

# Evaluation of the Understanding Autism in the Workplace Training

COMMISSIONED BY THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY

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BEHALF OF HEALTH INNOVATION EAST



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## Executive summary

# Background

Finding and remaining in employment is an ongoing challenge for autistic adults, with many facing unfair hiring practices, limited workplace support, and difficult workplace environments. Understanding Autism in the Workplace is a training course delivered by the National Autistic Society (NAS) to improve how people understand autism and support autistic colleagues within the workplace. Health Innovation East was commissioned by the NAS to evaluate the impact of training on autistic employees in the workplace. This report presents key findings and recommendations from the evaluation that was conducted between August 2024 and January 2025.

# Methods

A mixed-methods approach was adopted and included a pre- and post-training survey to assess the effectiveness of the training, people's experience of the training session, and the short-term impact on autistic employees and their workplaces. Interviews with autistic employees were conducted to explore the longer-term impact of the training on their experiences at work. An advisory group, including autistic adults (n=3) and members of the evaluation team (n=2) was set up to guide the evaluation, ensuring it reflected the needs and preferences of autistic people and their families.

## Findings

Forty-seven training attendees between September and December 2024 completed the surveys (pre-training survey n=47 responses; post-training survey (part 1) n=42 responses; post-training survey (part 2) n=11 responses). One autistic employee participated in an interview. Key findings from the evaluation are summarised below:

- **The training effectively increased awareness of autism in the workplace.** Of the 42 participants who completed the pre- and post-training survey, the average self-rating for understanding of autism increased from 2.8 to 3.9 out of 5; understanding of autism in the workplace increased from 2.7 to 4 out of 5; and confidence in creating a supportive and inclusive environment increased from 2.8 to 3.8, demonstrating improvement in people's confidence and understanding post-training.
- **The training inspired people to make changes within the workplace.** Thirty-one participants (74%) said they were inspired to implement new workplace practices post-training. Seven of the eleven participants (64%) who responded to the post-training survey (part 2) also reported workplace improvements one month post-training, including increased awareness of autism, open dialogue about the impacts of autism in the workplace, and personalised support for autistic employees across teams.
- **The training was viewed positively overall, however a handful of participants recommended areas for improvement** including a longer training session to cover more content, increasing course capacity to allow more attendees per training, further interactive components, and the inclusion of more diverse scenarios, for example non-office based examples. Participants also said they would like to learn more about strategies to manage and support autistic colleagues. Each of these recommendations were suggested by less than 10% of respondents to the post-training survey (n=42).
- **Over 75% of participants anticipated the training will lead to increased awareness of autism in the workplace.** The interview did however reveal that the impact of the training is likely to be localised to those who attended the training or work directly with training attendees.

# Recommendations

Based on findings from the evaluation, the following recommendations have been made:

- **Continued evaluation of the training to collect insights from a larger cohort of participants across different organisations.** Collection of insight at multiple-time points (i.e. 3, 6, and 12 months post-training) should be considered by the NAS to measure long-term impact and allow organisations more time to implement new practices and see organisational change.
- **Continued efforts to engage autistic employees as part of future evaluations.** More insight from autistic employees is required to understand the longer-term impact of the training on autistic people, including their experiences, wellbeing and inclusion at work.
- **Minor training improvements are recommended to meet the needs of training attendees.** Recommendations from participants, such as the inclusion of more diverse training scenarios and more discussion around how to support and line manage autistic employees, are detailed in the main body of the report. These should be reviewed once more feedback has been collected so that reoccurring recommendations can be actioned.

# Introduction

Autism Know How is a newly established arm of the National Autistic Society (NAS) specialising in autism training and services to promote best practice in autism (1). Autism Know How comprises five teams, each with their own portfolio of services that aim to equip professionals, organisations and service providers with the knowledge and understanding required to tailor their existing practice to be inclusive and meet the needs of autistic people. Work across these teams is considered important to help create the NAS vision of a society where services, support, employment, education, leisure activities and a good quality of life are accessible to all.

Understanding Autism in the Workplace aims to improve how people understand autism and support autistic colleagues within the workplace (2). The training course introduces the topic of autism through presentations, interactive activities, case studies and discussion, and seeks to raise awareness of autistic peoples' experiences at work. The training is delivered in one session either online or in-person and runs for approximately three and a half hours. In-house training can be organised by the workplace, or employees can enrol in an open-access online course that is available to individuals from different organisations. Expected outcomes of the course include an increased awareness of autism and the difficulties autistic people may face at work; recognition of what might cause an autistic colleague to feel anxious at work; and an increased knowledge of and confidence to implement appropriate adjustments to support autistic colleagues.

Although staff working within Autism Know How believe their services are effective and bring value to the autistic people, there has not been an independent evaluation to assess this impact to date. The NAS have commissioned Health Innovation East to conduct an independent evaluation of the Understanding Autism in the Workplace training course. This document outlines the findings and recommendations of the evaluation.

## Background

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world (3). Like all people, autistic people have their own strengths and weaknesses. Some difficulties autistic people may share include social communication and social interaction challenges, repetitive or restrictive behaviours, extreme anxiety, over- or under-sensitivity to environmental stimuli, highly focused interests or hobbies and meltdown or shutdowns (3). The NAS supports the 700,000 autistic people living in the UK and their families (1). Be it running

specialist schools, campaigning for improved rights or training companies on being more autism-friendly, the NAS are dedicated to transforming lives and changing attitudes.

The employment rate for autistic people has been cited many times as one of the lowest compared to other disabilities (5, 6). Latest data from the Office for National Statistics shows that just 29% of autistic people aged 16 to 64 are in employment (5). Though some autistic people are not able to work, the majority are able and want to work. Evidence shows there are a variety of barriers and challenges facing autistic people in either finding employment, accessing support whilst in employment or remaining in employment. A lack of autism understanding, discrimination and poor support and adjustments within employment all play a fundamental role in autistic people facing significant barriers in employment (6).

## Aim

The aim of this evaluation was to understand the impact of the Understanding Autism in the Workplace training course on autistic employees and their workplace. The evaluation specifically focused on measuring training effectiveness in enhancing workplace understanding of autism, changes in workplace behaviours towards autistic employees post-training, areas for training improvement, and impact of the training on the experiences of autistic employees at work. The evaluation sought to address the following questions:

1. How effective is the Understanding Autism in the Workplace training programme in enhancing participants' understanding of autism and inclusion of autistic employees?
2. What changes in workplace practices and behaviours occur as a result of the training?
3. What does feedback from participants tell us about how the training can be improved?
4. What is the long-term impact of the training on autistic employees in terms of workplace experience and support?

# Methods

## Evaluation context

This was an independent evaluation delivered by the Evaluation Team at Health Innovation East between August 2024 and January 2025. The NAS were consulted throughout the evaluation but not actively involved in its delivery. The NAS distributed an invitation to participate in data collection activities to all relevant parties and potential participants. Recruitment and data collection were then managed by the Evaluation Team once employees consented to their contact details being shared.

### Co-design and advisory group

Autistic adults were invited to form a co-design and advisory group to guide the evaluation. Group members were identified through existing contacts with the Evaluation Team and responses to an open invitation shared by the Autism Research Centre at the University of Cambridge. The invitation was shared with the Centre's established advisory group via email in September 2024. Respondents to the invitation were asked to complete a brief screening form which asked respondents to share their connection to autism and their availability to contribute to the evaluation. The group was selected based on their availability and experience with autism, including experience of autism in the workplace, and experience conducting or supporting research with autistic people. The group included five people in total; three autistic adults and two members of the Evaluation Team. Each member (excluding Evaluation Team representatives) was paid £25 per hour for their contributions to the project.

The co-design and advisory group contributed to the design of the evaluation framework and data collection materials, ensuring the research approach and questions were suited to achieving objectives of the evaluation. Five group meetings took place via Microsoft Teams between September 2024 and January 2025. These meetings centred around discussion to inform the design of the evaluation framework, participant recruitment, and best practice for conducting research with autistic adults. Interactive workshops were also held during these meetings to co-design evaluation questions for the surveys and interview. Outside of meetings, group members had the option to feedback on written materials including the evaluation plan and questions in the survey and interview topic guide. Towards the end of the project, the group provided feedback on dissemination materials, including the final evaluation report and a two-page summary for external audiences, to ensure they were informative and accessible for autistic readers.



## Data collection

Data collection took place between September 2024 and December 2024. A mixed-methods approach was used to conduct the evaluation. Surveys were designed to measure the effectiveness of the training on people's understanding and confidence in supporting autistic colleagues, people's experience of attending the course, and the short-term impact on the workplace for autistic employees, addressing evaluation questions 1, 2, and 3. Interviews were conducted to supplement this data and understand the longer-term impact on the experiences of autistic employees in the workplace, thereby addressing evaluation question 4.

### Surveys

All employees attending the training between September 2024 and December 2024 were invited to complete a pre- and post-training survey. This included a mix of employees attending in-house and open-access online training sessions. Surveys were created in Zoho Survey and shared with participants via a QR code. Participants accessed the survey at the start of the training session. It took between 5 to 10 minutes to complete and included eleven questions that were a mix of multiple choice and free text response (see Appendix 1). The post-training survey was delivered in two parts; the first was shared with participants via a QR code at the end of the session. Again, this took between 5 to 10 minutes to complete and included another eleven multiple choice and free text response questions (see Appendix 2). Part two was sent via email to participants who consented to sharing their email address with the evaluation team, one month post-training. Part two included just one question to understand what changes had occurred in the workplace soon after the training (see Appendix 2).

### Interview

Employees from workplaces that had completed the training at least six months before the evaluation began were invited to participate in an interview to understand the longer-term impact of the training on autistic employees' experiences at work. An invitation was sent in October 2024 to three workplaces who had completed the training 6 to 12 months prior. Anyone who identified as being autistic, regardless of whether or not they had attended the training, were eligible to participate in the interviews, which enabled the Evaluation Team to collect data from the perspective of autistic employees. Recruiting to interviews was challenging; the Evaluation Team received no expressions of interest from potential participants in the first few weeks of data collection. To mitigate the risk of obtaining no data from autistic individuals, invitations were extended to employees completing the training during the evaluation period who identified as autistic. This invitation was included at the end of the post-training survey.

The interview topic guide included thirteen questions, covering themes described in Table 1 (see below). The interview was facilitated online via Microsoft Teams. Participants were required to read a participant information sheet and sign a consent form prior to the interview. In considering the potentially challenging subject matter, participants were asked to complete a wellbeing plan prior to the interview. The wellbeing plan was designed by the Evaluation Team and was guided by resources on the Autistica website (8) to ensure the person facilitating the interview understood how best to support the participant should they become upset at any point during the session. The wellbeing plan also asked if the participant required any reasonable adjustments.

**Table 1:** Question domains in the interview topic guide.

Theme
Experience of training course
Perceived short-term impact of the training
Predicted long-term impact of the training
Recommendations for improvement

# Data analysis

## Survey

Survey data was exported from Zoho in Excel format and stored in Health Innovation East’s secure data storage. Quantitative data from the survey was descriptively analysed and interpreted based on emerging patterns. Three evaluation questions remained the same across the pre- and post-training survey. For these three questions, the difference was calculated but not tested for statistical significance due to the small sample size. Pre- and post-training comparisons were visually presented in figures, while tables were created for all other data. Free-text responses were analysed thematically using an inductive approach to generate themes. The qualitative analysis was also performed in Microsoft Excel.

## Interview

The interview transcript was thematically analysed using the six stage approach: familiarisation, coding, searching, theme refinement, and reporting. A researcher performed an inductive analysis of the transcript to identify key themes in the data. A second researcher repeated the analysis and compared themes to those generated by researcher one to ensure accuracy and consistency in data coding. Qualitative analysis was performed in Microsoft Word.

# Findings

In total, 47 employees who attended the training between September and December 2024 responded to the survey. All 47 completed the pre-training survey, while 42 went on to complete the first part of the post-training survey. Of the 19 participants who consented to sharing their email address, 11 completed post-training survey part two. One autistic employee was recruited to participate in an interview approximately three months post-training.

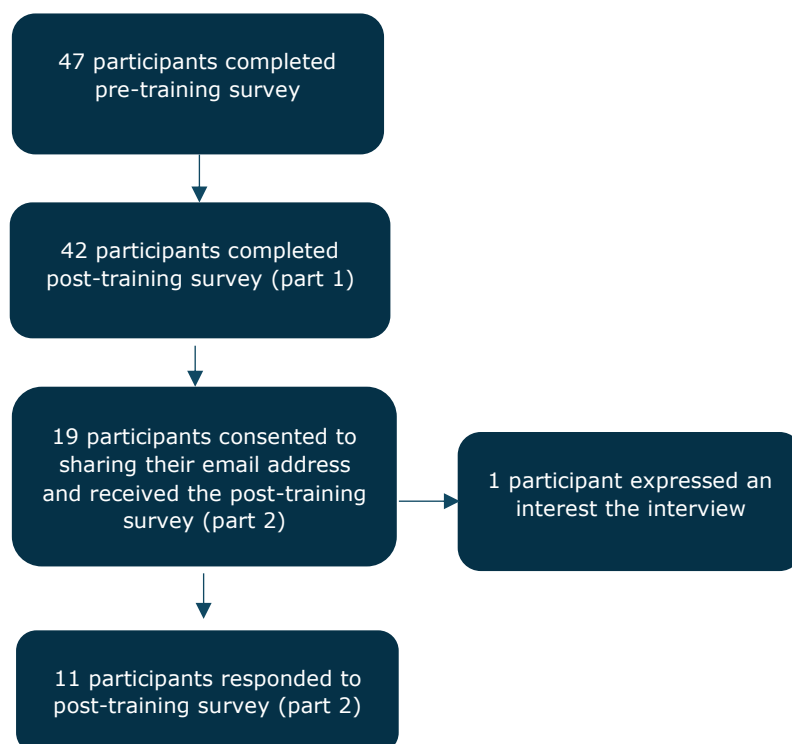


Figure 1. Flow-chart depicting participation in evaluation activities.

## 1. Motivations for attending the training

The pre-training survey included a number of questions to learn about participants' motivations for attending the course and perceptions of their current workplace practices. Participants were asked to select their reasons for enrolling in the course from a list of pre-defined options (see Table 2). Multiple options could be selected or participants could select "Other" and specify an alternative reason. Although responses were mixed, most participants indicated they were attending the course to improve their skills in supporting autistic colleagues (n=40) or to gain a better understanding of autism in the workplace (n=39). A small number of participants

shared that they were autistic and interested in learning about how their employer could offer support to them in the workplace (n=3). One participant who responded “Other” specified they were using the course to see if they recognised any neurodivergent traits in themselves.

**Table 2:** Responses to the pre-training survey indicating participants’ reasons for attending the training course.

	N	%
To improve my skills in supporting autistic colleagues	40	85%
To gain a better understanding of autism in the workplace	39	83%
To promote an inclusive work environment	31	66%
Personal interest in autism and neurodiversity	25	53%
It was required for my role	3	6%
It was required by my organisation	3	6%
It was requested by an autistic colleague	3	6%
I am autistic and want to know how my employer can support me	3	6%
Other (Please specify) *	2	4%

\*Responses to “Other” included “to understand if I have any neurodivergent traits” and “access to work made a formal recommendation on assessment”.

Participants were also asked whether they had previously attended training on the topic of autism or neurodivergence in the workplace. Eighteen participants (38%) said they had attended training, seven of which commented that they had previously attended training provided by the NAS. When asked how they perceived current support within their workplace, most participants reported their organisation offers varying degrees of support to autistic employees, but almost all agreed that there was a need for improvement (see Table 3).

**Table 3:** Responses to the pre-training survey indicating participants’ perceptions of current levels of support for autistic employees in their workplace.

	N	%
No support is offered	1	2%
Some support is offered, but not adequate	6	13%
Neutral	6	13%
Somewhat supportive, with room for improvement	27	58%
Very supportive	1	2%
Unsure	5	11%
Other (Please specify) *	1	2%

\*Response to “Other” included “if we know someone has autism, we are very good at supporting”.

Over half of respondents (n=30) reported being a manager or supervisor to a diverse team and / or colleague to an autistic employee (n=15) (see Table 4).

**Table 4:** Responses to the pre-training survey indicating participants' current role in promoting inclusion within the workplace.

	N	%
Manager or supervisor of a diverse team	30	64%
Colleague or peer working with autistic employees	15	32%
Directly involved in diversity and inclusion activities	10	21%
Not directly involved but interested in contributing	4	9%
I am an autistic employee	3	6%
Other (Please specify) *	1	2%

\*Response to "Other" included "People team with some responsibility for developing resource to support colleagues and their managers".

When asked what they hoped to gain from the training, survey respondents reported looking to obtain a range of skills and understanding including practical strategies to support autistic colleagues (n=43), techniques to adjust communication approaches (n=43) and an understanding of the differences experienced by autistic people (n=41) (see Table 5)

**Table 5:** Responses to the pre-training survey indicating what participants hope to gain from the training course.

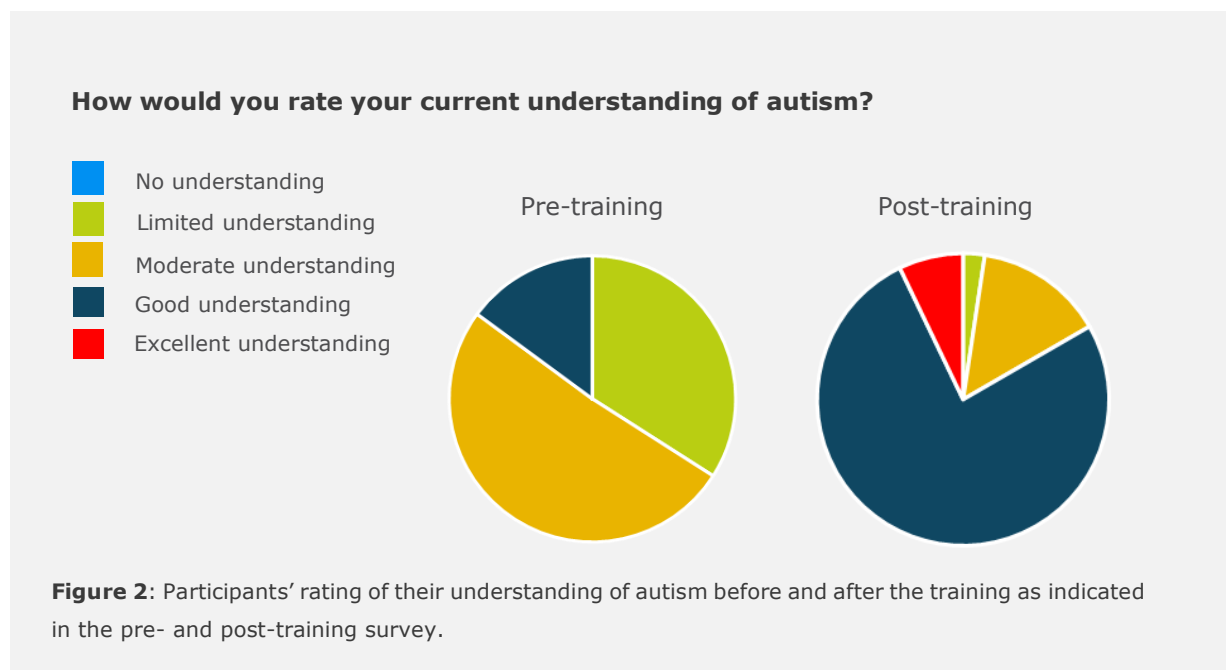
	N	%
New practical strategies for supporting autistic employees	43	92%
Techniques or skills to adjust communication approaches	43	92%
Understand differences that autistic people experience	41	87%
Insights into creating supportive work environments	37	79%
Tools for fostering a more inclusive workplace	35	75%
Other (Please specify) *	1	2%

\*Response to "Other" included "Assisting my own understanding of myself".

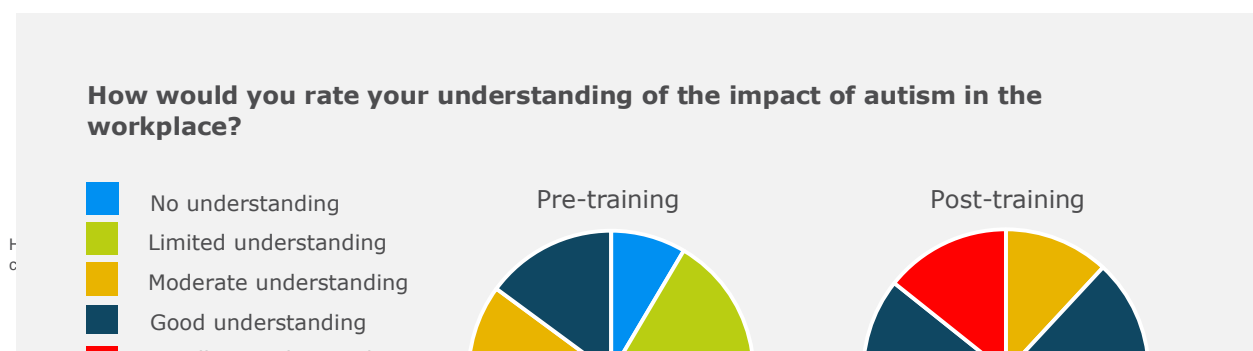
## 2. Training effectiveness (evaluation question 1)

Three survey questions were designed to measure how effective the training course was at enhancing participants' understanding of autism and the inclusion of autistic employees in the workplace. These questions asked participants to rate their current understanding of autism, understanding of the impact of autism in the workplace, and confidence in creating a supportive and inclusive work environment for autistic employees in both the pre- and post-training survey.

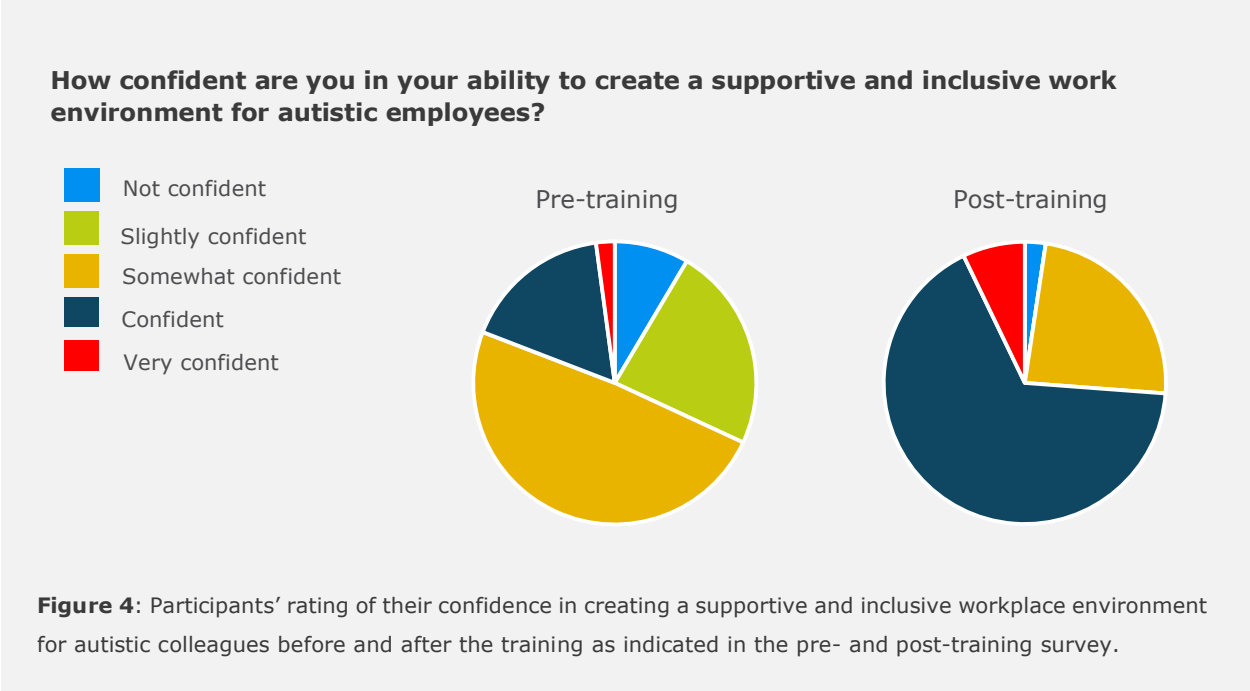
In response to the question on understanding of autism, just over half of respondents (n=24) felt they had a moderate understanding of autism in the pre-training survey (see Figure 2). Fewer participants felt they had a good (n=7) or limited understanding (n=16), and no participants reported an excellent or no understanding at all.



In response to the question on understanding the impact of autism in the workplace, figures were similar with just under half of respondents (n=22) rating themselves as having a moderate understanding of autism in the workplace in the pre-training survey, 30% (n=14) having a limited understanding, and 15% (n=7) a good understanding (see Figure 3). Unlike the previous question, four (9%) participants felt they had no understanding of the impact autism can have within the workplace prior to training.

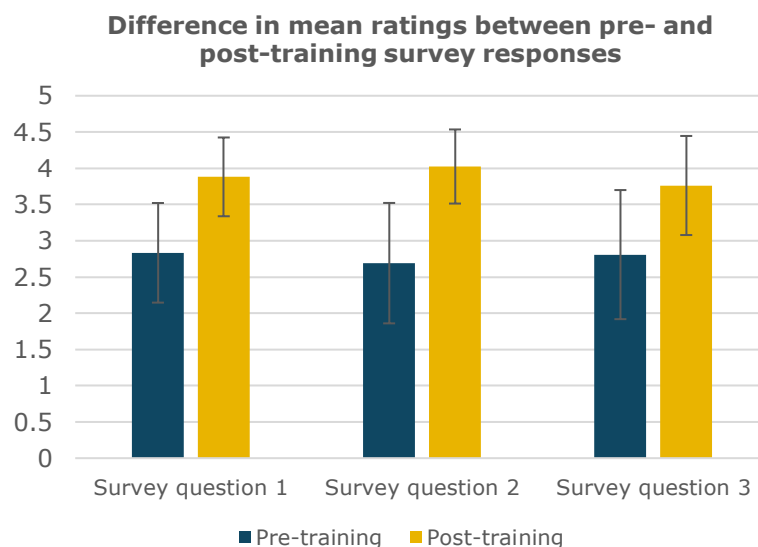


When asked about their confidence in creating a supportive and inclusive environment for autistic employees, 49% (n=23) of participants reported feeling somewhat confident, followed by 23% (n=11) feeling slightly confident and 17% (n=8) confident (see Figure 4). Again, four (9%) participants gave themselves a low rating to indicate they had no confidence in their ability to create a supportive and inclusive environment before the training. In contrast, one (n=2%) participant reported feeling very confident, responding with a high rating.



Participant ratings in the post-training survey increased across all three questions (see Figures 2, 3 and 4). Figure 5 presents the difference in average score across each question for

participants who completed both the pre- and post-training survey only. The mean rating for understanding of autism increased from 2.8 to 3.9; understanding of autism in the workplace increased from 2.7 to 4; and confidence in creating a supportive and inclusive environment increased from 2.8 to 3.8, demonstrating improvement in people's confidence and understanding post-training. Differences in pre- and post-training ratings were not tested for statistical significance due to sample size.



**Figure 5:** Difference in the mean between pre- and post- training survey ratings for questions on understanding and confidence in supporting autism in the workplace. Survey question 1=understanding of autism; Survey question 2=understanding of the impact of autism in the workplace; and survey question 3= confidence in creating a supportive and inclusive environment for autistic colleagues. Responses correspond to the following 5-points on a Likert scale: 1 = No understanding, 2 = Limited understanding, 3 = Moderate understanding, 4 = Good understanding, 5 = Excellent understanding (survey question 1 and 2) and 1 = Not confident, 2 = Slightly confident, 3 = Somewhat confident, 4 = Confident, 5 = Very confident (survey question 3). This is further supported by comments left by respondents in the post-training survey, which centred around an increased awareness of the differences autistic employees may experience at work and a confidence to work towards improving the workplace environment:

*"The training has given me useful ways to think about how autism affects individuals differently, and how thought processes may be different. It is difficult to ever understand how another person sees the world, but the main point seems to be to accept that others do think differently and we need to work with people." (P4 survey)*

*"It will take openness and communication but I'm confident we can get there." (P23 survey)*



While most participants felt more confident in their understanding of autism after the training, many were reluctant to select the highest rating, acknowledging there was still more to learn:

*"I thought the training was excellent and my understanding has definitely improved. The only reason I didn't say 5 is I believe there is always more that can be learnt."* (P1 survey)

*"Due to the individual nature of autism it is difficult to develop an excellent understanding."* (P33 survey)

*"Better than it was but still a way to go."* (P5 survey)

In a couple of instances, participants rated their confidence in creating a supportive and inclusive workplace lower after the training, attributing their response to an increased awareness of the challenges they are likely to face when attempting to implement adjustments:

*"But only lower rating because there are some aspects of our workplace environment that we can't control, that may not allow for some of the reasonable adjustments discussed in the training."* (P15 survey)

*"My work has undergone serious issues with resource, 40% staff gapping. This training has made me realise how unsupported I am to be able to have the time and resource to help autistic employees."* (P20 survey)

### 3. Changes in workplace practices and behaviours (evaluation question 2)

In the pre-training survey, participants were asked to think about what outcomes they hoped to see as a result of completing the training course. Comments included increased understanding of autism, practical skills and techniques to support autistic employees, and increased confidence managing and dealing with autism in the workplace:

*"Increased understanding of the experience of autism in the workplace, awareness of appropriate ways to support and manage staff. Increased confidence in having helpful approaches to autism in the workplace."* (P1 survey)

*"Feel more confident in creating an accessible environment and working with autistic people in the workplace"* (P44 survey)

*"More knowledge on methods to support, how to deal with situations and an overall understanding."* (P8 survey)

Others emphasised their hopes that the training would enable them to help autistic colleagues feel valued and able to thrive within the workplace:

*"Improved confidence to support my team member and make them feel valued and understood". (P15 survey)*

*"I want to do better when supporting my staff and colleagues, I want to do what I can to enable them to thrive." (P16 survey)*

Of the three participants who identified as autistic, there were common themes around hoping colleagues will better understand autism and preferred ways of working, as well as improving their own understanding of their autism:

*"More understanding that reasonable adjustments mean different ways of working. Software, hardware will not make my autism go away." (P6 survey)*

*"Staff having a strong and friendly understanding of autism." (P27 survey)*

*"Greater understanding of myself" (P24 survey)*

The post-training survey later asked if participants felt inspired to implement change within the workplace to better support autistic employees. Thirty-one out of forty-two participants (74%) responded yes and nine (21%) felt unsure (see Table 6). Some of those who responded to the question with uncertainty shared comments to suggest they were hopeful for change but remained cautious with their expectations:

*"I hope so. I'll have to wait and see." (P7 survey)*

*"Not immediately but will be following up with certain teams. Definitely want to provide similar training to more of my teams." (P5 survey)*

One participant responded "No" to this question but provided no further explanation.

**Table 6:** Responses to the post-training survey exploring whether participants were inspired to implement new workplace practices.

	N	%
Yes	31	74%
Unsure	9	21%
No	1	2%
No response	1	2%

A month post-training, a second survey was emailed to consenting participants to gauge any subsequent changes in workplace behaviours or practices relating to autistic colleagues. Of the nineteen participants who received the survey, eleven submitted a response. Seven (64%) participants responded “yes” to being asked if they had noticed any changes in workplace behaviours or practices for autistic colleagues since the training and four (36%) responded “no”. In the additional comments from participants who responded yes, emerging themes centred around increased awareness, open dialogue, and personalised support across teams:

*“Since the training we have had more practical conversations around how best to support and work with staff who may need extra support.” (P1 survey)*

*“When working with one of my team who has autism, if we have a meeting/discussion that results in actions, she & I now summarise and share by email afterwards so she is clear about what she is being asked to do.” (P13 survey)*

*“Still working on implementing additional support but definitely better awareness and recognition of consideration and early signposting within the team.” (P21 survey)*

One participant shared that they are already in the process of implementing new support:

*“We are implementing a support passport and focusing on raising awareness on neurodiversity.” (P23 survey)*

Of the participants who responded no, one survey respondent shared an additional comment explaining the autistic colleague they currently line manage has been off-sick since the training occurred.

Similar themes emerged in the interview, however this participant also shared that they, alongside other autistic colleagues, are feeling safer and more comfortable at work as a result of behaviour changes since the training took place:

*“It it's made a huge difference... they're no longer trying to fix them [autistic colleagues]. They're not treating them like they're broken. They're just treating them like they're different... It's subtle, but it's just enough to not come in to work and feel like crying every day... It doesn't feel as dangerous coming in”. (P6 interview)*

## 4. Feedback and areas for improvement (evaluation question 3)

The post-training survey and interview included questions to understand how participants experienced the course and suggested areas for improvement. Participants responding to the survey were asked which aspects of the training they found most valuable. Table 7 shows that the majority of participants found each aspect of the training valuable apart from “group discussions or interactive activities” which was valued by just 21% of participants (n=9). One respondent selected “Other” and shared they also valued being able to relate to their own personal experiences.

**Table 7:** Post-training survey responses demonstrating which aspects of the course participants found most valuable.

	N	%
Strategies for supporting autistic employees	37	88%
Understanding the differences that autistic employees experience	34	81%
Communication adjustments	34	81%
Adjustments to the workplace environment	30	71%
Creating an inclusive workplace environment	29	69%
Real-life case studies or examples of autism in the workplace	27	64%
Group discussions or interactive activities	9	21%
Other (Please specify) *	1	2%

\*Other=Being able to relate personal experiences

In agreement with survey responses, the interview participant reported that the training content and materials had effectively raised awareness of autism in their workplace. This participant particularly valued the video demonstrating the autistic experience, which they usually find difficult communicating to non-autistic colleagues:

*“I love the video with the child in the shopping mall... it was brilliant that it put into video what I experienced daily, which I just can't explain to someone” (P6 interview)*

The training was also seen to be effective in challenging existing mindsets and perceptions of autism:

*“I hadn't realised it until after the training course that people had assumed that I was learning disabled because I was autistic. And they suddenly started acting like I wasn't learning disabled... it's hard to know that it's again two completely separate diagnoses to be learning disabled is not to be autistic and to be autistic is not to be learning disabled.” (P6 interview)*

When asked how the training could be improved, survey respondents shared overall positive reflections with one commenting:

*"This is one of the best training courses I have been on in a long time. Presenters were faultless, a lot of information presented but slides were clear and never felt rushed. Plenty of time for questions." (P2 survey)*

Still, participants shared some recommendations for improvement including more time, increasing course capacity, more interactive components, and the inclusion of more diverse scenarios, for example in non-office based environments and of positive workplace outcomes:

*"I would like a longer session, it was effectively a half day course delivered over two short sessions. Feels worthy of a full day." (P4 survey)*

*"More people to attend as only able to have 25 and could have been provided to larger number." (P3 survey)*

*"Less talking from the trainer, group work or more videos" (P9 survey)*

*"More examples from non-office based work environments" (P15 survey)*

*"More examples of positive outcomes where issues were found and resolved and/or where adjustments were put in place." (P23 survey)*

Other survey respondents emphasised how they would have preferred the session to focus more on discussing strategies to manage and support autistic employees within their workplace:

*"A bit more focus on strategies to help autistic employees." (P11 survey)*

*"Managing people with autism long term, including 121/supervision sessions etc... and how to continue to help people over an extended period." (P14 survey)*

This point is further supported by views shared in the interview around the training not being geared towards teaching support mechanisms or how to implement new strategies for autistic employees:

*"...it was very much just how to make the general workplace more aware... not changing policies or changing particular work practises in areas... it didn't really cover anything like that except talk to your HR department." (P6 interview)*

The interview revealed additional recommendations around the content and materials used throughout the training, for example giving autistic attendees a warning before playing highly stimulating videos:

*"I had to take a couple of minutes to resetttle myself because it [video sounds] really set me off... it would be really good if there's just like a little warning disclaimer of you're about to see just so that if there is any other autistic people doing the training that they can mute it."*  
(P6 interview)

In addition to ensuring scenarios used are truly representative of the autistic experience at work and challenge colleagues to adapt their mindset:

*"Scenarios didn't particularly make anyone uncomfortable.. they were great because they are typical workplace scenarios, but they're not the ones that people remember. They're not the ones that make someone go. Oh, good God, I just had to deal with such and such and make you change... There wasn't any scenarios that would actually make you go, I have to think about this."*  
(P6 interview)

The interview participant recommended increased effort to co-design scenarios with autistic individuals to ensure they are as effective as possible.

Prior to attending the course, participants were asked whether there were any specific topics or questions they hoped the training would address. Many participants commented they were attending the course with an open-mind and had no expectations. Of those that did have specific topics in mind, participants shared that they hoped to learn how to identify autistic traits, how best to support and adapt to individual needs, as well as methods for communication:

*"How to spot traits and how to deal with them in supportive way."* (P31 survey)

*"Recognising appropriate reasonable adjustments and how to adapt processes to benefit people."* (P10 survey)

*"Communication skills"* (P34 survey)

One autistic employee also shared that they hoped the course would help colleagues understand how variable the autistic experience can be:

*"How variable the impacts of how we experience the world is. I'm still struggling to explain that if I could do a task one day I can't do it the next and vice versa depending on how I'm able to cope...."* (P6 survey)

Following the course, participants were asked whether they felt any content or topics were missing from the training. Comments indicated that the majority of participants were happy with the training content. One participant shared their expectation for the training to have covered exhaustion in the workplace and the importance of encouraging autistic employees to take more frequent breaks to support their wellbeing:

*"For a workplace focused training I expected there to be something more around the exhaustion of being in the workplace, masking and for the majority of autistic employees the necessity for more short breaks away from the workplace during the work day over above your lunch break. Different policies would have it as paid or unpaid breaks as appropriate but I felt it was missing as a topic to normalise the need for rest during a shift as a strategy to support autistic employees achieve a work life balance."* (P6 survey)

Table 8 presents participants' views in response to being asked whether they would recommend the training course to other colleagues. Forty-one survey respondents (98%) indicated that they were either likely or very likely to recommend the training, whilst one respondent indicated they were unlikely to recommend it further. This one participant did not comment further on their response.

**Table 8:** Likelihood of participants recommending training to other colleagues based on responses to the post-training survey.

	N	%
Very Likely	28	67%
Likely	13	31%
Neutral	0	0%
Unlikely	1	2%
Very Unlikely	0	0%

## 5. Long-term impact of the training (evaluation question 4)

Participants responding to the survey were asked to indicate what long-term outcomes they anticipated as a result of attending the training course. Most participants responded to this question by selecting an "improved understanding of autism" (n=36) and / or an "improved awareness of autism" (n=32) (see Table 9). Only two (5%) survey respondents reported anticipating no significant change within their workplace.

**Table 9:** Anticipated long-term outcomes in participants' teams as a result of the training based on post-training survey responses.

	N	%
Improved understanding of autism	36	86%
Improved awareness of autism	32	76%
Enhanced support for autistic colleagues	27	64%
More inclusive culture	27	64%
Improved communication and collaboration	26	62%
Fewer misunderstandings between colleagues	21	50%
Increased job satisfaction for autistic employees	21	50%
No significant changes expected	2	5%
Other (Please specify)	0	0%

Participants were asked to comment on what they predicted the impact of the training would be on autistic colleagues in their team or workplace. Responses to this question centred around autistic colleagues feeling more included and understood, as well as an increased confidence to vocalise their needs:

*"Will help them [autistic employees] to feel more understood and to be able to speak up if they feel like they need to." (P39 survey)*

*"Feel more comfortable to speak up about issues or support they needs." (P7 survey)*

*"Make them [autistic employees] feel seen and catered to" (P30 survey)*

Participants also predicted the training would lead to better awareness of autism and open dialogue across teams to ensure the right support and reasonable adjustments are offered:

*"Open discussion between individuals and line managers and then reasonable adjustments can be made" (P31 survey)*

*"More open to discussion and implement measures to make their [autistic employees] work more enjoyable." (P23 survey)*

The interview included a discussion about hopes and predictions for the future. While the participant reported positive changes within their immediate team, they shared reservations about how the training could lead to widespread impact considering how few people from their workplace participated in the course. The participant identified the need for their organisation to encourage course participation more widely across the workplace:



*"I've noticed so many small little changes just in my area, but I know that it's only in my area. I have 10,000 people who work for my company. This only impacted like 12, and I'm one of them... if my company could just acknowledge that this was good and make it standard and easy to access for anyone who comes in and says, we think we need help, you can then start hitting 12 people all the time, and then that 12 then spreads and then spreads." (P6 interview)*

This participant shared their hopes that the training would lead to normalising support offered to autistic adults in the workplace, just as they would for other medical conditions:

*"There is still this huge misunderstanding that you stop being autistic when you turn 18 and I don't know why because you don't suddenly stop being type one diabetic when you turn 18. You don't stop being epileptic when you turn 18. Why does someone who needed accommodations throughout their entire school suddenly stop needing accommodations because they turned 18... we have a diabetic fridge in our first aid office for the people who need insulin during the working day. That's not questioned because nobody questions that you don't stop being diabetic as soon as you come to work." (P6 interview)*

The interview participant recommended the training course should include additional content demonstrating the impact of autism from an adult's perspective:

*"It is one thing that I would have really loved to see introduced into the awareness training because that child video I mentioned at the very beginning have one for an adult. Because it's still sets in that perception that you stop being autistic when you turn 18." (P6 interview)*

# Summary of Findings

This evaluation sought to understand the impact of the Understanding Autism in the Workplace training on autistic employees in the workplace. Using a mixed-methods approach, the evaluation specifically focused on measuring the effectiveness of the training on how employees understand autism; the inclusion of autistic employees at work, including changes in workplace practices and behaviours towards autistic employees post-training; and the impact of the training on the experiences of autistic employees at work. The evaluation also sought to understand people's experience of the training to identify any potential areas for improvement. Forty-seven course attendees participated in the evaluation, responding to a pre- and post-training survey. One autistic participant was interviewed, contributing in-depth insight on their experience of the training, perceived short- and predicted long-term impact of the training on themselves and other autistic employees in their workplace, and recommendations for training improvement. A summary of the key findings is listed below:

## **The training was effective in increasing awareness of autism in the workplace**

Comparisons between the pre- and post-training survey demonstrated an overall increase in people's general understanding of autism, awareness of the impact of autism in the workplace, and confidence in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for colleagues. This was further reflected in the additional comments provided. Some survey respondents reported that whilst their confidence and understanding had increased, they did not feel they had an excellent understanding of autism and recognised there was much more to learn. Two participants rated their confidence lower in the post-training survey due to an increased awareness of the challenges they are likely to face when implementing workplace changes, for example limited time and resources to help offer increased support to autistic employees.

## **The training inspired people to make change within the workplace**

Findings from the survey revealed thirty-one participants felt inspired to implement new workplace behaviours and practices to support autistic colleagues, post-training. Although nine participants felt unsure, their comments suggested they were hopeful for change. One month after the training, eleven participants responded to a question on whether they had observed any change in their workplace since the training took place. Seven said they had, with participants recognising increased awareness, open dialogue, and personalised support for autistic people across teams. The interview participant reported feeling safer and more comfortable at work as a result of the training.

## **The training was viewed positively overall, however there is room for improvement**

Overall, participants shared positive feedback about the training, with all but one respondent reporting they were likely or very likely to recommend the course to others. Participants particularly valued aspects of the course relating to strategies for supporting autistic employees; communication adjustments and understanding the differences autistic employees experience at work; and viewed training materials and content as effective at increasing understanding of autism. Even so, participants shared thoughts on how the training could be improved, such as increasing training time to cover more content, increasing course capacity to allow more attendees per training, further interactive components, and the inclusion of more diverse scenarios throughout the session, for example autism in non-office based environments; positive outcomes in the workplace; and emphasising the experience of autism from an adult's perspective. Several participants said they would like more discussion around strategies to support and line-manage autistic colleagues. Caution is recommended when interpreting these results as no recommendation was suggested by more than 10% of the sample.

## **Over 75% of participants anticipated the training will lead to increased awareness and inclusion of autistic employees at work**

Although this evaluation did not measure the long-term impact of the Understanding Autism in the Workplace training, participants did share what impact they anticipated within their organisation, most of which indicated an improved understanding and awareness of autism. Participants shared predictions for the long-term impact on autistic colleagues which centred around inclusion, more open dialogue around autism, and autistic colleagues feeling more confident to vocalise their needs within the workplace. The interview did however reveal that the impact of the training is likely to be localised to those who attended the training or work directly with training attendees.

# Strengths and limitations

## Strengths

Adopting a mixed-methods approach for this evaluation enabled the nuance and depth of the qualitative data to supplement the quantitative data. Within a limited timeframe, the evaluation collected feedback from forty-seven training attendees. The robust and piloted survey can be used by the NAS to enable further evaluation and shape future delivery of the training. This evaluation was guided by a co-design and advisory group consisting of three autistic adults who have a lived experience of autism in the workplace, as well as some experience conducting research. This group was instrumental in ensuring the evaluation design had considered the needs of people with autism. Though this evaluation had a number of strengths, it is important to acknowledge the following limitations:

## Measuring the long-term impact

The evaluation had planned to recruit autistic adults from workplaces that had completed the training at least six months prior to data collection to participate in a focus group or interview. The aim of this was to collect some insight on the training's longer-term impact on autistic employees. Recruitment to focus groups / interviews was unsuccessful due to lack of uptake. To mitigate the risk of collecting no insight on the longer-term impact, participants completing the training during the evaluation timeframe were invited to respond to an additional survey one month post-training. This survey aimed to evaluate the impact of the training on a shorter timeframe than was initially planned. Further evaluation is required to better understand the long-term impact of the training on the workplace and autistic employees.

## Limited feedback from autistic employees

A key objective of this evaluation was to understand the impact that training has had on the experiences of autistic employees in the workplace. It was therefore considered essential to collect insight from autistic employees themselves and not just those attending the course. Although there was no requirement for participants to disclose their autism, the team are aware of three autistic employees who contributed to the evaluation; all three via the survey, and one in an interview. Whilst the evaluation was successful in collecting valuable insights from both non-autistic and autistic participants, particularly during the interview, more data is required to better understand the impact on autistic employees in the workplace.

# Recommendations

Based on insights generated through the pre- and post-training survey and single interview, the Evaluation Team recommends the following to ensure the Autism in the Workplace training continues to meet the needs of attendees and benefits autistic employees:

## **Continued evaluation to collect insight from a larger cohort of participants from across different organisations**

It is recommended the NAS continues evaluating the training to collect insight from a larger sample size. The pre- and post-training survey will be made available to the NAS should their team wish to use it. The NAS should also use consider further evaluation to monitor the long-term impact of the training on autistic employees in the workplace. Based on lessons learned from this evaluation, we acknowledge the challenges associated with engaging participants in evaluation activities, weeks or months after the training has been completed, however recommend the NAS adopts strategies to engage training attendees early on. For example, including a question at the end of the post-training survey to ask if respondents would be happy being contacted in the future (i.e. 3, 6, and 12 months) to understand what impact the training has had on them and their organisation. This approach will also give individuals and their organisation more time to process the training, implement change, and see the impact.

## **Continued efforts to engage autistic employees as part of future evaluations**

Recruiting autistic employees for the purpose of this evaluation was challenging. More insight from autistic employees is required to understand the impact of the training on autistic people including their experiences, wellbeing and inclusion at work. The autistic participant who was interviewed for this evaluation shared their view that many autistic employees will not feel safe or comfortable giving feedback about their organisation or experiences at work, whilst also reporting that some colleagues feel passionately about improving the workplace for autistic employees and will be eager to share feedback. Although this was the view of just one person, the NAS should continue their efforts to identify autistic employees who are willing to engage in evaluation activities. An additional question asking if participants feel comfortable disclosing their autism could be added to the end of the pre- and post-training surveys to help achieve this.

## **Minor training improvements are recommended to meet the needs of training attendees**

One autistic participant reported having to step away from the training after feeling overwhelmed by the sounds in a video that was shown to demonstrate the autistic experience. While this was only reported by one participant, disclaimers before sharing training content or materials that might cause autistic attendees to feel overwhelmed or upset are highly recommended. Other recommendations from participants are listed below. These should be reviewed once more feedback has been collected so that reoccurring recommendations can be actioned:

- More discussion on strategies to support and line manage autistic employees – if this is the focus of other courses offered by the NAS, course attendees may benefit from improved signposting to additional training.
- Inclusion of non-office based scenarios. The NAS should consider keeping a bank of scenarios that can be interchanged to suit the given audience.
- Inclusion of scenarios that demonstrate positive outcomes within the workplace.
- Inclusion of materials that reflect an adult's perspective of autism to complement the video demonstrating the child's experience.
- Sense-check with autistic employees whether scenarios used throughout the training are truly reflective of their experiences at work. Scenarios should be co-designed with autistic employees to ensure this is achieved.
- Increase the length of the training session to include more content.
- Increase course capacity to allow more people to attend each session.

# Conclusion

This evaluation aimed to measure the impact of the Understanding Autism in the Workplace training course on the lives of autistic people. Findings highlighted that the training was able to increase people's understanding of autism and the impact of autism in the workplace. Although the training inspired people to implement new practices and behaviours to support autistic colleagues in the workplace, more could be done to ensure employees feel confident supporting people with autism at work. Some recommendations were shared by participants to improve training content and materials, including a greater of range examples and scenarios and longer training sessions, however the course was overall well-received by attendees. While there are limitations, this evaluation provides valuable insights to help inform the future direction of training delivery. Further evaluation is required to understand the longer-term impact of the training, particularly on autistic employees.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Pre-training survey questions

1. What is your primary reason(s) for participating in this training? Please select all that apply.
2. How would you rate your current understanding of autism?
3. How would you rate your understanding of the impact of autism in the workplace? (This could include how you understand the impact of sensory differences or differences in processing information).
4. How confident are you in your ability to create a supportive and inclusive work environment for autistic employees? (This could include considerations such as adjustments to the physical environment or ways of working).
5. Have you previously received any training on autism or neurodiversity in the workplace?
6. What do you hope to gain from this training? Please select all that apply.
7. What challenges have you encountered when working with or supporting autistic employees? (If not applicable, please write "N/A")
8. How would you describe your organisation's current level of support for autistic employees?
9. What is your current role in promoting inclusion within your organisation? Please select all that apply.
10. What outcomes would you like to see after completing this training?
11. Are there specific topics or questions about autism in the workplace that you would like this training to address?

## Appendix 2: Post-training survey (part 1) questions

1. Overall, how would you rate the Autism in the Workplace training?
2. How would you rate your current understanding of autism?
3. How would you rate your understanding of the impact of autism in the workplace? (This could include how you understand the impact of sensory differences or differences in processing information).
4. How confident are you in your ability to create an inclusive work environment for autistic employees? (This could include considerations such as adjustments to the physical environment or ways of working).
5. Which aspects of the training did you find most valuable? Please select all that apply.
6. Has this training inspired you to implement changes in your workplace practices as a result of this training?
7. How likely are you to recommend this training to a colleague?
8. In your opinion, how could this training programme be improved?
9. What long-term outcomes do you expect to see in your team as a result of this training? Please select all that apply.
10. How do you think this training will impact autistic employees in your team?
11. Was there any content or topic you expected to be covered that was not included in the training?

### Post-training survey (part 2) questions

12. Since the training, have you noticed any changes in your workplace behaviour or practices? (hint: this could include the implementation of new practices or better communication with autistic employees).

## Appendix 3: Interview topic guide

### Experience of training

1. Can you start by telling us about your experience of the training?  
Prompt: What led you to complete the training?  
Prompt: Were there any aspects of the training you did like?  
Prompt: Were there any aspects of the training you didn't like?
2. Do you feel the training helped people learn more about autism?
3. Do you feel the training was effective at giving guidance and tips for supporting autistic employees at work?

### Short-term impact of the training

4. How do you think your colleagues responded to the training afterwards?
5. Have you noticed any changes in how people work or behave since the training? Has anything new been implemented since the training?
6. Have you noticed a change in how people interact with you or other autistic colleagues at work?
7. What part of the training do you think helps people change how they work or behave?

How has the training affected your own experience at work so far?

Prompt: Has it changed how you work day-to-day? Have you noticed any differences in how your team supports you?

### Long term impact of training

8. Looking ahead, what do you hope will change at work to better support autistic employees?  
Prompt: Are there specific improvements you'd like to see?
9. What (if any) do you think are the challenges to improving support for autistic employees?  
Prompt: is there anything the training could do to better address these challenges?
10. Do you think the training will have a lasting impact on you and your colleagues?

### Recommendations

11. Do you have any recommendations for how the training could be improved to have a greater impact on autistic employees in the workplace?  
Prompt: are there any topics or methods you'd like to see added?

### Final reflections

12. Is there anything else you'd like to share that we haven't discussed today?