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PRESS RELEASE

Minister Launches Employers' Awareness Guide on Autism

Minister for Employment and Learning, Danny Kennedy, has today launched a guide to raise employers' awareness of autism.

The guide, 'Employing People with autism: a brief guide for employers' is an initiative of the National Autistic Society Northern Ireland in conjunction with the Department for Employment and Learning, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and Employers for Disability NI.



The Minister said: “The current economic climate presents real challenges for jobseekers, for employers and even for those currently in employment. These challenges can be even greater for people with disabilities. It is more important than ever that we make extra efforts to support people with conditions such as autism in their pursuit of employment.

“It is essential that those who have the capacity for work are encouraged and prepared for employment. We must not only continue to provide support on ‘progress towards work’ for those who need it, but we must also concentrate on making sure that paid employment is the choice for those who are capable of it. The benefits of working stretch far beyond financial gain – being employed instills a sense of achievement, belonging and self-worth. Employment opportunities should be accessible to all those in our community who are capable of pursuing this option.

“The Department for Employment and Learning will continue to support people with autism and similar conditions to both secure and retain employment by providing programmes and services that help overcome barriers to employment.”

Recent research by the National Autistic Society found that only 15% of people with autism were in full time jobs, yet many wanted to work. Autism is a spectrum condition which affects 1 in 100 people. Some people with autism are able to live independent lives while others need a lifetime of specialist support. Many people with autism who are able to work find it incredibly difficult to get a job because of a lack of understanding of their condition

Shirelle Stewart, co-director of the National Autistic Society Northern Ireland said:
“Many people with autism want to work and they can make exceptional employees, but getting a job in the first place can be difficult. This guide has been produced in order to promote understanding of autism amongst employers and to make them aware of the skills and talents that people with autism can bring to the workplace. People with autism are often very focused and have considerable skills in specific areas, including attention to detail, a methodical approach, strong research skills and a good long term memory.”

As well as raising awareness of autism amongst employers, the guide alerts employers to their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and provides practical information on how to make the necessary adjustments when recruiting and employing someone with autism.

Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, said:
“The Commission is delighted to have been involved in the publication and launch of this guidance. People with autism have much to offer the world of work, and can benefit greatly from it. It is essential that they are provided with the support and reasonable adjustments necessary to enable them to realise their full potential. This publication will benefit both employers and employees across Northern Ireland and will hopefully lead to increased employment for people with autism in many workplaces.”

Notes to editors:

Caption for photo:

DEL Minister Danny Kennedy (centre), Equality Commission Chief Commissioner Bob Collins and Shirelle Stewart of the National Autistic Society Northern Ireland launch Autism guide for employers at Equality House.

The Employment and Learning Minister and spokespeople from the National Autistic Society and the Equality Commission will be available for interview. Contact the DEL Press Office on 028 9025 7492 for Ministerial interviews.

Autism affects 1 in 100 people in Northern Ireland more than 17,000 people have autism.

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while all people with autism share certain difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways. Some people with autism are able to live relatively independent lives but others may have accompanying learning disabilities and need a lifetime of specialist support. People with autism may also experience over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colours.

Asperger syndrome is a form of autism. People with Asperger syndrome are often of average or above average intelligence. They have fewer problems with speech but may still have difficulties with understanding and processing language.