

# RESEARCH AUTISM

## Research Report



## Factors in maintaining employment for adults with autism or Asperger Syndrome

### Introduction

This study carried out by Research Autism in October 2008 was a systematic survey of employers and employees who had previously used Prospects, a specialist employment service. The purpose of the study was to examine employment issues involving people with autism/Asperger's Syndrome (AS), with a particular focus on job retention. The study explored the experiences of both people with autism and their employers in the processes of recruitment and employment.

### Key Findings

#### Employees

- The majority of employees were satisfied with their job, found their work interesting and felt that they were treated with respect at work.
- The majority of employees receiving ongoing support from the specialist employment agency felt this to be helpful.
- A minority of employees reported 'severe' problems, whether occasional or frequent, in the work place.
- Half of employees mentioned anxiety as being problematic in the workplace, while a third highlighted depression or relationships in this context.

#### Employers

- The majority of employers expressed satisfaction with the experience of employing someone with autism/AS; identified advantages of doing so, and would recommend that others considered employing someone with autism/AS.
- The majority of employers felt that the Prospects service was helpful to them when employing someone with autism/AS.
- Two fifths of employers indicated that they felt they had gained a better understanding of autism/AS and of individuals with the condition
- A third of employers reported 'severe' problems with an employee with autism/AS in the workplace, and would be unlikely to recommend to others employing someone with autism/AS.

## Conclusion

- The majority of employers and employees were satisfied with the experience.
- The majority of employees and employers using the Prospects service in London felt that it was effective in enabling someone with autism/AS to retain paid employment.
- A significant minority of employers reported severe problems in the work place, as did a similar minority of employees.
- Further work is indicated that will examine these issues in more detail for both employers and employees.

## Background

Autism spectrum disorders, including Asperger syndrome, are neuro-developmental conditions, usually present from early childhood and persisting through life. They are manifested in difficulties in social functioning, communication and behaviour. Many adults with autism spectrum disorders experience difficulty in obtaining or retaining paid employment.

The Prospects employment service was established by the National Autistic Society (NAS) in 1994. It improves social inclusion and quality of life for people with ASD by supporting their access to paid employment, voluntary work and educational opportunities.

This study is important because it explores the experiences of both people with autism/AS and their employers in the processes of recruitment and employment.

## Current study

The current study was designed to examine two key issues not explored by previous research.

- It explored the experiences of both people with autism and their employers in the processes of recruitment and employment.
- It focused on both the employers' and employees' experiences of the support and input from the Prospects employment service in London and the South-East.

## Methods

The analysis and data in this report are based on the results of two postal questionnaires: one for employees and one for employers.

## Participants

The employees in this survey comprised 49 clients placed in employment by the Prospects employment service. They were aged 21 to 58 years, and were employed in a wide variety of working roles. More than half were employed in some form of administrative work – e.g. administrative assistant, clerical assistant. The gender of respondents was not identified in the responses. The employer cohort comprised 35 clients of Prospects, representing a wide range of employment settings which included administrative, IT, sales, finance, commerce and statutory agencies.

## Research Design

This study used two postal questionnaires which were sent to two groups involved with a single employment agency in London. The first questionnaire consisted of 24 questions and was sent to 260 employees with autism or Asperger syndrome, with a return rate of 49 (19%). The second questionnaire consisted of 11 questions and was sent to 260 employers, with a return rate of 35 (14%). Most of the questions were in multiple-choice format, although both questionnaires included some questions which allowed for written answers.

The return rates were very low and we acknowledge that this affects what we can say as a result of the study.

## Results

### Employees

- 84% of employees indicated that they were either 'satisfied' or 'mostly satisfied' with their job
- 63% of employees found their work interesting
- 75% of employees felt they were treated with respect at work
- 87% of employees receiving ongoing support from the specialist employment service felt this to be helpful
- 16% of the employees' group reported 'severe' problems, whether occasional or frequent, in the work place
- 39% of employees mentioned depression; 50% mentioned anxiety; and 34% mentioned relationships as being problematic in the workplace

Other 'unhelpful' factors reported by employees include low pay, difficult hours, harassment from colleagues and customers, too much customer contact, not being understood properly at work, poor management practice and relationships with managers; and bullying, ignorance, prejudice and discrimination at work.

### Employers

- 79% of employers felt that the Prospects service was helpful to them when employing someone with autism/AS
- More than 70% of employers expressed satisfaction with the experience of employing someone with autism/AS
- More than 50% of employers identified some specific advantages in employing a person with autism/AS
- More than 63% of employers would be likely to make a recommendation to other employers of employing someone with autism/AS
- Almost 30% of employers reported 'severe' problems, whether occasional or frequent, with an employee with autism/AS in the workplace
- 36% of employers would be unlikely to recommend others to employ someone with autism/AS.
- 44% of employers indicated that they felt they had gained a better understanding, awareness or appreciation of autism/AS and individuals with the condition, as a result of employing someone with autism/AS

# Further Information

## Full study

A full report will be published in 2009: "Experience of Prospects: a follow-up survey of employers and employees"

## Other studies

An evaluation of a number of other studies into the effectiveness of supported employment - and other interventions - can be found on the Research Autism website at [www.researchautism.net](http://www.researchautism.net)

## Organisations

Research organisations

- Research Autism, a UK charity exclusively dedicated to research into interventions in autism.

Funders

- The research was commissioned by the NAS Prospects specialist employment service

## Research Reports

'Research Reports' is an irregular series of scientific research reports into autism issues published by Research Autism. Each report is designed to explain sometimes complex scientific research findings to a non-scientific audience.

## Research Autism

We are the only UK charity exclusively dedicated to research into interventions in autism. We commission, carry out and support high quality, independent research into new and existing health, education, social and other interventions.