

New Government support package to help more disabled people into work

- New package of support to help thousands of disabled people into work as Government builds back fairer.
- 15 Jobcentre Plus sites to trial framework to become more autism-friendly.
- 26,000 work coaches are undergoing accessibility training to improve jobcentre services for disabled people.

Thousands more disabled people are set to benefit from a new package of support designed to help them into the work they want.

Minister for Disabled People, Chloe Smith, has today announced that 15 Jobcentre Plus sites will be testing an autism framework, designed with the National Autistic Society (NAS), to transform the service available to jobseekers on the autism spectrum. The framework pilot will aim to help people with autism find, retain and progress in fulfilling jobs.

This comes as 26,000 work coaches in jobcentres across the country are undergoing specialist accessibility training, delivered in partnership with Microsoft, in a further effort to help more disabled jobseekers secure employment.

The work coaches will look at how they can support disabled jobseekers with tools including immersive readers, magnifiers and automated captions, which will not only improve their daily work but will also help with the completion of job applications and interviews.

One in 100 people are autistic and there are around 700,000 autistic people in the UK, according to the National Autistic Society. Not all autistic people will be able to work, but the charity's research found that the vast majority want to.

Working age autistic people are often locked out of employment due to a lack of understanding and knowledge from employers and colleagues, and anxiety-inducing environments that can be distressing. It is hoped that the framework will help to break down these barriers and see more autistic people in jobs they love.

The Minister for Disabled People Chloe Smith said:

Everyone deserves an equal opportunity to find a job they love and to progress in their career, but we know we must do more to help people with autism.

By testing this autism framework and offering new specialist training to our jobcentre staff we are helping to deliver more employment opportunities for those who would otherwise feel locked

out, as we work towards seeing one million more disabled people in work by 2027.

The framework explores how best to support autistic people into employment, including ensuring jobcentre appointments with autistic customers take place in the right environment and educating local employers in the additional requirements of autistic workers.

For example, many autistic people become distressed in busy, bright or noisy environments. As part of the pilot, jobcentre staff will therefore be asked to carry out appointments with customers triggered in this way in quieter rooms, with more appropriate lighting.

Work coaches will also be able to help providers and employers in the local communities understand the additional needs required by autistic employees, which should in turn create more opportunities for autistic jobseekers in settings where they can thrive.

If successful, the framework could be rolled out to more jobcentres in England, Scotland and Wales, benefitting thousands of people with autism.

Christine Flintoft-Smith, Head of Autism Accreditation at the National Autistic Society, said:

We are pleased to be working in partnership with the DWP to make sure autistic people get the support they need delivered in the way they need it, when they visit Jobcentres. We both want to work to close the autism employment gap and make sure autistic people are getting the help they need to get jobs.

Our framework of best practice has been developed with input from autistic people, specifically for Jobcentres. We want all Jobcentre staff to understand autism, be able to think about their practice and make the necessary changes to the support and environment that autistic people need.

We look forward to our continued work with the team at DWP to get jobcentres working better for autistic people, and to get more autistic people in the jobs that they want and deserve.

Hector Minto, Lead Accessibility Evangelist at Microsoft, said:

Technology has the potential to greatly empower disabled people in the workplace, but awareness is often low, people don't know that there is support built into modern digital experiences.

In creating this training with DWP, built on our own internal training, we found there is terrific passion and energy in this workforce to share their knowledge with jobseekers. I am confident

that it will drive real impact and help us tackle a real challenge in society.

Autism framework

- The test project began in October 2021, using 15 Jobcentre test offices across the country, assessing the current state of knowledge and practices for dealing with autistic customers within those offices and then going on to create a new service delivery framework that ensures those customers get the support they need, in the way they need it.
- There will then be an assessment of each of these test sites to ensure compliance with the framework and accreditation against it.
- The test project will be completed by the 31 March 2022. The results of this test will be evaluated and if results are positive then DWP will explore how this can be rolled out across the whole network of Jobcentres.
- Jobcentres taking part in the test:
 - England: Gosport, Slough, Leeds Eastgate, Croydon, Grantham, Wigan, Stourbridge.
 - Scotland: Alloa, Falkirk, High Riggs, Leith, Musselburgh, Paisley, Fraserburgh.
 - Wales: Aberdare

About the National Autistic Society

- The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity for autistic people.
- We are here to transform lives, change attitudes and create a society that works for autistic people.
- Since 1962, we have been campaigning for autistic people's rights and providing support and advice to autistic people and their families
- To find out more about autism or the charity, visit autism.org.uk
- Follow the National Autistic Society on Twitter @Autism or Facebook.

Microsoft Accessibility Training

- Around one in five working-age adults report having a disability, therefore health and disability issues are affecting the working lives of millions of people.
- The learning is called Accessibility Fundamentals and is a one-hour learning product that will be completed by all DWP colleagues in work coach roles along with their line managers.
- The Accessibility Fundamentals learning aims to support the government's commitment to getting one million more disabled people into work by 2027.

Additional quotes

Testaments from work coaches who have completed the Microsoft Accessibility Fundamentals training:

- "I have just finished the training and what can I say!! This will be an

incredible source of tools for a lot of my customers with amazing resources such as immersive reader and dictate. This is an excellent support tool for colleagues and customers alike and has certainly improved my knowledge for myself as well as customers.”

- “I have completed the training and learnt a fair bit! It is a really useful course and got me thinking about which of my customers would benefit from some of these functions both during meetings and to upskill customers in what is available. I think colleagues will benefit from this too. LOVED the immersive reader – what a fantastic tool!”