

Tips for interviewing people with autism or Asperger syndrome

People with autism or Asperger syndrome thrive in a structured and well organised environment and have many strengths that are advantageous to an employer, such as accuracy, good eye for detail, reliability and meticulous application of routine tasks. However, they may have varying (but often mild) difficulties with the following:

- ❖ Clear understanding of verbal and non-verbal communication such as body language, facial expressions, idiomatic language etc. They may take words literally.
- ❖ Building social relationships, starting and maintaining conversations on general topics that may not be of particular interest to them.
- ❖ Imaginative activity – may have narrow interests and find it hard to think in abstract ways. Their literal interpretation of the world means they are much more comfortable with facts rather than hypotheses.

During an interview candidates will be encouraged to answer more productively if the following “reasonable adjustments”¹ can be made:

- ✓ Ask closed questions and avoid open questions. For example, asking “Tell me about yourself” is very vague and the candidate may not be able to judge exactly what you want to know. A better question would be “Tell me about any jobs/voluntary work you have done in the last five years”.
- ✓ Ask questions based on the candidate’s real/past experiences, for example “In your last job, did you do any filing or data input? What processes/procedures did you use to do this effectively?”
- ✓ Avoid hypothetical or abstract questions, for example “How do you think you’ll cope with working if there are lots of interruptions?” A better question would be “Think back to your last job. Can you tell us how you coped with your work when people interrupted you?”
- ✓ Be prepared to prompt the candidate in order to extract all the relevant information and gather sufficient information.
- ✓ Be aware that the candidate may interpret language literally. Asking “How did you find your last job?” may result in an answer of “I looked in the A-Z” or “I looked in the paper, sent for the application form and completed it”.
- ✓ Be aware that eye contact may be fleeting or prolonged, depending on the individual.

¹ As recommended by The Disability Discrimination Act 1995