

# Debate on the Buckland Review of Autism Employment

25 April 2024

## **RCSLT views**

- The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) welcomes the Buckland Review of Autism which sets out recommendations to support more autistic people to start, stay, and succeed, in work.
- The Buckland Review found that, despite their wish to work, only 3 in 10 autistic adults are in work. This is compared to 5 in 10 disabled people and 8 in 10 non-disabled people.
- The RCSLT believes that support for autistic adults should be everyone's business including job centres, employment hubs, employers, and fellow employees. Changes such as better understanding of autism and the needs of autistic people, providing accessible adjustments at interview, providing reasonable adjustments and environmental adjustments in the workplace, and access to specialist support including speech and language therapy/communication support groups all have a significant role to play.

## **What more must the Government do?**

We are pleased that the report tackled some of the issues our members highlighted.

We hope the Government will implement the review's recommendations and improve autistic people's employment prospects even further by strengthening support for them in the following areas.

The report provides advice on supporting autistic adults to more into or stay in work. We welcome this. We hope that when implementing it, the Government will ensure that autistic people will be enabled and empowered to ask for adjustments. The onus should not be on autistic people to communicate exactly what they need. Employers are under a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to the interview process, yet evidence has shown that when autistic applicants disclose their needs, only 11% were offered reasonable adjustments at interviews. Autistic people tell us that they do not always feel comfortable asking for the adjustments that they need and may consider leaving their job or profession due to challenges getting the adjustments and support they need to thrive in their roles.

We are pleased that the report discusses training. We hope that when implementing improvements to training, the Government will prescribe or signpost employers (and others) to gain the knowledge and understanding in autism to become a neuro-inclusive employer.

The report highlights the stigma and stereotypes that people face, and the challenges with inaccessible recruitment practices. To tackle this, the Government must ensure there is a focus on changing the mindsets of employers to recruit and work with autistic people. Training tools including unconscious bias are needed.

The recommendations must be monitored and reported against. The report calls for a task group, and we would like to see more information on this published including membership and activity timeframes.

Some of the big issues, such as raising awareness amongst employers and the public of what autism is, and challenging stereotypes, require significant thought to achieve the “transformational change” that the report calls for.

## **What else?**

This report applies to all employment sectors and RCSLT as professional body has been investigating the needs of autistic speech and language therapists.

From the RCSLT member data, 14% of SLTs have told us that they have a disability, difference or difficulty. Autistic speech and language therapists have told us about the barriers they face in the workplace, in finding and keeping a job and in progressing in their career.

We have been working with SLTs from the UK Neurodivergent Speech & Language Therapy Professionals Peer Support Group (NDSLTK) to support the development of guidance for Neurodivergent Speech and Language Therapists in the Workplace. We hope to publish this in the summer.

## **Shona's story**

- Shona, an autistic adult, was keen to gain work experience but has difficulties interacting and communicating with others. During a work placement at a local florist, she found interacting with customers challenging, and her responses were interpreted as rude and awkward by her work colleagues.

- With support from a local speech and language therapist, and a workplace coordinator, her employer was able to raise Shona's colleagues' awareness of autism and to 'think differently' about her communication and interaction skills. As a result of speech and language therapist intervention, Shona's employer offered her opportunities which played to her strengths, which included working directly with flowers, which was of benefit to them both.

## **Abigail's story**

- Abigail is a speech and language therapist in a community learning disability team. Abigail also helps to run autism assessment clinics for adults.
- With my multidisciplinary colleagues, I run clinics for adults who think they may have undiagnosed autism. As well as helping conduct in-depth diagnostic interviews, I might spend time assessing the person's communication in detail, helping them to identify where their usually very subtle difficulties lie. This knowledge can help them to make sense of a lifetime of emotional struggle, social rejection, and employment breakdown, and begin to find ways of seeing their strengths and celebrating their difference.
- 'It's amazing when you can make a connection with someone who may be very 'hard to reach' because of their severe communication difficulties. To see that moment where they can ask for something they want with a gesture, an object, or a picture, and to feel you had a part in making that happen, is a huge privilege.'

## **More information**

For more information, see:

- RCSLT's submission to the Buckland Review:  
<https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/RCSLT-response-to-the-Buckland-Review-of-Autism-Employment.pdf>
- RCSLT news story welcoming the Review's publication:  
<https://www.rcslt.org/news/rcslt-response-to-the-buckland-review-of-autism-employment/>