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Autism: Training and Capacity Building

Michael Potter

1 Introduction

The Autism Act 2011 provided for a Government autism strategy for Northern Ireland. Theme 1 of the strategy focusses on awareness, including an autism awareness programme for frontline staff and the promotion of opportunities for raising awareness generally.

This paper outlines the commitments and provision towards training and awareness raising among frontline staff in Northern Ireland. The paper also considers training and awareness raising in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland

It should be noted that, although the term 'autism' is used throughout the paper, this refers to a spectrum for which there is a wide range of manifestations and behaviours.

The paper does not cover training provided for people with autism or training and support for family members of people with autism. The paper also does not discuss training provision and standards, only the extent and requirement for such in the four jurisdictions.

2 Provision in Northern Ireland

Section 2 of the Autism (Northern Ireland) Act 2011¹ provides for an autism strategy for Northern Ireland. Section 3 provides for the content of such a strategy.

Content of the autism strategy

3—(1) The autism strategy must set out how the needs of persons with autism are to be addressed throughout their lives.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) the needs to be set out in the autism strategy shall include the health care, educational and social needs of persons with autism.

(3) The autism strategy must set out how the needs of families and carers of persons with autism are to be addressed.

(4) The autism strategy must set out the Department's proposals for promoting an autism awareness campaign.

(5) The Department may make regulations as regards the content of the autism strategy.

(6) No regulation may be made under this section unless a draft of the regulation has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly.

(7) Before making a regulation under this section the Department must consult the Northern Ireland departments and other such persons as the Department thinks appropriate.

The Autism Strategy was published in 2013, along with an action plan for 2013-6². The 2013-16 action plan was extended to 2017³. There are 34 cross-departmental actions in the Strategy organised under eleven themes. Theme 1 relates to the following:

1. Awareness

- 1. Deliver an autism awareness programme within government departments for frontline staff; and*
- 2. Promote opportunities to raise awareness about autism generally.*

Key Action 1(a) of the 2013-16 action plan committed to:

Promote, organise and deliver autism awareness training for all relevant frontline staff to include;

¹ Autism (Northern Ireland) Act 2011: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/27/contents>.

² Northern Ireland Executive (2014) *The Autism Strategy (2013 – 2020) and Action Plan (2013 – 2016)*, Belfast: NI Executive: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/autism-strategy-and-action-plan>.

³ AQW5791/16-21 answered 19 October 2016.

- *Relevant NICS Departmental staff; and*
- *Relevant NICS Departmental Agencies.*
- *Voluntary sector delivery partners*

Factsheets were to be made available and training delivered to frontline staff by March 2015.

The first progress report in 2015 related that most Government Departments had delivered autism awareness training to frontline staff, except⁴:

- The Department of Education had delivered on a request basis
- Staff at the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Industry had encouraged staff to avail of training
- The Department of Finance and Personnel was reviewing training provision
- Restructuring in the Department of the Environment had delayed roll-out of training

The draft 2018 progress report was not available at the time of writing.

The 'Broken Promises' report published by the National Autistic Society Northern Ireland and Autism NI in 2016 highlighted that a public awareness campaign on autism had not been implemented and recommended the following in relation to raising awareness⁵:

- fulfil the requirement under the Autism Act and secure funding to develop a public awareness campaign on autism that will promote real understanding;
- require government departments and associated agencies to instigate a programme of training in serving autistic customers and sign up for autism friendly or similar awards.

On 3 February 2020 the Assembly resolved the following⁶:

That this Assembly recognises the specific needs of pupils with autism in our schools; values and supports the role of all educators in ensuring pupils with autism have the best educational outcomes; and calls on the Minister of Education to introduce mandatory autism training for all trainee teachers, teachers and classroom assistants.

The autism strategy is currently under review⁷.

⁴ Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2015), *The Autism Strategy (2013 – 2020) and Action Plan (2013 – 2016) – Progress Report September 2015*, Belfast: DHSSPS, p.5: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/autism-strategy-2013-%E2%80%932020-action-plan-2013-%E2%80%932016-progress-report-september-2015>.

⁵ National Autistic Society Northern Ireland and Autism NI (2016), *Broken Promises*, Belfast: NAS NI and Autism NI, p.34.

⁶ NI Assembly debate 3 February 2020: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-03-02-2020.pdf>.

⁷ AQW 3078/17-22 answered 15 March 2020.

Appendix 1 shows the answers to Assembly Questions since 2016 that provide updates on training delivery on autism to Northern Ireland Government Departments.

3 Provision in Other Jurisdictions

This sections briefly summarises provision for training and capacity building in other jurisdictions.

England

The Autism Act 2009⁸ provides for:

- an autism strategy (Section 1)
- guidance issued by the Secretary of State (Section 2)
- a duty for local authorities and NHS bodies to act under the guidance (Section 3)

'Fulfilling and rewarding lives', the adult autism strategy for England, was published in 2010⁹. An updated strategy, 'Think Autism', was published in 2014¹⁰. This was subject to a 'governance refresh' in 2018¹¹ and a review of the strategy was initiated in 2019¹².

The 2010 strategy includes commitments to increase understanding of autism by¹³:

- improving autism awareness training for all frontline public service staff, in line with the needs of their job, and
- developing specialist training for staff in health and social care.

The 'Think Autism' strategy updates the 2010 strategy to incorporate changes in the delivery of services and the findings of a review of the effectiveness of the legislation. Training provision in the strategy action plan is summarised at Appendix 2.

A multi-agency Autism Programme Board was established to oversee delivery of the 2010 strategy and the 2014 updated strategy. This met until 2017.

Updated statutory guidance was issued in 2015 for local authorities and NHS staff. This states the following with regard to training provision on autism¹⁴:

⁸ Autism Act 2009: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/15/contents>.

⁹ HM Government (2010), *Fulfilling and rewarding lives*, London: HM Government: https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130104203954/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/documents/digitalasset/dh_113405.pdf.

¹⁰ HM Government (2014), *Think Autism Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives, the strategy for adults with autism in England: an update*, London: HM Government: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/299866/Autism_Strategy.pdf.

¹¹ Department of Health and Social Care (2018), *Think Autism strategy governance refresh*, London: DHSC: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696667/think-autism-strategy-governance-refresh.pdf.

¹² 'Review of the National Autism Strategy 'Think Autism': call for evidence', UK Government website, 14 March 2019: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-the-national-autism-strategy-think-autism-call-for-evidence>.

¹³ *Fulfilling and rewarding lives*, p.25.

¹⁴ Department of Health (2015), *Statutory guidance for Local Authorities and NHS organisations to support implementation of the Adult Autism Strategy*, London: DH, p.11: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-autism-strategy-statutory-guidance>.

Improving training around autism is at the heart of the autism strategy for all public service staff but particularly for those working in health and social care. This includes not only general autism awareness training, but also different levels of specialist training for staff in a range of roles, where this is needed to fulfil their responsibilities and for those who wish to develop their knowledge of autism.

The guidance then specifies the requirements of local authorities and NHS bodies in relation to such training. This is reproduced at Appendix 3.

Governance of the strategy was revised in 2017, published in the 2018 strategy governance refresh document¹⁵. This replaced the accountability arrangements for the strategy with an Executive Group to which five task and finish groups were to report, one for each of five Domains. Domain 2 is Workforce Development, led by the Department of Health and Health Education England, which has the aims:

1. Health and care staff, and staff in organisations with public facing responsibilities, who provide general support to autistic adults have appropriate knowledge of the condition;
2. Health and care staff, and staff in organisations with public facing responsibilities, who have a direct impact on, and make decisions about, the lives of autistic adults have appropriate specialist knowledge of the condition.

The UK Government remains committed to mandatory training on autism and learning difficulties for health and social care staff, trials to begin in April 2020 in health and social care settings, to report in March 2021, with a view to rolling out to all staff¹⁶.

Wales

The Autism Act 2009 extends to England and Wales¹⁷. However, the strategies detailed in the sub-section above and related actions only have effect in England.

The Welsh Government developed an Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan in 2009, which included as one of the four key priorities¹⁸:

the development of a range of awareness-raising materials which will be directed at those agencies and practitioners who work with adults as well as children with autism.

¹⁵ Department of Health and Social Care (2018), *Think Autism strategy: governance refresh 2018*, London: DHSC: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/think-autism-strategy-governance-refresh-2018>.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Parkin Robert Long; Andrew Powell; Tim Jarrett (2020), *Autism – overview of policy and services*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper 7172, p.11.

¹⁷ Section 6(1) Autism Act 2009.

¹⁸ Welsh Assembly Government (2009), *Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Strategic Action Plan*, Cardiff: WAG.

The ‘refreshed’ action plan in 2016 included awareness raising, information and training as one of three key priority areas for action¹⁹. This priority includes a commitment to²⁰:

*Develop and deliver training resources and material to raise awareness and provide support for professionals and others working with children or adults with autism.
Priority areas will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.*

The National Autism Team, hosted by the Welsh Local Government Association, is funded by the Welsh Government to deliver this commitment²¹. The Team has delivered training to a range of statutory and non-statutory organisations²² according to a National Training Framework.

The Autism (Wales) Bill was introduced as a Member’s Bill in the National Assembly for Wales on 13 July 2018²³. The Bill provided for:

- The introduction of an autism strategy
- A requirement for Welsh Government Ministers to issue guidance on the implementation of the strategy
- A requirement for Welsh Government Ministers to collect data in support of the implementation of the strategy
- A requirement for Welsh Ministers to initiate a campaign to raise awareness of ASD

Clause 2(1)(q) provided that the strategy:

make provision for the identification of key professionals and provision of appropriate (but not mandatory) training for them in relation to supporting persons with autism spectrum disorder.

The Bill was not agreed by the Assembly on 16 January 2019.

Scotland

The Scottish Strategy for Autism was published in 2011²⁴. The strategy lists ‘ten indicators for current best practice in the provision of effective Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) services’, which include²⁵:

¹⁹ Welsh Government (2016), *Refreshed Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan*, Cardiff: Welsh Government: <https://gov.wales/autism-spectrum-disorder-strategic-action-plan-2016>.

²⁰ *ASD Strategic Action Plan*, p.23.

²¹ National Autism Team web page: <https://www.wlga.wales/national-autism-team>.

²² National Autism Team Annual Report 2018/19, pp.27-43: <https://asdinfo.wales.co.uk/resource/National-Autism-Team-Annual-Report-2018-19-eng.pdf>.

²³ Autism (Wales) Bill: <https://business.senedd.wales/mglssueHistoryHome.aspx?lId=19233>.

²⁴ Scottish Government (2011), *The Scottish Strategy for Autism*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-strategy-autism/>.

²⁵ *The Scottish Strategy for Autism*, p.12.

- Access to training and development to inform staff and improve the understanding amongst professionals about ASD
- An ASD Training Plan to improve the knowledge and skills of those who work with people who have ASD, to ensure that people with ASD are properly supported by trained staff

Of the 26 recommendations of the strategy, one related to awareness training:

Recommendation 17: It is recommended that the Training Sub-Group of the main Reference Group is reconstituted and strengthened by the inclusion of an SCLD representative to undertake an audit of existing provision and to take evidence from grass roots trainers with a view to recognising strengths and gaps as well as identifying the means by which to further improve what is on offer.

An ASD Reference Group had been reconstituted for the development of the strategy and was to provide oversight for its implementation²⁶.

The 2014 Progress Report indicated training that had been initiated, consideration of a Scottish Framework for Autism Training and the development of a four tier model of autism training²⁷. A mapping project found that *knowledge of autism not in the mainstream and could be improved within the public sector*²⁸.

A 'refresh' of the strategy was published in 2018 setting out the priorities up to 2021²⁹. This includes the following commitment³⁰:

We will increase investment and build on the work done by NHS Education for Scotland (NES) on the autism training framework. We will work with NES, the Scottish Social Services Council, Health Boards, Local Authorities and Integration Authorities to analyse gaps in training across Scotland's health and social care workforce and deliver targeted training to improve the understanding of autism across the workforce.

The Autism (Scotland) Bill was introduced as a Member's Bill in the Scottish Parliament on 26 May 2010³¹. The Bill provided for:

- An autism strategy
- A requirement for Scottish Ministers to issue guidance

²⁶ Now the Autism Strategy Review Group: <https://www.gov.scot/groups/autism-strategy-review-group/>.

²⁷ Scottish Government (2014), *Scottish Strategy for Autism: Progress Report – Foundation Stage (0-2 Years)*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-strategy-autism-progress-report-foundation-stage-2-years/>.

²⁸ *Progress Report*, p.4.

²⁹ Scottish Government (2018), *The Scottish Strategy for Autism Outcomes and Priorities 2018-2021*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-strategy-autism-outcomes-priorities-2018-2021/>.

³⁰ *Outcome and Priorities*, p.12.

³¹ Autism (Scotland) Bill: <https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/17844.aspx>.

- A statutory duty for local authorities and NHS bodies to have regard for the guidance

The Bill was not agreed on 12 January 2011 and fell.

Republic of Ireland

A national review of autism services was published by the Health Service Executive in 2012³². Among the conclusions were³³:

There is a need to maintain the skill sets of staff that are currently placed to provide services at sub specialist level. At local level training is required to ensure that clinicians have the appropriate knowledge and skills which reflect best practice and fosters best outcomes for individuals with an ASD. These staff should also have access to support from sub specialist ASD teams for training, mentoring and advice.

Also³⁴:

A five year plan should allow the reconfiguration of current services, initially providing training for staff at Primary Care and to allow them to deliver services locally for individuals with ASD.

However, there were no training-specific actions under the eight broad recommendations of the report.

A second review of services was published in 2018³⁵. Among the nine key themes were that of training and awareness³⁶:

A significant concern highlighted by parents, professionals and professional bodies was the extent of the lack of ASD specific competence and ASD awareness amongst some professionals, particularly some of those working in Primary Care services.

Recommendation 6 of the report states³⁷:

This review has found that healthcare and other professionals need to improve their competencies to work with individuals with ASD. Training is necessary to address this. Additionally, training for family members should also be available.

Among the actions under this recommendation was to³⁸:

³² Health Service Executive (2012), *National Review of Autism Services: Past, Present and Way Forward*, Dublin: HSE: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/disability/autismservices.html>.

³³ *National Review*, p.56.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Health Service Executive (2018), *Report of the Review of the Irish Health Services for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Dublin: HSE: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0cc791-reports-on-the-prevalence-of-autism-in-ireland-and-a-review-of-the-s/>.

³⁶ *Review*, p.17.

³⁷ *Review*, p.23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Use multiple platforms (e.g. online, workshops) to provide training to staff working in Primary Care and similar settings to identify the behavioural indicators of ASD as early as possible. These may include General Practitioners, Public Health Nurses, Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Teachers and employers.

In December 2018, Minister for Health Simon Harris announced an 'autism plan' for 2019³⁹. In October 2019, the Minister announced an 'awareness plan'⁴⁰.

The Autism Spectrum Disorder Bill was introduced in Seanad Éireann on 10 May 2017 and passed by that House on 12 July 2017⁴¹. The Bill provided for:

- An autism spectrum disorder strategy
- Content of a strategy
- Responsibility for implementation of the strategy
- Monitoring and reporting on the strategy
- Guidance on implementation of the strategy
- Data collection
- A public awareness campaign

The Bill fell on dissolution in January 2020.

³⁹ 'Minister Harris announces first ever Autism Plan for 2019', Irish Government press release 5 December 2018: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/7acf61-minister-harris-announces-first-ever-autism-plan-for-2019/>.

⁴⁰ 'Harris announces €2m funding for autism awareness plan', *Irish Times* 14 October 2019.

⁴¹ Autism Spectrum Disorder Bill 2017: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2017/61/>.

4 Summary

Legislative proposals providing for a strategy on autism have been introduced in all five jurisdictions. These were passed in England and Northern Ireland, rejected in Wales and Scotland and fell due to dissolution for elections in the Republic of Ireland.

Strategies have been in place in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and an action plan in Wales.

The need for greater training and awareness in relation to autism has been recognised in all of the jurisdictions, particularly among front line workers, especially among health and education professionals and also for workers in key services such as employment advice and guidance. Training provision in these areas is uneven across the jurisdictions. Mandatory training for frontline workers is being trialled for health workers in England and is being considered in Northern Ireland.

There is also statutory guidance for local authorities and NHS bodies for the implementation of the strategy in England, which includes training requirements for key professionals, and a statutory duty to adhere to the guidance.

The following table summarises the provisions in the five jurisdictions.

	<i>Northern Ireland</i>	<i>England</i>	<i>Wales</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Republic of Ireland</i>
Autism Act	yes	yes	2019 Bill rejected	2010 Bill rejected	2017 Bill fell on dissolution
Autism strategy	yes	yes		yes	
Autism action plan	yes	for 2014 strategy	yes		
Mandatory training	being considered	trials 2020			
Oversight body		2010-17		yes	
Statutory guidance		yes			
Statutory duty		yes			

Appendix 1: Assembly Questions Related to Autism Training

Question	Department	Answer	Date Answered
AQW 228/16-21	DE	Autism specific training for teachers, to build the capacity of schools to effectively meet the needs of children with autism, has been delivered by the Education Authority (EA) and Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA). However, the EA and MCA have advised that they do not hold a database on teachers with accredited autism awareness training or on teachers who currently hold up-to-date autism awareness training certification.	9 Jun 26
AQW 12600/16-21	DE	<p>My Department currently has no plans to introduce mandatory autism training for teachers and classroom assistants. Since the launch of the NI Executive Autism Strategy and Action Plan, my Department has been working closely with the Education Authority (EA) and the Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) and other departments on implementation of actions. These include delivering training programmes for teachers, educational professionals, youth workers and parents and providing effective support for pupils with autism.</p> <p>The EA has advised that teachers and schools are routinely informed of training opportunities and actively encouraged to attend. If referrals for support are received the EA will review the status of training in the school and meet identified training needs as required.</p> <p>In addition, MCA provides a comprehensive range of training opportunities for those staff supporting</p>	28 Jun 16

		<p>children with autistic spectrum disorders across all schools.</p> <p>The training provided by the Centre is tailored to the needs of educational professionals and school staff. A range of sessions are specifically designed to the needs of staff in mainstream schools. In partnership with the EA, the Centre also provides tailored whole school training for schools upon request.</p>	
AQW 4979/16-21	DE	<p>The Education Authority (EA) has advised that it's Autism Advisory Service, in collaboration with the Educational Psychology Service, the Middletown Centre for Autism and the Health Trusts, provides a wide range of training and education targeted to and appropriate for all (i) school teachers; (ii) staff; and (iii) classroom assistants in all educational facilities. It is the responsibility of schools and other educational facilities to identify the training needs of their staff.</p> <p>The training, advice and support provided meets the standards required to ensure a) a comprehensive understanding of the continuum of autism conditions, b) that best practices are followed in meeting the needs of children and young people with autism in educational settings, and c) compliance with educational legislation and policy. All training is designed, directed and delivered by a team of highly qualified and experienced professionals.</p>	18 Oct 16
AQW 791/17-22	DE	<p>I recognise and value the role of all educators in ensuring that all children with special educational needs, especially autism, are supported with the opportunity to secure the best educational outcomes. Therefore, I will continue to consider how to best implement such training for both</p>	6 Feb 20

		initial teacher education and continuing professional development for all staff in this field.	
AQW 1664/17-21	DoJ	<p>Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) e-learning package is available for all staff in the Department of Justice (DoJ) to access as required.</p> <p>In 2019, the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) launched Just a Minute (JAM) card training for all staff, in particular those in front facing roles. DoJ has promoted this training throughout the Department, its Agencies and NDPB's and has achieved over 60% completion to become 'Jam friendly'.</p> <p>Some business areas have developed or delivered further autism training for frontline staff where required as detailed below:</p> <p>The Probation Board Northern Ireland (PBNI) offer autism training to their staff annually through four trained trainers who develop in-house autism awareness training.</p> <p>The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has delivered training within the Police College to student officers. Community engagement evenings are held for student officers during the training programme, with awareness sessions provided by advocacy groups. Autism awareness is also provided to Custody Officers and Detention Officers during their training.</p> <p>All Public Prosecution Service (PPS) staff have undergone NICS Centre of Applied Learning (CAL) training on autism and Prosecutors have received training from Autism NI.</p>	21 Feb 20

		<p>The Youth Justice Agency (YJA) trained all operational staff to Level 2 awareness in 2017/18. This was delivered by Autism NI.</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) have ten staff and trainers accredited to deliver autism training to new recruits as part of their induction programme. They plan to deliver further awareness training to Prisoner Escort staff in 2020.</p>	
AQO 318/17-22	DE	<p>All BEd and PGCE programmes in NI, include compulsory modules covering Inclusion and the Special Educational Needs Framework (SEN), including autism.</p> <p>Following the passing of the Assembly Motion on 3 February, I committed to consider how best to take this forward, to ensure that we have sufficient autism training for our teachers and educational workforce. My officials have commenced this work and should Initial Teacher Education (ITE) SEN modules need strengthened in the area of autism; my officials will engage with the various institutions to do so; in discussion with the Minister for the Economy, who is responsible for funding ITE.</p>	11 Mar 20

Appendix 2: Training and Awareness Commitments in the Action Plan to the Think Autism Strategy 2014

Number	Action	Target Date
11	Staff in DH to have access to training on autism and work with DH's arm's length bodies on including autism in their equality and diversity training.	End Dec 2014
14	Report on their review of bus driver disability awareness training to the Autism programme Board.	Mar 2015
21	Provide support to update the e-learning training developed under the 2010 strategy.	Mar 2015
26	Establish a Cross Government Group to consider and take forward issues to do with autism and the criminal justice system and report on progress to the Autism Programme Board, including issues such as training and awareness, screening, reasonable adjustments, and the use of IT systems to better support people with autism.	2014/15
27	Work with the College of Policing to update and add to their mental health e-learning training which includes autism for new police officers	End Oct 2014
30	Consider whether autism awareness training can be built into the work of the new Institute of Probation	End Mar 15
32	Respond to the results of NAS pilot on new training in autism for Disability Employment Advisors	May 14

Appendix 3: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and NHS Staff in England 2015 – Training Requirements

Local Authority, NHS bodies and NHS Foundation Trusts should:

- Ensure autism awareness training is included within general equality and diversity training programmes for all staff working in health and care;
- Ensure that all autism awareness training enables staff to identify potential signs of autism and understand how to make reasonable adjustments in their behaviour, communication and services for people who have a diagnosis of autism or who display these characteristics;
- Ensure that there is a comprehensive range of local autism training that meets National Institute for Health and Care Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines for those staff who are likely to have contact with adults with autism;
- Ensure those in posts whose career pathways are highly likely to include working with adults with autism (for example, personal assistants, occupational therapists, residential care workers, frontline health staff including all GPs and psychiatrists) have demonstrable knowledge and skills to:
 - Use appropriate communication skills when supporting a person with autism;
 - Support families and friends and make best use of their expert knowledge of the person;
 - Recognise when a person with autism is experiencing stress and anxiety and support them with this;
 - Recognise sensory needs and differences of a person with autism and support them with this;
 - Support the development of social interaction skills;
 - Provide support with transitions and significant life events;
 - Understand the issues which arise from co-occurrence of mental ill health and autism;
 - Support people with autism to gain and maintain employment (where appropriate);
- Ensure those in posts who have a direct impact on and make decisions about the lives of adults with autism (including, for example, psychiatrists, those conducting needs assessments) also have a demonstrable knowledge and skills in the areas listed above as well as a good understanding of:

- How autism may present across lifespan and levels of ability, and are defined and diagnosed, and the relevant pathways and screening tools;
 - The common difficulties faced by individuals on the spectrum and their families/ carers, including social and economic hardship;
 - Developmental trajectory of autism;
 - The impact of autism on personal, social, educational and occupational functioning, and interaction with the social and physical environment;
 - Current good practice guidelines (e.g. NICE Quality Standard)¹¹ and local diagnostic and care pathways;
 - Current good practice guidance with respect to an individual with autism's capacity to assess risk;
 - Available guidance for good practice in post-diagnostic support and intervention.
- Ensure that both general awareness and specialist autism training is provided on an ongoing basis and that new staff or staff whose roles change are given the opportunity to update their autism training and knowledge;
 - Recognise that women with autism may be missed and misdiagnosed as they may be better able to mask their social difficulties. There can also be a perception that autism is something that men have and this can impact on women being referred for diagnosis. Improved awareness and training should help overcome this;
 - Involve adults with autism, their families and carers and autism representative groups when commissioning or planning training. This may be in terms of inviting them to comment on or contribute to training materials, or asking them to talk to staff about autism and how it affects them, or to provide or deliver the training, for example they could help put together a multi-agency plan with regard to autism training for staff.

Good practice for local authorities, NHS bodies and NHS Foundation Trusts would be to maintain adequate staffing levels and build on the skill set of staff who are suitably trained, to ensure continuity of service.