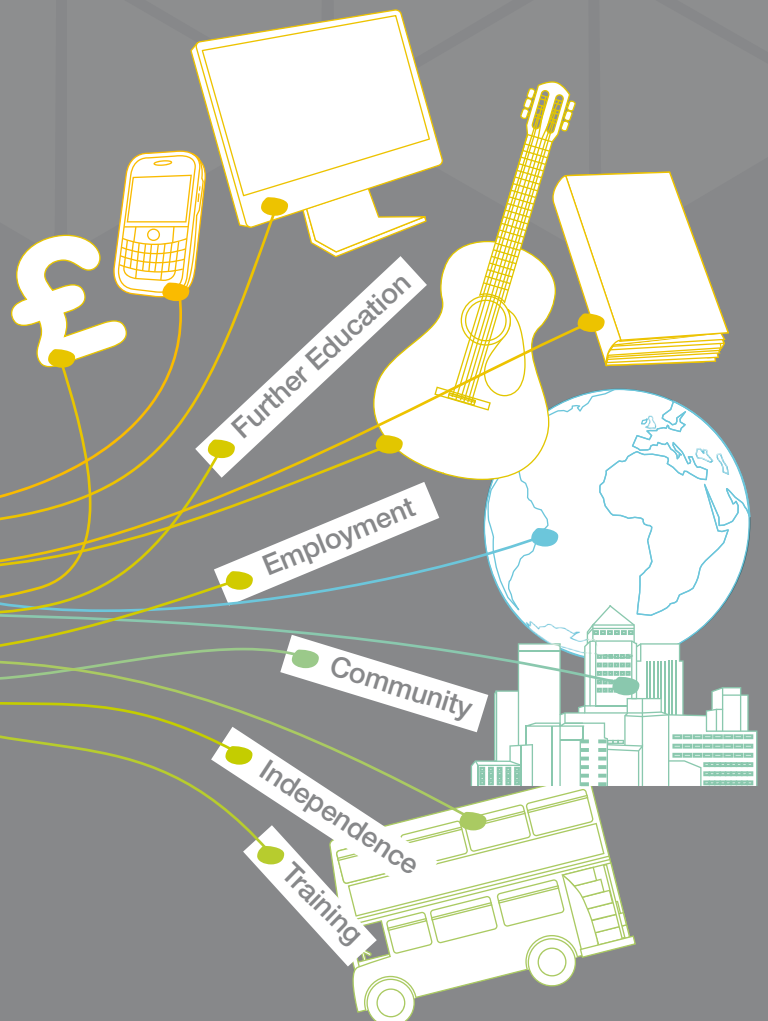


Finished
at
School

Where next for young
people with autism?



**Ambitious
about Autism**

Ambitious about Autism

Ambitious about Autism is the national charity for children and young people with autism. The charity provides services, raises awareness and understanding, and campaigns to make the ordinary possible for children and young people with autism. We exist to enable children and young people with autism to learn, thrive and achieve and through TreeHouse School we provide specialist education. Originally established in 1997 as The TreeHouse Trust, the charity was founded by a group of parents of children with autism.

www.AmbitiousAboutAutism.org.uk

Autism

Autism is a lifelong neurological condition that affects **1 in 100 children** in the UK.¹ Autism affects communication, social understanding and imagination. It can also impact on an individual's sensory experiences. Autism is a spectrum condition, which means that it affects people in different ways.

Currently around **70%** of children with autism are educated in mainstream school and the remainder in specialist provision.² Given the right support, children with autism can — and do — thrive and succeed.

Thanks

We would like to thank all of the young people, parents, professionals and policy-makers we spoke to in the development of this report. Their insights have been invaluable. We would particularly like to thank Kevin and Alison O'Brien at K&A Associates for their initial research which informed much of this report.

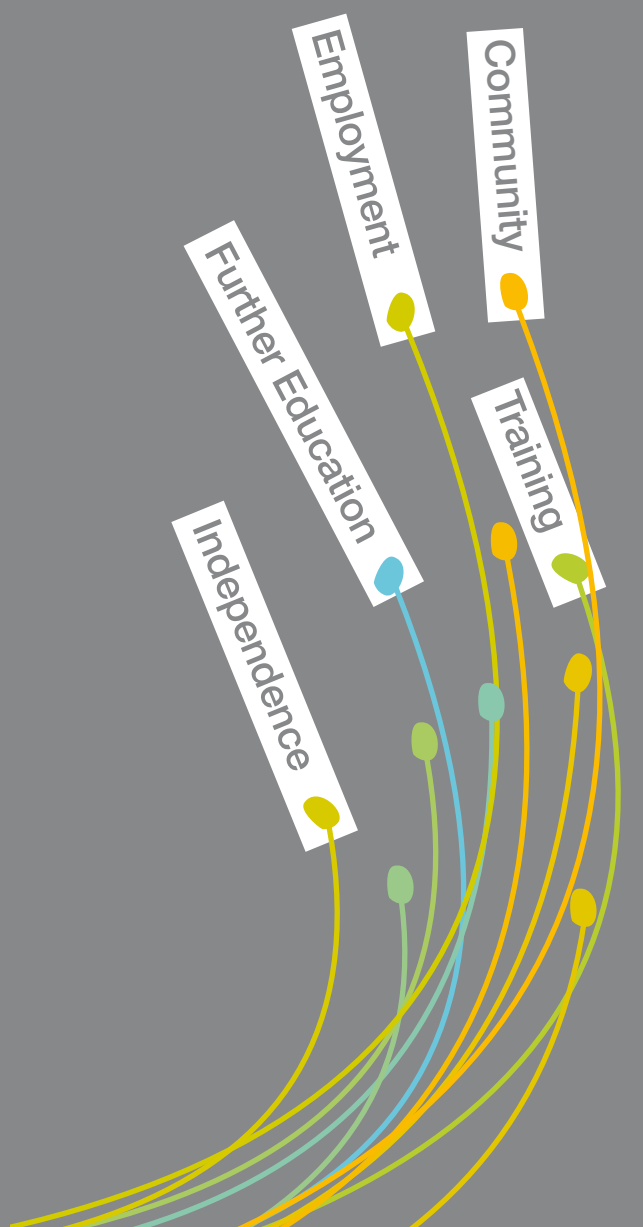
We would like to place on record our appreciation to Barnet College and the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London for their ongoing support.

Finally, we would like to thank our partners who have funded our transition work. Without them our transition services and campaigns would not be possible:

- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- The Mercers' Company
- SEIF, managed by The Social Investment Business

Glossary

There is a glossary at the back of this report explaining some words that may be unfamiliar. The words in the glossary are highlighted in **blue** the first time they appear in the report.



1. Office for National Statistics (2005), *Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain*, London: Palgrave Macmillan
2. Department for Education (2011), *Special Educational Needs in England*
3. Department for Education (2011), *Special Educational Needs in Schools*
4. Data Service (2011), *MI Reports — Regional Learning Disability/Difficulty Report*
5. Department for Education (2009), *Youth Cohort Study*
6. Knapp et al (2009), *The economic consequences of autism in the UK*

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● Key statistics:

- There are over **43,000 children** with autism in mainstream schools,³ compared with just **10,440 learners** with autism in mainstream further education.⁴
- Disabled young people are **2.5 times** more likely to be not in education employment or training (NEET) than their peers.⁵
- **85%** of adults with autism are unemployed.⁶

Foreword

by Robert Buckland MP

Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Autism

For most of us, school is just the start of our education. We go on to learn new skills and use our talents in further education, in the world of work and throughout our lives.

But for young people with autism, school is all too often the end of their education. Not because they don't want to develop their skills and achieve their ambitions, but because our education system beyond school acts as a barrier and blocks them doing this effectively. In my time as a Member of Parliament, and previously as a candidate, I've met many families who are dealing with these issues. I've always taken a personal interest and am keen to promote more 'joined-up' thinking in providing ongoing support as young people with autism move on from school.

Tens of thousands of young people with autism in this country can not find a way to access post-school education. There are a few excellent independent specialist colleges dotted about the country and some further and higher education providers that actively welcome and support learners with learning difficulties and disabilities including autism. However, for most young people with autism, their opportunities to learn finish as they leave school. Their options are typically to stay at home with their parents, or to go to a residential care home, often with people over twice their age.

We need to urgently address this gap by creating quality education options for young people with autism. This will benefit young people themselves, by supporting them to develop the skills they need to live independently, access work, contribute to society and live the lives they choose. It will also benefit their families, who often have to fight battle after battle to get support for their children — right through their adulthood. I want to see more education

providers incentivised and rewarded to provide learning that leads young people to meaningful destinations. I want young people to be able to build a flexible learning package that meets their needs. All too often, choices are driven by the needs of the system and not the needs of young people.

Just **15%** of adults with autism access work. By failing to support young people to continue learning beyond school, we create a barrier to them living more independently and gaining employment. As well as being unjust, this ends up creating large long-term costs to society.

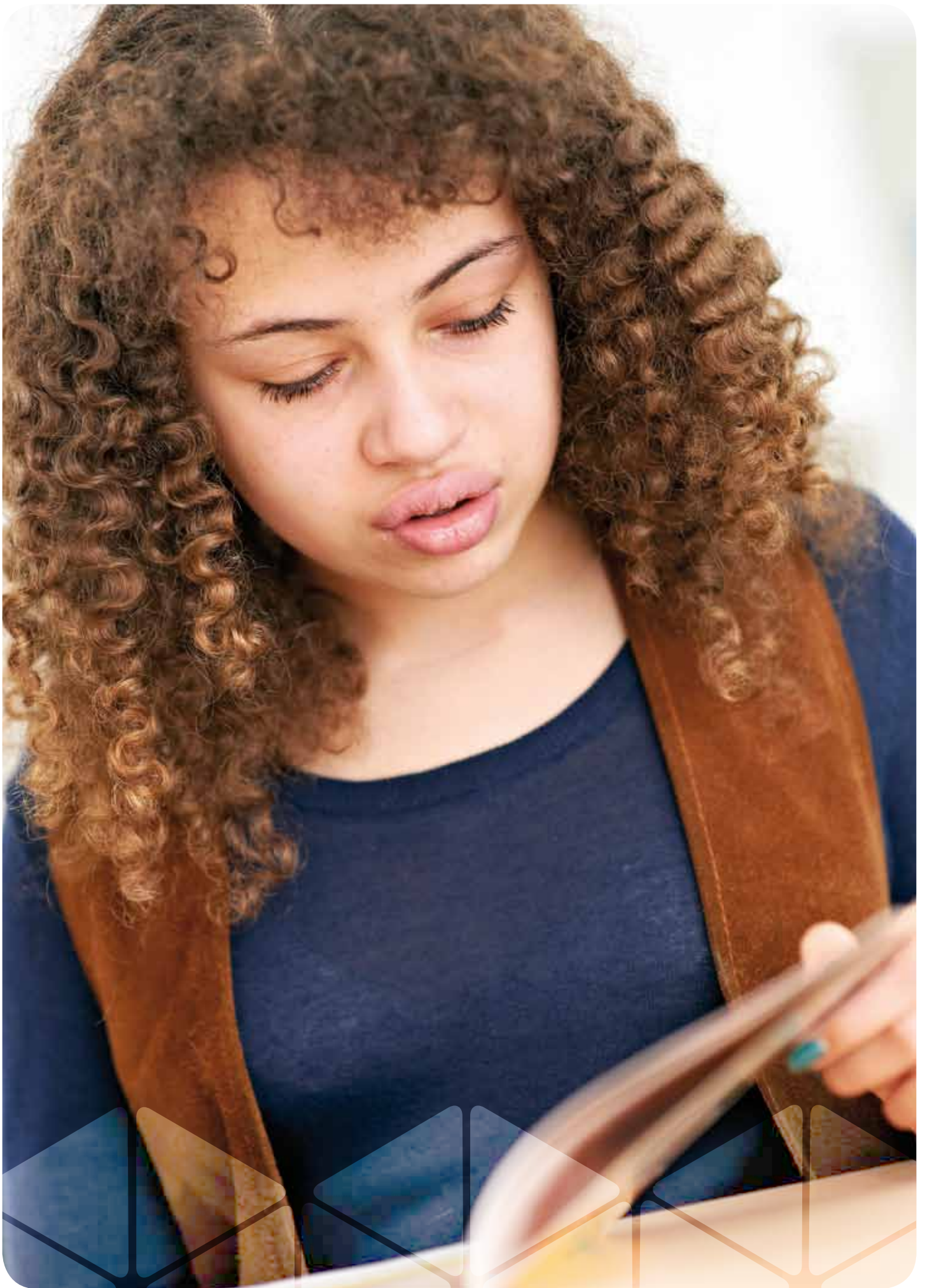
We know it can work better than this. Young people with autism can and do thrive and succeed when supported properly. But the current system is not fit for purpose. It is in everyone's interests to develop a more flexible system that encourages new and innovative models of post-school education for young people with autism — and all disabled young people.

I urge everyone to sign up to the Finished at School campaign. We will all benefit from the contribution young people with autism can make if we break down the barriers they currently face, and enable them to achieve their ambitions.



Robert Buckland MP





Executive summary

This is not another report about the problems with **transition** to adulthood for young people with **autism**. The challenges and barriers that disabled young people face as they move into adulthood are well documented.⁷ We know that too many young people and their families battle against complicated funding systems, disconnected services, a lack of information and are failed by the system.

Instead, this report focuses on what we believe to be the most critical factor in improving the transition to adulthood for young people with autism: addressing the desperate lack of effective education pathways for 16–25 year olds on the autism spectrum.

Progress has been made to improve transition planning through the **Transition Support Programme**. However, the glaring gap remains the lack of effective education services for young people to access as a result of their transition plan. In short, families often feel there is nowhere for young people with autism to go once they have finished at school.

“There aren’t enough options out there. If our daughter hadn’t gone to this college I honestly don’t know what we would have done, because nothing else was suitable — we tried everywhere.”

Parent

“Connexions gave us a big fat book with all the specialist colleges in the UK in it, but lots of them were inappropriate. They were for young people with sensory difficulties or physical disabilities. We went through it and wrote about 30 letters, but the replies we got back were very disheartening: either ‘she’s not able enough’ or ‘she’s too able’.”

Parent

“The options were non-existent. I didn’t have any choice.”

Young Person

Post-16 education options are essential to support young people with autism into work and into community living. Both of these outcomes benefit society as well as individuals and families, but are currently an aspiration rather than reality in most cases.

The picture is not entirely bleak. We know there are some examples of excellent education provision for young people with autism who are over 16, in both mainstream and specialist settings. This report draws lessons from these good practice examples to help reform and improve the whole system.

“The world beyond the school is a very scary place for Clare and for me. My worry is that when she leaves school, Clare will regress and lose the skills and confidence that she has developed over the last 10 years. She needs to move on to a place that understands her and continues to develop her.

She has got so much to learn and to offer, just like all young people. I know that Clare enjoys lots of things like art, cooking and music. And I know that if she is able to develop these interests in a safe and structured environment, she will make a place for herself in the world.

At the most basic level, I just want Clare to have a structured day with staff that understand her and are trained to meet her needs. On another level, I want what all parents strive towards — for my child to realise her true potential and lead as fulfilling a life as possible. My dream is that Clare is able to live close to her family but independently in a supported flat and match her skills to a social enterprise work placement. I’m not sure how to make it happen yet but I will.”

Parent

7. Department for Education (2011), *Support and aspiration*; National Audit Office (2009), *Supporting people with autism through adulthood*; APPGA (2009), *Transition to Adulthood*; Department of Health (2008), *Moving on well*; Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007), *Aiming High for Disabled Children*

The case for change

There are currently an estimated **66,000** young people with autism aged 16–25 in England.⁸ When we consider there are just **10,440** learners with autism accessing further education,⁹ around **3,600** places for learners in specialist colleges, and a dozen or so supported employment projects for young people with autism around the country, it becomes clear we are facing a desperate gap. Latest figures suggest that less than **1 in 4** young people with autism continue their education beyond school.

There are a number of compelling arguments to urgently address this gap:

- Young people and families describe facing a ‘black hole’ after school which creates great anxiety and stress;
- The lack of effective education options denies many young people with autism basic rights to work, achieve and live independently. **85%** of adults with autism are unemployed;¹⁰
- Huge waste in funds results as we lose the gains young people make at school, rather than translating them into success in adulthood; and
- Adult social services face increased costs due to our failure to support young people to live in their community and contribute to society. The annual cost of supporting people with autism in the UK is **£27.5 billion**.¹¹

Key conclusions

Young people with autism want and need more effective education options once they finish at school.

To deliver this, *Ambitious about Autism* calls for:

- A clear legal right to educational support up to the age of 25 for young disabled people;
- A funding system that gives young people and families more information, choice and support;
- A cross-government focus on outcomes and destinations for young disabled people; and
- A further education workforce with the skills to support young people with autism to achieve their ambitions.

In the following four chapters we set out four key areas for reform based on what families, young people and professionals say:

- **Creating effective education options for young people with autism** by creating a legal right to educational support up to the age of 25 and promoting effective local planning based on young people’s views.
- **Funding the outcomes young people and families want** by creating a system that gives them more flexibility and control to use budgets as they choose.
- **Measuring what matters** such as the quality, effectiveness and outcomes of education services, and the extent to which they support young people to reach the destinations they choose.
- **Developing the workforce** by creating career paths for specialist autism staff in post-16 education.

8. Office for National Statistics (2001), Census Report

9. Data Service (2011), *MI Reports — Regional Learning Disability/Difficulty Report*

10. Knapp et al (2007), *The Economic Consequences of Autism in the UK*

11. Knapp et al (2007), *The Economic Consequences of Autism in the UK*

The policy context

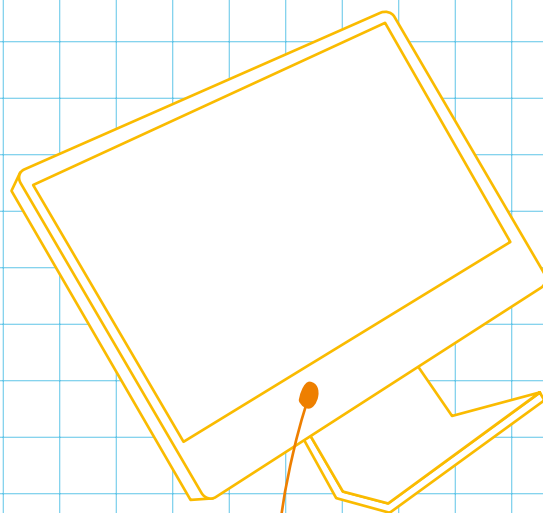
There are opportunities in the current policy environment that offer young people with autism a lifeline. The special educational needs and disability (SEND) Green Paper, **Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability** includes welcome commitments to increase **personalisation** of services and extend support for disabled young people up to the age of 25.

The **Autism Act 2009** creates helpful new duties around planning that can benefit young adults with autism. The **Equality Act 2010** is clear that all education providers must make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure disabled learners are not discriminated against. Plans to increase the age of compulsory participation in education, and increase 'choice and voice' in local services are also relevant and timely.

In producing this report, we have worked hard to find solutions that fit with the current economic environment: making better use of resources, eliminating wasteful practices and delivering long-term cost savings for the public purse.

Research methodology

We commissioned K&A Associates to carry out research with young people, parents, policy-makers and education providers to form the basis of this report. The research team spoke to learners with autism, their families, and staff working in **general further education colleges**, **independent specialist colleges**, special schools and supported employment providers. They undertook interviews and focus groups with **51** professionals from **33** organisations, including local authorities and national bodies, as well as **20** learners and **18** parents of young people with autism. Visits to services, an online survey of **196** **staff** in post-16 education and a literature review have also informed this report.



Key statistics:

Latest figures suggest that less than 1 in 4 young people with autism continue their education beyond school.

Call to action!

There is an urgent need to create more effective education options for young people with autism once they have finished at school.

To deliver this, please support our call for:

- A clear legal right to educational support up to the age of 25 for young disabled people;
- A funding system that gives young people and families more information, choice and support;
- A cross-government focus on outcomes and destinations for young disabled people; and
- A further education workforce with the skills to support young people with autism to achieve their ambitions.

Join the campaign at
www.AmbitiousAboutAutism.org.uk
where you can:

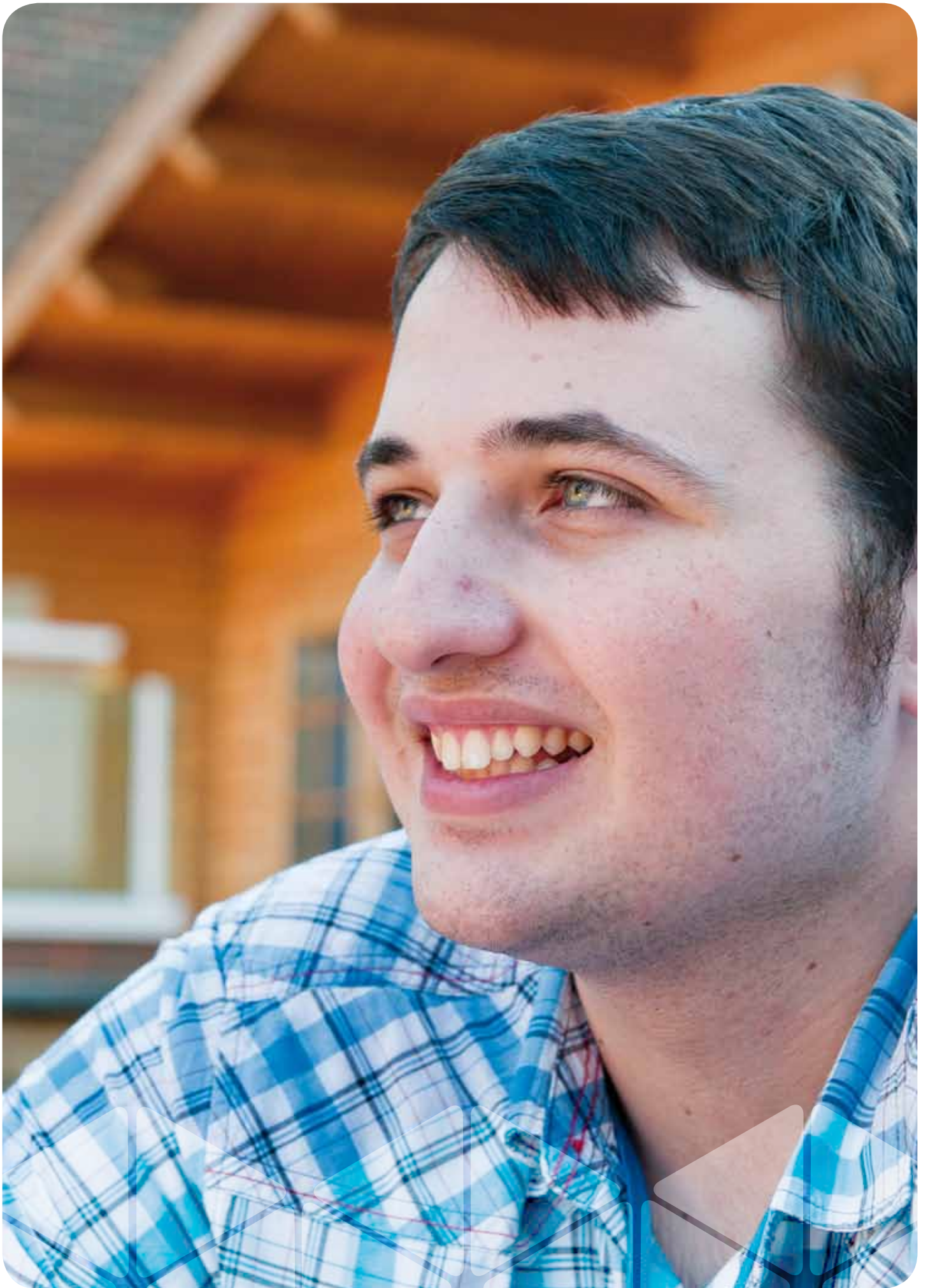
1. Sign up to the Finished at School campaign
2. Write to your MP about the campaign
3. Share your story

We want young people, families, professionals, politicians, colleges, universities, local authorities — everybody — to join our campaign.

Visit **www.AmbitiousAboutAutism.org.uk** or our Facebook page at **www.facebook.com/finishedatschool** now to sign up and find out more.



**Together
we can make
change happen**



Creating effective education options for young people with autism

This chapter:

- Describes the current lack of education provision for young people with autism and the impact on young people, families and society; and
- Sets out how we can fill this gap.



“There is very little provision out there and far too many people needing it. We have always been very focused, because you have to be. People who shout the loudest get the input. But what about those who can't do that? What happens to them?”

Parent

The current lack of provision

There is broad agreement across the many government and sector reports about the essential elements needed for a successful transition to adulthood. These include:

- Person-centred planning which starts by age 14;
- Clear information for families and young people about what is available;
- A strong voice for young people and families in local planning;
- Effective links between local services including children's, adult's, health, social care, and other teams;
- Clear strategic responsibility for transition locally and nationally;
- A skilled workforce including **key workers** to coordinate support; and
- A partnership approach between agencies, young people and families.

While progress towards this model transition service has been made in some areas, there continues to be a significant lack of effective education options for young people to transition into. Despite some good practice examples, our research found deficiencies in the quantity, quality and diversity of post-16 provision for young people with autism.

Lack of quantity

Education provision for young people with autism currently includes:

- Placements at independent specialist colleges, which are typically residential;
- **Additional learning support** in further or higher education; and
- A small number of innovative local education or employment projects, usually funded as pilot projects or by fundraised income.

The latest data available indicates that students with autism make up just **0.2%** of the general further education population.¹² When compared with the **1%** of the population who have autism, this statistic reveals a significant under-representation of young people with autism in our further education system.

While there have been notable improvements in access to further education in some areas,¹³ our evidence shows insufficient supply. The numbers suggest the majority of young people with autism are not accessing education after they leave school.¹⁴ Many parents express serious concerns that their children will not have anywhere suitable to go beyond school. Families told us that some young people end up doing courses they have no interest in, and that are of no benefit to their future, simply because there isn't an appropriate alternative.

“He’s doing it because there is nothing else for him to do. He doesn’t want to just sit at home.”

Parent

We know anecdotally that many young adults with autism are at home with their families, not accessing any learning or employment. There is also a large population of adults with autism in residential care homes. However, families we spoke to were clear that staying at home doing nothing, or going into a care home, was the result of a lack of alternative options, rather than a positive choice.

“There is very little around London for our young people, and most of them are looking for something local. The things that are available tend to be far away, and parents don’t want to have to travel that far to see their son or daughter. The recent care home scandal won’t have helped either.”

Transition Support Worker

Lack of quality

Young people told us they want support to learn the skills that will make a positive difference to their future lives. These include independence skills, social and communication skills, as well as practical vocational skills that will lead to employment. At the moment there is a very

short supply of quality education providers that deliver these outcomes.

We agree with findings in the **Wolf report** that point to the limitations of **Foundation Learning**. While the majority of practitioners interviewed as part of this research support the principles of Foundation Learning, many are unhappy with what it achieves in practice. Their concerns include the relevance of the learning and the appropriateness of accrediting aspects of it, the value for learners, the attendant costs and the excessive bureaucracy.

“There are lots of extra costs. This year there are over 50 students, all doing at least two units. They all need registering, we need all the evidence in paper copies in triplicate — it is very time consuming and expensive, and I am not sure it adds much value.”

Further Education College Tutor

Wolf refers to Foundation Learning qualifications as something ‘which fit you to do nothing but take more qualifications’.¹⁵ We found examples of accredited qualifications that included how to use a public toilet, and how to take a shower. This learning is crucial and success should be recognised. However, like Wolf, we question the value of a formal qualification for some of these skills. For many learners with autism, foundation learning courses form the bulk of their provision. We would like to see it reformed to ensure all learning is designed to meet young people’s needs, and that qualifications are designed to provide genuine additional value for learners.

¹² Data Service (2011), *MI Reports — Regional Learning Disability/Difficulty Report*

¹³ In particular in the ‘Improving Choice’ programme in the Eastern Region and ‘Action for Inclusion’ in the South East

¹⁴ McGill et al (2005), *Support for family carers of children and young people with developmental disabilities and challenging behaviour*

¹⁵ Prof. Alison Wolf (2011), *Review of Vocational Education: The Wolf Report*

Case Study

Jane attended a special school at which there was no sixth form college, so as she approached Year 11 the search for an appropriate post-16 option began. After extensive research, Jane and her parents eventually identified sixth form options at two special schools. They went through long negotiations with the local authority, and eventually managed to secure her a place in one of them.

In her final year of sixth form, the family once again began the search for Jane's next option. Yet again they undertook extensive research. A key issue was finding provision where Jane could be with people of her own age. A number of places were immediately discounted because the average age of the other residents was over 50. Ultimately the family elected for an autism specific setting, but even once the placement had been secured, agreeing funding was a battle, as Jane's father explains:

“It went down to almost the last week — the council wouldn't commit the money until they knew what would be provided and the organisation wouldn't do the assessments until the council agreed to fund. In the end, it was only decided 10 days before she was due to go.”

Lack of diversity

Young people, families and professionals spoke of a need to reflect the improvements that many schools have made in supporting children with autism — and the government's aspiration to further these improvements — in order to expand choice, quality and outcomes. Specialist support should be available in a range of settings: mainstream colleges, universities, community and work-based options, apprenticeships, and specialist units based within mainstream colleges.

“Not everyone with autism wants to end up studying and working with information technology; just because they might be good at it, it doesn't mean it is what they want to do for the rest of their lives.”

Young Person

Our research identified a specific gap around pathways to employment. Many young people with autism learn best in context and can struggle to transfer learning from one environment to another. Despite successful pilot projects,¹⁶ the system overall lacks the flexibility and incentives needed to help providers develop work-based learning programmes. As Ofsted recently stated, ‘opportunities for supported employment or other gainful and meaningful activity post 19 were variable across the country and, in some areas, were very limited’.¹⁷

The lack of supported employment and vocational options is having a devastating effect on our ability to support adults with autism into work. Only **15%** of adults with autism are currently in employment.¹⁸ Where work is available, many young people with autism need additional support to demonstrate their abilities.

“I know I can do the job, I just can't get through the interview process.”

Young Person

What can we do about it?

Create a clear legal right to educational support up to 25

The gap in special educational needs provision in schools started to be filled when clear rights to support were embedded through the Statement of special education needs introduced in the Education Act 1996. Extending this legal right up to the age of 25 through the new Education, Health and Care Plans proposed in the SEND Green Paper is the crucial driver to fill the gap in post-16 education provision. Ofsted found that only 1 in 3 people who require a learning disability assessment currently receive one.¹⁹ The legal framework must be stronger and clearer if we are to improve the situation.

Recommendation:

The Government should create a clear legal right for young disabled people to access educational support up to the age of 25, through the proposed Education, Health and Care Plans.

Develop a local offer based on young people's needs and views

To improve transparency local authorities should be required to publish information on the full range of provision available in their locality, as well as the number of young people accessing these services. This could form part of the 'local offer' set out in the SEND Green Paper and should be based on the needs and views of young people and families. Local authorities should also be required to report on outcomes for learners with autism.

Recommendation:

Local authorities should publish an annual plan for developing a diverse range of quality post-16 provision for young people with autism, based on young people's views. This should include local data on outcomes for young people with autism, and could be embedded in local authorities' planning duties arising from the Autism Strategy.²⁰

Encouraging the development of new provision

There is currently no systematic method of funding innovative post-16 education provision, even though the outcomes of flexible learning and supported employment pilots are consistently good. There is a particular gap around access to funding for capital and development costs.

Recommendation:

The government's review of post-16 funding should ensure that both capital and revenue funding will be available to create, pilot and replicate new models of post-16 education.

¹⁶. Notably Project Search and Getting a Life.

¹⁷. Ofsted (2011), *Progression post-16 for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*

¹⁸. Reid et al (2006), *Moving on Up?*

¹⁹. Ofsted (2011), *Progression post-16 for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*

²⁰. Department of Health (2010), *Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives: The Strategy for Adults with Autism in England*

Funding the outcomes young people and their families want

This chapter:

- Describes the barriers to learning caused by the current funding system and the impact of this on young people with autism; and
- Recommends a new, flexible model of funding built around young people's views and choices, supported by key workers.

"When I leave here I want to get a job. I might need help on the interviews. I probably want to live at home, but I want to decide."

Young Person

Funding streams determine what gets provided and where, and therefore have a significant effect on outcomes. Post-16 education funding is notoriously complex — particularly for learners with disabilities. We welcome plans in the SEND Green Paper to rationalise these budgets, and to put power and decisions back in the hands of young people and their families.

Complexity and lack of transparency creates frustration

Education services for young disabled people aged 16–25 are currently funded predominantly through the **Young Peoples Learning Agency (YPLA)**. However, learners over 19 who have a disability but do not have a **Learning Difficulty Assessment** are funded through the **Skills Funding Agency (SFA)**. The YPLA funding is used in two main ways: for places at Independent Specialist Colleges, or to cover Additional Learning Support costs in mainstream colleges.

There is a different funding system for young people accessing sixth form colleges in special or mainstream settings, and a number of other potential education funding sources which families often do not know about or cannot access. When the other budgets that may be needed by a young person with autism are added to this — including health, social care, housing — an unmanageably complex picture emerges.

Families told us they did not have enough information to understand these funding streams, nor were they able to find out how much they were entitled to. This makes effective planning for the future nearly impossible.

If only somebody would tell me what funding my son is entitled to, I could go away and build a package of support that would work for him, and get a plan in place. As it is, we have no idea what to do."

Parent

Funding is viewed by many parents as a battleground. There is a sense that for funders, immediate cost is often a greater concern than reducing long-term dependency. Whilst many families wanted more control over their funding, for example by accessing **personal budgets**, they were clear they would need support from a key worker to manage this. Brokerage services, which help make the link between individuals needing a service, providers of services, and commissioners, were also identified as critical to the strategic development of effective education provision.

“We’ve seen so many people, I don’t know who is doing what or even who is who. We need someone to bring this together for us.”

Parent

“I went to a meeting about personal budgets — I am still not sure I’m clear about it. They said to us, “You’ll be offered this for example and then you need to go into battle”. How many more battles have we got to go through?”

Parent

Inflexibility blocks learner progress

The current funding system has a very rigid approach to what is funded.²¹ Funding silos ‘lock’ learners into a single type of education provision, though many learners with autism would benefit from a package of support across a combination of settings. For example, learners in a further education college may benefit hugely from a day a week of intensive support from a local specialist college. This sort of personalised package is very difficult to achieve through current funding arrangements.

“Additional Learning Support rules are frustrating. I’m an expert in spreadsheets and maximising allocations — you become a bureaucratic fundraiser. I would much rather spend time improving the lives of learners.”

Additional Learning Support Manager

“We had a student on a level 3 course who began to experience major challenges associated with his autism. We knew a level 2 course would be the most appropriate programme to meet his needs, but because he had already achieved at level 2, the system would not allow us to fund another level 2 package for him. We had to devise a new programme at level 3, and provide support even though there was not a mechanism for funding it.”

Further Education Tutor

“In my experience with my son, funding doesn’t mirror patterns of need. Most support is often required in the first few months of a college placement, then the fear of the provider has been dealt with and the young person has settled into a routine so may not need as much support. But local authority budgets don’t allow this degree of flexibility.”

Parent

In spite of the evidence that ‘young people and adults who are studying at below level 2 are likely to learn best, and make the most progress, in practical, realistic contexts’,²² the funding system does not adequately promote this type of learning. In current college funding guidance, supported employment and job coaching are only available as exceptions rather than being recognised as the first and best option. This explains why the role of supported employment for young disabled people remains underdeveloped, in spite of significant attention to employability in various government strategies.

For more able learners, it can be hard to find ways to fund courses in the social and communication skills that are necessary to allow them to use their academic skills in a practical setting.

21. As identified in the *Through Inclusion to Excellence* (Learning and Skills Council, 2005) and in the review of services carried out in London (Learning and Skills Council, 2007)

22. Adult Learning Inspectorate (2006)

Case Study

Iqbal has autism, complex communication difficulties and health needs. When he left his special school at 19, his family were anxiously considering what he would do next. They looked at the local further education college, but found it was unable to meet his complex needs. They considered residential provision, but appropriate placements were hard to come by. Iqbal wanted to live locally, be part of his community and be near his family. His post-school learning needed to focus on practical life skills and be delivered in a 'real' setting, as Iqbal finds transferring learning to a different setting very difficult.

Iqbal joined a pilot project aimed at enabling disabled young people to access personalised funding for all their support needs, including education. The project created a personal budget across education, social care, health and the Independent Living Fund for Iqbal. This enabled him to become the sole tenant in his own property.

His family recruited a team of people to work with him and trained the staff to understand his communication, behaviour and health needs. Because Iqbal and his family were in control, they were able to recruit people who liked doing the same things as him. A learning programme was designed specifically for Iqbal, around what contributed to making him happy and healthy.

The model has been a tremendous success for Iqbal and his family, who are very happy with the outcomes. The personalised process has enabled Iqbal to enjoy an effective transition into adulthood. For commissioners it has been a cost-effective solution, enabling Iqbal to live in his own community close to his family while getting an education that promotes his independence and well being.

What can we do about it?

Join up post-16 education funding streams

Many learners are unable to access providers with specialist expertise because structures and funding rules create unnecessary barriers. Generally, specialist colleges can only support young people on full-time placements with them, and mainstream colleges are often restricted from offering flexible support by the rules for additional learning support. There is currently no mechanism for using different funding streams in combination to create more personalised programmes. This conflicts with the flexible packages of support young people with autism often want and need.

The complicated system of different funding streams makes it almost impossible for young people and families to find out what they are entitled to and plan ahead. Bringing together the relevant funding streams would allow us to offer what young people need and want, rather than letting the system dictate options.

Recommendation:

The government should bring together post-16 funding for 'high cost' learners, and give all approved education providers equal status so they can offer education to a broader range of learners.

Develop and support personal budgets

Personal budgets, when well-supported by key workers, can give young disabled people and their families more choice and control, and create positive outcomes.²³

There are legitimate concerns that personalisation could be used as a means to reduce budgets, leaving young people with insufficient funds to meet their needs. This risk needs careful monitoring, as inadequate budgets could lead to breakdown in placements. However, a well-planned personalised process can improve quality of life as well as being highly

cost effective. Young people could choose a local college, a specialist college, a supported employment agency or a combination. This would allow learners to create a flexible package that is personal to them.

Young people and families will need support to get the information they need and manage their personal budget. We must ensure they have access to an accredited key worker with responsibility for providing independent guidance and support. They must also continue to have the right to choose not to have a personal budget.

Recommendation:

A right to choose a personal budget, supported by an accredited key worker, should be an option for all young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan aged 16 and over.

Manage the move to local funding

The government's stated aim is to move funding for high cost learners with a learning difficulty assessment from national to local government control. There are advantages and disadvantages to both national and local funding approaches.

On balance the need to have funding of all provision located in one area, with clear local accountability, is the priority if we are to create more integrated, flexible and personalised solutions. We support a carefully managed move to local authorities holding budgets for this provision, as long as certain critical conditions are met.

There are risks that if funding for post-16 learners with disabilities is not ring-fenced it may not reach the young people it is intended to support, particularly in times of significant reductions in local authority budgets. Furthermore, local authorities may have the same conflict of interest identified in the SEND Green Paper around school-age provision, as they would be responsible for assessing needs as well as funding provision. Lastly, in many local areas

there is a lack of experience of commissioning and funding education beyond school for young disabled people.

Clear rights to educational support for young disabled people, protected and transparent budgets, and strategic commissioning of services supported by effective brokerage, are all vital if we are to avoid chaos and wasting funds.

Recommendation:

The move of YPLA funding from national to local level for young disabled people must be underpinned by:

- A legal right to educational support up to age 25 for learners with an Education Health and Care plan;
- Strong personalisation arrangements in place locally which have been positively evaluated by young disabled people; and
- Impact assessments from the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills which report on the effect of the transfer.

²³ See *Putting People First* (Department of Health, 2007) and *Think Local, Act Personal* (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2011)

Measuring what matters

This chapter:

- Describes what we currently measure in post-16 education and the impact of this on young people with autism; and
- Recommends the development of new measures looking at outcomes and destinations such as employment or independent living.

As in Peter Drucker's famous quote, 'what gets measured gets managed'.²⁴ Our research illustrates that current measures are not only preventing us from gaining a clear picture of the impact of post-16 education, they often get in the way of providing the right support.

What do we currently measure, and does it work?

The purpose of transition for young people with autism and their families is simple: improved life chances, gaining independence and finding work. These are difficult things to measure directly and so proxy measures have traditionally been used. In the further education system, these are usually measures of attainment in the form of formal qualifications.

This has created a system in which the key driver in colleges is the achievement of **accreditation**, regardless of whether this helps young people achieve the outcomes they need. As identified in the Wolf review, this drive towards accreditation without regard to outcomes can prevent young people with autism accessing the flexible, contextual learning they need in order to secure work or achieve their other ambitions.

The main data on attainment gathered in the further education system is known as the **Individual Learner Record (ILR)**. The ILR does not measure non-accredited learning, such as job coaching or specific job skills, despite the fact these have been proven to be effective for young disabled learners. The main data collection process is therefore severely limited and in need of reform to ensure that it incentivises colleges to focus on positive outcomes and destinations for learners.

"The college is under pressure to show results in black and white: they've passed this or that course. I would like to see more on all the other bits which go around being a learner with autism, all the social and independence skills they have learnt, without which they can't use the qualification they've got."

Specialist College Manager

Lack of outcome data

The data currently recorded does not allow us to see how effective provision is: it does not capture outcomes for learners. Ofsted reported that, **‘Across all the providers visited, information other than anecdotal accounts about the success and destinations of previous students was limited. In all phases, the lack of such information made it difficult to evaluate what the provider had contributed to ensuring the longer-term success in education, as well as in employment and training, of young people after the age of 16’**²⁵

The current system focuses on accreditation rather than outcomes and purpose. In practice providers often, and understandably, prioritise meeting immediate targets to gain funding, at the expense of longer-term and more meaningful outcomes. Attainment is too often seen as the key indicator of success. The data general further education colleges typically report are:

- **Retention figures:** of those who register on a course, how many are retained until the end; and
- **Success rates:** how many of those who register on a course successfully attain a qualification.

There has been some attempt to acknowledge the need to be more destination focused, and in the ILR for 2010–11 providers of foundation learning are required to record learners’ initial intended destination. The intention is good, but while the overall focus remains on purely measuring accreditation, this will not provide an adequate solution.

24. Druckers, P. (1992), *Managing for the future*

25. Ofsted (2010), *The special educational needs and disability review*

Case Study

Peter is a young man with autism who is academically very able. His key challenges are around social, communication and independence skills. Peter is working hard to gain a level 3 qualification in media production from a further education college, but has now hit a stumbling block.

As his tutor explains, “He hasn’t yet got the independence skills he needs to go for an interview and sell his technical skills, or to get the bus there and back. He will come out with a merit or possibly even a distinction, but if he leaves this year, there is nowhere for him to go that will use his skills. The only support he gets to do any work on his independence is from us, but we can’t find a way to fund a level 2 course for him.”

Although his tutor is aware of Peter’s priorities for learning, the college cannot easily offer him a learning programme to teach him just the additional independence skills he needs.

What can we do about it?

Develop destination measures

Ofsted should work with education providers to review the data collected and create measures which relate more closely to outcomes. In particular, destination data should be revised to include options such as progression to employment and independent living, and more detailed use of learner satisfaction surveys for providers and local authorities.

Recommendation:

Ofsted and the Department for Education should reform data collection about the effectiveness of post-16 provision to focus on outcomes, destinations and satisfaction rather than purely on accreditation. This should be used to create an annual report about what works for young disabled people to help improve overall standards.

Extend current successful data collection systems

To reflect the 0–25 approach set out in the SEND Green Paper, the government should create a more integrated process of collecting data on education up to the age of 25. The data collected under the SEN Information Act 2008 should be amended to cover the achievements and outcomes of disabled young people in education beyond school.

Recommendation:

The Department for Education and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills should amend the scope of the data published under the SEN Information Act 2008 to include progress and outcomes for young disabled people in further education.

Report on post-16 education outcomes through the Autism Strategy

The education needs of young people with autism could be better addressed through an amendment to the Autism Strategy.²⁶ The recent evaluation of progress on the strategy outlines seven quality outcomes, one of which is ‘adults with autism are included and economically active’.²⁷ The achievement of this objective is in large part bound to the opportunities for education and training that an individual receives, and yet education is not sufficiently recognised in the outcomes framework.

This may be in part because the Autism Act 2009 only places legal duties on local authorities in relation to their social services function, not their education function. If local authorities are to take on responsibility for commissioning post-16 education for young people with autism, then the measures and outcomes associated with this could be included in the evaluation of success measures relating to the Autism Strategy.

Recommendation:

The Autism Strategy should be updated to include measures and outcomes associated with post-16 education. Local authorities should be required to report on the effectiveness of provision by monitoring outcomes for learners.

²⁶ Department of Health (2010), *Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives: The Strategy for Adults with Autism in England*

²⁷ Department of Health (2011), *Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives: Evaluating Progress*



Developing the workforce

This chapter:

- Describes the capacity of the current post-16 workforce and the impact of this on young people with autism; and
- Recommends the development of career paths for specialist autism tutors in post-16 education and skills sharing across settings.

The quality of learners' experiences is above all determined by the skills of the staff supporting them. If we want to improve outcomes, we must create a capable, confident and well trained workforce. Young people and families tell us that staff with a deep understanding of autism and a willingness to listen make a powerful difference to their educational success.

Lack of autism specific training

Professionals working with young people with autism in post-16 settings were surveyed to gather information for this report. Their responses showed that staff felt there was a significant lack of accessible autism specific training:

- **87%** did not have a qualification related to supporting learners with autism;
- Almost half (**47%**) described the training they had done as simply 'awareness raising'; and
- **63%** said the training they received in autism was a day or less per year.

"My training was several years ago and focused on identification of autistic spectrum conditions rather than strategies to support students."

Professional

Where staff did have an autism-specific qualification they were typically at degree or post graduate level. We found very little training available for learning support assistants and teachers. This reflects Ofsted's finding that there is a particular lack of staff qualified to work with learners on the autism spectrum.²⁸

"For learning support assistants there is nothing that offers a recognised qualification unless they do a level 5 diploma. There's nothing at level 2 or 3 to develop their skills or show they know what they're doing. It's either awareness training or a full degree."

Learning Support Assistant Manager

"My training was limited... We just had an hour with a lady who has a child with autism. I would like in-depth knowledge to equip us better to support learners with autism'.

Further Education Tutor

Learning support staff felt they were not always valued and supported to maximise their impact. They reported difficulties in accessing training. Given that students spend much of their time with learning support staff, investment in their skills, knowledge and understanding is crucial to delivering high quality learning.

The impact on young people with autism

This gap in skills and training is of particular concern when we consider the huge impact young people say staff have on their learning, confidence and ability to succeed.

**“I couldn’t imagine I could do all this...
He [the learning support assistant] has
really helped my confidence a lot and
my independence skills.”**

Young Person

For parents too, finding staff they can trust, who understand autism, is a huge relief. As one mum put it, **‘For the first time in my life I was talking to someone who knew more about autism than I did’.**

“We made a lot of decisions based on the staff we met in the places we looked at — if we felt they made a connection with us and with Amanda. They knew what they were talking about and we felt we could trust them to keep her safe and happy.”

Parent

“We chose the college because we knew they had a specialist autism team and it’s been better than I dared hope. Every week he has an hour with his tutor — he can talk about whatever he wants. She helps him to prioritise his work, they cover managing deadlines, study skills and things like friendships. It’s been fantastic. He’s doing really well on his course and socially.”

Parent

28. Ofsted (2006)

What can we do about it?

Develop autism specific career paths

Young people, families and professionals agree that the best outcomes are delivered when all staff working with a pupil have a good understanding of autism and, more importantly, the implications of autism for learning and for life. Staff working at all levels identified the need for more in-depth training, to include the opportunity to gain recognition at levels 2 and 3 as well as the higher levels.

Recommendation:

The Department for Education should ensure the Learning and Skills Improvement Service develop a range of specialist qualifications and training activities at all levels for staff working in post-16 education. These could be adapted from existing materials such as those being developed by the Autism Education Trust.

Sharing knowledge and skills across sectors

Professionals explained that the key to providing effective learning in a further education college is to support mainstream tutors to deliver learning in a more inclusive and accessible way. We found several good practice examples of autism support staff making a huge difference to learners on the spectrum in further education colleges, by working in partnership with the subject tutors.

One tutor explained how the support staff helped him rewrite assignment questions, phrasing them so as to make the expectations more explicit. The tutor recognised that this approach not only supported learners with additional needs, but actually improved learning for all his students. He has subsequently adopted this approach to preparing all his assignments.

Recommendation:

All further education colleges should have access to an autism specialist to support learners with autism to access their courses, and to support mainstream tutors to deliver accessible teaching.

Case Study

Christopher used to travel to and from college by taxi. He struggled to enter the building and found the refectory so over stimulating in sensory terms that he had to have a private room to eat his lunch in. Now he eats in the dining room as part of a group, can travel in and out of college independently and is working on learning the bus route to a nearby city to visit a friend.

These achievements are the result of intensive one-to-one work with his learning support assistant. For example, when Christopher started to work on catching the bus, he and his learning support assistant spent the first few sessions simply sitting at a bus stop and watching buses go by. Together they worked out what it was about buses he found challenging and then systematically identified strategies and routines to address each of these challenges. This included how to find a seat, how to buy a ticket and how to remain calm by listening to his music. Christopher progressed from watching buses to going on bus journeys with support to ultimately being able to travel fully independently.





Conclusion:

Where next for young people with autism?

Our research confirms that we are facing a crisis in the lack of education opportunities for young people with autism. Without swift and radical action, the potential of thousands of young people with autism will simply be wasted when they are finished at school.

We are ambitious about what young people with autism can achieve. We call for immediate action to prevent a generation of young people being finished at school.

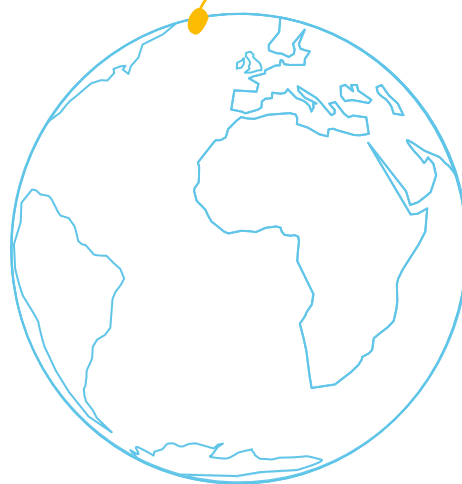
There is an urgent need to create more effective education options for young people with autism once they have finished at school.

To deliver this, we call for:

- A clear legal right to educational support up to the age of 25 for young disabled people;
- A funding system that gives young people and families more information, choice and support;
- A cross-government focus on outcomes and destinations for young disabled people; and
- A further education workforce with the skills to support young people with autism to achieve their ambitions.

We believe that if the changes we recommend are adopted, we can improve the life chances of many young people with autism, and live up to the expectation of a young man with autism, who is hoping that **‘things will get better and I will have more opportunity.’**

As our examples demonstrate, improving education for young people with autism will reduce long-term costs to the public purse, enrich our society, and most importantly give young people with autism the equal chance they deserve to thrive.



“I’ve gained confidence — reached out for a bit of myself, and because of the support to learn, I’ve been able to be me.”

Young Person

“The support has been great, and now I can do more for myself — so the support is narrowing all the time.”

Young Person



Glossary

Accreditation

A measure of attainment, usually in the form of a formal qualification.

Additional Learning Support (ALS)

A funding stream that supports young people with additional needs in colleges.

Autism

A lifelong neurological condition that affects 1 in 100 children in the UK. Autism affects communication, social understanding and imagination. It can also affect an individual's sensory experiences. Autism is a spectrum condition, which means that it affects people in different ways.

Autism Act 2009

An Act of Parliament to make provision about meeting the needs of adults on the autism spectrum.

Equality Act 2010

An Act of Parliament that consolidates existing legislation surrounding anti-discrimination and equalities law.

Foundation Learning

A system of education designed to deliver a personalised vocational or subject based programme for 14 to 19 year olds, based around formal awards which are intended to promote progression.

General Further Education Colleges

Post-compulsory education, for people over 16, generally taught in colleges, work-based learning environments or adult and community learning institutions.

Independent Specialist Colleges

Independent colleges that usually provide further education or training for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities whose learning and support needs can not be best met locally. Many are residential.

Individual Learner Record (ILR)

The main system for gathering data about learners in further education.

Key worker

A trained individual who provides personalised support and/or advocacy for disabled people and their families.

Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA)

An assessment made under section 139A of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 to determine what

additional support young people with learning difficulties need in order to access education beyond school. LDAs must be undertaken for those with Statements of special educational needs in their last year of school and are intended to help young people plan for education after school.

Personal Budgets

Money that is allocated to individuals to meet assessed needs, in place of services that would otherwise be provided directly to the individual by statutory bodies.

Personalisation

Tailoring support services for disabled people to meet individual needs, requirements and preferences.

Skills Funding Agency (SFA)

A partner agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the SFA funds and regulates adult further education and skills training in England.

Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability

A Green Paper published by the Government in March 2011 outlining ways in which to improve care and education for young people who are disabled or who have SEN.

Transition

The period in which young people move into adulthood, typically regarded as being somewhere between the ages of 14 and 25.

Transition Support Programme

A government funded project to improve transition services in each local authority, which ended in March 2011.

Wolf Report

An independent review of vocational education for young people between the ages of 14 to 19, focusing on how improvements can be made to the current system.

Young Peoples Learning Agency (YPLA)

A non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department of Education and launched in April 2010. The YPLA supports the delivery of training and education to all 16 to 19 year olds in England, and to young people with a learning difficulty and/or disability up to the age of 25. Subject to the passage of the Education Bill, the Education Funding Agency will take over responsibility from the YPLA on 1st April 2012.



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