

# **Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) and recruitment**

This document will set out some of the possible strengths for people with ASC and also go through some of the considerations when engaging with the recruitment process for people on the autistic spectrum.

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## **Skills /Strengths with ASC**

If you're bored of hearing about all the "deficits" challenging people on the autism spectrum, you are not the only one. But for the perceived down side to autism, there seems to be more positives - with traits that are rarer among the "typical" community, but shine among the autistic community. These are worth celebrating.

- **Rarely judge others**

Who's fatter? Richer? Smarter? For many people on the autism spectrum, these distinctions generally hold much less importance than for neurotypical people. In fact, people on the spectrum often see through such surface appearances. Often having an inherent sense of equality, not only are they less likely to judge others on stereotypical standards like attractiveness or wealth, but also more likely to be accepting of others from different background and ethnicity or with a disability which can help fitting in to an organisation.

- **Rarely lie or have hidden agendas (Integrity)**

Integrity is a highly rated quality by employers, but many people tell small untruths. This is less likely from those on autism spectrum. They often consider that truth is truth -- and a good word from a person on the autism spectrum is to be valued. Most of the time, if a person on the autism spectrum tells you what they want – they are telling you what they want. No need to second guess or read between the lines! This makes communication much less complicated and more clear.

- **Work when nobody is watching**

It is the focus and commitment to do what they are tasked to do with good adherence to rules. Often people with ASC make dependable and diligent employees that get on with doing the job.

- **Passion that lead to productivity**

People with ASC can be truly passionate about the things, ideas and people in their lives. Because autistic individuals can have intense, specific interests, the best jobs may be those that allow them to be involved with those interests. Intensity can be an asset that helps them focus on the task at hand. An employee who is perfectly suited to a position because of a passion results in a win-win situation. Working in an area of extensive knowledge and being hyper-focused can lead to productivity.

- **Attention to detail**

Whilst it is important to look at “the big picture” when thinking about an issue, Sometimes focusing on smaller details, which can sometimes seem less important, can be a benefit. This is thought to be linked to a hypersensitivity to sensory input, which while sometimes distracting, can also help individuals with ASC take in the details that many of us miss. This perceptiveness can be highly useful in providing insights that may otherwise be missed.

For example, Some IT companies (such as SAP) actively seek people with ASC for employment as they can find issues with software that others cannot due to their intense focus on details, rather than on whether a program works functionally overall or not, as these small mistakes can cause problems that may not be immediately obvious but can have negative impacts later on.

- **Good memories**

People on the autism spectrum are often much more tuned in to details. They may have a much better memory than their typical peers for all kind of critical details. Some people with autism have exceptional memories, and can remember information they read weeks ago and are also less likely to misremember something.

- **A different world view**

People with autism see things differently than those who are considered “neurotypical”. The differences in thought that autistic people have can lead to revolutionary ideas that can change how others view certain concepts. Not only does neurodiversity add to the workplace dynamic, but also their perceptiveness allows them to approach problems innovatively and creatively.

- **Expertise in special interests**

Some people think that having an obsessive interest in a particular subject will limit social interactions, but colleagues will recognise the level of expertise and appreciate the assistance with tasks relating in the topic of special interest, and can connect through a shared interest.

Many people have hobbies, but not many are experts? Often, individuals with ASC are not afraid to devote their time and energy to the pursuit of their areas of interest.

The special interests of a person with ASC can be marketable. For example, people who have used their deep fascination with animals may excel in positions at zoos and animal reserves. Another example, an individual who really enjoys searching for and collecting rocks/minerals may seek to become a geologist. It is about connecting the area of focus with relevant opportunities that will bring the most out of these areas.

- **Great at auditory and visual tasks**

Recent research has shown people with autism often outperform others in auditory and visual tasks, and also do better on non-verbal tests of intelligence. In one study by Mottron, on a test that involved completing a visual pattern, people with autism finished 40 percent faster than those without the condition

## **Approach to the Recruitment process**

### **Reasonable adjustments**

It is your choice whether or not to be open about your ASC and at which point in the process, but if you do, do it with confidence. Here in the UK employers are bound by equality legislation and have to make 'reasonable adjustment' for people with ASC, which means making allowances in selection and interview and providing certain kinds of support in the job.

Reasonable adjustments are not about giving you an unfair advantage, they are about giving you a fair chance and the conditions to perform well. Reasonable adjustments should be implemented from first advertisement of a position, throughout the recruitment process and during working life up to and including departure or dismissal procedures.

Understanding your particular range of reasonable adjustments can help you better articulate these to others that may not understand that many of these are simple and minimal cost or no cost, mitigating worries that employees may otherwise have.

Examples of reasonable adjustments for people with ASC include:

- that the environment takes account of sensory needs

- Quieter working space, noise cancelling head phones, corner desk facing walls, seated away from high traffic areas, seated away from kitchen or toilet facilities where the smells may be a problem
- Ability to go to a less sensory environment for short period
- Office buddy – not for line or performance management but someone available to discuss office dynamics, nuances or to clarify meaning with etc.
- Pre induction meeting at office to get used to the space
- Setting up meetings in advance with a clear purpose
- Informed of change in advance where possible – staffing changes, office moves etc.
- Making sure communication is clear, and that it is communicated in an appropriate way
- Make sure instructions are concise and specific
- Asking that people make it clear if you are talking too long about a subject
- Writing down instructions and tasks
- Breaking down large tasks into smaller components
- Having a regular timetable of tasks to add structure to your working day
- Extra time to familiarise with new and or unfamiliar equipment
- Extra time to familiarise with new procedures
- Informal pre interview or start visits to familiarise with the environment
- Alternative testing methods - for some, multiple choice and SJTs may not be appropriate, as the wrong or right nature of pre-scripted responses can create a disadvantage

Tips:

Look for mentors that model acceptable social skills to help you understand different social signs and cues.

### **Job search**

There are ways to help identify some employers who are particularly keen to attract applications from disabled candidates. Things to look out for include:

- Achievement of the Disability Confident Employer status (formerly 'Two Ticks' Award (symbolised by two ticks and the words "positive about disabled people"). Only employers who have proved ongoing commitment to disability initiatives and support of employees/applicants with disabilities are able to achieve this award. These employers also guarantee interviews will be offered to any disabled applicants that meet the minimum criteria for the role.
- Equal opportunities policy statement on company websites
- Profiles of disabled employees on website or company literature
- Evidence of commitment to equal opportunities on recruitment material (including offer of adjustment to materials at application stage and requests for information about adjustments needed to enable optimum performance during the recruitment process or in the workplace)

It is important however to note that just because an employer does not appear to demonstrate the criteria above it does not mean they will not be disability friendly.

Check out each individual job description, and see how your strengths fit in.

These following links are to just some of the organisations that post roles specifically for people with disability, learning difference or long term health conditions:

<https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/autism-exchange/our-current-opportunities>

<https://www.employ-ability.org.uk/internships>

<https://www.evenbreak.co.uk/jobs/>

<https://myplusstudentsclub.com/jobs/>



### **The job advert/ job description**

Job adverts are not always concise and written in easily understood language, using jargon and/or unnecessary information. This can sometimes make it harder to assess what the role is there to do and the competencies that are required to work effectively within the role.

Job descriptions also often include competencies / skills that are not essential for the job to be carried out effectively. Qualities such as 'excellent communication skills' or 'good team player' are often included as default skills, even if they are not necessary. It is important to understand the competencies / skills asked for in the context of the job role that you are considering applying for and how your strengths enable you to do this. An example could be for 'excellent communication skills' the ability to relay detailed information with accuracy to others or writing highly detailed reports. For 'good team player' an example could be the ability to complete your part of a team project on schedule to a high quality, being dependable within the team.

Tips:

Start by researching the type of job generally, not specific to an organisation. This should give a good indication of what the job function is and skills required, without as much jargon.

Setting up notifications if possible for target organisations can let you know when things start to be advertised. This will ensure you have the maximum amount of time to make a good application.

Do check with someone you trust any phrases that you do not understand or are unclear in the advert / person specification.

Do consider what reasonable adjustments would enable you to perform the job role.

### **Applications and CV**

It is not always obvious what information the applicant needs to provide on the application form. Application forms may require people to provide 'additional information' or 'other relevant information'. There can be a particular difficulty with the desirable category, this can be unclear. Generally, if you have relevant experience in the desirable area then do try to provide this information

Tips:

- You can use the Careers service to help you decode the unclear language that some employers use in their Person Specifications so you know what you need to address in your application and CV
- Many organisations provide a guide to filling in their applications or an FAQ section, it is good practice to read through this as it often gives more specific information to complete the application as required
- Meeting all of the essential criteria for employers signed up to the Disability Confident Scheme should mean that you should be offered an interview
- Check to see if the form includes a space for applicants to highlight any support or adjustments they may need at an interview.
- **Create a Portfolio:** In addition to your resume, you can put together a portfolio of your work – or pictures or videos of your work – for future employers to see
- **Prepare a List of References:** As you are preparing information for your resume, create a separate list of your references to share with potential employers once you secure a job interview

### **At Interview**

Interviews rely heavily on social and communication skills, such as body language and eye contact, tone and formality of what you say and judging how much information is appropriate. Traditional interviews also often use open questions and “what if” scenarios. These can sometimes be challenging for people on the autistic spectrum, so some autistic candidates may struggle to make the best impression in an interview, even if they have all the right skills.

It is important to realise that asking each applicant exactly the same question does not always equate to equality of opportunity, as this may be disadvantaging some. This is why reasonable adjustments are available to help mitigate disadvantages in the process.

Tips:

- Ask for an informal visit before the interview
- You can contact the employer and ask questions that may make you feel more comfortable  
These might include:
  - Who is going to be interviewing me?
  - What is the environment going to be like?
  - How many people are going to be interviewing me?
  - Is the interview formal or informal?
  - What format will the interview be, formal or group interview and will a presentation be required?
  - What if I can't find where I am supposed to be going?
  - What am I supposed to wear to the interview?
  - How long will the interview last for?
  - Will I be expected to complete any tests?
- You can ask for interview questions or sample interview question in advance so that you can be more comfortable with them, or to have a written copy at the interview
- Ask for questions to be asked as open but bounded questions
- Ask that they avoid asking hypothetical or abstract questions
- Practice with someone you trust
- Taking a small sip of water after a question has been asked can give you the time to construct your answer
- Research materials that may help to prepare for the interview, such as copies of the company aims and values
- Questions you may wish to ask about 'what happens next':
  - When will I find out if I have been successful? What happens if I haven't been successful, will I find out why?
  - If I am successful, when will I start? What will I be expected to do next before I can start my job?

### **Assessment and tests**

Some Psychometric assessments have been noted as disadvantaging people with ASC and as a Tribunal against the Government legal services

Tips:

- Ask for a clear schedule for and Assessment Centre
- Understand what reasonable adjustment may be required for the different elements of the Assessment Centre
- If you have sensory difficulties, ask about whether there will be a quiet space available on the day

### **Alternatives to the traditional Interview and Assessment Centres**

**Inviting a supporter to accompany the person**

Many autistic people perform much better in interviews if they have a supporter with them. This person can act as a go-between to ease communication between the interviewer and the candidate, rewording any unclear questions for the candidate and helping them understand exactly what the interviewer wants. The supporter will not answer on behalf of the person, but may help to rephrase unsuitably worded questions (although ideally the employer should do this in preparation for the interview), or help them to communicate with the interviewees, in order to clarify their relevant knowledge and skills. This does not only benefit the candidate: it can also help employers understand what the candidate has to offer.

### **Work trials**

Some employers find that a work trial, or a period of work experience, is a better way of assessing skills than a formal interview. This approach may also help if you think that an autistic person is likely to do well in the job but you have concerns about how well they will cope in the workplace.