

Guidance Note On Autism Training

1. Introduction

Throughout Scotland thousands of people on the autistic spectrum rely on the support of their families, professional staff and general employees of public and private agencies.

Autistic Spectrum Condition affects 5 out of every 1,000 adults in Scotland ranging from those who have profound learning disabilities to leading business people and academics.

There exists a large body of work and knowledge about what is autism and how to support and offer help to people who have the condition. A large number of academic courses, workplace training, basic awareness, continuous professional development award and specialist courses exist.

Scottish Autism is developing an “Approved Autism Trainer Award” but this will take a considerable time before every autism trainer is “accredited”.

The Scottish Government’s Autism Strategy Reference Group recognises there is a need to help people understand what different training opportunities offer and how people can best use these to increase their own levels of skills. This will allow us to use our scarce resources in the most efficient manner and to make sure that the people with autism get the best help and support that can be delivered in Scotland.

This Guidance Note has been developed to produce a basic framework for understanding what the various courses should offer, who they have been developed for and how to think about the quality and effectiveness of particular training.

This note recognises that autism takes many different forms and that no one approach will meet the variety of need and that a flexible approach to training will be needed.

2. Training

Training is the planned acquisition of the specific skills, knowledge and attitudes required to carry out a task more effectively by working in a creative relationship with a facilitator.

Sufficient training can only be determined by knowing what skills and knowledge need to be acquired and assessing whether this has been achieved by the training. It is not determined by the length or duration of a training event nor by any qualification achieved at the end.

For some, such as ordinary school staff, a day long awareness course will be sufficient. For others, such as Consultant Psychiatrists specialising in autism, a four year long undergraduate course will be insufficient.

3. Who Needs Training

a. Families and paid staff

Training to support people with autism needs to be able to encompass the needs of both families and paid staff of all levels of experience. The Scottish Government's National Strategy for Autism makes clear that an artificial division between families and paid staff is not helpful and that there should be much better working together.

Earlier research found that 24% of parents felt they had no training needs in relation to autism in general but 76% reported a variety of training needs.

Our understanding of Autism continues to develop and we now understand that while there is a general condition of Autism that shares a number of distinct characteristics, that these characteristics manifest themselves in unique ways in each individual.

Training to support people with Autism must start from a general approach to autism and what it means but it must be delivered in a flexible way that allows both families and paid staff to draw from a general store of knowledge and to apply in to particular individuals.

This shared approach to support people with autism means that many training opportunities in Scotland should be open to families as well as paid staff to attend.

Information and other forms of help should be made available to families to support a wider range of learning

b. Undergraduate Students

There is little evidence that this is consistently provided as part of mainstream course. The Open University autism module has drawn a lot of interest because of its open nature and availability. A number of psychology courses offer modules on autism.

c. Postgraduate & Post Qualifying

For professionals the emphasis is on provision of in-service training. In service and CPD training in autism is available for specialist registrars, nurses, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, psychiatric and paediatric services, social workers, trainee psychologists, support workers, educational psychology trainees and respite care staff.

The NTFS found that training was often developed to meet either perceived need or local demand. A wide range of training content was noted, including the triad of impairment, behaviour management, education, diagnosis and intervention, communication, challenging behaviour and communication environments.

Some change in course content and curriculums will need longer term engagement. Teaching of trainee doctors and nurses is by local colleges operating to a national curriculum set by the BMA and RCN respectively.

In other situations, the case for change has already been made. The Donaldson Review [2010] of teacher training recommended that all new teachers should be confident in their ability to address additional support needs (especially dyslexia and autistic spectrum disorders). The review suggested that it is necessary to be explicit about the core knowledge, skills and competencies that teachers could update and refresh through CPD.

Skills and Knowledge List¹

This list is intended to make sure families, staff, managers and other professionals can identify the skills and knowledge that they already have and are then able to identify appropriate training to complement their existing skills.

This list is designed to establish a basic foundation on which training, education and staff development can be built. Some people will require specialist training to further their skills to support and help people with autism who have relatively rare co-occurring conditions.

There are four sections to the list:

1. **The underpinning values and attitudes**, which should be given a high priority to meet the needs of people with autism. These do not replace values statements that already exist in any public service, but complement and work alongside them. Any help or support given to people with autism should respect their right to:
 - i. Be independent
 - ii. Be regarded and treated as individuals.
 - iii. Make choices for themselves.
 - iv. Be treated in an equal and fair way.
 - v. Be treated with respect, dignity and confidentiality.
 - vi. Access specialist support to realise potential.
 - vii. Receive compassionate and non-judgemental support, and to give it in their own roles as parents, carers, workers or volunteers.

2. **Basic awareness**—the basic knowledge and skills that all families should have access to and be required for all non-specialist staff whose day-to-day roles may bring them into contact with those who have autism. Basic autism awareness should include:
 1. The notion of autism as a spectrum, including the fact that it is a life-long condition.
 2. A brief synopsis of the theoretical models developed by Kanner and Asperger in identifying autism.
 3. Key characteristics – understanding the main differences found in people with autism (often referred to as the ‘triad of impairments’).
 4. Common sensory differences experienced by people who have autism.
 5. Common co-occurring conditions.
 6. Basic understanding of the complexity surrounding diagnosis, which includes:

¹ This list draws on work down by the National Autistic Society and Skills for Care.

- getting a formal diagnosis
 - lots of different diagnoses within the 'autistic spectrum'
 - reasons for avoiding, or barriers to, diagnosis.
7. • Prevalence of autism in the general population.
3. **The intermediate knowledge and skills level** will help families who have members with autism, staff who have frequent or intensive contact with people with autism, and those members of staff who may spend little time but have a high impact on the outcomes for people with autism. People participating at this level should have taken part in Basic Awareness training. This level is also appropriate for a proportion of workers in all generic services. This level should be incorporated into the general training of specialist staff.
1. Use appropriate communication skills when supporting a person with autism.
 2. Support families and friends and make best use of their expert knowledge of the person (where appropriate).
 3. Recognise when a person with autism is experiencing stress and anxiety and support them with this.
 4. Recognise sensory needs and differences of a person with autism and support them with this.
 5. Support the development of social interaction skills.
 6. Provide support with transitions and significant life events.
 7. Understand the issues which arise from co-occurrence of mental ill health and autism.
 8. Support people with autism to gain and maintain employment (where appropriate).
4. **Specialist development**—skills for specialist workers or workers in specialist services. People participating at this level should have taken part in Basic Awareness and Intermediate Training. This list is not exclusive.
1. Diagnosis – application and use
 2. Assessment skills
 3. Sensory profiling
 4. The effects of co-morbid conditions
 5. Strategic planning of services
 6. Care Planning and signposting for specialist services
 7. Communication tools and their use
 8. Behaviour Management

5. Effective Practice in Training

The purpose of Autism Training is to provide knowledge and skills for people to learn and understand more and to be able to adapt, modify or enhance their behaviour so that they can be more effective in helping and support people with autism.

The method of training is as important as the content of training. Again, there has been a lot of experience in how training can be delivered in the way that works best.

Effective training should be clear about what it aims to do and how it will do it. It should be responsive to the needs of the participants of any particular audience recognising their needs and learning styles. Such training should be a relationship between trainer and participants with content and method continuing to adapt to feedback, comments and evaluations.

Effective Practice will include:

1. Clear written outline, aims and objectives and learning outcomes which reflect the needs of the learners.
2. Content is clear, well presented and well written.
3. Content and aims are clarified and refined with those requiring the training before it begins.
4. Materials and media to be used:
 - a. are appropriate to the training
 - b. are appropriate in terms of terminology
 - c. are up to date
 - d. contain references to any papers or research quoted.
5. Profile of the trainer is available with details of all relevant experience and expertise, qualifications and declarations of interest. References are available if requested.
6. Trainers are suitably qualified to deliver the content of the training and are suitably experienced in autism and in any additional specific technical aspect that they will be teaching.
7. Trainers are able to reflect and address any cultural, racial and locality related issues in their training.
8. Trainers will declare any interest in any product or service that may be promoted during the course of the training.
9. Trainers agree to independent evaluation of content and delivery, and will make use of feedback in the review of their training.
10. Evaluation includes how well the training met expectations and fulfilled the brief.
11. Trainers welcome critical evaluation and peer review of training. The opportunity for learners to provide this anonymously is essential.
12. There is a complaints procedure – informal and formal.
13. Costs are transparent and agreed ahead of the start of training.
14. Trainers or commissioners ensure equipment and venue are fit for purpose.
15. Adequate insurance is in place (where appropriate).

6. Making Training Work

Training is the planned acquisition of the specific skills and knowledge required to carry out a task more effectively by working in a creative relationship with a facilitator. Training may be required to deal with an immediate problem but it should also be able deliver lasting long term change.

Evaluation should be an extended process that allows change to be seen over time. A four stage process could be used:

1. Course Evaluation systems
2. Before and After training skills assessment
3. Putting training outcomes into practice
4. Assessment impact of training on the service.

**** More here from Research Sub Group ****

7. Classifying Autism Training in Scotland

The National Training Framework developed a number of ways of looking at training in Autism in Scotland. By using a framework that classifies training we can

- Allow individuals to identify which training will help them add to their existing skills and knowledge
- Help chart a progression path for people who wish to train for particular opportunities
- Allow the identification of gaps in existing training.

The NTF suggested that training to support people with autism could come in five categories.

1. **Practical Preparation In House** - Practical preparation for working with people with autism that normally takes place in the workplace. These are the normal management steps for any service that consider how it will approach particular individuals with autism or for the organisation to be ready for general users who may just happen to have autism. It includes areas such as pamphleted information, use of books and videos, buddying and work shadowing.
2. **National and Local training events** - These are often practical in nature and focuses on the application of strategies and skills, and are very supportive in terms of practitioner confidence and 'know how'. Specific approaches may be geared to individuals with autism, but often the training need to be interpreted and individualised if they are to be successful in practice. There are often a wide range of opportunities available and people may be able to match courses to their current needs. It includes local conferences, short courses, particular therapies or communication styles.
3. **Support Worker Training** - Practitioners working in support roles are able to access a group of experiences and awards. Some of these courses are now specialist in autism while others are more generic. These often reflect that some "specialist" workers have to support people with a range of needs not all of which will be linked to autism. Support assistants and support workers often take on a variety of roles and can remain with a particular person for many years. A combination of experience and study can allow such workers to have access to further training through recognition of prior learning. This includes Professional Development Awards and SVQs.

4. **Autism training in FE and HE colleges** - Children, young people and adults on the autistic spectrum are likely to encounter a range of trained professionals. Many of these professionals need basic awareness of autism if they are to support people with autism they meet in their line of work. Some of these professional courses offer Intermediary training and specific preparation for working with individuals with autism. This is particularly important for 'pivotal' professionals, as they may lead teams working with pupils or clients or patients with ASD needs. This will include particular modules in courses, specific courses and undergraduate research and thesis options.

5. **Postgraduate and Continual Professional Development opportunities** - At this stage specialist training is far more likely than at undergraduate level. Such specialist training is associated with the volume of autism-specific work that an individual professional undertakes. For those in the field of autism there will need to be specific opportunities linked soundly to practice developments. Included within this will be eCPD modules for health care staff and postgraduate qualifications at Strathclyde.

Each of these layers of training can be seen to link to education, social work services, community and health practitioner needs as well as the needs of families.

ASD Reference Group Sub-group 2 Cross Agency Collaboration and Involvement

This table combines the way that training is delivered to people with the Skill and Knowledge levels to show what might be covered in within each area. Every training opportunity in Scotland should be able to sign up to the Underpinning Values listed in the Skills and Knowledge List. Different events will cover some of the Basic Awareness or Intermediate areas on the Skills and Knowledge list or a combination of both.

Table - Autism Training Levels

Method of training delivery	Underpinning Values	Basic Awareness	Intermediate	Specialist
Practical preparation of staff in-house	Yes	Yes		
Nationally & local arranged training initiatives	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Support workers training	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Higher and Further Education Undergraduate opportunities	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Postgraduate, CPD opportunities for training,	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Each event, course or training opportunity should be able to categorise it using the Skills and Knowledge list so that potential participants can make an informed choice about whether or not to participate in the training opportunity. Each event, course or training opportunity should also be able to demonstrate where they fit within such a structure

Gaps in Autism Training in Scotland

The National Autism Training Framework (2003) Dunlop & McKay also proposed a way of looking at training that could identify where gaps in training might arise.

Each professional group from support workers to educational psychologist to doctors should expect to be trained in order to provide an appropriate professional service.

All professionals should have had Basic Awareness Training.

Those professionals who come into contact with people with autism during the general conduct of their work should have sufficient training in order that they can provide a service for the those people.

Those professionals who have specialist contact should have specialist training in areas that are appropriate to their work.

“A template for planning training needs”

Stage of Training	Professional Role	Level		
		1 Awareness	2 Intermediary	3 Specialist
Initial or Undergraduate Training	All	X		
Professional Training	Non specialist staff with limited contact	X		
	Staff with frequent contact or staff with high impact on people		X	
	Specialist contact with people with autism			X
Continuous Professional Development	Non specialist staff with limited contact	X		
	Staff with frequent contact or staff with high impact on people		X	
	Specialist contact with people with autism			X

Dunlop & McKay suggest that the current level of training leads to professionals being trained one level below that suggested in the table. The use of this table along with the other information in this Guidance Note could be used to assess what training gaps currently exist for each professional group.