not see the progress it desires for people with mental health conditions or autistic people until it can accurately record them.

As a matter of urgency, as it takes forward the Green Paper, the Department must ensure that the data it uses and commissions – including the Labour Force Survey and all sources relating to disability benefits – records if a person is autistic. We have discussed this with the Office of National Statistics (ONS). The Government should also pursue this with the ONS.

## 2. SUPPORTING AUTISTIC PEOPLE INTO WORK (CHAPTER 2)

Many autistic people want to work who are currently not doing so. According to our recent survey, the majority of autistic adults – 53 per cent – are unemployed but want to work. Under-employment is also a significant issue, both in terms of the number of hours that people work and the extent to which they are using their skills.

Our recent survey of autistic adults found that only 32 per cent are in any kind of paid work. While full-time work will not be the right option for everyone on the autism spectrum, four in ten of those working part-time say that they feel under-employed – working fewer hours than they would choose. Others are in low-skilled work and believe that employers do not see their abilities. Just over half (51 per cent) of autistic people who responded to our survey said their skills were higher than their job required.

The benefits of addressing this are significant, both for autistic people and for the wider economy and society. Autistic people's lives would be improved by the rewards of paid employment, giving them economic independence as well as greater confidence. Taxpayers would be saved the cost of out-of-work benefit payments for people who are able to support themselves. Employers will be able to access the talents of autistic people, often bridging the skills gap in their business and industry.

The type of work that autistic people say they want to do varies greatly. People report assumptions from Jobcentres and employers that they will want work that is solitary, technical or requires particular attention to detail. While they may be true for some people, they do not apply to everyone on the autism spectrum. As an illustration, our survey found that slightly more autistic people want to work in the arts than in IT (11 per cent and 10 per cent respectively).

We support the intention set out in the Green Paper to provide personalised, tailored employment support that meets people's individual needs. This must be provided by advisers who have a **good understanding** of the needs of autistic people, the available **options** and where to obtain further

**information and advice**. It will also require the **financial resource** to provide an appropriate range of service, including external providers with expertise.

The Government should develop an autism employment pathway that includes end-to-end autism support. It should also begin collecting data routinely on the employment rate and other outcomes specifically for autistic people, to build up an accurate picture of progress and which interventions work best.

### 2.1 Obstacles that autistic adults face in finding work

> *The most prominent difficulty for me has been the entire process of being employed - the interviews/applications aren't designed for autistic people and because of that, I can't understand the forms and if I'm lucky enough to get an interview, it is disastrous - sensory overload from too many sounds/lights, shaking hands, eye contact! It's terrifying! And if I did get a job, I think I would be looked down on as stupid due to needing clarification of things people consider obvious, like more than one question in a sentence, or whether they mean things literally (which is what I always think).*
> [From online response to consultation]

The main obstacle to finding paid employment cited by the autistic people we consulted was their own anxiety and lack of confidence. This was also the most common reason given for not being in or looking for work found by our *Autism Employment Gap* report.[4] This gets in the way of finding the right kind of role to suit their skills, abilities and circumstances. The more that people try to find work and either cannot get a job offer or cannot sustain employment, the harder it is for them to feel confident about themselves. Problems caused by past rejection, workplace bullying, poor social contact and isolation can be hard to overcome, and can result in mental health problems that make moving into employment harder than ever.

However, the lack of confidence that people experience does not exist in a vacuum. It is caused or compounded by a range of different factors that stand in the way of autistic people being able to demonstrate their abilities and fulfil their potential.

### 2.2 How Jobcentre Plus can effectively support autistic people

> *The Jobcentre needs to be aware of the levels of anxiety some people experience about having to go for assessments or meetings and be flexible and have more training about autism.*
> [From online response to consultation]

> *In order to help us get into the jobs we want and deserve, you must set up a more autistic-friendly environment within Jobcentres.*
> [From online response to consultation]

As the previous section describes, autistic people give ‘lack of confidence’ as the most common reason for not being in work or looking for work. Employment advisers have a crucial role to play in helping autistic people to gain skills and consider various work options, but also in building their confidence by understanding their existing strengths and capabilities.

[4] Almost a quarter (23%) of respondents told us that lacking confidence was a reason for not being in or looking for work.

Many autistic people tell us of negative experiences at their local Jobcentre Plus. When asked to rate their experience, 61 per cent of people who responded to our 2016 survey said it was ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’. Only 13 per cent rated it as ‘good’ or ‘very good’. People say that staff do not treat them as individuals or consider the particular adjustments they need to make to meet the needs of autistic people. They perceive Jobcentre Plus less as a place for support than a place where they may be sanctioned.

We also hear from autistic people that the Work Programme introduced in 2011 is not working for them. And there appear have been no significant changes in the autism employment rate since it was introduced. More than half the people who responded to our survey (56 per cent) described their experience of Work Programme as poor or very poor. Fewer than one in 10 (eight per cent) said it was good or very good.

It is not possible for the Government itself to more objectively assess how effective current programmes are for autistic people, as it does not record information about outcomes for this group. With more than one in 100 people on the autism spectrum, it is crucial that data on outcomes is recorded so that the new Work and Health Programme can be monitored to ensure it is making a difference for the people who need it.

The new Work and Health Programme must make sure it works for autistic people better. It should include the following support for people on the autism spectrum:

- Support from Jobcentre Plus staff who have undergone appropriate autism training for the role they have
- Access to specialist autism support from specialist providers
- Support tailored to each individual person’s needs that they can access voluntarily
- Ongoing support to help people make a success of work placements
- Ongoing support for autistic people once they have found a job, to help solve any problems that arise

Tailoring support effectively to individual needs is essential. For autistic people being ‘fit for work’ or being closer to the work place does not necessarily mean being ‘fit for any work’ that happens to be available. It would be helpful if Jobcentre Plus staff recognised that the ‘wrong’ job can have harmful psychological effects on an autistic person. Some autistic people may be very able, but because of their ‘spiky profile’ can only work in the right environment with the right support. In addition, meeting people’s needs as individuals may mean that it is not always possible or realistic to meet imposed timeframes, such as every person moving into employment within a 12-month deadline. There may be good reasons why this is not possible in every case.

> *In my experience, Jobcentre Plus staff do not understand how autism affects people. This meant that I had to attend interviews for jobs unsuitable for me. This does not help self-esteem as it was setting me up to fail. The Jobcentre Plus and employers should be more aware of what we can and can't do, by staff specifically trained in autism.*
> [From online response to consultation]

Autistic people are clear that they want employment advisers who understand autism. They believe that Jobcentre Plus advisers also have a proactive role in matching individuals to specific jobs, based on a good understanding of the particular skills that individuals have, and the roles and opportunities that exist in their area.

> *My son would benefit from having an appropriately trained advisor allocated specifically to him, so one point of contact only. This adviser would assess my son's needs and then help him to search for appropriate jobs that are achievable for him to do. They would then help him to fill in an application form and then liaise with the potential employer for a suitable way in which to proceed should they be interested in meeting my son.*
> [From online response to consultation]

It sounds like a statement of the obvious, but the support that individuals are offered should be what they actually need in order to help them access employment. During our consultation we heard from someone who had been sent on a CV-writing course on three separate occasions. He told us that his CV was not the problem: he did not struggle to get job offers but to keep jobs once he had started them. He believed that a course of social skills training would have been more useful for him, but this was not what was on offer.

Autistic people have identified the following types of support that they would find valuable:

- Help with applying for jobs and preparing for interviews, including social skills training.
- Help with searching for appropriate jobs that fit with their own skills and qualifications and that they have a chance of being offered. (The current Jobcentre Plus requirement to meet a quota of job applications is unhelpful. There is no point in anyone completing a large number of applications that are of poor quality or that the applicant will not be offered because they do not meet the essential criteria.)
- Advice on which jobs to apply for, or what skills an individual may need to acquire to make a job offer more likely.
- Intervention with prospective employers regarding adjustments that an autistic candidate may need at the interview stage. This will include engaging Access to Work. Specialist workplace assessments should be commissioned and the recommendations accepted (and funded by Access to Work as appropriate).
- Feedback from interviews, to help autistic individuals understand what they are doing right and wrong in the eyes of potential employers.
- Proactive liaison with potential employers, to help them understand the needs and potential of autistic people.
- Help and advice on the kind of adjustments that employers could make and what to ask for. If an autistic person has not been in work before, they may not know about these.
- Support and advice on self-employment and how an autistic person may set themselves up independently if that is what they want to do.

During our consultation, some people made the comparison between the support they need to help them into employment and the social care and support they may need to manage their lives or look after themselves. Personal budgets are available for care and support, and people would like there to be an option of a personal budget for employment support.

All employment advisers should have training in autism, to help them understand the needs of people on the autism spectrum and provide effective tailored support. We also note the Work & Pensions Select Committee report, *The Disability Employment Gap*'s recommendation for increased training of work coaches and urge the Government to accept this recommendation.

Consideration should be given to offering personal budgets so that people can arrange their own employment support.

### 2.3 Developing the knowledge and skill of disability employment advisers and work coaches to help them support autistic people

The role of work coaches is central to the proposals outlined in the Green Paper. In order to support autistic people effectively, work coaches will need good quality autism training to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills. We welcome plans to increase the number of Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs), which have been halved over recent years, to advise on how work coaches can support disabled people. However, we do have concerns that even with this increase, there will be insufficient DEAs to provide the support that work coaches will need.

While every autistic person should be treated as an individual, and their own unique needs and circumstances considered, the best starting point for work coaches who will be supporting autistic people is a good understanding of the condition and the impact it can have on people's efforts to find – and retain – employment.

Importantly, they should know how to build autistic people's self-esteem, confidence and social skills.

Jobcentre Plus advisers and work coaches should be able to demonstrate a level of knowledge and skill that is appropriate for their role – with work coaches demonstrating a clear knowledge of autism, how it presents, how to adapt their communication and recognise sensory needs. By way of guidance, the *Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and NHS Organisations to Support Implementation of the Adult Autism Strategy* (2015) outlines this level of training in the context of social care. Similarly, it highlights that positions with greater impact on autistic people should be able to demonstrate a higher level of knowledge and skill. This would be an appropriate level for disability employment advisers, those carrying out assessments for benefits, and work coaches carrying out work and health conversations. The National Autistic Society would be interested in assisting the Department in developing its training offer to Jobcentre Plus staff, and have in the past carried out some training in London, which was very well received.

The Government should ensure that all Disability Employment Advisers and work coaches receive training in how to support autistic people. Information should be published on what training is offered, how it is monitored and how many staff receive it.

### 2.4 Employment support and services for young people

> *Transition from education to work is critical. Many young autistic adults want to work but are unable to find and keep a job or unsure how to go about it. They can get stuck in a cycle of attending college courses and staying in education because it is familiar and safe. Kids on the spectrum get help and support at school, whereas adults are expected to fend for themselves much more. Specialist person-centred support is needed for teenagers to smooth the transition between school and adult life - especially the world of work.*
> [From online response to consultation]

Young people on the autism spectrum need particular support to help them make a smooth and successful transition to adult life. It is vital to work with them to find what they are good at and what their adult role might be. If a young person has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), employment planning should be part of this from Year 9 (age 13-14), as set out in the SEND Code of Practice.[5]

[5] Department for Education/Department of Health (January 2015), *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 Years.*

They may need specific help with understanding what employers expect and how to prepare for a job or career. They may also need assistance with matching their particular skills, attributes and interests to job-types, rather than focusing simply on the qualifications they can get. Respondents to our consultation said that many autistic teenagers leave school unaware of what the adult world will be like and what a job will expect of them.

There is a risk that, without the right help and advice, young people on the autism spectrum will grow to adulthood with the belief that they cannot succeed. This may be because of difficult experiences at school, or because educational aspirations are set too low. The groundwork is laid for the autism employment gap by the skills and qualifications gap, with young people on the spectrum less likely than their peers to go to university or take up an apprenticeship.

Work experience programmes and supported internships designed around the needs of autistic students are essential components of a strategy to get more young autistic people into paid work. Schools and colleges will need to work with employers, who may need appropriate incentives to persuade them to offer suitable work experience. The Department for Education could take leadership here by providing clearer information and guidance to local authorities about the types of placements or support that can be provided for through EHCPs.

The National Autistic Society is putting this into practice ourselves. In 2017 we will open an innovative new school, Anderson School, in Chigwell, Essex, on our new Enterprise Campus. The school's curriculum will be individualised to ensure that each student can access the support, training and skills they will need, in line with their aptitude and career aspirations, to move into work or further education. We will develop a range of local partnerships to link students with employers, give them access to work placements and internships and ensure that they achieve relevant vocational qualifications to enable them to fulfil their potential.

We welcome the Green Paper's inclusion of work experience in the enhanced support offer for disabled young people. To be effective, this must include support to think about what jobs the young person would like to work in, to find an appropriate placement, training for the employer and support for the young person throughout the placement. We support work undertaken by the Department to pilot this approach and believe that it should be rolled out as soon as possible.

### 2.5 Misconceptions about autism by employers

> *As soon as employers learn that I am autistic then they find someone 'more suited'. However, if I were to hide my autism, then the chances are I would not last in the job as I wouldn't be able to have the support that I need and I would have too much pressure put on me.*
> [From online response to consultation]

Respondents to our consultation expressed a high level of doubt and uncertainty about when, or indeed whether, to disclose their autism diagnosis to a new or potential employer. This is because they believe that employers do not always understand what it means to be autistic. Employers may see autism, erroneously, as a mental health condition, and make incorrect assumptions.

A YouGov survey of employers that we carried out in 2016 highlighted some of the barriers that autistic people face when applying for jobs, and confirmed that myths about autism prevail. For example, 34 per cent of employers said that an autistic person would be unlikely to fit into their team, and 28 per cent said that an autistic person would be unlikely to be a team player.

Autistic people are very aware that other people misunderstand them. When we asked people who took our survey in 2016 about the single biggest thing that needed to change to help them into work, more than 50 per cent said greater support, understanding or acceptance. They want to promote their autism in a positive way, rather than as a problem for potential employers. They are keen to highlight the skills they can bring to a role, as well as any adjustments they may need in order to fulfil the role to the best of their ability.

The key thing to understand about autism is that it is a hidden disability. There is no single obvious 'sign' that indicates to an observer that someone is autistic or what their particular needs might be. Respondents to our consultation highlighted this as a major obstacle to their efforts to navigate the world of employment. Someone who is autistic sees, hears and feels the world in a different way to people who are not autistic. They will have specific difficulties associated with their disability which will not be immediately obvious to others. Some respondents told us that they believe that potential employers and colleagues see them simply as 'weird'.

It is generally accepted that if someone is disabled, they need adjustments and adaptations. (And the law is clear that disabled employees are entitled to these.[6]) For example, if someone uses a wheelchair, they may need ramps or wider doorways. If they have a hearing impairment, they may need a sign language interpreter. However, if they are autistic, it may not be clear to an employer what they need, or even that adjustments are required at all. They may be perceived as difficult or uncooperative, when in fact they are experiencing sensory overload or communication challenges.

The Government should promote the positives of employing autistic people and ensure that advice about how to support autistic people in applying for and keeping a job is made available.

### 2.6 Support to enable autistic adults to stay in work and make progress

Many autistic people say that finding a job can be less of a problem than keeping it. The main challenge many people face is getting through the probation period with a new employer and becoming established in an organisation. Some say that once they are 'known' by an employer and colleagues, it can be easier. Having said this, some people experience difficulties if they receive an autism diagnosis as an adult and share this with their existing employer. Respondents to our consultation told us that their employer's perception of them seems to change in these circumstances, and they are sometimes prevented from doing work that they had previously been doing without any problems.

The problems that autistic people experience in the workplace are similar to the obstacles they face in finding work, as outlined above. One of the biggest things they struggle with is the 'hidden disability' aspect of autism, which means that it is not obvious to employers and colleagues what their needs are and why they may need support.

It may not even be obvious to the person themselves, as it appears that losing a job may be a trigger for some adults to be diagnosed with autism. They may have worked for years without realising why they have difficulties with particular things. The autistic people we spoke to during our consultation believe that having an autism diagnosis damages their employment prospects, and that the label can lead to problems at work – and yet at the same time they do not regret being diagnosed, as it helps them understand why their brain works the way it does and what they need in order to thrive.

[6] Equality Act (2010).

Autistic people are clear that, in addition to the tailored, personalised support that can help them find a job that matches their skills (as discussed above), they want this support to continue after they start a job and while they settle in with a new employer and arrange any necessary adjustments. Respondents to our consultation stated that support should be provided by a neutral person from outside the organisation, not by another employee. This type of support is also very valuable to an autistic employee when there are changes taking place within an organisation, as many autistic people say that change makes them anxious. Support should be provided by a specialist, with training for an individual's employer and manager to enable them to put the right strategies in place so that specialist support can be decreased over time.

One observation made by some of the autistic people we consulted was that employers should not assume that every employee wants to 'progress' in a traditional way at work. Some autistic employees want a role and responsibilities that remain unchanged and do not become more complicated. Not everyone wants to get promoted or become a manager, and some people say that they are happiest doing a set task where they understand what is expected. What they want more than anything is to find a workplace where they are accepted and valued, and where they can contribute their particular skills. Others also highlighted that they were excluded from promotion because their autism makes it difficult to meet the job description, but some felt that with minor adjustments to the role they could have progressed. Flexibility from employers was considered to be key.

The National Autistic Society and other organisations provide support for employers to help them maximise the potential of their autistic employers. As the Green Paper goes forward, the Government should ensure that employers have the information at their disposal to bring in support when necessary – to address issues before they escalate and to provide the most effective support to their autistic employees.

### 2.7 Ensuring support from Access to Work

Access to Work (AtW) is a vital source of support for many autistic people to find work and stay in work. The last two years have also seen the establishment of the Hidden Impairments Specialist Team within AtW, to ensure that autistic people receive individualised support and in recognition that autism is not a mental health condition. The NAS carried out training sessions with the advisors on this Specialist Team.

However, many autistic people that we support through our Employment Training and Consultancy Service have experienced trouble in accessing the specialist autism advice they need via AtW. These issues centre on contracting procedures and funding awards.

Referrals for a specialist autism workplace assessment cannot be directly made by the Specialist Team. Instead, they must be made to the Mental Health Support Service, which may then contract out. This places an additional administrative hurdle on getting the right support and we are concerned that this means that too often specialist support cannot be accessed. We have heard from other organisations in similar situations.

Recommendations for reasonable adjustments for autistic people supported by AtW can involve training for managers and some sensory adaptations (for example, ear defenders). These reasonable adjustments are generally low cost. However, we have received feedback from employers and employees that even when they have commissioned a specialist autism assessment, AtW have refused to fund the recommended adjustments.

Access to Work has a vital role to play in increasing the number of autistic people in work – especially when it comes to smaller employers. The system requires the flexibility to bring autism specific advice and support at the earliest stage. Delays can leave a person without support and jeopardise their employment.

The Government should ensure that AtW systems are flexible to allow autistic people easy access to the support they need. Furthermore, the Government must ensure that AtW has the funding it requires to provide the support people need.

### 2.8 Sensory overload and communication challenges in the workplace

Although autism affects people in different ways and no two autistic people experience it exactly alike, sensory overload – too much sensory information caused by busy, noisy environments – is a constant risk for many people on the autism spectrum. This means that many work environments are challenging, especially as the greatest number of available jobs in many areas tend to be in offices or retail outlets. Over the last few decades, these have generally got bigger and noisier – with offices typically open-plan in design and lacking quiet space – making sensory overload a constant problem for people on the autism spectrum.

In addition, the external environment has become increasingly crowded and noisy. Prescriptive working hours may mean that an autistic person is unable to avoid travelling to work at the busiest time of day, when they may struggle. They risk becoming overloaded and over-stimulated before they even get to work. Difficulties with transport and travelling are significant enough to be an obstacle to autistic people attending interviews or staying in work. These issues could be overcome if support were available to autistic people to help build their confidence in travelling to work, and if employers were willing to consider allowing employees to work from home or more flexible hours (so they could avoid rush hour, for example).

Autism also affects people's communication skills, both in terms of expressing themselves and understanding others. This has significant implications for their ability to identify suitable job opportunities, complete applications and present themselves at interview.

Respondents to our consultation observed that many job descriptions and person specifications are not clear enough to be well understood by people on the autism spectrum, who may read them and remain unclear about what a job involves, what is expected and what type of skills and experience the employer is looking for. People may need help with writing applications, and advice on what information an employer needs and would find useful, and what is irrelevant.

There is wide agreement among autistic people that interviews are highly problematic. They may misunderstand the questions they are being asked, and find themselves judged for things like not making eye contact. Interviewers do not generally understand autism, and so may inadvertently discriminate against autistic candidates without realising that this is what they are doing, such as by making judgements about a candidate based on their social skills in the first few minutes of an interview.

> *My son has Asperger's and so although he is highly intelligent, extremely reliable and loves to follow orders and will carry out any given task to a very high standard he is unable to get*

*a job due to his struggles with social interaction, a job interview causes him high anxiety and he is unable to maintain eye contact, and articulate his good qualities under questioning.*
[From online response to consultation]

There are various adaptations to the interview process that could help an autistic interviewee. Respondents to our consultation suggested that the playing field could be levelled for people on the autism spectrum by interviewers writing questions out instead of asking them verbally, asking one question at a time instead of multiple questions in one sentence, or sending questions in advance so the candidate can gather their knowledge and experience. It was also suggested that interviews could be replaced entirely with work trials.

*The most important thing for me as an autistic person that I feel is crucial to me finding a job is for me not to have to go to an interview. Something like a trial shift I feel would benefit me much more. Having Asperger's means I get incredibly anxious and even if I can get myself to an interview I don't feel like I'm able to show myself and my qualities in that situation.*
[From online response to consultation]

Once an autistic employee has been recruited, there are many things that employers can do to support them and ensure they can perform to the best of their ability. This obviously has benefits to both employer and employee. But employers have told us that they are worried about getting things wrong for autistic employees, and that they do not know where to go for advice or information. A starting point is simply to learn about autism, and to be prepared to offer some flexibility and to make reasonable adjustments that enable the autistic employee to do a good job. For example:

- Be prepared to give an autistic employee more precise instructions or detailed guidance about their task than might usually be expected.
- Offer access to a quiet space in the workplace.
- Understand that a lack of social interaction does not necessarily have a negative impact on an autistic employee's performance at work.
- Offer flexible working hours, such as a later start and finish time.
- Allow home-working.

As part of a campaign to encourage employers to recruit autistic employees, the Government should provide clear guidance to employers on the adjustments that autistic people are entitled to and good practice in making these. We would be keen to work with and support the Government to do this and have created resources, including our free employer newsletter – *Autistic Talent* – that could be shared further with employers.

### 2.9 Tackling bullying in the workplace

Autistic people say that it can be difficult to learn the 'unspoken' rules of a new organisation, to understand the culture and the way things are done, and to meet the expectations of managers and colleagues. Respondents to our consultation noted that 'fitting in' at work can be as important as fulfilling your job description – and this can be very difficult for people on the autism spectrum, who struggle with social behaviour. Sometimes they simply feel uncomfortable; sometimes they are bullied. They frequently become isolated, and may feel unable to stay in an organisation.

Our 2016 survey of autistic adults uncovered some distressing experiences in the workplace. Approximately half of respondents who had been employed reported bullying or harassment (48 per cent) or other discrimination or unfair treatment (51 per cent) due to their autism. These bad

experiences have long-term consequences. People's confidence can be undermined, leading to long-term unemployment, greater dependency on benefits or mental ill-health.

Employers need to be prepared to tackle the real and persistent problem of workplace bullying. The attitudes of people throughout an organisation to colleagues who may be 'different' are shaped and driven by the attitudes of senior managers. Autistic people want organisations – and the people who work in them – to understand that they see and experience the world in a particular way, that they communicate differently to people who are not on the autism spectrum, but that they nonetheless have skills to offer employers. They would like effective diversity training for managers and staff to be the norm for all organisations – while observing that individuals have to be open and receptive to training for it to be effective, and that the people who need diversity training the most might be the least receptive to it.

The Government should require employers to tackle workplace bullying and make clear guidance and training available to help make their workplaces autism-friendly. This should form part of a Government-led programme to promote employing autistic people to businesses.

The Government should support The National Autistic Society's *Too Much Information* campaign, which aims to shift public attitudes on autism.

### 2.10 Effective support for individuals in the ESA Support Group

Work will not always be an appropriate outcome for everyone on the autism spectrum – for example, because they have significant mental health problems or learning disability meaning that their needs preclude the option of work for the time being. However, some of the 77 per cent of unemployed autistic people who told us in our *Autism Employment Gap* report that they want to work will be in the Support Group. The autistic people we consulted felt that this group of people should be offered support to find employment that works for them. However, they were emphatic that, while employment support may be desired and will be necessary for people within this group wishing to move into employment, it should be **voluntary**, not mandatory.

This requires that mandatory requirements should not be used within a health and work conversation, or proposed 'keep in touch' meetings, nor should benefits claimants be sanctioned for failure to meet any requirements that are set out. Autistic people have told us that mandatory activity such as applying for a certain number of jobs or attending a certain number of interviews, which does not take into account their specific needs and sets them up for failure.

Mandatory activity such as this can cause a great deal of anxiety for autistic people. They may have difficulty reading social cues and knowing when to speak or listen during an interview, and understanding facial expressions that can be impossible to read. Rather than moving them closer to the labour market, this regime can result in benefit sanctions if they are unable to comply with the mandatory activity, and does nothing to help them become more work ready.

Mandatory activity can also put considerable pressure on carers, as it can often be the parents or carers of an autistic adult who have to support autistic individuals to comply with Jobcentre Plus demands. Further, all this 'activity' can get in the way of other activities that are genuinely beneficial for the autistic person, such as attending college. By way of illustration, the NAS social welfare advice team has recently been contacted by the parents of a 20-year-old autistic woman who has limited cognitive ability, limited verbal communication and needs constant supervision. She is on Universal Credit and has been allocated to the default jobseeker group. Her parents have to take her to

Jobcentre Plus for mandatory meetings and to demonstrate that she is looking for work. However, she is unable to look for work and this compulsory activity is preventing her attending her life skills course at a specialist college. This is a good example of how someone can end up in an inappropriate Universal Credit conditionality group, with demands that are difficult for them to meet and do not help them, and no knowledge that there is an alternative group.

Employment support for autistic people within the ESA Support Group should be voluntary, not mandatory.

## 3. ASSESSMENTS FOR BENEFITS FOR PEOPLE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM (CHAPTER 3)

Over the course of their lives, autistic adults may reasonably need to move in and out of employment as their needs and circumstances change. We know that many autistic people can be supported into work, step by step. They need to be offered support and positivity, not benefit sanctions, as they progress along this path. We believe that people on the autism spectrum who are unable to work should **not** be subject to conditionality.

Sufficient financial support should be provided for autistic people both in and out of work, to enable them to live independent lives.

Some autistic people make the observation that they are required to present themselves in very different ways when they are applying for benefits and when they are applying for jobs, even though they may need to do both these things at different points. When applying for a job, they have to sell themselves positively and emphasise their strengths and abilities, while for benefits, they have to emphasise their difficulties and the things they cannot do. This can be particularly confusing for people on the autism spectrum.

At the same time, there are many other autistic people who do not have a good understanding of what the assessments are for and how they are being judged. Current assessments do not work well for people on the autism spectrum. Repeat assessments are particularly disruptive and detrimental to people's wellbeing.

### 3.1 Splitting financial and employment support

The Green Paper suggests splitting the financial and employment support that is available. In principle, we do not object to this suggestion. As we described above, some autistic people in the ESA Support Group and its Universal Credit equivalent may wish to engage in employment support. However, we note that claimants who are currently found not fit for work and placed in the Work Related Activity Group can face conditionality and sanctions. It is not clear from the Green Paper whether the remit of conditionality would be increased.

As discussed above, we believe that conditionality puts autistic people at a substantial disadvantage. We strongly believe that conditionality should not be applied to **any** autistic people who have been found not fit for work. We would certainly object to anything that sees conditionality applied to anyone who would have been in the Support Group.

We also note that a recent National Audit Office report has suggested a poor evidence base for the use of sanctions.[7]

[7] National Audit Office (2016), *Benefits sanctions*.

As a member of the Disability Benefits Consortium, we also highlight the upcoming £30 a week cut to those on Employment and Support Allowance in the Work Related Activity Group (and its Universal Credit equivalent). We strongly believe that this is a retrograde step, which will leave disabled people – including those on the autism spectrum – further from the workplace. **We strongly urge the Government to halt this measure being implemented from April.**

### 3.2 How best to assess autistic adults for financial support

The Green Paper asks for opinions on the Work Capability Assessment. The starting point should be looking at what autism is and how it affects the individual person who is being assessed and their ability to undertake paid employment. Autistic people want benefits assessments to be carried out by assessors who have a good understanding of autism and are qualified for the task of deciding how much impact an individual's autism has on their ability to work.

Face-to-face assessments can often be problematic for claimants with autism, as a result of difficulties with communication which are at the heart of their disability. For example, people with autism may misunderstand questions asked, find it hard to answer questions, and fail to pick up on inference and assumption. For example, if asked 'Can you travel to work on a bus?', they may say 'Yes', but without knowing to add that they can only travel on one bus route, planned with the help of a support worker, providing the bus isn't late or a different colour from usual, or that no other factors have occurred.

Unless an assessor has clear knowledge and understanding of autism, and of how to adapt communication when assessing someone with autism and the likely impacts of the condition on an individual, it is unlikely that they will be able to comprehensively and fairly assess someone with autism, particularly given the short time frame of the assessment.

The autistic people that we consulted also felt that the Work Capability Assessment does not accurately identify their needs, and are instead more relatable to people with a physical disability. The rigid points system and current descriptors do not help people to convey the impact of autism on their life.

We are not advocating for assessors to have the specialist knowledge needed to diagnose autism or recommend a particular intervention. Instead, we believe that in order to understand the potential impact that having autism may have on a person's daily life, the assessor will need an understanding of the condition and how to communicate effectively with someone on the spectrum.

Where an assessor does not have this expertise they should be able to access support from someone with additional expertise. Professor Harrington, the previous Government appointed independent advisor on WCA, recommended that there should be 'Mental Functioning' champions available to support assessors who require extra help to assess those with learning disabilities, mental health problems or autism.[8] It is not clear that assessors across the country have sufficient access to these champions, or that the champions themselves have specific knowledge of autism as well as mental health.

In looking at assessments for community care, the Department of Health included requirements in the passing of the Autism Act and the subsequent statutory guidance for local authorities, as well as the Care Act, that assessments of need should be made by people with appropriate understanding of autism.

[8] Department for Work and Pensions (2010), *An independent review of the Work Capability Assessment.*

We are very concerned about the proposal in paragraph 132 of the Green Paper to give work coaches the discretion to make case-by-case decisions about the type of employment support an individual is able to engage with, and to decide on conditionality. It is unclear how individuals would be able to challenge these, and whether existing rights would be maintained. At present, if someone is assessed and put in the wrong group, they have a clear legal route to challenge decisions about both conditionality and level of payment. If decisions are to be made by work coaches, we would like claimants to retain the legal right to challenge these via the appeals system.

The Government should commission a positive, evidence-based reform of the Work Capability Assessment with involvement from disabled people – including people on the autism spectrum. Key within this will be ensuring that work coaches, Disability Employment Advisers and professionals carrying out assessments have appropriate levels of knowledge and skill in autism.

### 3.3 Assessments for people with the most severe lifelong conditions

We welcomed the announcement in autumn 2016 that those with the most severe lifelong conditions, including some people on the autism spectrum, would no longer face reassessment under Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit. In order for this to have the desired impact, the criteria will need careful consideration, as well as ensuring that external evidence is used when available.

### 3.4 Using other information within benefits assessments

The Green Paper asks whether other evidence and information could be used by decision makers. Autistic people will often have diagnosis letters or reports from health professionals, including psychologists, occupational therapists or speech and language therapists. However, many autistic people, including those we consulted, said that this evidence too often isn't collected or isn't taken into consideration. They also said that too often it felt like they had to push for the evidence to be taken and they believed that the system should instead actively *ask* what evidence is available.

Although the people we consulted did not have an outright objection to information being shared between benefits to help make an assessment, they were keen to highlight that the assessments are designed to find out different things and will not always be automatically relevant. Some people also expressed concern at the sharing of information from health or social care agencies around exactly what details would be shared. As a result, we believe that more information should be provided about evidence-sharing proposals.

## 4. SUPPORTING EMPLOYERS (CHAPTER 4)

### 4.1 Expecting and encouraging more employers to recruit and retain autistic people

> *It is important that employers themselves are aware of autism and how to deal with it - it needs to be made clear that no two people will autism are the same, it is not an illness it's just the way we are - we aren't incapable, often the case is that we are more than capable but people just hear the word autistic and don't want to give us a chance.*
> [From online response to consultation]

> *People with autism can be excellent employees. They are more likely to stay in a role long term and are precise in their work. The advantage of having people with autism as employees vastly outweighs the support they need.*
> [From online response to consultation]

Employers need to be more aware of the skills and potential of people on the autism spectrum, and they may need encouragement to take on autistic employees. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss how this could be taken forward under the auspices of *Disability Confident*, which provides a great opportunity to reach employers with an interest in employing disabled people.

Furthermore, given the low employment rate of autistic adults, alongside the mix of skills and interests among this group, the programme would raise awareness of autism among employers, could help identify skills gaps in the economy and set out how autistic adults could be supported to help fill these gaps. The result would be a more diverse and productive workforce, a narrower employment gap and a stronger economy.

It is about dispelling fears, dismantling myths and helping employers see the skills that autistic employees can bring and the value they can add to an organisation. Autistic people say that they want employers to recognise that weakness in one area does not mean weakness in all areas – something that is the case for all employees, autistic or not.

The National Autistic Society offers resources to help employers recruit prospective employees who are on the autism spectrum. There is advice on our website[9] on adjustments that can be made to the recruitment process to help employers comply with equalities legislation. Job descriptions, application forms and advertisements can all be made clearer and more concise to help autistic candidates better understand an employer's requirements. Interviews can be adapted so that 'closed' rather than 'open' questions are asked, and hypothetical or abstract scenarios – which may confuse autistic candidates – are avoided. Alternatives to the traditional interview can be offered, such as inviting a supporter to accompany the person being interviewed, or offering a work trial in place of an interview as a way of assessing a person's skills and ability to do the job.

The National Autistic Society also offers employment training and consultancy for managers, HR professionals and colleagues to help increase their confidence in supporting autistic people effectively in the workplace. We can offer workplace assessments, to help employers identify adaptations that would help autistic employees reach their potential and understand effective management techniques and ways of communicating. We can also provide bespoke autism training and consultancy packages for employers, to help them work with autistic job-seekers, retain autistic staff or build awareness of autism in the wider workplace. Our main objective and vision is to upskill both the manager and the employee to reduce over time the amount of direct in-work support that is needed. In doing this, we hope to reduce the overall cost of ongoing support and improve inclusive employment opportunities for autistic people.

We encourage the Government to look at ways of incentivising employers through the tax system to recruit disabled employees. A recent report by the Work and Pensions Select Committee stated that financial incentives could 'encourage employers to undertake desirable behaviour, which in turn might encourage others and create a virtuous circle'.[10] The Committee recommended that the Government should pilot relief on National Insurance Contributions, and we agree that this should be taken forward. The Government should also look at reasonable adjustments and ensure that employers are aware of tax relief that is available (corporation tax and VAT) for making adjustments.

We understand that the US Government has implemented a number of ways of incentivising employers to recruit more disabled employees and to make necessary adaptations to the

[9] www.autism.org.uk/recruiting

[10] House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2017), *Disability employment gap.*

workplace.[11] We urge the Government to look at how well these initiatives work and whether they could be successfully introduced in the UK.

The Government should launch a new programme targeted at employers to raise awareness of the skills and potential of people on the autism spectrum.

The Government should look at ways of incentivising employers through the tax and National Insurance system to recruit disabled employees, as recommended by the Work and Pensions Select Committee.

### 4.2 Work experience and internship programmes for young people

A growing number of employers are working with The National Autistic Society and other organisations to offer work experience and internship programmes to young people on the autism spectrum. Research suggests that this type of 'stepping stone' job often translates directly into paid employment, as it enables both participants and employers to test suitability.[12] It is helpful for young people to be exposed at an early age to a working environment, and to begin to understand how workplaces operate and what the expectations are.

We believe that more employers should be seeking out and introducing these sorts of opportunities. This would help them with recruitment and would give young autistic people the opportunity to develop skills in a real work context and learn more about their interests and strengths.

Developing skills that employers will value, and enabling autistic people to offer something that an employer needs – not just asking an employer to take a chance on them – is a good way of building people's confidence. It also increases the chances that their job search will be successful.

We support work undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions to pilot supported work experience schemes, and would like to see these rolled out as soon as possible.

DfE should also issue guidance to local authorities on the types of supported internship or other opportunities that could be funded through a young person's Education, Health and Care Plan.

### 4.3 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are an important pathway into work for autistic people of all ages – respondents to our consultation said that they should not be restricted to young people. People on the autism spectrum may not finish education until they are older, or may have health issues (such as mental health issues) that prevent them moving into employment until they are older. It may take time for them to develop the necessary confidence for employment, or to overcome anxiety.

Learning and developing skills on the job helps people on the autism spectrum to gain the confidence they need to move into permanent paid employment.

We welcome the Government's pledge to create three million new apprenticeships by 2020, and the recommendations made by the taskforce led by Paul Maynard to ensure that apprenticeships are

[11] https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/tax-benefits-for-businesses-who-have-employees-with-disabilities

[12] Wehman P et al (March 2014), 'Competitive employment for youth with autism spectrum disorders: early results from a randomised clinical trial', *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 44, no 3.

accessible to young people with learning difficulties and disabilities such as autism.[13] The taskforce's recommendations include making sure that employers know what support is available to them, and making adjustments to fixed entry requirements such as English and Maths grades.

The Government should implement the recommendations of the Maynard Taskforce on apprenticeships as soon as possible, and offer flexibility on autistic people's academic records and the requirement for the equivalent of a C grade in GCSE English and Maths.

We urge the Government to run a pilot to help develop a model of what a 'gold standard' apprenticeship should look like for autistic young people. This may include looking at whether apprenticeships need to be longer-lasting for this group and how teaching can be adapted so that autistic people are able to better transfer what they have learnt in the classroom to the workplace.

Consideration should also be given to offering employers incentives to take on more autistic apprentices. One approach may be to change the way the apprenticeships levy works, by increasing the top-up payment for those who take on more disabled apprentices.

### 4.4 Helping employers to support autistic employees effectively

We believe that the vast majority of employers want to support their employees, but may not know where to go for advice or feel apprehensive about getting things wrong. Our YouGov poll of employers in 2016 found that 60 per cent would worry about getting support for an autistic employee wrong and 60 per cent said that they did not know where to go for support or advice about employing an autistic person.

As described above, there is information, advice and support available for employers from The National Autistic Society. Employers can support autistic employees by making adjustments during the recruitment process and once the person starts work. They should consider the particular strengths and weaknesses of an autistic employee, and be prepared to help them make the most of their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. Both employer and employee will benefit.

Access to Work grants are an important resource to help pay for the reasonable adjustments that employees may need, and to which they are entitled under equalities legislation across the UK. We believe that awareness of this resource needs to increase among employers, especially smaller employers. In addition, autistic adults tell us they would like more choice and control over how Access to Work funds are spent and who their support provider is. The Government should take steps to ensure that the scheme is working effectively to meet the needs of people on the autism spectrum.

## CONCLUSION

Closing the autism employment gap means creating autism-friendly workplaces, improving wider public understanding of autism, making training available to employers, work coaches and benefits assessors, and creating incentives for employers.

People on the autism spectrum can make effective and valuable employees. However, traditional recruitment and work practices often prevent talented, motivated people from accessing employment and being successful in their chosen careers. The reasonable adjustments that employers are

[13] Department for Business, Innovation & Skills/Department for Education/Department for Work & Pensions (July 2016), *Independent report: Paul Maynard Taskforce Recommendations.*

required to make recognise that equality does not mean treating everyone in the same way, but making it possible for everyone to achieve as much as they are capable of.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

**The UK Government should:**

- Commit to doubling the number of autistic adults in work to support its pledge to halve the disability employment gap by 2020.

- Ensure that the data the Department for Work and Pensions uses and commissions – including the Labour Force Survey and all sources relating to disability benefits – records if a person is autistic. We have discussed this with the Office of National Statistics (ONS). The Government should also pursue this with the ONS.

- Develop an autism employment pathway that includes end-to-end autism support as part of the new Work and Health Programme.

- Ensure that all employment advisers have training in autism, to help them understand the needs of people on the autism spectrum and provide effective tailored support.

- Offer 'personal budgets' so that people can arrange their own employment support from their choice of provider.

- Ensure that all Disability Employment Advisers and work coaches receive training in how to support people with hidden impairments. Information should be published on what training is offered, how it is monitored and how many staff receive it.

- Roll out work experience programmes for disabled young people to help them identify jobs and find appropriate placements, as well as providing training for the employer and support for the young person throughout the placement. DfE should also issue guidance to local authorities on the types of supported internship or other opportunities that could be funded through a young person's Education, Health and Care Plan.

- Promote the positives of employing autistic people and ensure that advice about how to support autistic people in applying for and keeping a job is made available.

- Ensure that employers have the necessary information to bring in support from specialist organisations such as The National Autistic Society to help them maximise the potential of their autistic employees.

- Ensure that Access to Work systems are flexible to allow autistic people easy access to the support they need, and that AtW has the necessary funding to provide the support people need.

- Provide clear guidance to employers on the reasonable adjustments that disabled people are entitled to in the workplace, and good practice in making these.

- Require employers to tackle workplace bullying and make clear guidance and training available. The Government should support The National Autistic Society's Too Much Information campaign, which aims to shift public attitudes on autism.

- Commission a positive, evidence-based reform of the Work Capability Assessment with involvement from disabled people, including people on the autism spectrum. Key within this will be ensuring that work coaches, Disability Employment Advisers and professionals carrying out assessments have appropriate levels of knowledge and skill in autism.

- Launch a new programme targeted at employers to raise awareness of the skills and potential of people on the autism spectrum. We would be keen to work with and support the Government to do this and have created resources, including our free employer newsletter – *Autistic Talent* – that could be shared further with employers.

- Look at ways of incentivising employers through the tax and National Insurance system to recruit disabled employees, as recommended by the Work and Pensions Select Committee.

- Implement the recommendations of the Maynard Taskforce on apprenticeships as soon as possible, and offer flexibility on autistic people's academic records.

- Run a pilot to help develop a model of what a 'gold standard' apprenticeship looks like for autistic young people. This may include looking at whether apprenticeships need to be longer-lasting for this group, and how teaching can be adapted so that autistic people are able to better transfer what they have learnt in the classroom to the workplace.

- Offer incentives to employers to take on more autistic apprentices. One approach may be to change the way the apprenticeships levy works, by increasing the top-up payment for those who take on more disabled apprentices.

- Work with the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Assembly to launch a national programme to promote the employment potential of autistic people to employers.

**The Scottish Government should:**

- Design new employment support programmes in consultations with autistic people and their family members.

- Monitor work outcomes for autistic people in any new employment programmes.

- Note the recommendations of the England taskforce on apprenticeships and look at the scope for implementing them as part of the apprenticeships programmes in Scotland.

**The Welsh Government should:**

- Maintain the role of the Autism Employment Ambassador and look at enhancing the role as the autism strategy for Wales is refreshed.

- Make sure that support for finding work is included in its Additional Learning Needs reforms.

- Ensure that the £6 million integrated autism service, announced by the Welsh Government in March 2016 as part of its refreshed strategy, includes employment support.

- Note the recommendations of the England taskforce on apprenticeships and look at the scope for implementing them as part of the apprenticeships programmes in Wales.

- Set a target as part of a wider action plan to boost the number of autistic apprenticeships within the commitment to creating at least 100,000 apprenticeships.

**The Northern Ireland Assembly and Government should:**

- Undertaken an independent examination of the range of support provided to autistic young people/adults to examine if it meets their needs.

- Ensure that autistic adults can access a range of autism-specific pre- and post-employment support that meets their individual needs.

- Note the recommendations of the England taskforce on apprenticeships and look at the scope for implementing them as part of the apprenticeships programmes in Northern Ireland.

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