

CHAPTER 11

FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

This chapter describes the common issues arising in Further and Higher Education, training and employment for people with ASD. Recommendations are given for the development of services in these areas.

INTRODUCTION

11.1 The information on incidence rates in primary schools indicates that there have been large increases in the numbers with ASD recently (see Chapter 4). These increases are not evident as yet in the Further and Higher Education, training and employment sectors where the numbers remain relatively low. Practitioners in the field, however, report that numbers are starting to increase and the indications are that more people with ASD will be seeking services in these areas.

11.2 A number of research studies have commented on provision and outcomes in this area. A recent research survey carried out by the National Autistic Society, "Ignored or Ineligible" (Burkin et al, 2001), highlights the position of adults with ASD. This indicates that less than 6% of adults with ASD are in full-time employment, the figure falling to 2% for those at the less able end of the Autistic Spectrum. The parents who were interviewed on this study stated that many of the serious problems appeared in the transition between school and adult life:

"But most of all this survey throws into sharp relief the lonely, lengthy and confusing battle for services which faces people with autism and Asperger syndrome, and their carers, at the transition from childhood to adulthood. The Government Policy of inclusion within the education system is raising expectations, which are

only shattered in adulthood as current provision is woefully inadequate. The crucial years of transition can make the difference between an unhappy and dependent existence in adulthood or a more independent and fulfilled life" (Burkin et al, 2001).

11.3 Until relatively recently there have been very limited Further Educational opportunities of any kind for individuals with ASD (Howlin, 1997). Group studies (Tantam, 1991) indicated that only 2 out of 46 had received Further Education and Newsom et al (1982) identified 11% receiving Further Education. A lack of knowledge combined with poor diagnosis often resulted in an inability to provide the right learning environment or support for individuals with ASD. With appropriate educational provision, progress can be made and Howlin and Goode (1998) have noted improvements between 1960 and 2000 with less institutional care and increased employment opportunities. Kuncze and Mesibov (1998) emphasize the importance of appropriately-structured educational programmes in the achievement of academic and occupational attainments. Asperger (1944) comments on the variable outcomes of his patients but gives examples of many who excelled in later life including a professor of astronomy, mathematicians, ethnologists and chemists and suggested that perhaps "only such people are capable of certain achievements. Their unswerving determination ... their narrowness and single mindedness ... can be immensely valuable and lead to outstanding achievements in their chosen areas." (translation by Frith, 1991).

11.4 The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) are committed to improving access to Higher and Further Education. At the launch of a Register of Support Workers for Students with Learning Disabilities (Jan 2001) the then Minister, Dr Seán Farren, said:

"At the recent launch of Adult Learners Week, I drew attention to the Programme for Government which states that the Executive will seek to provide high quality education for all with equal access for all. This is important for social and community development and is a major engine in our economic development to which people with learning difficulties have much to contribute.

“My Department is committed to promoting participation in learning. In Higher and Further Education, action has already been taken on a number of fronts, both legislative and non-legislative, to improve the rights of, and access by, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities”.

PREVALENCE RATES AND PROJECTIONS

11.5 DEL records information on students with disabilities which is provided by the Universities and Colleges of Further Education. This is collected by Agencies such as the Higher Education Statistics Agency and passed to the Department. Information on a small number of specific categories of disability is recorded, eg Dyslexia and Deafness, but ASD is not one of the listed disabilities. The remaining disabilities are recorded under broad disability categories.

Further Education

11.6 The Careers Officers in DEL have 70 people with ASD on their caseload, 54 from the special school sector and 16 from mainstream schools. It is estimated that about 20 of these progress to Further Education. Those from the special school sector would mainly be on Jobskills Access courses and those from mainstream schools on Jobskills, general academic, and vocational courses. The Learning Support Co-ordinators in the Colleges reported that the maximum any college had was 2 people with ASD and some colleges had none. It was thought that numbers with ASD were increasing slowly at present and future increases were anticipated.

Higher Education

11.7 Five people with ASD were identified by the Disability Officers as currently attending the 2 local Universities. They indicated that these figures represented those that had a definite diagnosis and true figures of those with ASD may be much higher. The Disability Officers also felt that improved support mechanisms, and the fact that people were successfully completing courses, would encourage others, resulting in increased participation in Higher Education.

Employment Training

11.8 Specific training for people with ASD is not available but it is estimated 20 students are trained under the Jobskills and Jobskills Access Courses provided by Training Organisations and vocational courses provided by voluntary organizations.

Employment

11.9 The Disablement Employment Advisors (DEAs) of the Training and Employment Agency have currently 6 people with ASD on their caseloads. They have also placed 5 people into employment in the last year. Numbers have increased recently and are expected to increase further.

RANGE OF PROVISION

11.10 A number of studies have emphasized the importance of the quality and range of provision if a positive outcome is to be achieved for young people moving from school to college, work and independent living (Lord and Venter, 1992, Howlin, 2000). Other studies have shown that the right provision can make a difference, helping to minimise or avoid secondary behaviour or emotional problems, and can ensure that the individual young person develops his/her existing skills to the full (Jordan, 1995, 1999).

11.11 Submissions to the Task Group by students and parents indicate a range of experiences, some negative and some positive. The parent of one student with an ASD, who achieved an NVQ Level 2 in Business Administration, stated *"She only achieved this because one special wonderful tutor took a personal interest and recognized her difficulties because he had a son with autism"*. Her experience at college had been poor as she was shunned by her peer group as being "different" and found difficulty coping with unstructured time such as lunchtimes. One of the tutors tended to shout at her and this lowered her self-esteem. Another student had mixed experiences of employment training. An initial course in computing was found to be "stressful" although they gave every consideration to his needs. The environment was too confined and too disorganized for him to feel "comfortable". He then moved to do an NVQ Level 2 in Warehousing

and has since got a job as a storeman. His experience is summed up as follows: *“they took on board what his needs were, found a suitable placement and delivered a good social skills programme. They visited his placement regularly, and developed social and work skills through group work, sport/leisure activities and outdoor pursuits”*.

11.12 A student with Asperger syndrome studying for a degree initially had problems with methods of study and examination stress but stated that *“support from student support services, course advisers and lecturers was excellent”*. Another parent commented that *“there should be resources provided for cross-cutting activities between education and training for employment”*. Lynne Moxon, an Educational Psychologist with many years’ experience of ASD, works in a Residential Further Education College for Autism in Sunderland and shared her experience with the Task Group. She made a number of suggestions regarding best practice in the organization of Further and Higher Education for people with ASD:

- ❖ there must be consistency of contact from support workers, and continuity in staffing of key workers is important;
- ❖ service provision must be individualized, taking into account knowledge of needs, wants, skills, behaviours and anxieties;
- ❖ staff must be well trained in the nature of ASD. The right to self-determination and risk-taking and the ability to achieve these aims depends on well-trained, knowledgeable and experienced staff;
- ❖ new opportunities must be made available, but from a familiar and secure environment. Changes must be introduced and planned in a systematic way;
- ❖ meaningful activities are needed to prevent regression to stereotyped, repetitive routines and other self-stimulating activities;

- ❖ to provide support to colleges, it is important to develop an experienced specialized group to plan and monitor provision, and to deliver staff awareness and training to a broad range of staff;
- ❖ a suitable environment is very important for people with ASD;
- ❖ consideration must be given to unstructured time such as breaks, lunchtimes, as this is often a difficult area;
- ❖ learning styles must be considered and accommodated.

Further Education

11.13 There are no courses designed specifically for students with ASD but in theory all courses are open to them if they fulfil the entry requirements. Many students with ASD are on the Jobskills Access courses which have been designed for those with special educational needs and which last for 3 years. (Additional funding is provided to support students). These courses concentrate on pre-vocational skills, personal development and vocational training, leading to a National Vocational Qualification at Level 1 or a National Skills Profile. Classes tend to be smaller and more student support is available. They adopt a client-centred approach focusing on individual needs. On these courses there is more stability and routine which suits those with ASD. Students stay together and are generally in the same classroom most of the time. They also build up self-supporting relationships and socialize together.

11.14 Work placements are organized, and supported by training support staff from Disability Action. Their caseload of around 70 covering all disabilities means that support has to be prioritised according to need with some people being visited once a week and others once every 6 months. One-to-one support is only available for a maximum of one day if necessary. Their role is to liaise with students and employers, provide disability awareness and deal with any problems which arise in the placement.

The support staff report that success in work placements is highly dependent on a good match between the student and the appropriate work tasks and environment. Staff and co-workers must be aware of the disability and individual needs.

11.15 The general courses in the colleges offering Jobskills, vocational and academic courses are open to those with higher functioning autism and Asperger syndrome. These courses would consist predominately of non-disabled students and be less stable in terms of changing classroom environments, and changes in staff and students. There is generally less routine with frequent changes and more need for independent decision-making and time management. Some students with ASD have been very successful on these courses, going on to obtain employment, but the lack of routine and limited support can cause problems. The Careers Service and 'Skill', the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, report that ASD students find it difficult to cope with the lack of routine and the independence that is required in college. They often displayed aggressive or disruptive behaviour which the teachers found difficulty coping with. They had problems relating to the other students and bullying and scapegoating were problems for some. Structuring free time and travelling to and from college also presented problems.

11.16 Each college has a Learning Support Co-ordinator with the responsibility to support all students with disability. DEL provides additional funding for students with a disability who have a learning difficulty. An additional support fund of £310,000 is also provided to cover the 17 colleges' support needs. One Learning Support Co-ordinator stated that the funding structure based on colleges was suitable for most disabilities, but for ASD students much more intensive one-to-one support was often necessary, involving higher costs, therefore an individual funding package would be more suitable.

11.17 In terms of support the Careers Service in DEL work with the schools and colleges on transition planning, advising on suitable courses and the support and adjustments that may be necessary. 'Skill' offers additional support to parents, students and colleges in areas such as funding, policy, adjustments and disability awareness. There are currently 25 Special Needs Careers Officers working in the

special school sector and 100 Careers Officers working in the mainstream sector. They are based in Training and Employment Agency offices throughout Northern Ireland.

Higher Education

11.18 Students with ASD who have higher functioning autism or Asperger syndrome can often be very successful in Higher Education. High intellectual ability, high ability in specific areas, obsessive interest in particular areas, a liking for routine and rules and a willingness to perform repetitive tasks could all be positive factors in academic success.

11.19 When students apply to University they are asked to state on the University Central Admissions System form if they have a disability and if they have any special needs. Each University has a Disability Officer to support students with disabilities, who would then liaise with the student and staff in the University to develop support structures and provide disability awareness. The Careers Officers and 'Skill' also offer advice during this transition period.

11.20 Numbers in Higher Education reported by the Disability Officers are 4 at primary degree level and one progressing to doctorate study. Problems presented include difficulties communicating, relating and integrating with other students, inability to travel or access facilities in the University independently, difficulty taking notes, problems with standard examination procedures, a lack of knowledge/understanding from students/lecturers and behaviour problems in University accommodation.

11.21 In terms of funding, students with ASD would receive a Disabled Students Allowance which can be used to support their academic needs related to their disability. This can be used to fund a support worker. A good example is one student at Queen's University who receives 25 hours per week support while travelling and on the campus. The support worker also takes notes at lectures as the student has co-ordination problems, takes photocopies and helps him access the library facilities. The Universities are also paid a "widening access premium" for each student who is in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance.

Training and Employment

11.22 A range of Training and Employment Programmes are provided by DEL to meet the needs of people with disabilities. These programmes are not designed specifically for people with ASD but can meet their needs in many instances.

Jobskills Access

11.23 The Jobskills Access courses as provided in Further Education Colleges are also provided by Recognized Training Organizations. Extra funding is provided to give additional support related to the individual's disability. DEL also fund Disability Action to provide support for trainees with disabilities on these courses.

Access to Work Programme

11.24 This provides assistance with Aids to Employment, eg specialized computers, desks, wheelchairs etc, travel to work, care assistance, support worker or communication support.

Job Introduction Scheme

11.25 This provides the opportunity to try a job for a period of up to 13 weeks before the individual or the employer decides it is suitable. It has been used in the past for trainees with ASD to check if the job tasks, environment and working conditions are suitable or to see if the job could be re-designed to make it more suitable.

Employment Support

11.26 This scheme provides financial support to employers to compensate for the effects of the person's disability on their productivity. A number of people with autism are employed under this scheme. In most cases it has been used to restrict the range of tasks the individual needs to cover (mainly in the inter-personal/ communication areas) and to keep work routines and environments stable.

New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP)

11.27 DEL and the Social Services Agency are jointly responsible for NDDP. Individuals accessing NDDP will be guided by a Personal Adviser towards appropriate NDDP options, including External Gateway (eg refresher and foundation skills training), Pre-employment Training and Jobskills. They will receive assistance in their jobsearch activity and once in employment can continue to receive DEA support from their Personal Advisor/Disablement Employment Advisor, if this is required. Disablement Employment Advisors are based in Training and Employment Agency offices throughout Northern Ireland.

Jobskills

11.28 Jobskills encompasses 3 distinct, but interrelated, strands of training, ie Access, Traineeships and Modern Apprenticeships (MA): Access training has been referred to earlier. Jobskills Traineeship and MA programmes are provided through Training Organisations (TOs). TOs manage, monitor and review the process of training. They draw up Individual Training Plans that meet the Key Skills required by DEL and the training objective in the Training Credit, and place and support trainees in vocationally appropriate training/employment placements.

Supported Employment

11.29 The Supported Employment Model was developed in the 1970s through the pioneering work of Gold (1980) and Bellamy (1979) in the United States. Their work demonstrated that people with significant intellectual and behavioural challenges were able to complete complex vocational tasks given the appropriate instructions and support. From this work a new model was developed where people with disabilities were placed in integrated employment settings and assisted by a job coach or support worker to do a job. A number of voluntary agencies in Northern Ireland are operating this model successfully and some people with ASD have been placed in employment through it. The Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment co-ordinates work in this area and can supply information on individual agencies.

VIEWS OF SUPPORT WORKERS

11.30 The views of the support workers on the training and employment of people with ASD emphasize the importance of the person/job match, maintaining routines and educating employers and peers on the behaviour and needs of people with ASD. Examples are given of success, such as the following: *“His work on retrieving and downloading information on computer is of an exceptionally high standard. It is very repetitive in nature and previously there have been difficulties maintaining staff in the post because of this”.*

11.31 For another employee with ASD the job had to be redesigned so that he did not have to use the phone, deal with the public or interact with other departments. His performance in an administration post is now of a high standard and very reliable. One of the remaining problems is that he does not want to take holidays.

STAFF TRAINING

11.32 As described in Chapter 2, ASD is a complex disability with wide variation in the levels of intellectual ability, communication skills, social skills and behaviour problems. People with ASD also vary in the learning styles that suit them best and in their sensitivity to stress and environmental stimuli. Where specialized training/education is required, it should be delivered in an environment where the social, communication and education needs can be accurately identified and addressed (Howlin, 1997). Given the complexity and variation in the disability all staff working with people with ASD should be well trained.

11.33 Most of the people working in the Higher and Further Education, training and employment sectors have come across very small numbers of people with ASD and have not had the opportunity to build up a lot of experience of working with them. None of the support staff, Lecturers, Careers Officers, Disability Officers or Disablement Employment Advisors are specialists in ASD but have a more general role working with all disability groups. Training regarding working with ASD is not formalized and in many cases it is minimal or limited to background literature. There are some good examples of training undertaken but this has generally been organized by individuals who

have an interest in the subject. All the training courses have been in England. Two staff from the Careers Service received training from Gerald Lombard of Independent Psychology Services in Wiltshire, and were very impressed by the standard and usefulness of the course. Their intention is to bring this training over for the rest of the Careers Service. In another case a Learning Support Co-ordinator received training by Think FE in Manchester regarding Asperger syndrome. When he returned he set up training for the staff at the college.

FUTURE TRAINING NEEDS

11.34 All practitioners who were consulted in the Further and Higher Education, training and employment sectors expressed a desire for further training and information regarding ASD. They were aware of the complexities in the area and felt that they would be more confident if they had more knowledge and experience of dealing with this group.

11.35 Some also stated that in working in such a specialized area they often felt isolated and would appreciate an opportunity to share their experiences with others working in the field or to consult "experts" for advice and guidance.

MODELS OF GOOD PRACTICE

Further Education

11.36 European Services for People with Autism (ESPA) run a specialized residential Further Education College in Sunderland for 150 people with ASD. It takes referrals from all over Britain and provides a 24-hour curriculum over 43 weeks. They have a multi-disciplinary staff including teachers, psychologists, speech therapist, consultant psychiatrist, occupational therapist and support workers. Most students attend one of the local FE colleges for part of the course where they receive support. This is given in a number of ways: they can contact staff by phone if there is a problem; help is given to develop relationships with mainstream tutors and peers; support is given to cope with unstructured time at mealtimes and breaktimes; tutors are given background support and advice when required; help is given with assignments, study skills and management of workload; a risk assessment is completed for each individual. The

tutors in the local FE Colleges have access to a consultancy team in the Residential College to discuss problems and develop solutions. At the College they pay a lot of attention to non-academic skills and feel it is important to improve and develop social and inter-personal skills. Behaviour self-management skills are taught and also independent living skills such as shopping, transport training etc. The College is funded by the Department for Education and Skills for 38 weeks, with the Department of Health funding an additional 5 weeks to cover an extended college term of 43 weeks.

Employment

11.37 Prospects Employment Consultancy based in London is run by the National Autistic Society and works only with people with ASD. They run a Supported Employment Scheme funded by the Department for Education and Skills and staffed by trained and experienced consultants working specifically with ASD. Support is provided at two levels: employment consultants work alongside the individual to enable them to carry out their role and responsibilities fully and to ensure their successful integration into the corporate culture. During the early stages of employment, guidance is given on issues such as establishing a routine and planning for changes. Equally important is the advice and support given to the individual's colleagues in the work environment - employment consultants can advise on how best to structure the applicant's workload and enable colleagues to be direct in their communications to the applicant. It has been very successful in obtaining and maintaining jobs for people with ASD.

Higher and Further Education

11.38 Prospects Employment Consultancy also run a student support service for people with ASD. Advice and information is given by employment consultants in helping to develop an understanding of the difficulties people with Asperger syndrome may face with regards to their studies. They also work on a one-to-one basis with the student and liaise with staff and peers. Help is also given in setting up support networks such as mentors and providing effective strategies to aid independent learning.

NORTH-SOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

Employment

11.39 The STAAR project (Structured Training for Adults with Autism in Roscommon), a partnership between St Michael's School and the Brothers of Charity, has successfully developed a supported employment project to develop employment opportunities for school leavers with ASD using the TEACCH approach. This has now been mainstreamed with funding from the Health Board. It would be useful for supported employment projects in Northern Ireland to have the opportunity to consider this employment scheme jointly with their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland and to establish links which could help the future development of comparable services for adults with ASD.

CHAPTER 11

**FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION,
TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT****RECOMMENDATIONS****Recommendation 11(i)**Training

All staff working with people with ASD should be well trained within a co-ordinated training framework which makes use of the expertise in the education sector and includes the key agencies and the voluntary sector.

Recommendation 11(ii)Expert Group

A Reference Group of Professionals should be established, representing the various agencies and the voluntary sector, who would advise and support on ASD issues.

Recommendation 11(iii)Multi-Disciplinary Approach

People with ASD should have access to a multi-disciplinary service to assist their post-school placement. This may include psychiatrists, social workers, speech therapists, occupational therapists and psychologists.

Recommendation 11(iv)

Late Diagnosis

Diagnostic services for young people and adults should be improved in order to reduce the number of young people and adults with ASD who do not have a diagnosis.

Recommendation 11(v)

Support Service

A support service, to include access to a residential facility where necessary, should be established, for individuals with higher functioning autism or Asperger syndrome to ensure their successful completion of Further and Higher Education.

Recommendation 11(vi)

Funding for Further Education

Individual funding packages should be provided for students with ASD to ensure that colleges can effectively provide for their education.

Recommendation 11(vii)

Statistical Information

DEL should develop a database to identify numbers in Further and Higher Education, training and employment. This information should inform the future planning of services.

Recommendation 11(viii)

Training/Employment Support

In order to build up experience and expertise of supporting people in employment, a specialist approach needs to be adopted. A number of support workers should specialize in order to build up expertise in working with people with ASD, a number sufficient to ensure that all people with ASD can have access to an appropriate level of support.

Recommendation 11(ix)

North-South Opportunities

Exchange visits, seminars, and conferences should be set up to bring people together, establish networks and generally give more support to people working in this area.

Recommendation 11(x)

Transition Planning

The Transition Planning process should be improved in order to ensure the effective involvement of all relevant professionals and parents. Apart from educational provision it should address the areas of social and life skills, behaviour, environmental needs, risk assessment and support needs. A profile of information gathered throughout their school life should follow the pupil to any new provision.

