

Bristol Autism Spectrum Service

Guide to Employment in Bristol

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“People with autism can have exceptional talents and by making some straightforward adjustments can prove to be a tremendous asset to business. We need to do more to make use of those talents.” Lord Freud – Minister for Welfare Reform

There is a higher than average rate of unemployment amongst people with autism, including Asperger syndrome

Many people are able to work but don't get given the right support or opportunities

If someone cannot work it is important they get on the right benefit

The Bristol Autism Spectrum Service can assist so book an appointment 01275 796 204 or email awp.bass@nhs.net

Employment – what type of job?

People with autism do all kinds of jobs. Jobs that tend to work best:

- are routine, follow 'rules' and have clear structure
- avoid too many complicated people skills
- have understanding, educated employers
- provide reasonable adjustments as necessary.

But it is also important to remember that autistic people can succeed in all kinds of jobs.

Part time employment often suits people with autism but this also varies.

Should you tell an employer you have autism?

Under The Equality Act 2010 employers cannot ask about your disability directly during the recruitment process except in a few circumstances (but can check you have the skills to do the job).

You need to weigh up the pros and cons of telling an employer (also consider *when* to tell an employer) it is a personal decision. It is OK to wait until you are offered a job before telling an employer, if you prefer.

Some reasons to tell an employer – it is being honest, you are protected under the Equality Act and there are distinct advantages to having autism in some jobs.

One reason you might decide to not tell an employer – it might put the employer off if they do not understand about autism.

Employment - The Equality Act 2010

Employers have to make reasonable adjustment/allowances for employees and those applying for jobs

Reasonable adjustments can be at interview stage or once someone has a job. For example:

- Allowing a friend to attend interview with you
- Getting the interview questions in written form
- Having someone speak to other employees about autism
- Altering the job role slightly to accommodate your disability

Employment – what is usually required in the workplace:

The following list of eight bullet points make for a good working environment for someone with autism:

1. Clear and positive explanation of autism to other employees and practical training on how to assist the employee
2. Clear job role, responsibilities and work tasks
3. Work place etiquette explained
4. Clear lines of management and support
5. Regular supervision meetings to monitor work and training needs
6. Pro-active approach to dealing with social difficulties that occur or workplace bullying/teasing
7. Quiet place to have a break, if required.
8. Job coach or support worker (this could be through Access to Work – see more detail below)

Apply for an Access to Work grant

You may be able to get some money to fund equipment, staff training or a support person if you are having problems in the workplace such that you could lose your job (or without that support you could not start a new job).

You must be 16 or older and employed (including self employed). You cannot get Access to Work money for voluntary jobs

You may not qualify if you receive income support or ESA

Contact Jobcentre adviser about how Access to Work can help you or look online to make an application

For more information on Access to Work <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work> or call 0345 604 3349 Weekdays, 9am to 5pm (you can apply online)

Employment – top tips to find work

- If you are working but want help with explaining the diagnosis to employer/other employees talk to the Bristol Autism Spectrum Service 01275 796 204 or email awp.bass@nhs.net
- Make a business case – sell yourself - think about what skills and abilities you can bring to the workplace
- Be pro-active – write letters to Business Disability Forum members eg local authorities, bigger chains www.businessdisability.org.uk – email advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk and request their most up to date Membership list
- Look out for 2 Tick Positive about Disability employers logo on job adverts
- Permitted work rules: if you work under 16 hours a week and get ESA you can earn up to £120 approximately without this affecting your benefit but get advice. You could consider doing some part time work using permitted work (see section on Permitted Work for more details).
- Book an appointment with the Bristol Autism Spectrum Service to discuss how to find work 01275 796 204 or email awp.bass@nhs.net

Employment – voluntary work

If cannot find paid employment consider getting involved with voluntary work for a charity/non-profit

You can volunteer and still claim JSA or ESA so long as you are available for work or attending any work related group activity /interviews

You must tell the Jobcentreplus adviser if you are doing voluntary work

Some voluntary organisations contacts

- www.voscur.org
- www.csv.org.uk and see what opportunities there are in Bristol area.
- www.do-it.org.uk
- www.bristol.gov.uk/social-care-health/befriending-and-volunteering
- Also target local charities for voluntary jobs: www.charityjob.co.uk/volunteer-jobs/?location=bristol

Useful work contacts for courses and programmes to help you get work ready or into work

Mental Health Matters

<http://www.mentalhealthmatters.com/service/bristol-employment/>

Telephone: 0117 923 2741 (Monday – Friday 9am until 5pm)

Email: enquiries.bmhemployment@richmondfellowship.org.uk

www.findajobcoach.co.uk

BOSS Employment 07522 350 651

Sixteen Co-operative Ltd - Keith Bates 0779 6053847 info@sixteencoop.co.uk

Project Search 0117 90 37450 project.search@bristol.gov.uk

Learndirect www.learndirect.com 0117 929 7744 help with finding work if aged 19 and older and in receipt of benefits

Enquiries.bristol@learndirect-centres.co.uk

Remploy www.remploy.co.uk 0300 456 8027 (operate Workchoice programme in Bristol)

Pluss www.pluss.org.uk (operate Workchoice programme in Bristol)

Mencap Pathway www.mencap.org.uk/pathway 0117 965 5623 You need to be referred by a professional

Shaw Trust www.shaw-trust.org.uk

Tomorrow's People 0117 924 6815 Help with finding work if you are on ESA

My Way 2 Employment (charity) 0117 965 5133

Third Sector solutions 0117 941 5318

Aspire Community Enterprise (for homeless and ex-homeless people) 0117 954 0861

Filwood Hope, Knowle West 0117 963 4566 Getting back into work (Tuesday all day session)

Jigsaw – a catering course for people with a learning disability

www.cityofbristol.ac.uk/courses/details/jigsaw-0001

Whole baked café 0117 908 2266

Must be referred by Care Direct /social worker. Catering experience

YMCA Training 0117 935 1344

CSV Avon 0117 908 2266

Prince's Trust 0117 929 2300

If you are interested in environmental and green issues the following organisations may be of interest:

Bristol Trust Conservation Volunteers www.tcv.org.uk 01302 388 883 -UK conservation projects and Green gyms

Windmill Hill City Farm www.windmillhillcityfarm.org.uk

Avon Wildlife Trust www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk

National Trust www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Bristol Friends of the Earth www.bristolfoe.org.uk

Avon Valley Railway

Volunteers sometimes wanted

0117 932 5538

info@avonvalleyrailway.org

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens www.farmgarden.org.uk

Outset

Helping you to start a new business in Bristol

0800 032 2903

info@outsetbristol.co.uk

www.outsetbristol.co.uk

More about the Equality Act 2010 - discrimination and your rights

When are you protected from discrimination?

Discrimination means treating you unfairly because of who you are. The Equality Act 2010 protects you from discrimination by:

- employers
- businesses and organisations which provide goods or services like banks, shops and utility companies
- health and care providers like hospitals and care homes
- someone you rent or buy a property from like housing associations and estate agents
- schools, colleges and other education providers
- transport services like buses, trains and taxis
- public bodies like government departments and local authorities.

There are nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act. Discrimination which happens because of one or more of these characteristics is unlawful under the Act. We all have some of these characteristics - for example, sex or age - so the Act protects everyone from discrimination.

If you're treated unfairly because someone thinks you belong to a group of people with protected characteristics, this is also unlawful discrimination.

What are the protected characteristics?

The characteristics that are protected by the Equality Act 2010 are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage or civil partnership (in employment only)
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

Discrimination by association

The Act also protects you if people in your life, like family members or friends, have a protected characteristic and you're treated unfairly because of that. This is called discrimination by association. For example, if you're discriminated against because your son is gay.

If you complain about discrimination

The Equality Act protects you if you're treated badly because you've complained about discrimination or stood up for discrimination rights, either for yourself or for someone

Permitted work

If you are getting employment and support allowance (ESA) national insurance credits or income support because of incapacity for work, you are allowed to do some '*permitted work*'.

The idea of permitted work is to allow people who are on disability related benefits to still receive minimum wage earnings.

There are three permitted work options, depending on your circumstances:

- Permitted work lower limit
- Permitted work higher limit
- Supported permitted work

Permitted work can include paid employment or self-employment.

You do not need the permission of a doctor to do permitted work, but you should tell the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) if you are working.

You must tell the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) if you start doing permitted or supported permitted work. They'll send you form PW1 to fill in and send back to them.

Any volunteer work you do needs to be reported. It normally doesn't affect your ESA.

For ESA all permitted work earnings are ignored. If you are on income support, any earnings over £20 will be deducted from your income support. Earnings from permitted work are also completely ignored in Housing Benefits. Earnings are also usually ignored for Council Tax Support (but check with the council).

Permitted work lower limit

Under this option, you can earn up to £20 a week for an unlimited period.

Permitted work higher limit

Under this option, you can earn up to £120 a week, after tax and national insurance deductions. The work must be for less than 16 hours a week.

Supported permitted work

This is work where you are supervised by someone who is employed by a public or local authority or community or voluntary group which provides or finds work for people with disabilities. It can also be work which is part of a treatment programme under medical supervision while you are an in-patient or regularly attending as an out-patient of a hospital or similar institution.

Supported permitted work has no restriction on the hours you work and can be for an unlimited period. You cannot earn more than £120 a week after tax and national insurance deductions.

What happens if you go over £120 earnings in a week?

Usually this will mean that you do not receive any ESA or other means tested benefit in that week.

Other allowed work

The following kinds of work are also allowed:

- care of a relative or domestic tasks carried out in your own home.
- work as a councillor. If you receive a councillor's allowance that pays more than £120 a week, excluding expenses, the excess will be deducted from your contributory ESA, or incapacity benefit.
- any activity in an emergency to protect another person or to prevent serious damage to property or livestock.
- duties undertaken as an appeal tribunal disability member – one day a week is allowed (or two half days).
- a DWP-approved unpaid work trial or work placement.
- self-employed work done whilst you are 'test trading' for up to 26 weeks with help from a self-employment provider arranged by Jobcentre Plus.
- (for ESA only) duties undertaken fostering a child or providing respite care to someone who is not normally a member of your household, if you receive payment from a health body, voluntary organisation or local authority (or from the person placed with you by the local authority).
- a DWP-approved unpaid work trial or work placement.
- work which is so minimal that it can be regarded as trivial or negligible.

Self employment

Anyone starting up in business should get advice and information about the best way to do this.

You need to set yourself up officially for example as a sole trader or limited company.

You don't have to pay VAT unless you earn a lot of money. It is still worth considering whether you might benefit by registering for VAT.

Keeping track of your work and receipts

Make sure you buy a receipt book to keep records of your work and what you have been paid for different jobs. Dates each job and write what the job was and who it was for and their contact details.

You may also want to get an invoice book so you can give people invoices of how much they owe you.

You will need to have some way of tracking who has paid you and who still owes you money.

Getting started with self employment

It is sometimes a good idea as part of a business plan to do some free work first as this gives you an idea of what jobs you will be best at and build up a list of possible contacts who may give you work.

You may be able to get a start up loan to buy equipment you need.

How to register to become self employed

If you are just starting out with a new business and you are unsure if it is the right job for you there is no rush to get registered to become self employed.

You might decide to hold off applying to become self employed until you are actually getting a few bits of paid work coming in.

To become self employed you need to complete a form which you can complete at - <https://www.gov.uk/new-business-register-for-tax>

Before you can register as a new business you need to have a Government Gateway credentials but this is all easy to do, if you have an email account.

We can assist you with being self employed. Contact awp.bass@nhs.net to set up a appointment to discuss self employment.

Some examples of Reasonable Adjustments under the Equality Act 2010

Reasonable adjustments when Advertising the job

- Please consider whether the job actually requires 'good interpersonal skills'. If it doesn't, leave it out. People with autism may not apply for a job with this requirement if they are aware of their potential difficulties in this area. Avoid jargon.
- Provide space on the application form to write about potential adjustments needed. (Bear in mind, however, that appropriate adjustments often emerge on-the-job.)

Reasonable adjustments in the Recruitment process

Interviews rely heavily on social and communication skills and the ability to 'sell yourself'. Individuals with autism may struggle with this even if they have all the right skills for the job.

- Interview questions written down or given ahead of time
- Ask for questions to be rephrased in more explicit concrete terms
- Ask for pen and paper at interview to be able to make notes
- Any adjustments to physical environment (eg, lighting, background noise)
- Ask closed questions if possible, e.g. 'Describe your work history for the last 5 years' rather than 'Tell me about yourself', so that the candidate knows exactly what you are asking.
- Avoid hypothetical ('What if?') questions. Instead, ask the candidate to give specific examples of relevant situations they have experienced in the past.
- Let the candidate know if they are talking too much and move onto the next question.
- Be aware that candidates' eye contact or body language may not be the same as other candidates and may not be a reflection of how they feel about the job. Please do not assume someone is being rude or disinterested if they are unable to look you in the eye, this can be hugely overwhelming for some people with autism and they may need to look away to take in the verbal part of communication.
- A reasonable adjustment could be to allow someone to support the candidate at interview in case questions need to be rephrased, or the candidate has misunderstood the context and needs to be prompted.
- Consider offering a work trial so the candidate can demonstrate exactly how they would perform in the workplace.

Potential Reasonable Adjustments in the workplace

- Changing shifts or hours
- Offering a reserved car parking space
- Allowing an employee to work from home
- Having a permanent desk
- Offering additional supervision sessions
- Allowing workers to attend a support meeting (eg staff from BASS)
- Providing an enclosed office
- Providing partitions, room dividers, or otherwise enhancing soundproofing and visual barriers between workspaces
- Blocking noise (eg by use of headphones, reducing the pitch or volume of telephone rings)
- Increasing 'personal space'
- Positioning the worker as far away as possible from noise
- Allowing additional time for workers to reach performance milestones
- Providing a private space for employees to rest
- Allowing a job coach to come to the work site
- Providing a personal computer to enable an employee to work at home or at unusual hours
- Providing software that allows the worker to structure time and receive prompts throughout the workday
- Offering additional training or instruction on new procedures or information
- Training supervisors to customise their management style
- Provision of regular feedback
- Assigning a co-worker to act as 'buddy' or 'mentor'
- Offer clear and concise communication
- Offer a clear work structure and routine
- Providing autism awareness training for management and colleagues

More workplace adjustments

- Provide a full induction eg an introduction to each employee, explanation of unwritten rules of the workplace, a map of the building/office and where each person sits, and a timetable for the week ahead. It would be beneficial to provide this information in advance to reduce anxiety. Giving the person written information on basic induction information is usually important

- Provide autism awareness training to line manager and colleagues.
- Give clear, concise and specific instructions. Some people may need this backed up in writing or sent via email.
- Structure the working environment. Use timetables, and break down large tasks into small clear steps. Use written instructions if your employee would prefer this.
- Give direct but sensitive and regular feedback. If a problem occurs, it is important that it is addressed at the time, not in an appraisal 3 months later for example.
- Be flexible in working arrangements when possible (e.g. if rush hour travel is a cause for anxiety then arrange flexible working hours or an assigned parking space)
- Assign a mentor or buddy if available, or arrange support from a suitable colleague.
- Allow access to stress reduction sessions, mindfulness or relaxation techniques
- Ensure that ongoing, proactive support from the organisation is booked in regularly and not used as a last resort when things go wrong.
- Be aware of sensory issues, e.g. open plan offices have lots of noise and lights. Consider using desk partitions, telephones that light up when ringing, noise-cancelling headphones (e.g. Bose®), desk low-lights etc. An employee with autism will feel more productive, and experience less work-related anxiety, when they can reduce the ambient interference from their working environment.
- Encourage a working culture where employees are not intimidated by senior management, and promote a culture that is willing to engage with and support individual differences.
- If specific support is required in the workplace to address issues arising from the individual's disability, support the individual to find out about the government's Access to Work scheme to assist with any costs of this support.

Funding for some workplace reasonable adjustments may be available through Access to Work.

Useful Links

Email - Bristol Autism Spectrum Service awp.bass@nhs.net

<http://www.awp.nhs.uk/bass> - Bristol Autism Spectrum Service web information

www.autism.org.uk – *Untapped Talent – A guide to employing people with autism* - pdf available

