

Autism Centre for Employment

Developing an evidence-based, person-centred
work programme for adults with ASD

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Developing an evidence-based, person-centred work programme

Evidence of
need

Barriers to
employment

NICE
guidelines

Evidence of need: Employment

- 85% of people with ASD are unemployed (NAS)
- Difficulty to hold jobs, switch jobs often and difficulties adjusting to job settings (Howlin, 2000; Hurbultt & Chalmers, 2009)
- Large majority of work programmes are aimed at people with ASD and LD:
 - 23% of people with ASD and no LD have no daily activity (as opposed to 8% of those with LD (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011))

Barriers to employment

Collaboration of University of Portsmouth with Autism Research, Policy and Practice Hub (Wales Autism Research Group, 2014)

1. To investigate practitioners' views on the implementation of the Adult Autism Strategy (2010) regarding training and employment targets
2. To identify the barriers people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) encounter on the road to successful employment

Respondents

		ASD n=47	Carers <18 yrs n=10	Carers 19+ yrs n=27
Age	Mean	39.7	17.2	25.07
	Standard deviation	13.1	0.92	11.44
Diagnosis	Asperger Syndrome	35	5	17
	High-Functioning ASD	8	2	7
	ASD	2	-	1
	Low-functioning ASD	-	3	2
Comorbidity	Developmental Disorder	12	1	6
	Mental Health	4	1	2
	Combination of above	4	3	2
Schooling	Mainstream	40	3	15
	Special Need school	5	4	7
	Other	1	3	5

Practitioners (n=43)

Barriers to employment

	Practitioners (n=43*)	Carers (n=28*)	Adults with ASD (n=28*)
External barriers			
Services	11.6% (n=5)	7.1% (n=2)	-
Application and interview process	18.6% (n=8)	7.1% (n=2)	-
Employer and staff lack of understanding	20.9% (n=9)	39.3% (n=11)	35.7% (n=10)
Failure to make adjustments	16.3% (n=7)	14.3% (n=4)	42.8% (n=12)
Other	7% (n=3)	-	21.5% (n=6)
Internal barriers			
Condition related	18.6% (n=8)	7.1% (n=2)	-
Confidence	7% (n=3)	10.7% (n=3)	-
Lack of coping strategies	-	14.3% (n=4)	-
Adjustments in the workplace	Yes	61.5% (n=16)	60% (n=3)
	No	38.5% (n=10)	40% (n=2)

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Summary

- Lack of understanding from employers and staff: Carers and adults with ASD identify this as one of the main barriers to employment (39.3% carers and 35.7% adults with ASD).
- Failure to make adjustments in the workplace: 40% of carers and 38.5% of adults with ASD
- Need to create work experience and apprenticeship opportunities (12.5% of respondents)

NICE guidelines

NICE (2014) recommendations for supported employment programmes

- Employability skills
- Careful matching the person to the job
- Support for the employer and employee
- Advice on making reasonable adjustments

Barriers to implementing NICE guidelines

- How to match a person to a job?
 - No autism-specific assessment tools to identify career preferences, employability skills
- How to support the employer and employee?
 - High variability in symptoms (Valla & Belmonte, 2013; Kargas, López et al, 2014)
 - Generic training to employers and mentors does not provide information about individual employee
- How to provide advice on how to make reasonable adjustments?
 - Generic training again, does not inform about individual needs
- Need of tools to identify individual profiles

Developing an evidence-based, person-centred work programme

Evidence of need

High unemployment rates

Higher need for ASD with no LD

Evidence of support needs

Lack of understanding from employers and staff

Failure to make adjustments in the workplace

Barriers to NICE guidelines

High variability in symptoms

No tools to identify individual profiles

ACE

- Funding from Autism Innovation Fund (Dept of Health)
- Collaboration between University of Portsmouth, four local authorities (SHIP) and Autism Hampshire
- Aimed at high-functioning adults with ASD
- Development of autism-specific, employment focused assessment tools to identify **individual employment profiles** in order to:
 - Facilitate job-person matching
 - Provide person-centred training to employers
 - Support decisions of adjustment needs
- Provide work placements



Stage 1

- Online assessment
- In-depth follow-up interview



Stage 2

- Job person matching
- Training: Intervention vs. control



Stage 3

- Work placements
- Supported by volunteer mentors



Stage 4

- Evaluation of intervention
- Revision of tools

Stage 1: Individual assessments

Cognitive profile

- Core difficulties in autism
 - Executive functioning (i.e., flexibility and planning; Hill, 2004)
 - Sensory sensitivities (Ben-Sasson et al, 2009)
 - Social and communication skills Dawson et al, 2004)
- Adaptation of existing scales to work settings
 - Executive function: *I have trouble with tasks that have more than one step (BRIEF-er)*
 - Sensory sensitivities: *I cannot work in rooms with fluorescent lights*
 - Social and communication: *I have difficulty making and receiving telephone calls*

Stage 1: Individual assessments

Employability Profile

- Occupational typology (Holland, 1985):
 - RIASEC: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional
- Employability skills:
 - Creative, numerical, practical, problem solving, social and interpersonal, influencing, verbal communication, organising, written communication

Individual Employment profiles

- Comprehensive report on cognitive and employability profile
- Accessible graphic and verbal information
- Summary boxes in each section
- Recommendations of adaptations needed and strengths
- Recommendations on further training
- Summary table for employers

Stage2: Job-matching

- Individual Employment profile:
 - Type of placement
 - Type of tasks (strengths and weaknesses)
- Targeted employers that matched the individual career preferences
- Lessons learned:
 - Not advisable to have employers lined-up before knowing strengths and interests of client

Placements

Type of work	No	Type of work	No
Retail assistant	3	Art gallery assistant	1
Data entry	3	Mobile app developer	1
Research assistant	3	Web developer	1
Library assistant	2	Journalist	1
Administrator	1		

Stage 2: Training/intervention

- Matching only group (2 employers):
 - The individual profiles of the people with ASD assigned to this group was used to match them to a placement.
 - The employers in this group attended a generic training event held at Portsmouth University.
- Matching and adjustment group
 - The individual profiles of the people with ASD assigned to this group was used to match them to a placement.
 - We held individual sessions with each employer to inform them about the individual profile of the person with ASD and provide them with recommendations about minor adjustments needs.

Stage 3: Work placements

- 8 week placement: Part time, unpaid
- Both employers and employees supported by trained volunteer mentors
- Weekly feedback sessions with employers and employees

Stage 4: Evaluation of intervention

- Employers and work colleagues:
 - Quality of working life
 - Positive and negative affect
 - Self-Esteem
 - Attitudes towards employees with ASD, autism awareness, expectations of the scheme (at start of the project only), likelihood of hiring a person with ASD in the future and feedback on the work scheme to include benefits and limitations.
- Adults with ASD:
 - Positive and negative affect
 - Self-Esteem Quality of Working Life at end of project
 - Expectations from the work scheme, confidence in own abilities and on gaining employment, intention to gain permanent employment, absent days, hours of work and feedback on the work scheme to include benefits and limitations.

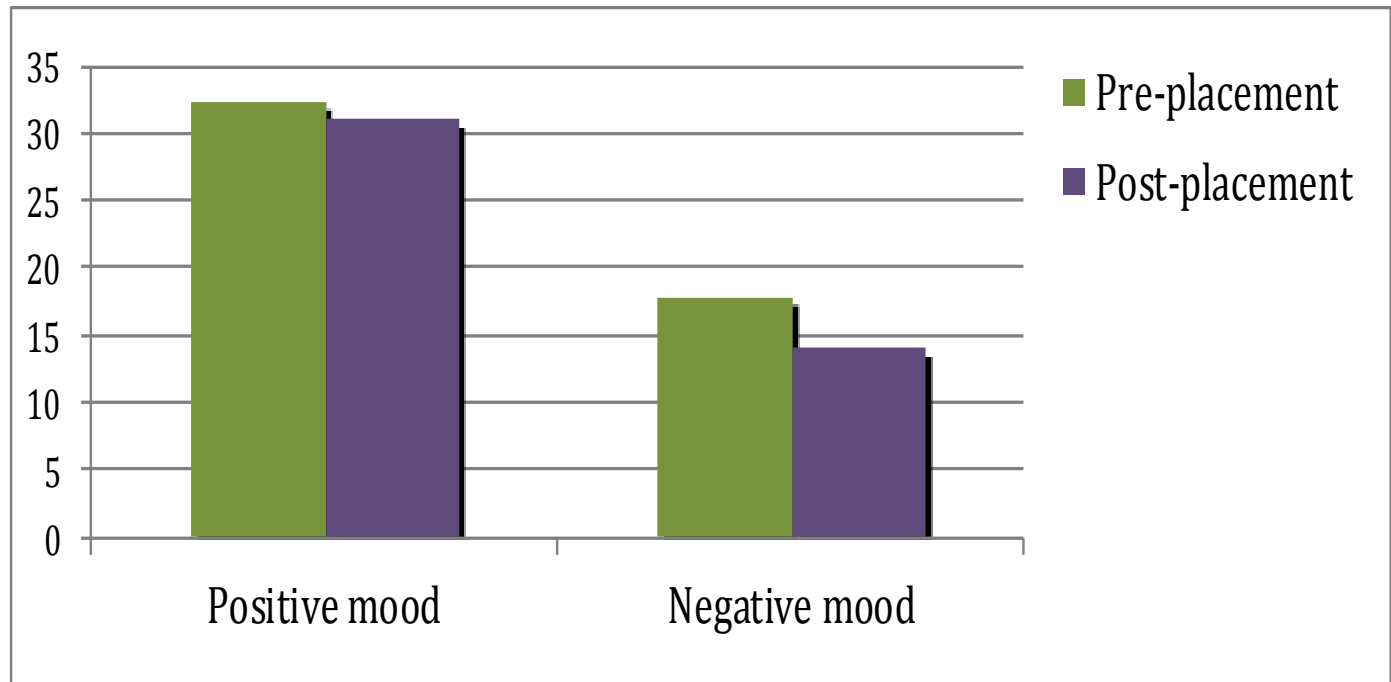
Employers' outcomes

	Strongly agree	Agree	Total
1. My knowledge of autism has increased by taking part in this scheme.	37.5%	50%	87.5%
2. Taking part in this scheme has given me useful information of the value of employees with autism.	50%	50%	100%
3. My confidence in my ability to manage an employee with autism has increased as a result of taking part in this scheme.	50%	25%	75%
4. The training provided by ACE has helped me to support the employee with autism.	50%	25%	75%
5. Having a mentor to support the employee with autism has made me feel more confident.	12.5%	62.5%	75%
6. Participating in this scheme has made me feel better about myself.	25%	37.5%	62.5%
7. Overall this has been a positive experience for my organisation.	37.5%	37.5%	75%
8. Overall this has been a positive experience for myself.	37.5%	62.5%	100%
9. I am likely to employ someone with autism in the future.	37.5%	12.5%	50%

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Employers' outcomes: Mood



Employers' outcomes

	Pre-placement	Post-placement
Quality of working life	3.73	4.12
	(0.47)	(0.34)
Self-esteem	22.7	27.37
	(5.32)	(2.46)

Employers' evaluation of employees

Employability strengths

Is appropriately friendly with supervisor.

Accepts work assignments with instructions from supervisor without arguing.

Improves performance when shown how.

Works at routine jobs without resistance.

Expresses willingness to try new assignments.

Carries out assigned tasks without prompting.

Accepts correction without becoming upset.

Conforms to rules and regulations.

Pays attention to details while working.

Expresses negative feelings appropriately, such as anger, fear, sadness.

Controls temper.

Employers' evaluation of employees

Employability weaknesses	Number of employers
Items identified as potential or definite weakness	
Appears comfortable in social interactions.	3
Initiates conversations with others.	3
Arrives appropriately dressed for work.	2
Maintains workplace even if distractions occur.	2
Performs satisfactorily in tasks that require variety and change.	2
Items not rated by employers	
Works comfortably in group tasks.	6
Appears comfortable in social interactions.	7
Works comfortably in group tasks	8
Supportive of others in group tasks	6
Joins social groups when they are available	6
Offers assistance to coworkers when appropriate.	6
Is sought out frequently by coworkers.	6
Assumes assigned role in group tasks.	7

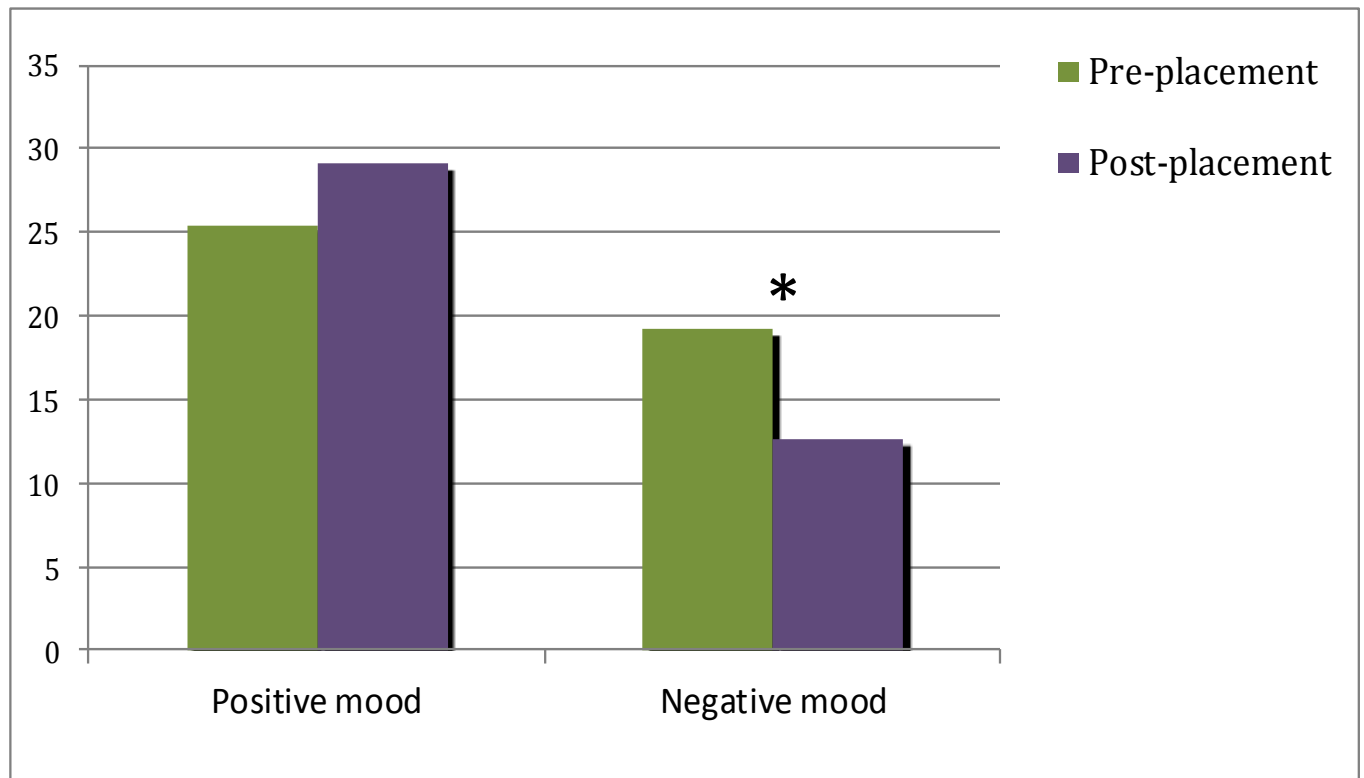
Employee's outcomes

	Strongly agree	Agree	Total
1. Participating in this work scheme has helped me gain confidence on my skills.	36%	55%	91%
2. Participating in this scheme has made me feel better about myself.	36%	55%	91%
3. Taking part in this scheme has helped my chances to find work in the future.	27%	27%	54%
4. Participating in this work placement has helped me gain skills that will help me to find a job in the future.	9%	36%	45%
5. I have enjoyed taking part in the work placement.	55%	27%	82%
6. I have made friends with colleagues from the work placement	36%	36%	72%
7. My employer has made the right adjustments for me in the work placement.	36%	45%	81%
8. I would have liked more hours of mentoring support in the work placement	9%	0%	9%
9. Having a mentor to support has made me feel more confident about doing well in the work placement.	27%	36%	63%
10. The quality of the support provided by my mentor was very good.	27%	45%	72%

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Employee's outcomes: Mood



Employee's outcomes

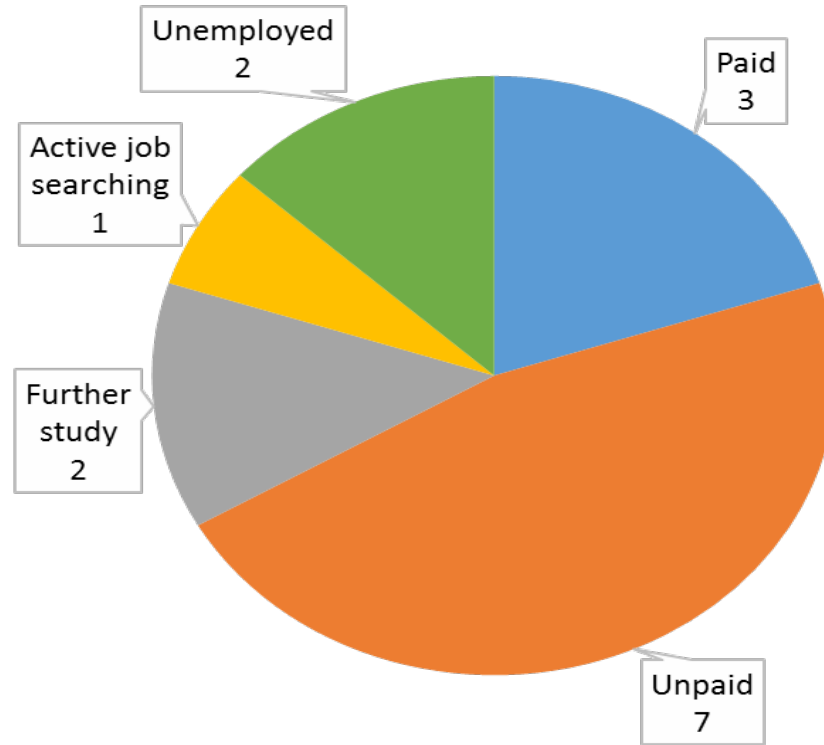
	Pre-placement	Post-placement
Quality of working life	-	3.91 (0.57)
Self-esteem*	17 (4.37)	19.45 (5.95)

Other outcomes

- *“I have learned that I can work again, that given the right circumstances I can be utterly professional and crack on and do a job. I’ve had self-doubt as to whether or not I would be able to work again so this has proven to me that I am still good enough that I can still give something back to society and I can feel worthy again [...] It was just an absolutely perfect placement for me”*

(Client aged 54 years returning to work after a mid-life diagnosis).

Retention



Outcomes summary

- Positive outcomes:
 - Providing work placements has positive effects not only for employees with ASD but also for employers
 - Person-centred training based on individual profiles help employers in making adaptations: Almost all clients (81%) felt that the employer had made the right adjustments in the work place
- Not so good:
 - Despite the increased confidence in their skills, adults with ASD do not have great confidence in finding paid employment (45%)
 - Employers: Despite positive feedback only 50% likely to employ someone with ASD in the future

What next?

- Develop a self-sustained service
 - Funding from Autism Research to pilot and entire online version of the assessment
 - Semi-automatic generation of reports
 - Full comprehensive assessment service
- Revision of tools to adapt to adults with ASD and LD
- Pilot the use of the tools in secondary education
- New branch of ACE in midlands
- Interactive website: Employment research database, job opportunities and schemes

For information about ACE please visit:

<http://www.port.ac.uk/ace/>

Or email us at:

ACE@port.ac.uk