



A step by step guide to becoming an **autism friendly employer**



IRISH JOBS

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Foreword



National Autism Charity AsIAM and IrishJobs are partnering to encourage all small to medium enterprises in Ireland to give Autistic people the same chance to access, maintain and thrive in employment within neuro-affirmative workplaces that can foster an Autistic person's true potential and sense of wellbeing. The "SME Same Chance Toolkit" provides small to medium enterprises with a step-by-step guide to help them recruit, support, maintain and develop the untapped potential and resourcefulness of the autistic talent pool readily available in the Autistic community for their organisations.

The toolkit encourages an open discussion with SMEs on the importance of creating the same chance and opportunities for autistic talent while highlighting some of the barriers autistic people face accessing employment in general. It also aims to help SMEs to reframe and assess any barriers to attracting, recruiting and developing Autistic talent they experience in conjunction with the most significant barriers Autistic people face to help bridge any gaps and decide what changes can and will have the most impact. This toolkit will also provide guidance and support to employers around reasonable accommodations and workplace supports, which can help autistic employees to thrive at work and simplifies best practices around inclusive autistic candidates' interviews and onboarding processes. In addition, the toolkit includes details of a wide range of supports available to SMEs, including wage subsidy schemes, government organisations, and social enterprises that can support your organisation in attracting, recruiting and developing autistic talent.

AsIAM's latest study in 2022 revealed that at least 1 in 65 people in Ireland are Autistic, which is inevitably increasing daily. Accessing employment and underemployment among the autistic community is significant. 2019 figures reveal that 85% of autistic individuals in Ireland are either unemployed or underemployed. While autism acceptance is increasing rapidly within Ireland, gaps remain to be bridged. There is always more that can be done to support autistic people in getting employment. AsIAM's most recent Autism in the Workplace Report revealed 40% of Autistic professionals surveyed chose not to disclose their Autism to their employer, while just 15% made a disclosure before or at the interview stage.

In addition, fewer than 20% of Autistic people received any form of reasonable accommodation in the recruitment and interviewing stages of their current roles. Most notably, 80% of Autistic people said they would make a disclosure if they felt supported and safe to do so. Sadly, 80% also felt their employer and colleagues still do not know enough about Autism to allow for safe disclosure and reasonable accommodation and support. Just over a third of businesses felt their organisations knew enough to support an Autistic employee in their workforce.

Autistic and neurodivergent people have many valuable skillsets, strengths and talents to complement many organisations' neurodiverse workforces when given the same chance as their neurotypical peers.

Research shows that Autistic professionals can be up to 140% more productive than the typical employee when adequately matched to jobs and can bring multiple strengths to the workplace. Autistic adults are among the fastest-growing groups within the neurodiverse workforce. Shortages of skilled employees and professionals may be among the most considerable constraints to growth and sustainability in the new economy. As a community of many loyal skilled, ethical workers, Autistic people everywhere deserve to play an impactful, purposeful role in building Autism acceptance in society and recovering and rebuilding our homegrown and global economies post-pandemic. Therefore attracting, supporting and developing Autistic talent may not only be the right thing to do for your business going forward it might just be one of the most beneficial recovery strategies post-pandemic to help your organisation to build more inclusive, innovative, and responsive neurodiverse workforces in the current global economic climate.

Adam Harris, *CEO, AsIAM*

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1. An Autism Friendly SME is Important For Diversification



Why Creating An Autism Friendly SME is Important For Diversification

According to a survey by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), most Irish SMEs have embraced an optimistic outlook for 2023 and beyond. While there is much for SMEs to consider to ensure success beyond 2023, diversification can enable SMEs to remain confident about the future. By reviewing and diversifying Autism inclusivity as one of the key areas, SMEs will be on the road to futureproofing their business for years to come. However, to engage in growth opportunities, SMEs must understand the “why” behind their Autistic talent recruitment drives. The only way to do this is to sit down and spend time reviewing and assessing your SME’s skills and talent shortages and your demand to assess the gaps and opportunities that could be explored if more Autistic people were given the same chance as others to play an impactful part of your organisations post-pandemic growth opportunities.

- What skillsets and strengths do you need?
- Why do you need them?
- Why is this important to your future organisational objectives?

This fundamental information will support any decision from shifting the focus to more diversified talent pools encompassing Autistic candidates, buying new equipment and growth and expansion plans to exploring new markets.



To engage in growth opportunities, SMEs must understand the “why” behind their Autistic talent recruitment drives.

What Are The Benefits Of An Autistic Talent Pool For SMEs

While recruiting and employing Autistic people may require alternative approaches that allow for reasonable adjustment, many outdated misconceptions can exclude a potential candidate who best fits a particular position. Knowing and understanding the benefits of employing Autistic people will help break down those common barriers. There are multiple benefits to hiring Autistic people; however, here are some to consider to achieve the growth opportunities that diversification can bring to your SME post-pandemic.

Reputation Management

By diversifying the strengths of their workforce and by embracing autistic and neurodivergent individuals in their recruitment practices, organisations can also enhance their reputation with customers and the community.

Creates safer spaces for all employees

Many organisations have realised that modern workplaces are not effectively serving many neurotypical needs. Therefore the organisational gaps between many of our neurotypical colleagues and neurodivergent ones are closing. However, the pandemic pause did help to highlight that many organisations' working practices were not fit for purpose and needed to be reassessed on a more flexible needs-based approach. Creating safer spaces for Autistic talent with reasonable accommodation and support subsequently creates safer spaces for everyone to thrive and work more effectively.

Autistic people often show high levels of loyalty.

Autistic people know the challenges faced on their path to finding meaningful employment and will therefore be inclined to stay with one company for considerably longer. This value-driven loyalty can help increase overall morale in the company and motivate all employees to value their jobs.

Alternative Perspectives Can Aid Innovative Solutions

Many Autistic people have increased attention to detail and memory, which helps them be accurate and notice errors that may have been missed. In addition, logical thought patterns and creative thinking skills can help autistic people find innovative ways of solving problems. More simply, Autistic people may be able to provide alternative solutions to the issues that others cannot see. This alternative perspective may increase the willingness of all team members to share more ideas and collaborate more, boosting morale and a sense of impact and psychological safety.

Potential cost-saving benefit

With greater loyalty, motivation, and dependability comes less staff turnover. While adjustments to work schedules or reasonable accommodations may be needed; it is essential to note that many cost nothing or are inexpensive to implement and will be offset by lower staff turnover and improved productivity.



2. How To Attract Autistic Talent

How To Attract Autistic Talent



Post-pandemic workplaces are evolving to become more accessible, inclusive and diverse. Future work trends in 2023 highlight the need for workforce diversification, pursuing non-traditional candidates, and bringing DEI to the forefront. Diversifying talent pipelines has many strategic benefits. Organisations can no longer meet their talent needs through traditional sourcing methods and candidate pools. Plus, hiring managers are less concerned with industry experience and technical skills than they once were. To fill critical roles in 2023, organisations will need to become more comfortable assessing candidates on their focused skills, strength sets, and ability to perform in the role rather than their credentials and prior experience. As a result, it's more of a priority now than ever to rethink outdated assumptions about Autism. With more employees charting nonlinear career paths and organisations needing help meeting their talent needs through traditional sourcing methods, now is the time to act.

Some suggestions are that organisations begin by removing formal education and experience requirements from job postings. However, context must be applied here for practicality and effectiveness. Therefore, where possible, adopting this organisational approach and speaking directly to your needs as an employer in the context of what the role requires can help to speak directly to the strengths and skillsets available in the Autistic talent pool available in the workforce. In addition, some organisations' recruitment strategies can inadvertently disadvantage Autistic candidates and sometimes dissuade candidates from applying for the position even if they are qualified. How can you rethink your existing recruitment strategies to ensure, where possible, that your SME's policies and procedures reflect the diverse workforce available in the Autistic talent pool and are accessible to everyone?

Here are some guidelines:

- Research and facilitate any possible and reasonable accommodations that your organisation could provide in an interview setting and at work.
- Conduct a sensory audit and work to reduce any potentially distracting or overwhelming sensory stimuli that you may find in the workplace.
- Try to ensure that autism-friendly recruitment practices have support from the top down.
- Screen your organisation's recruitment practices for unconscious bias.
- Seek the support of autistic-led organisations and other organisations working in this field for advice and guidance on recruiting Autistic people. You can find some of these organisations in the "Employer Supports and Grants" section of this Toolkit.
- Engage with the Autism community, particularly with Autistic adults, and advertise your jobs on neuro affirming hiring platform. Let candidates know you welcome applications from neurodivergent people. Review the job description, using clear, unambiguous language throughout.
- Educate hiring managers on best practices for recruiting Autistic people, neurodivergent people and neurotypical people.

3. Communicating With Your Autistic Employees



How To Communicate With Your Autistic Employees

There should be no reason to treat an Autistic employee any other way than neurotypical employees or how you would like to be treated. Many respectful communication strategies are best practices for all employees; however, here are some guidelines on what might benefit your organisation to reflect on, assess, and, if needed, adapt.

Use clear, direct, and concise communication

There can be many unspoken rules and expectations in workplaces. Using vague language in interview settings, instructions, questions, and workplaces does not speak to an Autistic person's need for directness. Say precisely what you mean, and don't assume something is obvious unless you've said it in words or writing. Try to avoid colloquial expressions, idioms or metaphors wherever possible. Clear guidance and feedback are essential.

Be Considerate of An Autistic Person's Need To Avoid Eye Contact

Some Autistic people might find eye contact very intense or painful or prefer not to make eye contact as it can be an intimate experience. In addition, they often find it easier to process information or their surroundings without looking directly at the person talking to them. Therefore, the most considerate thing to do if an Autistic person wishes not to make eye contact is to respect their choice, to carry on with the conversation, and to offer prompts to ensure that the person understands what you're saying and that you're moving on to the next topic you wish to discuss.

Be Aware That Not All Autistic People Will Engage In Small Talk

Some Autistic people will enjoy more social engagement and interaction than others. Others may refrain from engaging in small talk. For example, some Autistic people believe literally that work is for working and use it to aid productivity and an organisation's benefit; therefore, they do not seem interested in engaging in small talk or anything distracting from a hyperfocused workflow. Not engaging in small talk, thus, should not be considered rude or impolite but rather reframed as a value-driven strength in many Autistic employees.

Be Patient and Calm

Some Autistic people can take longer to process what you mean by what you say, so please give them the time and space they need to process what you said if they need it. Where possible, avoid interrupting them. You can also reassure them to take their time to process what you've just said and give a response. It can also help if, during a conversation, you ask one question or give one piece of information at a time. Keep calm and maintain an even tone when communicating with an Autistic person. If they don't understand what you've said, avoid judgement and allow them more time to process your words.

Respect Personal Space

Not everyone is comfortable with having somebody close to them, especially post-pandemic across all neurotypes. However can be particularly true for an Autistic person, who may need their personal space and may feel particularly anxious around having somebody close to them. If an Autistic person prefers not to have somebody near them, the best thing to do is to respect their preference and keep your distance.

Where possible, Review the Sensory Environment Before Any Verbal Communication Begins

If the environment has lots of flickering or bright lights, strong smells or loud noises, this can distract or overwhelm an Autistic person with sensory sensitivities. Don't hold 1:1 meetings with an Autistic person in a noisy, bright, stimulating or uncomfortable environment.

Enable Stimming without judgment

Many Autistic people will use fidget toys, sensory objects or squishy balls to process the environment and better focus on what is being said and the actions they must take. This is not unlike another employee using a stress ball to regulate themselves, who could be having a bad day in the office or going for a walk to manage their emotions. But, of course, everyone has their own ways of regulation; it just might look slightly different from one person to the next.

4. Reasonable Accommodations

What Are Reasonable Accommodations for Autistic Employees?

Naturally, all accommodations are in the context of the role-specific details, and context must be applied for their practicality and effectiveness. Nevertheless, your organisation has a duty to provide reasonable accommodations if a disability is disclosed if any employee requests them. Reasonable accommodations are best reviewed and monitored for effectiveness using a needs-based approach. It is fair to consider that some accommodations that Autistic people may ask for now are similar to that of neurotypical employees on some levels post-pandemic. Most cost-effective accommodations can have the most significant effect on Autistic professional work life. The AsIAM Autism in The Workplace report, for example, shows that autistic people are reluctant to ask for reasonable accommodation because they think it might be off-putting for the employer. There is also a reluctance in that report on behalf of employers because they simply do not know enough about it and are afraid of getting it wrong. Be vulnerable as an organisation. Inclusion is complex but not impossible, and this vulnerability can help build trust within the Autistic community. It is better to be seen trying to take action and learn than taking no action.

- **Ask the Autistic employee how they would like to communicate.** Some Autistic people may prefer written communication. Other Autistic people may like verbal, visual, or non-verbal communication. Once an Autistic person indicates a preference for how they wish to communicate, try to be consistent in how you communicate with them.
- **Allow for sensory breaks and alternative workspace.** Sensory regulation is a crucial facilitator of emotional and executive functioning regulation, so supporting this in the workplace is essential.
- **Where possible, provide advance notice of schedule changes.** Unexpected changes can overload an Autistic person's performance and place increased demands on their working day. Therefore, where possible, providing advance notice can make a big difference.
- **Offer flexible work environments and hours.** Many Autistic people can better manage sensory needs and executive functioning challenges and leverage hyperfocus strength and productivity when they feel more in control of their work environment.
- **Engage a Go to Person.** Having a go-to person to answer any questions and learn about the organisation's culture can help ease stress and anxiety before an interview or in a new workplace setting and provide Autistic people with clear instructions and guidance to help them learn new contexts.

5. Createing Safe Spaces for Autism Disclosure



How to Create Safe Spaces for Autism Disclosure



Many Autistic people that are working, have very successful careers, are employers and are in senior positions throughout every sector in Ireland. However, we cannot rule out that there may be people who need help and need to learn about self-advocacy and ask for reasonable accommodations in their roles to do their work more effectively. Your organisation is obliged under the law to keep any personal information disclosed to you confidentially. Any disclosure of a person's disability or difference must comply with Data Protection legislation and your organisation's policies and procedures about maintaining personal data. This information should not be passed to other people without the person's consent.

There are several benefits to your business in encouraging people to disclose their Autism or disabilities at work, including:

- Increased productivity
- Increased staff retention and attendance
- Increased workplace safety.
- Reduced long-term training costs
- More diversity across the organisation
- Enhanced reputation to future employees, clients, and customers

There is no right or wrong decision concerning the decision to make a disclosure as an Autistic person, as it is a very personal decision.

The key to making an Autism disclosure safer to reveal is to create a transparent and inclusive workplace that strives to inspire self-advocacy and support Autistic people to disclose their Autism when they feel comfortable and confident.

Some suggestions for creating safer spaces for disclosure are:

- Ask every employee if their needs are accommodated to do their jobs effectively, providing many opportunities for people to disclose their differences. With these broader perspectives on individual differences, an organisation can begin to take steps to consider what is reasonable and feasible to start putting in place.
- Ensuring all staff can access training on Autism and neurodivergent acceptance in society and the workplace.
- Adopting a strengths-based approach when talking about the multiple talents Autistic and neurodivergent people can bring to your organisation
- Make your communications, websites, and environments more accessible and include Autistic people in any decision-making, which affects them and helps your organisation be more needs-led and Autism informed.
- Many workplaces are not created with Autistic and neurodivergent needs in mind. As we know, Autism is not an intellectual disability or a mental illness. Autism is an alternative neurotype and a meaningful contributory value-driven way to be in work and beyond. In a non-Autistic designed world, being Autistic can involve challenges when suitable supports and reasonable accommodations are not considered or made accessible to make the workplace environment a place where Autistic people can have the same chances as others in society. It is essential to understand that Autistic and disabled individuals are often more disabled by their environments. Non-autistic people can also be disabled by their settings when reasonable needs are not considered.
- Every Autistic person is different and has varied skills, interests, personal qualities and career ambitions. A person's identity does not determine how effective they could be in their role. An organisation's culture can and will shape both how people might react to somebody's decision to make an Autism disclosure, as well as how managers and colleagues treat employees with disabilities overall.
- Recruit a person for their strengths-based skills and personal qualities they can bring to the role. Whilst being Autistic is a key part of their identity is far from the only part of themselves they will show at work, and many Autistic people deserve the same chance to demonstrate their skills and show they can be valued and impactful employees for your organisation.
- Be aware of the range of support for Autistic and disabled people to perform their job. There is a wide range of services and supports detailed in the last section of this toolkit, and this is continually expanding and being reviewed with needs-led and informed data from the Autistic community.

Some Autistic people can struggle with disclosure because of many things, including:

1. Conditioning and masking to blend in and be polite.
2. Fear of inviting in another label of being difficult because of past shame and trauma about their needs
3. People pleasing
4. Not being able to find the words to ask for a reasonable accommodation.
5. Being sensitive to rejection



6. Autism-Friendly Interviews and Onboarding Processes

How To Facilitate Autism-Friendly Interviews and Onboarding Processes

Disclosure and asking for accommodations preferences must also be considered in an interview and onboarding process with an Autistic candidate. For example, some may find it more challenging to interpret what is being asked of them due to misreading social cues and the vagueness of language that others can sometimes use. In addition, the sensory environment may be overwhelming; some Autistic people may find making eye contact difficult, and not being able to use strategies that effectively help us to self-regulate during an interview process may cause them additional distress.

Therefore, if you are interviewing an Autistic candidate, please, consider the following:

1. Provide the candidate with what is expected of them ahead of time. If needed, provide this in a written format, with a visual timetable and pictures, and ask if they would like it conveyed verbally.
2. As an option, consider offering, where possible, a pre-interview visit to where the interview will take place, as it can help an Autistic candidate be less anxious and more relaxed on the day.
3. Consider online interviews also
4. Please give them a guideline on how long the interview will be
5. Let them know if there is a group assessment.
6. Remind yourself as an interviewer that if an Autistic candidate states, “I do not understand what you mean” or “I do not understand the question”, this is simply a request for more information.
7. Please provide interview questions in advance for the interview and written assessment, allowing the candidate to prepare and seek clarification on any questions they are unsure about.
8. Please allow more time to answer verbal and written questions and more time for any tasks.
9. Review the sensory environment before interviewing and remove any distractions.
10. Encourage the candidate to bring anything, such as fidgets and stim toys, to help them feel more at ease in the interview.
11. Remember, eye contact and body language are not a determiner of how well-equipped an Autistic candidate is to do the role they are being interviewed for.

Interview template

As an interviewer, here is a guideline on reframing some of the competency-based questions you may ask to give an Autistic candidate the same chance as any other candidate in the interview stage. Please consider asking the alternative adapted versions to the Autistic interviewee to allow them to process this information if needed:

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

I am going to ask you to give me a short introduction to yourself:

- What are your best personal characteristics?
- What are your educational qualifications?
- What work experience do you have?

What are some of your strengths?

I am going to ask about your strengths:

- What do you consider to be your main strengths (things that you are good at)?
- How have you used these strengths at work?

What experience do you have in managing high workloads?

Think of an example of when you've had many tasks to complete in a limited time. Please tell me:

- What was the situation?
- What management strategies did you use?
- Were these strategies effective?

Tell me about a time you've disagreed with a colleague – how did/ would you handle it?

Think of a time you disagreed with a colleague. Please tell me:

- What was the disagreement about?
- What did you do to resolve it?

Are you good at problem-solving?

Think of an example of a time you solved a problem at work. Please tell me:

- First of all, what was the problem was
- What did you do to resolve that problem?
- What was the final result?

Onboarding

For autistic and neurodivergent employees to be successful, it is essential to have a clear onboarding process. Provide new employees with as much information as possible before their start date to help remove any stress or anxiety they may have around the first day of work and help them to process what will happen and get the most out of their first day with your organisation.

Here are some suggestions as a guideline for the onboarding process:

- Consider a welcome pack
- Provide a schedule of what will happen on the first day and an agenda for the week, which they will meet on the first day initially. Give them detailed visual instructions on how to get to their place of work, a map of the building, pictures and short bios of people they are likely to meet, including managers and teammates, and any other information they need to start their new job.
- Provide a clear description of their role and responsibilities.
- Provide a schedule of any training sessions upfront.
- Discuss the purpose behind each training and how it relates to the employee's tasks or role
- Let them know the expected timing to complete the pieces of training and how long each one should take
- Provide clear and consistent direction to autistic employees about any of the unwritten rules of your work environment and directly communicate the norms of your organisation's culture
- Engage a go-to person or a workplace mentor to support the new employee. For example, they can walk them through the workplace, accompany them for lunch, introduce them to colleagues or any other social gatherings, and answer any questions.
- Review and sign off on any reasonable accommodations or requests made. Ensure any team leads or managers are informed within the boundaries and consent of the Autistic individuals' privacy.
- Invite the employee to department or team meetings before they start, or you can arrange a more informal get-together, like a coffee or invite them to lunch so the new employee can get to know their colleagues before starting their new job.
- The first two months in a new job are critical for all employees. This can provide an opportunity for the employer and the employee to establish ways to provide regular mutual feedback about all respective roles, learn more about how the employee is finding different aspects of their role and set out a career development pathway for the employee based on their interests in this field.



7. Grants and Supports Available To SMEs

What Grants and Supports Are Available To SMEs

There is a wide range of supports, Government organisations, and social enterprises that can support your SME in attracting and recruiting autistic talent. The Department provides various services and supports for employers to recruit and retain job seekers with a disability, including financial incentives under the wage subsidy scheme and reasonable accommodation fund grants. The disability awareness support scheme further provides employers funding for disability awareness training for staff who work with a disabled colleague. Many financial supports and grants are significant and worthy of research to see what is available to your SME currently.

These grants include:

1. Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant

The Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant is available to private-sector employers, employees or self-employed people. This provides a grant of up to €6,350 to make adaptations to the workplace or to purchase adaptive equipment for disabled employees if they are currently working, if they are offered employment or an apprenticeship, changing jobs, or are self-employed. Workplace adaptations may include adjustments to the building or environment, like ramps or accessible toilets. It may also include assistive technology such as voice synthesisers, text-to-speech software, picture cue or scheduling software, or access to noise-cancelling headphones or headsets. It may also have funding available for the procurement of training to support the organisation or the employee to use the adaptations or supports requested by the employee.

It may also be possible for an SME to avail of additional funding of up to €9,523 if it needs specialist training to use the technology the employee has requested that has been acquired through the grant. To apply for the Workplace Adaptation Grant and any additional grants mentioned, the first point of contact is with your local Intreo or Department of Social Protection office, which will have a designated officer responsible for managing employment supports for people with disabilities. They can signpost your business to the support you need.

2. Wage Subsidy Scheme

WSS is available to employers who recruit people with a disability. There are approximately 1,500 participants in that programme, with an annual budget of €23 million. The Wage Subsidy Scheme gives financial incentives to private sector employers to employ people with a disability. The work offered must be for at least 21 hours per week, and the subsidy is available for up to 39 hours per week.

An employee with a disability on the scheme has the same conditions of employment as other employees.

These include:

- social insurance (PRSI) contributions
- tax deductions
- annual leave
- other leave entitlements

The employer must pay the employee with a disability the going rate for the job. This must be at least the statutory minimum wage. These terms and conditions of employment should be set out clearly in the employee's contract.

An employer can receive subsidies of over €9 under the wage subsidy scheme, and we have a minimum wage of €11. The minimum subsidy available is €6.30, which is still significant.

3. Employee Retention Grant

The Employee Retention Grant Scheme aims to help private sector employers keep employees who acquire an illness, condition or impairment (occupational or otherwise) that affects their ability to do their job.

The grant helps employers explore an employee's ability to operate as a workforce member.

This scheme provides funding to:

- identify accommodation or training or both to enable the employee to stay in their current position
- retrain the employee so that they can take up another position within the company

The Employee Retention Grant Scheme is open to all companies in the private sector. Funding is available to help keep any existing employee at any level and occupation within the company.

4. Disability Awareness Support Scheme

The Disability Awareness Support Scheme provides a maximum of €20,000 in funding for private sector employers to arrange and pay for disability awareness training for staff working with a colleague with a disability.

The training should provide clear and accurate information to employers and employees about working with people with disabilities. In addition, the training should give those taking part an understanding and awareness of the issues surrounding disability. Also, an overview of relevant anti-discrimination and equal opportunities legislation.

It should also provide specific information on the following:

- disabilities and abilities focusing on mobility and sensory issues
- perceptual awareness exercises that aim to dispel common myths
- disability etiquette to clarify appropriate language and behaviour

The training should include information on dealing with mental health issues in the workplace.

Grants available to private companies

Eligible costs include:

- fees paid for external disability awareness training programmes or courses
- fees for in-house disability awareness training by external trainers
- fees for open learning, computer or web-based disability awareness training programmes

Other costs included in the scheme are learning materials clearly associated with the relevant training programme, to a maximum of €650.

This includes:

- manuals
- books
- DVDs

5. Jobplus Scheme

The Department of Social Protection has extended the eligibility for JobsPlus, another employment recruitment incentive for employers, to persons on disability allowance. JobsPlus is an employer incentive which encourages and rewards employers who offer employment opportunities to unemployed individuals. It provides employers with two levels of payment: €7,500 or €10,000 over two years, depending on the jobseeker's age and the length of time in receipt of a qualifying payment.

Eligible employers who recruit full-time employees may apply for the incentive.

The JobPlus scheme is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union. The European Commission provides co-funding to JobsPlus for participants aged under 30 years under the European Social Fund (ESF+) Programme 2021-2027. Visit eufunds.ie for more information.

In addition to Government support, there are also external organisations your business can use to support the recruitment and retention of autistic talent:

Intreo

Intreo is the State agency that acts as a point of contact for employment and income support for employers nationwide. They also manage the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and support employers through initiatives such as the EmployAbility Service. Intreo also delivers a recruitment and job matching service for employers, via events, in-person engagement and online, through JobsIreland.ie.

EmployAbility

EmployAbility is a service funded by the Department of Social Protection that can support people with disabilities to find work in their community through supported employment and a free recruitment and employment service.

EmployAbility also provides advice on employment grants and support, job-matching service, and access to support from Job Coaches who support job seekers and employers. There are 23 EmployAbility Services nationwide.

Open Doors Initiative

The Open Doors Initiative is a broad coalition of partners across business and the community, and the voluntary sector, which supports people who might encounter disadvantages in entering employment, including people with disabilities, refugees and young people with educational barriers to secure employment and develop their career. These supports include an employability platform which provides online training to young people, internship programmes supporting autistic people, work experience programmes for people from immigrant or refugee backgrounds, hospitality training and mentoring for unemployed people, and employment supports to assist people with disabilities in obtaining employment:

Employers For Change

This is an employer disability information service from the OpenDoors Initiative, which provides advice and guidance to employers seeking to recruit, employ, manage and retain people with disabilities and build a diverse and inclusive workforce. It also provides a portal, which guides a wide range of issues for supporting people with disabilities at work, from language and disclosure to grants and supports which can help your organisation secure reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities.

WALK

WALK is a non-profit organisation that aims to provide person-centred support to people with a wide range of disabilities living in the community.

This includes a range of support employment programmes which allow people with intellectual disabilities and autistic people with high support needs to fulfil their employment and career ambitions by helping them to realise their potential, access opportunities, and build their own natural support systems.

Not So Different

Not So Different is a social enterprise which aims to bridge the gap between third-level and employment for neurodivergent graduates. They support neurodivergent people who wish to pursue a career in the creative industry. As well as providing training and in-person support, they run the Creative Ability programme, which supports students in developing and showcasing their talents through community projects and availing of employment supports, including mentoring from industry professionals.

AHEAD

AHEAD is a non-profit organisation that aims to build inclusive environments and help college graduates seeking employment opportunities for people with disabilities. AHEAD provides information to disabled students and graduates on a wide range of issues related to disability and contributes to national policy on employment. AHEAD also supports disabled graduates.

National Learning Network

The National Learning Network provides training and support services to people with disabilities and people who require more specialist support. With over 50 centres nationwide, the NLN offers 140 certified training courses in various industries and one-to-one support, career guidance and personal development to support learners to succeed in their chosen careers.

Specialisterne Ireland

Specialisterne Ireland is a recruitment consultancy that recruits and supports talented autistic and neurodivergent adults to find employment in a career they can thrive in. They offer a wide range of support to both employees and employers alike. They support employees in applying for jobs, preparing for interviews, discussing their options if on disclosure and requesting reasonable accommodations.

For employers, Specialisterne provides a pool of talented candidates for roles, training for managers on conducting autism-friendly interviews, and advice on applying reasonable accommodations. They also offer ongoing support to employers and employees.

8. Support for SMEs from AsIAM while Recruiting Autistic Talent



How Can AsIAM Support SMEs In Recruiting Autistic Talent

AsIAM has two teams that can support your organisation in recruiting and retaining autistic people, our Adults Support and Employment Department and our Training and Accreditation Department. As an autistic-led, not-for-profit autism advocacy organisation with half our staff being either autistic or neurodivergent, we have the knowledge and expertise to help your business tap into the unlimited potential of embracing Autism and neurodiversity.

AsIAM Adult Support and Employment Team

Our Adult Support and Employment Department support employers in recruiting and retaining autistic people. We can provide training, advice, and guidance to help you build an autism-friendly workplace and to develop a more inclusive organisational culture for autistic and neurodivergent talent, which benefits from the strengths that autistic people can bring to the workplace. We can also provide staff training through the use of our digital badges. In addition, we continually work with autistic people who wish to find work by providing advice and support on the recruitment process, including help preparing cover letters, CVs and applications, preparing for interviews, and any next steps in the recruitment process via our Job search support workshops.

AsIAM Training and Accreditation Team

Our Training and Accreditation Department supports organisations nationwide to become more autism-friendly through our online and in-person Autism Acceptance and Understanding Training and Accreditation programmes. We can deliver training in person or remotely. In addition, our Autism-Friendly Accreditation programmes can support your organisation in attracting more Autistic talent by becoming more autism-friendly and inclusive using best practices as they evolve.

Don't hesitate to contact us to learn how we can support you. You can email us at info@asiam.ie for more information, or visit our website at www.asiam.ie.



IRISH JOBS