



**Enabling People  
who are on the  
Autistic Spectrum  
to participate  
in Employment**

# INTENDED OUTCOMES

- To dispel myths and establish the accepted features associated with Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC)
- To identify a variety of behaviours that people with ASC can exhibit
- To reflect on the challenges and benefits of employing people with ASC

# FACTS OR MYTHS?

- A middle class disorder?
- Simply an inter-changeable term for mental handicap or learning disability?
- More likely in boys than girls?
- Due to parental rejection or 'Refrigerator parents'?
- Often linked to genius ability?
- A developmental disorder involving a difference in brain function?
- Associated with organic causes e.g. Maternal rubella, encephalitis, birth trauma etc'
- Associated with epilepsy?

# FACTS OR MYTHS?

- Is clearly portrayed in the film “Rain man”?
- Genetically linked - there is an increased risk of occurrence in siblings?
- Associated with problems with motor co-ordination?
- Associated with unusual responses to sensory stimuli  
e. g. sound/ smell
- Is caused by the MMR?
- Is a wish to avoid social contact?
- Is a life long condition?
- A mental illness?
- A result of emotional deprivation or emotional stress?

# What we know

1. It is a lifelong developmental disorder, present at birth but not immediately obvious.
2. It is a spectrum which reflects the fact that the disorder can present in a variety of ways
3. It is caused by a difference in the development of the brain which can be produced by a variety of causes which are not yet fully understood
4. It is a complex genetic condition which can run in families but can occur spontaneously
5. It is seen as a male dominated disorder but recent research suggests that women are equally affected
6. Extensive research suggests that the prevalence is 1 in 100 of the population

# The way behaviour can be affected

- Sensory perceptions are disordered and the brain cannot filter multiple inputs therefore they can feel overloaded, disorientated, unsettled and anxious
- They can be hypersensitive or hyposensitive to light, sound, smell and touch so they may need to adjust their environment accordingly
- They can become socially isolated: the social demands of others can cause anxiety
- Social cues can be difficult to read so they may behave in a socially inappropriate way and cause offence without being aware

# The way behaviour can be affected

- They can lack the strategies to establish and maintain friendships and can appear egocentric or insensitive
- They may not know how to react to other's feelings
- Their spoken language can be formal and pedantic, their voice may lack expression and they may have difficulties understanding implications of different tones of voice
- They may have difficulty using and understanding non verbal communication
- They may be overwhelmed by being given too much information in one go

# The way behaviour can be affected

- They can take things literally and have an inability to understand implied meaning i.e. not recognise sarcasm
- Their interests can be unusual and/or highly absorbing
- They may be easily distracted, have limited concentration span or become fixated on a task
- They may have a limited ability to think creatively; they can insist on following set rules and routines
- Transferring skills from one setting to another can be challenging and they may need to be given extra time to adjust when change is implemented

# EMPLOYING PEOPLE WHO ARE ON THE AUTISTIC SPECTRUM

Most publications on autism emphasise the disabling aspects of autism or the medical and psychological basis and consequences of autism.

But this is not the whole picture. Many people who are on the Autistic Spectrum have skills and interests, which can be very positive in the workplace, particularly if they are identified as such, nurtured and used to develop potential and broaden the scope of interests of these individuals.

# EMPLOYING PEOPLE WHO ARE ON THE AUTISTIC SPECTRUM

People with ASC:

- ✓ often have advanced vocabularies
- ✓ recognise patterns others do not
- ✓ pursue ideas despite evidence to the contrary because they are not easily swayed by others' opinions
- ✓ can focus on details which means they can often come up with solutions to problems others overlook

# EMPLOYING PEOPLE WHO ARE ON THE AUTISTIC SPECTRUM

People with ASC:

- ✓ are often willing to spend long hours in laboratories and in front of computer screens because they often do not mind being alone
- ✓ can be very loyal and are often free from sexism or racism. They can have a high sense of fairness.
- ✓ do not manipulate people but speak out frankly and honestly, are sincere truth-tellers, whose naivety and trusting nature makes them incapable of backstabbing
- ✓ can be dependable and follow the rules of the job

# EMPLOYING PEOPLE WHO ARE ON THE AUTISTIC SPECTRUM

Psychologist Teresa Bolick writes, "Their deficits are actually assets, as they are unfettered by convention or manners" and they question basic societal assumptions

Author Patricia Bashe points out that people often admire those who can work independently; "Our society celebrates the individual who does what he thinks is right and goes his own way."

Adapted from <http://www.yourlittleprofessor.com>

# APPROPRIATE SUPPORT IN EMPLOYMENT

For a person with ASC to be able to function in a work place they need:

- ✓ All associates to have an understanding of ASC and any other associated learning difficulties and recognise how their behaviour can impact on the person with ASC
- ✓ Person centred planning and review to include:  
easy and regular access to appropriate communication aids  
a working environment adjusted for any sensory sensitivities  
Clear, precise and unambiguous information and directions
- ✓ A specific workplace mentor trained and able to give appropriate support as and when needed

# The Teaching and Learning pack

**“Strategies for Supporting People in Employment who are on the Autistic Spectrum including Asperger Syndrome, ADHD and Tourette’s Syndrome”**

has been designed to be used for anyone working with the Autistic Spectrum including Workplace Mentors

You can find this power point and the teaching and learning pack at <http://www.wescfoundation.ac.uk/index.php/training>