

Autism Accreditation Inclusion Award

Mainstream Health Services

Name of provision

Department/Ward

Reference number

Lead contact



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What is autism



What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong disability related to differences in how the brain works. It impacts on how people communicate and interact with the world. One in 100 people are autistic and there are around 700,000 autistic people in the UK ¹.

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people. If you are autistic, you are autistic for life; autism is not an illness or disease and cannot be 'cured'. Often people feel being autistic is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

Autism is a spectrum condition. All autistic people share certain difficulties but being autistic will affect them in different ways. Some autistic people have learning disabilities, mental health issues or other conditions, meaning people need different levels of support. With the right sort of support, all can be helped to live a more fulfilling life of their own choosing.

Autistic people and healthcare services

In 2019, the National Autistic Society were asked to carry out an **inquiry** into the experiences of autistic people in accessing public services, including mainstream health services. Over 11,000 autistic people and their families were consulted. Only 22 % of autistic people felt that their GP have a good understanding of autism and only 11 % felt this was true of hospital doctors. Understanding of nurses, health visitors and reception staff was rated as even lower.

A recent **study** showed that many autistic people with a serious or life-threatening condition do not seek medical care. Nearly 70 percent of autistic people said they had untreated mental health issues, nearly half said that they "did not attend referral to a specialist," and 34 percent said they didn't access treatment for a "potentially serious or life-threatening condition". The most common health-care barriers include difficulties communicating with health professionals, making appointments by telephone and noisy, brightly lit, busy waiting areas..

The health inequalities experienced by autistic people was brought into sharp focus when in 2020 an enquiry into the death of an autistic teenager Oliver McGowan whilst in hospital concluded that his death could have been avoided and that 'there was a general lack of understanding and acknowledgment of Oliver's autism'.

A campaign led by Oliver's parents has resulted in the Government decision to make training in autism **mandatory** for all health staff based on identified **knowledge and skills** required in supporting autistic people identified by the National Autistic Society and other organisations. This is one of the ways in which the **Government** is seeking to carry out its commitment to ensuring that the 'whole NHS will improve its understanding of the needs of people with learning disabilities and autism, and work together to improve their health and wellbeing'

1. Estimating the Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Conditions in Adults (National statistics, 2012)

About the Healthcare Services Inclusion Award

This award is intended for mainstream health services that are not specialist services for autistic people but nevertheless work closely with autistic individuals and have a responsibility to ensure that they are not disadvantaged because of their autism. This includes GPs and General Hospitals.

The award complements our Specialist Award for services which are required to provide a high level of targeted specialist support for autistic people.

The inclusion award standards support provisions in addressing the specific barriers that autistic people often experience in accessing information and services. The standards have taken into account current research into good autism practice, as well as the experiences and insights of autistic individuals.

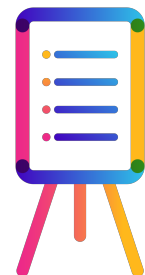
By using the standards, teams can:

- **identify what they are already doing well and where more work may be needed**
- **create an action plan to ensure staff are receiving adequate training and reasonable adjustments are in place for autistic people**
- **improve outcomes for autistic people**
- **support provisions in meeting their Equality Act duties**
- **provide evidence of good autism practice in order to achieve the National Autistic Society Inclusion Award.**

Terminology used in the framework

The terms used in this framework are consistent with the guidelines provided by the National Autistic Society on how to talk and write about autism. This guidance is based on research on the preferences of autistic people, their families and professionals, as well as the feedback and insight the National Autistic Society gets from our supporters and wider work.

[How to talk and write about autism](#)



Completing the self-audit



After registering with the programme, the next stage is for your team to complete the self-audit, which is based on our standards of good practice.

The standards are divided into four topics:

- Understanding autism
- Making our service accessible for autistic people
- Providing personalised support
- Working in partnership in the best interests of autistic people.

Each of these standards are broken down further into indicators. These are pointers to help services identify what they can do to meet the standards.

Your team can score how well they are doing in meeting each indicator using the following RAG (Red; Amber; Green) rating:

Not applicable	This aspect of practice is not relevant or practical for the provision to address. It would be expected that only a few indicators (if any) are rated as not appropriate, and a rationale can be given for why.
Not developed	Work has yet to be started in this area.
Developing	Work has started in this area but maybe only recently or with some inconsistency.
Developed	Work is taking place in this area.

Once the self-audit has been completed, an action plan can be created to address those standards where more development work is required. You can use the template in this document or your own version.

The assessment process



Before your assessment

You should contact your adviser to book a date for your assessment. Please give six months' notice to ensure a booking as your adviser may not be able to accommodate an earlier date.

A few weeks before the assessment date, you will be sent a link to a confidential survey which you can share with the autistic people you support.

Two weeks before the assessment date you will need to submit a portfolio of evidence. This will consist of:

- the completed audit and action plan
- individual case studies (maximum of three)
- working documents to support case studies.

The assessment day

On the day of the assessment, the assessor will interview the key person in your provision responsible for developing inclusive systems and processes in supporting autistic people. You can nominate up to three other staff members to be interviewed.

Where appropriate, interviews should also be conducted with autistic individuals themselves. Interviews will be conducted through a confidential video link.

Consideration will also be given to the outcome of the surveys and documentary evidence provided.

After your assessment

Within a month of your assessment, you will receive a letter confirming if you have achieved the award and identifying what you are doing well and where further developments could be made.

The letter will be followed up by a certificate and access to the Inclusion Award Quality Mark. We recommend that you request a reassessment every three years to ensure that a good standard is maintained, and your award will be recognised as reflecting current practice.

Topic one : Understanding autism

- **Our staff understand the key challenges that autistic people may experience in accessing our service.**
- **Our staff are aware of what actions they can take in their job roles to make it easier for autistic people to access our services.**
- **Our staff receive ongoing professional development to develop their knowledge and confidence in working with autistic people, including gaining insight from experts with lived experience.**

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
We have provided our staff with guidelines on what terms they should use when talking about a person's autism, so they show respect and avoid causing offence.				
Our staff know that autistic people are autistic all their lives and that autism is caused by differences in processing within people's brains.				
Our staff know characteristics that might indicate that a person is autistic but also that these characteristics can present in many ways or not at all and that each person is affected by autism differently.				
Our staff know about the challenges that autistic people might face in visiting public spaces (especially for the first time) and know that individuals may become anxious, confused, find it difficult to communicate or be overwhelmed by too much noise and activity.				
Our staff understand their role and responsibility to make reasonable adjustments for autistic people according to the <i>Equality Act</i> and the <i>Autism Act</i> .				
We have provided our staff with guidelines on what reasonable adjustments they should consider (relevant to their role and responsibility).				
We have identified one or more staff members as autism or neurodiversity champions. They could be people with knowledge, interest or personal experience of autism who are willing to support other staff in identifying and embedding good practice in working with autistic people. (This could be within our staff or across a group of provisions.) All our staff know who the autism champions are and what their role is.				
Members of our staff who work directly with autistic individuals over an extended period of time receive additional training in providing person-centred support.				
We have created a staff autism group within our provision, or across a group of provisions, to provide opportunities for staff to share ideas about how best we can work with autistic people.				

Topic one : Understanding autism

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
Our staff know who they can ask additional help and advice from in working with autistic people if they feel they need it.				
Our staff are encouraged to access additional resources to find out more about autism as and when it would be timely for them to do so.				
Staff members who are autistic, or who have a close relative who is autistic, are encouraged to share their expertise through experience in whatever way they feel comfortable, while taking care to recognise that each person's experience of autism is unique and may not apply to others.				
We include opportunities for staff to hear or read accounts from autistic people about the challenges they face within the community; for example, inviting an autistic person to speak at a staff meeting or showing everyone a video interview.				
We have identified autistic people we have worked with who are willing to be autism representatives and help us to develop our understanding of how best to support autistic people accessing the service.				
We gather feedback from autistic people and/or their families, who we have supported, and use this to improve our staff's understanding of autistic people experience of using our service.				

What key evidence shows how we meet these standards?

Topic one: Assessment

Our staff understand the key challenges that autistic people may experience in accessing our service.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade

Our staff are aware of what actions they can take in their job roles to make it easier for autistic people to access our services.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade

Topic one: Assessment

Our staff receive ongoing professional development to develop their knowledge and confidence in working with autistic people, including gaining insight from experts with lived experience.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)
Assessor comment (Max 400 words)
Assessor grade

Topic two: Making our services accessible for autistic people

- **We have taken reasonable steps to make the physical environment of our service more accessible.**
- **We provide accessible information for autistic people which helps prepare them for what is going to happen and what they can expect from us.**
- **We adapt the ways we normally do things to make it easier for autistic people to attend appointments or make use of our service.**
- **We gather and make use of feedback from autistic people to identify whether further adaptations could make our service more accessible.**

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
We always consider requests for reasonable adjustments and are willing to do things in a different way or to provide additional support when it is practical to do so.				
We provide autistic people with accessible information about what they can expect from our service.				
When visiting our service, an autistic person is able to follow directional signage to work out where they need to go which is highly visual and consistent throughout the service e.g arrows, footprint stickers, colour-coded trails etc.				
On arriving at our service, there are visual cues to help autistic people know who they can go to for help.				
We offer people visiting the service ways to immediately alert staff that they may need extra help; for example, by displaying and making available 'I am autistic' cards.				
We know that autistic people may find it difficult to cope in areas which they find busy, noisy, cluttered or where there is a lot of activity. We take steps to try to reduce sensory overload.				
We offer a quiet place for autistic people to wait or talk to us or a screened-off space where there are less distractions.				
Consideration has been given to seating arrangements to avoid autistic people having to sit in close proximity to others; for example, when waiting for an appointment.				
We offer autistic people an opportunity to have an appointment when the service is less busy.				
All our staff recognise that autistic people are likely to be feeling very anxious in visiting the service although they may mask their anxiety, or it may present as unwillingness to co-operate or communicate or rudeness.				

Topic two: Making our services accessible for autistic people

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
<p>All our staff have been trained in approaches to help calm an anxious person down, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> listen to them carefully and calmly focusing on what the person wants them to do giving processing time not telling the person to calm down not giving false reassurances which later turn out not to be true 				
<p>All our staff are trained in knowing how to adapt their communication if they know a person is autistic or if they present with having difficulties in their communication and interactions. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> slowing down and avoiding talking too much using clear language sticking to the point writing down key points and sharing them with the autistic person. 				
<p>We actively seek and use feedback from autistic people on what we can do to ensure our service is accessible to them.</p>				

What key evidence shows how we meet these standards?

We have taken reasonable steps to make the physical environment of our service more accessible.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade

We provide accessible information for autistic people which helps prepare them for what is going to happen and what they can expect from us.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade

Topic two: Assessment

We adapt the ways we normally do things to make it easier for autistic people to attend appointments or make use of our service.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade

We gather and make use of feedback from autistic people to identify whether further adaptations could make our service more accessible.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade

Topic three: Providing personalised support

- **Our staff find out the best way of working with autistic individuals and make reasonable adjustments according to what is best for them.**
- **Our staff structure the support we offer and try to ensure consistency, preparing the autistic individual for any changes.**
- **Our staff help autistic individuals to access extra support if they want and need it.**

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
Members of our staff providing direct support are aware of the reasonable adjustments they can make for autistic people and inform them about what they can offer, rather than assume that the autistic person knows what to ask for.				
Members of our staff providing direct support find out from the autistic individual (or those who represent them) how best they can work with them. In particular, they will ask them the best way of; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicating with them (eg would you like me to write notes down as I explain things and then give you a copy?) • what they can do to help them in self-organisation • how they can support them in their sensory needs (eg would you prefer we had our meetings in a quieter space?) 				
We keep an open mind about what an autistic person can or cannot do and avoid relying on stereotypes and myths; eg autistic people don't feel emotion, have a savant skill, cannot form meaningful social relationships etc.				
We do our best to avoid changes; eg last minute cancellations, change in seeing a familiar professional. Where changes cannot be avoided, we give the autistic person as much advanced warning as we can rather than just telling them at the last minute. We also reassure them about what will stay the same despite the change and what will happen next.				
We try to start and finish appointments on time and appreciate the stress we might cause if we don't. When a change of time can't be avoided, we give as much advance warning and try to be as specific as possible (avoiding figures of speech such as 'in a moment').				

Topic three: Providing personalised support

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
We structure appointments and try to keep the format the same, so they become very predictable. We explain what is going to happen at the start (eg First I will ask... then...) and if it helps, present this as a written schedule.				
When giving information, we check for understanding rather than assuming we have been understood.				
When asking questions, we make them clear and specific. We allow thinking time and consider writing the questions down for the autistic person to read before they answer. If the autistic person's answer suggests confusion, then we repeat the question or break it down into more closed questions.				
We encourage and support the autistic person to write an About Me/Hospital Passport or similar document that explains what reasonable adjustments they might need.				
We have processes in place to avoid the autistic person having to tell members of staff information they have already told one of our colleagues.				
In offering extra support and reasonable adjustments, we recognise the importance of the autistic person (or, where appropriate, those that represent them) being able to express their views, and be involved in decision making, with their informed consent and understanding.				

What key evidence shows how we meet these standards?

Topic three: Assessment

Our staff find out the best way of working with autistic individuals and make reasonable adjustments according to what is best for them.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade

Our staff structure the support we offer and try to ensure consistency, preparing the autistic individual for any changes.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade

Topic three: Assessment

Our staff help autistic individuals to access extra support if they want and need it.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade

Topic four: Working in partnership in the best interests of autistic people

- We work in partnership with other services to ensure the needs of autistic people accessing the service are addressed.
- We work in partnership with other organisations to share good practice and resources in supporting autistic people.
- We work in partnership with providers and other services to improve our work with autistic people.

Indicator	Not applicable	Not developed	Developing	Developed
We work in collaboration with other services to share resources and examples of good practice in working with autistic people.				
We work in collaboration with organisations that represent or are run by autistic people so we can share with them what we do and how we work with autistic people, and they can share their expertise and knowledge.				
We share information about an individual's autism and reasonable adjustments that they might need, with the consent of the individual, and where it would be appropriate to do so.				
We find out about and tell autistic individuals about services, charities and user-led organisations that can help them in the local area and how they can access them, making direct referrals when it would be appropriate to do so.				

What key evidence shows how we meet these standards?

Topic Four: Assessment

We work in partnership with other services to ensure the needs of autistic people accessing the service are addressed.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade

We work in partnership with other organisations to share good practice and resources in supporting autistic people.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade

We work in partnership with providers and other services to improve our work with autistic people.

Summary of how we address this standard (Max 400 words)

Assessor comment (Max 400 words)

Assessor grade



Action plan

Topic one : Understanding autism

- Our staff understand the key challenges that autistic people may experience in accessing our service.
- Our staff are aware of what actions they can take in their job roles to make it easier for autistic people to access our services.
- Our staff receive ongoing professional development to develop their knowledge and confidence in working with autistic people, including gaining insight from experts with lived experience.

Action	Completed



Action plan

Topic two: Making our services accessible for autistic people

- We have taken reasonable steps to make the physical environment of our service more accessible.
- We provide accessible information for autistic people which helps prepare them for what is going to happen and what they can expect from us.
- We adapt the ways we normally do things to make it easier for autistic people to attend appointments or make use of our service.
- We gather and make use of feedback from autistic people to identify whether further adaptations could make our service more accessible.

Action	Completed



Action Plan

Topic three: Providing personalised support

- Our staff find out the best way of working with autistic individuals and make reasonable adjustments according to what is best for them.
- Our staff structure the support we offer and try to ensure consistency, preparing the autistic individual for any changes.
- Our staff help autistic individuals to access extra support if they want and need it.

Action	Completed



Action plan

Topic four: Working in partnership in the best interests of autistic people

- We work in partnership with other services to ensure the needs of autistic people accessing the service are addressed.
- We work in partnership with other organisations to share good practice and resources in supporting autistic people.
- We work in partnership with providers and other services to improve our work with autistic people.

Action	Completed

Case study one



Brief description of the skills and challenges experienced by the autistic individual. (Do not use real name or any specific information that could personally identify them.)

What reasonable adjustments have been made? (e.g. to know what to expect, to wait, to undergo medical procedures)

What additional support has been provided? (eg to attend follow up appointments, to follow clinical advice, to manage long term physical conditions and mental health.)

What outcomes have been achieved?

Any other relevant information

Case study two



Brief description of the skills and challenges experienced by the autistic individual. (Do not use real name or any specific information that could personally identify them.)

What reasonable adjustments have been made? (e.g. to know what to expect, to wait, to undergo medical procedures)

What additional support has been provided? (eg to attend follow up appointments, to follow clinical advice, to manage long term physical conditions and mental health.)

What outcomes have been achieved?

Any other relevant information

Case study three



Brief description of the skills and challenges experienced by the autistic individual. (Do not use real name or any specific information that could personally identify them.)

What reasonable adjustments have been made? (eg to know what to expect, to wait, to undergo medical procedures.)

What additional support has been provided? (eg to attend follow up appointments, to follow clinical advice, to manage long term physical conditions and mental health.)

What outcomes have been achieved?

Any other relevant information

Summary of the assessment

Date of assessment:	
Assessor:	
Outcome:	

What the service does well:

Next steps:



About the National Autistic Society

The National Autistic Society is here to transform lives, change attitudes and create a society that works for autistic people.

We transform lives by providing support, guidance and practical advice for the 700,000 autistic adults and children in the U , as well as their three million family members and carers. Since 1962, autistic people have turned to us at key moments or challenging times in their lives, be it getting a diagnosis, going to school or finding work.

We change attitudes by improving public understanding of autism and the difficulties many autistic people face. We also work closely with businesses, local authorities and government to help them provide more autism-friendly spaces, deliver better services and improve laws.

We have come a long way but it is not good enough. There is still so much to do to increase opportunities, reduce social isolation and build a brighter future for people on the spectrum. With your help, we can make it happen.



The National Autistic Society is a charity registered in England and Wales (269425) and in Scotland (SC039427) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England (No.1205298), registered office 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.