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| **The ‘*Achieving More in College'* Project: Support for autistic students attending Further Education Colleges**  *Nick Chown, Barcelona, Spain; Joanna Baker-Rogers, South Yorkshire; Liz Hughes, Lancashire; Kleio Nicola Cossburn, Staffordshire; Luke Beardon, South Yorkshire; Julia Leatherland, South Yorkshire*  **Address for correspondence: npchown@gmail.com**  **Acknowledgements**  Our special thanks go to the newest member of our team – Shona Davison – for her careful scrutiny of the draft version of the report on which this paper is based and to all those individuals who expressed interest in this project.  **Editorial comment** |
| This paper presents the data from a survey of 58 FE Colleges in England which asked for details of the type of support offered to autistic students. From the figures given by the colleges, there was over 6500 students who had declared an autism diagnosis and some colleges had more than 200 autistic students on roll and there was evidence that this number was increasing year on year. Data was gathered on staff knowledge of autism and training opportunities, the support given to students and arrangements for the transition from school. Forty out of 57 Colleges had at least one autism specialist on the staff. A range of support was provided largely concerned with their academic studies but 26 had a befriending scheme or mentioned clubs. The authors recognise that it was not possible to ascertain the quality of the support offered and suggest that an accreditation scheme which specifically audits provision for autistic students would be helpful. The Autism Education Trust has developed a set of Standards and a Competency Framework for post 16 settings specifically for autistic students. This can be accessed at [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk) so readers in this sector can download this as a guide to good practice. |

**Introduction**

In the UK, autism is classed as a disability under the Equality Act (2010). Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), Further Education (FE) institutions in the UK are legally required to make reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities. As there have been few studies directly examining the needs of autistic students in post-secondary education, an online survey of FE colleges in England was undertaken, to ascertain the nature and level of support for autistic students. This paper presents the findings based on responses from 58 colleges.

**Aims of the study**

There were two specific objectives for the online survey. Firstly, to understand the extent to which FE colleges in England complied with disability discrimination law regarding autistic students by making necessary and reasonable adjustments. Secondly, to identify examples of best practice and make recommendations aimed at raising standards across the FE sector. These findings would enable FE colleges to enhance their practice and reputation, potentially leading to recruitment of more autistic students and most importantly, would serve to increase the life chances of the students by supporting their studies enabling them to complete their courses and gain useful and important qualifications.

There is no shortage of advice and guidance on supporting autistic students in further and higher education. In many cases, but not all, the same advice and guidance will be suitable for both college and university. Guidance in the peer-reviewed autism literature which specifically focus on students at FE colleges include Breakey, 2006; Chown & Beavan, 2012; and Mitchell & Beresford, 2014. Other authors have focused on support for autistic students in college and/or university (eg Beardon, Martin, & Woolsey, 2009; Draisma & McMahon-Coleman, 2016; Gelbar, Smith & Reichow, 2014; Hillier et al., 2017; MacLeod & Green, 2009; Madriaga, 2010; Masterson & Meeks, 2014; VanBergeijk, Klin & Volkmar, 2008; Welkowitz & Baker, 2005; Wenzel & Rowley, 2010; White, Ollendick, & Bray, 2011). Guidance on supporting students with Asperger syndrome is also available from the National Autistic Society (NAS) website which includes a reading list.

**The online survey**

A questionnaire survey in the form of requests under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) (FOIA) submitted via SurveyMonkey was chosen as the main research tool. Using the statutory duty to respond to FOIA requests was expected to maximise the response rate (as it had with our earlier university study). The college project was undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the FOIA, the University College London guidance for using FOIA requests in an academic context (Bourke, Worthy, and Hazell, 2012), and the guidelines issued by the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO).

The investigation focused on ‘mainstream’ colleges of further education (excluding sixth form colleges, specialist colleges, and adult education institutes). The Association of Colleges (AoC) maintains a list of all college types on its website. At the time, the AoC list contained details of 202 mainstream colleges.  A FOIA request containing a link to the SurveyMonkey questionnaire was sent to every third college on the AoC list (about 70 establishments). As SurveyMonkey did not have the facility to retain copies of submissions ‘for subsequent reference’ as required under section 8(1)(a) of the FOIA, the colleges were also provided with the questions in MS Word. The majority of colleges responded via email. All non-respondents were sent a reminder. A large proportion of the colleges (60) failed to respond to the initial request *or* the reminder. Contact was then made with the AoC following which a formal complaint was submitted to the ICO. The ICO wrote to some of the non-responders and a further 12 colleges responded, making a total of 58 responses in all.

Researchers using surveys wrestle with the need to strike a balance between the wish to ask questions and the risk of discouraging participation by asking too many. Furthermore, exemptions in the FOIA enable organisations to avoid responding to individual questions and a college can refuse to respond at all.  A survey of universities conducted by the authors (Chown et al., 2017) had proved FOIA-compliant so colleges were asked the same number of questions. The final version of the survey is given in *Appendix 1.*

Although we would not expect all the different types of support listed to be deployed by all FE colleges, the responses given show there are many gaps in providing certain supports which the authors deem critical for supporting autistic students.

1 None of the 99 universities contacted by the team during the earlier study failed to respond. There is a clear need for many colleges to review and improve their FOIA receipt and response process.

2 These exemptions include requests that would cost too much (cost limits are applied), take too much staff time to deal with, or which are considered to be vexatious.

**Findings**

Responses were received from 58 FE Colleges. The colleges did not always respond to all questions, hence the total number of responses to a question was often less than 58.

***Number of students who declared an autism diagnosis in the last five years***

Of the 58 respondents, 55 gave details on how many students declared an autism spectrum diagnosis during the previous five academic years, but not all colleges provided figures for each year. Twenty-seven colleges provided figures for all five years. The totals are unlikely to be exact (eg some ‘rounded’ figures were likely to be estimates). Precise year-on-year comparisons cannot be made as a college’s disability categories may have changed during the period in question. However, the data is considered sufficient to enable a reliable estimate of trends.

Approximately 6,622 students attending the 58 Colleges declared a diagnosis of autism in the academic year 2016/17. The actual number may be significantly greater due to non-disclosure and students not knowing they are autistic (see Barer, 2007; Getzel and Thoma, 2008; Hastwell et al., 2013). The number of autistic students in individual colleges ranged from 18 to 548 students. Eleven colleges reported having more than 200 autistic students in 2016/17, with 14 Colleges having between 100 and 200 students. So some of these mainstream colleges are dealing with a very significant number of autistic students. If the figures are averaged out, there were 114 autistic students in each college in this year but large variation. In the year 2014/15, the average was 89 students which compares to an average of 55 students that same year at each university included in our earlier study of support for autistic students in higher education (Chown et al., 2017).

The total number of autistic students at the 39 colleges reporting figures for all five years increased from 2,548 in 2012/13 to 4,910 in 2016/17 (see *Figure 1*). This represents an increase in the student population declaring a diagnosis of autism over the five years of 93%. This increase is considerably less than the equivalent university percentage increase but an almost doubling of the college student numbers in five years is substantial. The overall trend masks substantial individual college differences in autistic student numbers.

**Figure 1:** Trend in autistic student numbers at FE College between 2012/13 and 2016/17



Fifty-seven of the 58 Colleges answered the question relating to whether they had an in-house autism expert or specialist. Fifteen (26%) of the colleges did not, 16 colleges (28%) had one autism specialist, and a further 24 colleges (41%) had more than one autism specialist on the staff. Of the 40 respondents who had at least one autism specialist, 34 had one or more full-time specialists. There is a clear preference (69%) for colleges to have at least one autism specialist and to employ their specialist(s) on a full-time basis (81%). One college’s ‘full-time’ specialist was a member of the teaching staff. No other respondent stated that their specialist also had a teaching role. There is significant variation in the number of hours worked by part-time autism specialists and no clear link between hours worked and the number of students on the college roll. *Table 1* compares in-house specialist autism expertise in colleges and universities.

**Table 1:** Number of colleges and universities with in-house expertise in autism

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **In-house autism specialists** | **Colleges** | **Universities** |
| None | 26% | 41% |
| One | 28% | 29% |
| More than one | 41% | 29% |
| At least one full-time | 81% | 54% |

A further question asked for details of the qualifications of autism the specialist(s). Of the 40 respondents who had at least one in-house autism specialist, 37 gave details of these. In total, 26 (70%) of the 37 colleges said that their autism specialist had an autism-specific qualification. However, the highest autism-specific qualification varied from Level 7 (Master’s Degree or equivalent) down to Level 2 (equivalent to GCSE grades A\*-C). One autism specialist had only attended a two-day autism course. *Table 2* gives details on the qualifications of the autism specialists.

**Table 2:** Number of specialist staff with autism-specific qualifications

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **National qualification framework level** | **Example of the qualifications gained** | **Numbers of colleges** |
| Level 7 | Master’s Degree  Post Graduate Certificate | 18 (two studying) |
| Level 6 | Bachelor’s Degree  Graduate Diploma | None |
| Level 5 | Foundation Degree  Higher National Diploma | 2 (one studying) |
| Level 4 | Higher National Certificate  Certificate of Higher Education | 2 |
| Level 3 | Access to Higher Education Diploma  AS Level | 5 |
| Level 2 | GCSE grades A\*-C  CSE grade 1 | 3 |

Colleges who did not have a specialist were asked what arrangements they made to obtain autism advice. As expected, many colleges ‘bought in’ specialist services. Other Colleges felt their staff had a great deal of experience in autism so there was no need to have an autism specialist on roll. One respondent said,

*‘We have staff that have many years’ experience working with those on the autistic spectrum and (have) not encountered the need to access specialist expertise to date’.*

Another college said they used online information and shared good practice across their teams.

**Type of support provided by the Colleges to autistic students**

The type of support given by the 58 Colleges is shown in *Table 3.*

**Table 3:**Type of support provided for autistic students by the Colleges

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Choices (respondents could tick as many of these as applied)** | **No of colleges** | **Percentage providing support** | **University percentage** |
| 1= | Assistance on college day trips and residential trips | 57 | 100 | N/A |
| 1= | Support for applicants with autism when attending for interview | 57 | 100 | 68 |
| 3 | Extra face-to-face tutorial time and/or email contact time with tutors/mentors | 56 | 98 | 91 |
| 4 | Support in accessing learning centres and IT | 55 | 95 | 72 |
| 5 | Arrangements to ensure continuity of tutors between years, as far as possible | 53 | 91 | 39 |
| 6 | Provision of scribes and/or audio recordings of lectures | 52 | 90 | 90 |
| 7= | Adjustments to curriculum when required | 51 | 88 | N/A |
| 7= | Quiet room for break times / lunch times | 51 | 88 | N/A |
| 7= | Assistance in travelling to and from different locations in the college | 50 | 88 | 59 |
| 10 | Classes/tutorials for courses with a high percentage of autistic students scheduled to take place in the same building/room as far as possible | 44 | 81 | 28 |
| 11 | Extended submission deadlines for *all* courses\* | 38 | 66 | 75 |
| 12 | Extended submission deadlines for *some* courses\* | 35 | 60 | 75 |
| 13 | Befriending scheme / club | 26 | 45 | 48 |
| 14 | Dedicated section in the prospectus outlining support available for autistic students and who to contact for further information? | 25 | 43 | 22 |

\* The percentages of colleges providing extended submission deadlines totalled more than 100% as some colleges ticked both the “*all* courses” and “*some* courses” boxes.

Fifty-seven of the 58 respondents answered the questions relating to support offered to autistic students with and without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). All responding colleges provided support to students with an EHCP and only one establishment failed to provide support for students without a plan. Seven colleges qualified their response by stating that support would be provided on the basis of need.

In response to the question about how the college obtainedfeedback on the effectiveness of support provided for autistic students, a myriad of approaches were reported. One respondent’s approach placed the responsibility to make contact with support staff on individual students, some of whom would have high levels of anxiety which is likely to make it difficult for them to be proactive in a situation (see Gillott and Standen, 2007; Trembath et al., 2012). Another college wrote that,

*‘Students meet with their Support Tutor weekly or less often if they are high functioning and do not require that level of support.’*

This appears to imply that intellectually high functioning autistic students require less support than other autistic students which is not always the case.

Others said that they acted on all student feedback without explaining how. Mention was made of the tracking and monitoring of support, progress, and policies; dissemination of data for action; discussion; and meetings, without stating how decisions were implemented in practice. Colleges said they often worked within resources. Five establishments referred to their process for ensuring that Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) or individual support plans were kept up-to-date without advising the position regarding students without an EHCP or similar plan. Thirteen colleges identified links to their quality improvement process. Two colleges referred to a link with their business planning process and there were also mentions of a link with training development.

**Training for staff about autism**

Four colleges provided training in autism for all their staff; 19 further colleges provided training without making it clear who attended; two Colleges had instituted a mandatory online training package; one other college had made online training available; 12 Colleges referred to a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme; 14 stated that training was offered or available or delivered as requested or when necessary. One college was planning to introduce autism training. A further College referred to the AET’s post-16 programme inferring that they were using this for training purposes. One College mentioned that they provided sensory overload awareness training. Six Colleges referred to training for learning support staff, four stating that they required a certain level of qualification in autism (1 x Level 3, 3 x Level 2), and one other stating that a Level 2 qualification was available. Three Colleges mentioned refresher training provided by the National Autistic Society, although in two instances the training was just offered and not necessarily taken up.

Training was delivered in a myriad of ways including: continuous professional development; one-off training sessions and support from the College’s Autism Ambassador/Neurodiversity Coordinator. There was also online training and support from the in house Educational Psychologist and SENDCO who carried out annual staff development training events to prepare staff for the new SEND intake each academic year. One College reported that they were exploring the potential to become an AET (Autism Education Trust) approved training hub for their county. Another College was already the North West hub for post-16 AET training, and another College was the equivalent hub for the North East, both offering ongoing training to all staff.

Although 29 colleges did not make their staff aware of the Ambitious About Autism (AAA) College Good Practice Guide, 19 Colleges did make some or all of their staff aware of this Guide; three colleges were planning to do this; and six stated either ‘not currently’ or ‘not to date’ which perhaps implied that they planned to do this in the future. One College had produced their own direction and guidance.

According to the AAA website, 34 Colleges (including sixth form colleges) had signed up to their College Inclusion Charter in July 2017[[1]](#footnote-1). Seven of the 58 respondents had signed the Charter and five were in the process of signing up or planning to sign up. The AET’s Competency Framework self-evaluation tool setting out requirements for professionals working with autistic learners was not in use by 40 of the 58 Colleges, one of the Colleges stating that they had stopped using the tool. Thirteen Colleges were using it, and others were ‘drawing from it’ or planning to use it in the future.

**Transition from school**

Arrangements made by Colleges for new autistic students transitioning from school are set out in *Table 4.*

**Table 4:** Arrangements made by Colleges for autistic students transitioning from school

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| **Arrangements made for autistic students transitioning from school (**where 5 or more Colleges offered this**)** | **Number of Colleges.** |
| Open days (or evenings)/welcome days (also mention of ‘welcome weeks’) / learner walks / familiarisation visits / transition visits/ (some held during a ‘quiet time’) | 30 |
| Specialist transition days/taster days/sessions | 25 |
| Liaison/relationship with feeder schools/links programme/link visits | 16 |
| Learning support staff attend other meetings (interview, reviews, transition etc) | 15 |
| Support staff go out to schools to meet students | 12 |
| Staff attend annual reviews at schools for identified learners | 9 |
| Transition plans made | 5 |
| Summer transition days/summer school events/transition weeks in August/summer social development group/transition events | 9 |
| Documents requested/obtained from schools | 5 |
| Meetings to discuss and agree levels of support | 5 |

**Raising peer awareness of autism**

The issue of raising awareness of autism amongst the non-autistic peers of autistic students is linked to the sensitive issue of diagnostic disclosure. One response reflecting the disclosure issue noted that

*‘Where appropriate support staff will raise awareness during tutorials, however many students with ASD prefer for this not to happen.’*

Another respondent said,

*‘Learners, with support from their tutor or support staff, sometimes choose (to) discuss their support needs with their course group.’*

Other responses referred to tutorials; student presentations; whole class peer awareness training; use of television screens and poster areas; and recruitment of a student inclusion ambassador.

Thirty one colleges do not include autism qualifications in their student curriculum, six do, one appeared to offer an unaccredited qualification, another stated that there is an autism unit in the ‘wider curriculum framework’, and one further college stated ‘N/A currently’.

**Other comments made by College respondents**

* *‘We are aware of autism as a growing issue for our learners and are planning to introduce training and awareness sessions for staff and students.*

*’*

* *‘We are looking into signing up to the Ambitious About Autism Charter and exploring the AET post 16 Competency Framework to use in college.’*
* *‘We would like to be involved in the Ambitious About Autism College Good Practice Guide and inclusion charter and we will be exploring how to do this.’*
* *‘The College is on a journey to outstanding. We have invested in staff and resources to help raise the awareness and understanding of staff and students within the college as well as providing an extensive range of support to students with autism including: Quiet room; Mentoring; Assignment support; Study support … Simple resources to help manage sensory difficulties such as Pod Chairs, Ear-defenders, and Stress balls/ fiddle toys; Advice and strategies to teaching staff regarding how best to support their learners in lessons such as: Low arousal environments/areas, Guidance on how to set out classroom/learning environment ...’*
* *‘Our provision for support for students with autism was a finalist in the National Autistic Society Professionals Award in 2015.’*

**Discussion**

It is difficult to be certain about the total number of autistic students in general FE Colleges in England but it can be estimated. According to the AoC (Association of Colleges) there were 202 such Colleges at the time of writing. Responses were received from about 20% of these colleges reporting a total of just over 5,000 students with a diagnosis of autism in the academic year 2016/17. This suggests that the total number of autistic students in FE colleges in England in the last completed academic year was in the region of 25,000. This compares to the estimated figure of 9,000 autistic students at University across the UK in 2014/15, the last year for which we have figures (Chown et al., 2017). It would seem that in 2016/17 there may have been as many as 30,000 autistic students in general FE Colleges across the UK (assuming a 20% uplift to reflect the number of colleges in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and 40,000 autistic students across both general FE and HE, UK wide (uplifting the HE figure to apply to 2016/17). All figures will be underestimates of the actual numbers of students because some students do not declare their diagnosis to their College or University and others may not know that they are autistic. There are not far short of twice as many students on average at an English college than in a UK university.

Whilst it is encouraging that 69% of Colleges reported that they had at least one in-house autism specialist, and that they are sometimes supplemented by other staff with experience of supporting autistic students, it is of concern that approximately one out of every three colleges apparently do not have any in-house specialist expertise in autism. Arguably, the percentage may be an overestimate of the availability of specialist autism expertise as each college could use their own definition of ‘autism expert/specialist’. At least one college autism specialist also had teaching duties which reduced their availability to autistic students. Some Colleges without their own specialist employed external advisers. This can work well but is not necessarily a sufficient alternative to in-house provision unless the advisers are specialists and available to students as and when required.

Of the 41 Colleges which reported that they had at least one in-house autism expert/specialist, 18 (44%) had at least one individual with a Level 7 (Post Graduate Certificate or equivalent) qualification in autism. There were at least 17 individuals qualified in autism at Level 7 across the Universities employing at least one in-house specialist, and one further qualified to Level 6, in 2014/15 (ie a total of 18 out of the 63 HE establishments (29%) had someone qualified at Level 6 or above in the latest year for which there are figures). Although a slightly greater percentage of Colleges than universities have someone with a Level 6/7 qualification in autism, approximately two out of every three establishments in both sectors rely on bought-in services. This study did not include external suppliers of autism support services so it is not possible to comment on these suppliers.

It could be argued that the minimum standard for an autism specialist should be a Level 7 qualification in autism *(*ie a PG Cert in Autism or its equivalent). If so, there is a considerable disparity between this and the actual level of qualification autism specialists in Colleges are reported as having in the majority of cases. College staff supporting autistic students come from various professional backgrounds and so a Level 7 requirement may be considered unrealistic. The success of an autism support role lies not only in having suitable academic qualifications but on the ability of an individual to engage with autistic students and to build a rapport. In our view, work experience and an attitude that values and enables the abilities of autistic students are as important as academic qualifications. A Bachelors degree plus enhanced training provision in autism may be a more realistic requirement than a Level 7 qualification. However, postgraduate qualifications in autism can offer valuable insight into autism and there is considerable scope for other Colleges to follow the lead of those who have in-house Level 7 autism-qualified autism specialists.

The inclusion of a dedicated autism section in College prospectuses is a potential ‘quick win’ for those establishments yet to provide specialist staff support. Fewer than half the responding Colleges had a befriending scheme/club which is not satisfactory given the difficulties faced by many autistic students in making friends and achieving the kind of social life that many would like to have because of the social difficulties they face (see Beardon, Martin, and Woolsey 2009; Chown and Beavan, 2012). Arguably, these difficulties make this the most important support of all and yet only 45% of Colleges provide support to engage with other students. The size and complexity of College teaching and tutoring arrangements, does make it difficult to ensure continuity of arrangements. Autistic students often have difficulty in finding their way around even one single large, complex building, let alone a campus so it was good to note that about 85% of Colleges provided assistance in travelling to and from different locations (only just over half of the universities responding to our earlier survey provided this support). Continuity of class/tutorial venue (where possible), assistance in travelling within the College, a quiet room, curriculum adjustments, continuity of tutors (where possible), and provision of scribes and/or audio recordings of lectures are all crucial aspects of support for many autistic students, as the provision of these supports by between 78 and 93% of respondents attests to; these may also be ‘quick wins’ for those establishments yet to provide them.

It was notable that in 12 of the 14 types of support, Colleges outperformed Universities. In some cases the difference in performance was substantial (eg in relation to continuity of tutors, there was a 54% gap between the two in favour of Colleges, and a 50% gap in favour of Colleges in respect of continuity of class/tutorial venue. Impressively, all but one responding College provided support for applicants when attending interview (68% of Universities) and all colleges provided assistance on day trips and residential trips (no corresponding University support question). For two other types of support, virtually all the Colleges provided support (ie 98% of Colleges provided extra face-to-face and/or email contact time with tutors/mentors (91% of Universities) and learning centre/IT access support (72% of Universities).

There is much scope for Colleges to make use of the AAA Good Practice Guide (about 50% of respondents had not publicised the Good Practice Guide amongst their staff), to sign up to the AAA College Inclusion Charter (only 21% of respondents had signed up to the charter or were in the process of signing up or planning to sign up), and to implement the AET’s post 16 Competency Framework self-evaluation tool (just 22% of the Colleges who responded to our survey stated that they had implemented this).

The Ministerial Foreword to the ‘*Statutory guidance for Local Authorities and NHS organisations to support implementation of the Adult Autism Strategy*’ relating to the Autism Act (2009) includes:

*‘We recommend that other providers of public services, such as providers of services to support people into employment … look to follow the guidance to help improve the delivery of the services they provide to adults with autism: for example, ensuring that staff who provide services to adults with autism have received autism awareness training would clearly be of value across* ***all public services****. This should lead to better outcomes for people with autism and make best use of public resources*.’

Colleges support people into employment and are covered by this non-statutory recommendation. So we propose that Colleges include text along the following lines in their Equalities / Disability policy (which is substantially similar to our earlier proposal for the Universities):

*The College confirms its adherence to the recommendation in the Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and NHS organisations to support implementation of the Adult Autism Strategy for other providers of services to follow the guidance to ensure that delivery of the services the College provides to its students with autism meet current good autism practice standards.*

Finally, our earlier University study indicated that no university had been accredited under the National Autistic Society’s autism-specific quality assurance programme at the time of writing (although one respondent University was seeking accreditation then). As only a small number of Colleges are accredited under the existing NAS scheme, we suggest to the NAS and AoC that they work together to develop a college-specific accreditation scheme.

**Limitations of the survey**

We would have asked additional questions but wanted to avoid respondents being able to rely on FOIA exceptions (few respondents relied on these exceptions in practice). We obtained responses from nearly 60 Colleges which, although a reasonable sample at 19% of the total number of Further Education colleges in England, 80% of Colleges did not take part. For logistical reasons, only the online data (28%) was analysed by two or more team members. The hard copy data was analysed by one team member only. All results were reviewed by members of the team who were not involved in the analysis.

While the data gives an indication of what is currently being offered, it is limited in relation to the *quality* of that provision. As a direct result of that, we wish, subject to funding, to follow up this study, and the earlier University research, to ascertain from the student perspective what support they feel they are getting, and the extent to which this meets their individual needs.

**Concluding comments**

The Government recommends that providers of services not covered by the Autism Act (2009), but who support people into employment, should adopt the Statutory Guidance issued in connection with the Adult Autism Strategy. As autistic College graduates are often at a disadvantage relative to their non-autistic peers in obtaining employment, it is suggested that all FE establishments follow this recommendation. It is also proposed that the Association of Colleges and the National Autistic Society work together to develop an FE specific accreditation scheme, whereby FE colleges which offer good support to autistic students can be recognised and accredited.

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**APPENDIX 1: ‘ACHIEVING MORE AT COLLEGE’ SURVEY QUESTION SET**

1. Please state the name of your college here (We only ask so we do not 'chase' any college for a response unnecessarily; all data will be anonymised).
2. How many students declared an autism spectrum diagnosis to the college during each of the previous five academic years?
3. Do you have an autism expert/specialist on staff to provide your staff with advice on supporting students with autism (academically and pastorally)?

Answer choices:

We have no in-house expert/specialist in autism

We have one in-house expert/specialist in autism

We have more than one in-house expert/specialist in autism

1. If you have in-house autism expertise/specialist support, is this full time or part time?

Answer choices:

Full time

Part time

1. If you have part time in-house autism expertise/specialist support, how many hours a week are worked?
2. If you have in-house autism expertise/specialist support, please provide details of their qualifications and experience
3. If you *do not* have an autism expert/specialist on staff, what arrangements do you make when you need access to specialist expertise in autism?
4. What form does support for students with autism take? Please tick the box next to each type of support that you provide.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Support for applicants with autism when attending for interview? |  |
| 1. Is there a dedicated section in the prospectus outlining support available for persons with autism and who to contact for further information? |  |
| 1. Extra face-to-face tutorial time and/or email contact time with tutors/mentors/specialist support staff |  |
| 1. Extended submission deadlines for *all* courses |  |
| 1. Extended submission deadlines for *some* courses |  |
| 1. Provision of scribes and/or audio recordings of lessons |  |
| 1. Classes/tutorials for courses with a high percentage of students with autism scheduled to take place in the same building/room as far as possible |  |
| 1. Arrangements to ensure continuity of tutors / support staff between years as far as possible |  |
| 1. Adjustments to curriculum when required (e.g. students can study a one year course over two years) |  |
| 1. Assistance in travelling to and from different locations in the college |  |
| 1. Assistance on college day trips and residential trips |  |
| 1. Befriending scheme / club |  |
| 1. Quiet room for break times / lunch times |  |
| 1. Support in accessing learning centres and IT |  |

1. Do you offer support at ***all levels of study*** to students with autism who have an Education Health Care Plan?
2. Do you offer support at ***all levels of study*** to students with autism who do not have an Education Health Care Plan?
3. How do you obtain feedback on the effectiveness of the support you provide for students with autism?
4. How do you act on feedback to ensure that support continually evolves and meets the needs of the students?
5. What training and refresher training in autism do you provide for all staff?
6. Are college staff made aware of the Ambitious About Autism College Good Practice Guide?
7. Has the college signed the Ambitious About Autism College Inclusion Charter?
8. Is the Autism Education Trust post 16 Competency Framework self-evaluation tool (supported by the Department for Education) used for training purposes?
9. What arrangements do you make for new students on the autism spectrum transitioning from school?
10. What arrangements do you have to raise awareness of autism amongst non-autistic students?
11. If you offer qualifications in autism, do those teaching these qualifications play any role in raising awareness and understanding of autism across the college?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

1. https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/whos-signed-up [↑](#footnote-ref-1)