



## **Supporting staff with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

### **What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?**

Autism is a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience and make sense of the world around them.

Some autistic individuals will have a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome however, since 2014, Asperger's has been brought under the broader definition of autism spectrum disorder. In line with this, the following information on ASD includes those with Asperger's.

### **Strengths associated with ASD**

- Attention to detail and processes
- Honest and strong principles
- Logical working style
- An ability to 'hyper-focus'
- In-depth knowledge on topics of interest
- Good problem-solving skills

### **Common challenges associated with ASD**

No two people with ASD have the same experience or have the same strengths and challenges. The most common core features of ASD include:

- Difficulty maintaining eye contact
- Difficulty reading non-verbal cues and understanding 'office politics'
- Sensory sensitivity/altered sensory perception, which can affect concentration and anxiety
- Difficulty in dealing with change
- Increased anxiety, especially in social situations

## **How can staff get assessed?**

Formal diagnostic assessments are carried out by specialist psychiatrists and a GP referral is required for this.

## **Reasonable adjustments at work**

Effective adjustments will be specific to individuals. Ask the person what they find harder to do and what has helped previously. Adjustments to be considered include:

- Adapting working hours e.g. to allow extra breaks, or to allow staff to travel at quieter times
- Locating the individual's desk in an area away from the main flow of 'traffic' in the office
- Using dividers between desks or providing noise-cancelling headphones to cut out sounds
- Providing screen filters and/or low desk lighting to reduce glare
- Avoiding use of 'hot-desking' for autistic staff
- Providing structure to the working day e.g. a regular timetable of tasks, meetings etc.
- Arranging brief, regular meetings to check progress on tasks
- Giving clear, written instructions on work tasks

## **A more extensive list of reasonable adjustments can be found at:**

[https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/adjustments\\_and\\_management\\_strategies\\_to\\_support\\_neurodiverse\\_staff.pdf](https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/adjustments_and_management_strategies_to_support_neurodiverse_staff.pdf)

## **External support:**

The National Autistic Society – <https://www.autism.org.uk>

Scottish Autism - <https://www.scottishautism.org/>

Autistic Mutual Aid Society Edinburgh (AMASE) - <http://amase.org.uk/>

Number 6 - <https://www.number6.org.uk/>