

Roadmap for Autism and Employment

Foreword - Adam Harris

Our vision in AsI Am is for an Ireland in which every Autistic person is accepted “as they are” - equal, valued and respected. What would this look like? At its most simple a society in which every member of our community has the same chance to live, work and play in communities across Ireland. Unfortunately, that is all too often far from the current reality.

Autistic people face pervasive barriers to accessing the world of work, these barriers not only impact the individual and their family but represent a major loss of perspective, talent and insight to workplaces across the country. Whilst Ireland has long failed to break down these barriers and turn the dial on Autism and disability unemployment, the coming decade presents an urgent challenge – with a whole generation of Autistic children due to age out of school, and a growing cohort of adults accessing Autism assessment. Neither the State nor business can afford to leave our community behind.

In AsI Am, we believe in working in partnership to co-create solutions with relevant thought leaders which makes for a better society for all. That is why we are delighted to present this roadmap for Autism and employment, in partnership with Ibec. The roadmap sets out a series of coordinated and cooperative actions which if government, businesses and organisations such as AsI Am were to take, would lead to a substantial increase in the number of Autistic people who are able and wish to work being supported to secure employment.

This publication marks a call to action for employers to commit to start out on the journey, or build on the progress they have already made, and to work with us to create accessible workplaces which are good for Autistic people and good for business. In advance of Budget 2026, it also sets out clear areas of investment that are required in order to bring about long-term change – inviting the State to both invest in meeting the support needs of Autistic people and ensuring real investment in employment supports for Autistic people seeking to secure and maintain employment or progress in their careers.

As an organisation, we hope that you will join us on the journey to create the accessible workplaces of the future.

Adam Harris
CEO, AsI Am

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Foreword - Danny McCoy

Ireland's economic success has always been built on the strength of its people — their innovation, adaptability, and resilience. As we look to the future of work in a rapidly evolving global economy, the most competitive and sustainable societies will be those that make full use of all their talent.

The Roadmap for Autism and Employment is both timely and essential. It offers a practical and forward-looking guide for employers, policymakers, and society at large to create a more equitable labour market — one where Autistic people are not just welcomed but valued for their unique perspectives and contributions.

At Ibec, diversity and inclusion are not simply moral imperatives, but strategic business imperatives. Embracing neurodiversity enhances decision-making, drives innovation, and strengthens organisational culture. Yet, despite increased awareness, Autistic individuals continue to face significant barriers to entering and thriving in the workforce.

This roadmap confronts those barriers head-on. It presents a collaborative vision, drawing on evidence-based practices and the collective input of stakeholders. It challenges outdated assumptions, proposes actionable solutions, and sets out a path to the labour market that is fairer and more fit for the future.

Employers have a unique opportunity — and responsibility — to be at the forefront of this change. By fostering inclusive recruitment practices, building supportive environments, and committing to continuous learning, we can help unlock the potential of a highly capable, often overlooked segment of our workforce. Government must lead the way by embracing the necessary changes to supports and structures to harness this talent and remove unnecessary obstacles in systems and procedures. As a significant employer in Ireland, the State also has a responsibility to lead by example. With the support of the Autism charity and support sector who bring lived experience and real solutions, the potential to co-create the way forward will benefit individuals, families, organisations and society, and offers the potential for collective ambition and success.

The Roadmap represents more than a policy document — it is a call to action, and a commitment to building a society where every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

Danny McCoy
CEO, Ibec

1. The untapped workforce

Despite legislation on equality in the workplace, disabled people do not experience the same access to employment opportunities as their counterparts without disabilities for various reasons.

While the employment rates vary across countries, consistently a person with a disability is less likely to be employed than one without a disability¹. Globally, neurodivergent unemployment rates are up to 3 times higher than for non-disabled peers (WHO, 2022).

According to the European Disability Forum's 2023 Human Rights Report, *The Right to Work*, Ireland has one of the lowest disability employment rates in the EU at 32.6%, nearly 20% below the EU average of 51.3%. The employment gap² stands at 38.6%, significantly higher than the EU average of 24.4%³.

However, the situation for Autistic people is even more stark. Whilst Ireland lacks disaggregated national data on the number of Autistic people in paid employment, national and international research demonstrates the scale of the challenge with a UN proclamation (2015) noting that over 80% of Autistic people globally are unemployed.

The most recent National Disability Survey (2006) found only about 16% of Autistic adults aged 25-64 are in paid employment, while 32% are engaged in some form of paid work. This contrasts with the approximately 70% employment rate in the general population within the same age group (CSO). A report by AsIAm and Irish Jobs⁴ revealed that 96% of Autistic people believe securing the job they want is more difficult for them compared to neurotypical individuals, with many reporting difficulties accessing and sustaining work due to lack of workplace supports and understanding⁵. This highlights a dual challenge of both unemployment and underemployment facing the community.

To address this will require a whole of society response with a particular focus on empowering Autistic people, supporting employers to create more accessible workplaces and practices, and government providing wraparound supports that are accessible, practical, tailored to the person, and effective for both individual and employer.

2. Shifting the Dial: Inclusive Workplaces for Autistic People

Autism is a lifelong, developmental difference which relates to how a person communicates and interacts with others, and how they experience the world around them. Autistic people make up a diverse community with individual support needs, strengths and differences varying greatly from one person to another. Autism is a natural variation in human neurology which needs to be recognised, accepted and affirmed. Autism is a spectrum, meaning that every Autistic person has a unique set of strengths, challenges, and support needs. Autistic people may also have another co-occurring differences or diagnoses, such as an intellectual disability or a mental health condition. In Ireland, Autism is recognised as a disability and as such is protected by the Equal Status Acts (2000-2018) and Employment Equality Acts (1998-2015).

Ireland has a dearth of reliable data relating to the experiences of Autistic people, including how many people in Ireland have a diagnosis of Autism. A lack of a public pathway for adult assessment, significant wait times for children seeking a diagnosis and consideration of the large number of Autistic people who may be without a diagnosis means that it is likely the number of Autistic people in Ireland is far higher than the number that the State is able to identify or recognise. In recent years, the State has sought to estimate prevalence of school-going children based on data from the Department of Education (2025) which indicates that the education system currently plans for around 5% or 1 in 20 schoolchildren being identified as Autistic.

It is important to take a strengths-based or neuroaffirmative approach to Autism. This recognises the differences an Autistic person may have, compared to neurotypical or non-Autistic people, and the barriers that the person may encounter in society as a result. This approach recognises that by identifying and removing barriers, the strengths, abilities and interests of an Autistic person have the same chance to be heard, harnessed and thrive.

1 Heymann, Stein, & de Elvira Moreno, 2014, p.4

2 "The difference between the employment rates of people with disabilities and that of people without disabilities.

3 <https://www.disability-federation.ie/publications/disability-in-ireland-factsheet-2024>

4 AsIAm/Irish Jobs (2023). *Autism in the Workplace Report: Creating opportunity for Autistic People*.

5 AsIAm Employment Report 2023

Whilst no two Autistic people are the same, members of the community may share differences in a number of key areas:

- **Predictability and routine** - Autistic people often rely on clear information and expectations in order to plan and engage in day-to-day activities or new experiences. A lack of predictability can lead to increased levels of anxiety, inaccessible communication or a sense of overwhelm. In order to provide certainty in an uncertain world, routine may be very important to members of the community as well as having context and visual information on what to expect before undertaking an activity.
- **Sensory Processing** - Autistic people may experience the world differently through the senses of taste, touch, smell, sound, movement and sight.
 - An individual may more intensely feel certain sounds, smells, colours or textures, sometimes to the point that it can be overwhelming and/or impact physically (e.g., painful, nauseating). Equally may be attracted to, enjoy, and/or may have favourite textures, sounds, colours or smells or specific preferences.
 - May find crowded spaces, certain environments and group conversations harder to manage from a sensory perspective.
 - May use voice experimentation, for example might enjoy saying certain words/phrases, making certain sounds, or speaking a certain way.
 - May become overwhelmed to the point of “meltdowns” or “shutdowns” if their communication and sensory needs are not met.
 - May ‘stim’ (self-stimulatory behaviour), which is a series of repetitive actions/movements that an Autistic person may do when excited, anxious, stressed or stimulated, or when they wish to communicate but can’t find the words (e.g. flapping hands, rocking, pacing, repeating phrases). Almost everyone stims to some degree in their own way (e.g. cracking knuckles, tapping feet, or humming/whistling. Autistic people are usually more overt when stimming or may need to stim more often than non-Autistic people (e.g. for regulation).
- May require routine, structure and certainty to compensate for an unstructured and at times overwhelming world.
- **Communication differences** - Autistic people may communicate differently to neurotypical people in a variety of ways including:
 - May need more time to take in verbal information and understand it.
 - Might have issues with finding the right words to say to certain people and in certain situations.
 - Could take phrases/idioms literally.
 - May interpret jokes differently or have a different sense of humour.
 - May find it challenging to articulate frustrations/ anxiety/distress or causes of emotional dysregulation, and might communicate this differently.
 - May speak in a different tone of voice, a different accent, or at a different rate or volume.
 - May use facial expression and body language differently.
 - May be non-speaking.
 - May interpret differently, or miss, facial expressions or non-verbal social cues.
- **Social preferences** - Autistic people may have different preferences for how they engage socially with others including:
 - May avoid eye contact, may find eye contact to be unnatural, too intimate or painful. May alternatively have intense eye contact.
 - Differences reading emotions of others, or in showing their own/displaying emotion.
 - May not read social cues as non-Autistic people do, like boredom or irritation, or may find it difficult to know when a conversation is finished.
 - May find it challenging to know how to start a conversation with someone and to keep it going.
 - May not get the point of ‘small talk’ and may have a preference instead for talking about things they (or their conversational partner) have an interest or passion in.

- There may be a preference, some or all of the time, for spending the majority of time alone/in their own company.
- For many reasons (such as sensory overwhelm and communication preferences), an Autistic person may have challenges in interacting with people in group settings, and may find social gatherings, such as parties, or socialising in unfamiliar environments, uncomfortable.
- May feel anxious or distressed when unexpected events happen in a social situation e.g., a person arriving who was not expected.
- May be compelled to hide their true self in social interactions e.g. may use scripted language, may force eye contact etc. Research suggests that masking in this way can impact negatively on self-esteem and mental health.

When we approach the experiences of Autistic people from the perspective of **difference not deficit**, we create the space in which we can identify the many strengths Autistic people can bring to the workplace and the importance of diversity of thought and experience within the world of work.

3. The social and economic cost of Autistic unemployment

There are substantial costs to individuals, families, businesses and to society associated with the under-representation in employment of Autistic people.

Individuals with disabilities incur extra costs ranging from €8,700 to €12,300 per year, depending on the level of a person's support needs⁶. These costs can encompass a wide range of expenditures, including medical expenses, specialised equipment, transportation, and personal assistance services. However, these additional costs are often not fully met by current social welfare payments, leading to financial strain. People who are unable to work due to long-standing illness or disability have an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 35.2%, which is significantly higher than the national average of 13.1%. Where individuals with disabilities face challenges in accessing employment, this further exacerbates their financial difficulties. The European Disability Forum's Human Rights Report (4th edition) ranked Ireland fifth worst (of the 28 Member

States examined) when it came to the increase in the risk of poverty and social exclusion, where 38% of disabled people were at risk.

For Autistic people who can and wish to work, employment offers a significant positive outcome for an individual in terms of their economic outcomes, achievement of social inclusion, the psychosocial benefits on mental health and wellbeing, and the overall greater integration into participation in society. It is a core tenet of independent living, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a central part of most adults' lives and for many people a key part of their identity. As such, a lack of employment is excluding many disabled people from being part of this fundamental opportunity and from being part of a wider community.

Diversity of thinking adds value to the workplace in terms of problem-solving, decision-making, and innovation as a broader set of ideas and considerations can result. As Ireland's economy increasingly depends on creativity, precision, and adaptive thinking, it is vital to fully harness the talents of Autistic and neurodivergent individuals. Many individuals bring distinctive strengths, including deep focus, pattern recognition, visual thinking, and innovative problem-solving, skills that are underrepresented yet critical in sectors like technology, finance, data, design, logistics, and healthcare. There is no one role suited to Autistic people generally, rather it is key to match an individual's skills and interests to suitable roles and responsibilities

Whilst many Autistic people can work full-time, with the appropriate accommodations, other Autistic people, such as those with high support needs, may be more suited to working a small number of hours per week or taking responsibility for specific tasks. Addressing unemployment in the Autism community requires a wide range of opportunities and roles and a recognition of both the economic benefits of work as well as the wider social benefits for the individual.

An increase in the number of Autistic people accessing full-time employment or employment above the threshold for social welfare payments, has positive knock-on effects for the economy, including the reduction of a reliance on supports, an easing of the costs of economic dependency, as well as the associated outcomes of having individuals gainfully employed.

⁶ Indecon Cost of Disability in Ireland report, commissioned by the Department of Social Protection and published in December 2021

However, perpetuating the challenge of underemployment of Autistic people is the level of investment in income versus employment supports across the whole area of disability. Disability spending accounts for 5% (€3.3 billion) of total social protection spending in Ireland in 2023 and yet only €70 million was spent on employment supports such as partial capacity benefit, the wage subsidy scheme, and activation supports.

While precise figures on the number of Autistic individuals accessing income supports in Ireland are not readily available, we can infer some insights based on related data.

As of 2025, approximately 167,000 adults in Ireland receive the Disability Allowance payment (DA), a means-tested payment for individuals aged 16 to 66 with a disability that substantially restricts their ability to work. While the DA is not exclusive to Autistic individuals, it is reasonable to conclude, that by virtue of the demographic shifts within the Autistic community, including the growing number of Autistic people ageing out of the school system and the large number of Autistic people unable to access employment that Autistic people make up a significant cohort of recipients. This is further supported by Department of Social Protection data⁷ which found that between 2018 and 2024, the number of DA recipients increased by 19%, with associated expenditure rising by about 45% during the same period driven largely by increasing diagnoses of “generalised anxiety and neurodiversity issues” including Autism, dyspraxia and ADHD.

Table 1: Expenditure on disability income supports €mn

Scheme	2023	2024
Blind Pension	€13.08m	€13.47m
Disability Allowance	€2.18bn	€2.41bn
Invalidity Pension	€793.63m	€852.44m
Total	€2.98bn	€3.27bn

Source: [2024 DSP statistics report](#)

When we examine the employment supports for disabled people there is a real difference in the investment levels.

Table 2: Expenditure on employment supports €mn

Scheme	2023	2024
Wage subsidy scheme	€22.1m	€23.46m
Disability activation and employment supports ⁸	€10.05m	€23.28m
Partial capacity benefit	€24.88m	€25.93m
Total	€57.03m	€72.67m

Source: [2024 DSP statistics report](#)

In 2024, the state spent just 2.2c on these employment supports for every €1 it spent on income supports for people with disabilities. This is before considering provision of additional benefits and payments such as GP card, travel card etc.

4. Barriers to employment

Autistic people in Ireland face a wide range of systemic, social, and practical barriers to gaining and maintaining employment. These barriers span from the job application and recruitment stage, through to retention and progression in the workplace. They include:

a. Application challenges

- Often job advertisements use vague or non-literal language (“self-starter,” “good under pressure”), which can be confusing. Roles often list overwhelming numbers of responsibilities and soft skill demands that can exclude Autistic candidates unnecessarily. While tasks could be done with reasonable adjustments, the need is often not anticipated.
- Newer forms of application often include an AI driven process requiring candidates to record a video responding to set questions, and upload it as part of the screening process. This may pose challenges for an Autistic candidate as the technology monitors repetitions of certain words or phrases, disengagement of eye contact and pauses in speech.

b. Social and communication barriers

- Many Autistic individuals face barriers with traditional interview formats, which often emphasise social cues, eye contact, and quick responses - skills that may not reflect actual job competence.

⁷ <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/ministers-brief-part-b-97e5120f-fe7f-43b6-b72e-4e817d8fa2d1.pdf>

⁸ Includes “the EmployAbility service, the WorkAbility Programme, the Employee Retention Grant Scheme, Workplace Equipment/Adaptation Grant, Job Interview Interpreter Grant, the Personal Reader Grant and the Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme as well as other supports”

Employers may misinterpret communication differences as disinterest or lack of ability.

- Few employers offer alternative formats (e.g. skills trials, written questions and answers, or portfolio reviews).

c. Inaccessible work environments

- A lack of consideration of the sensory environment (lighting, noise, smells), sensory processing differences around particular aspects of the workplace (i.e. dress code or environment), and inflexible schedules can create hostile or unmanageable environments for Autistic employees.
- Other concerns include having to ‘mask’⁹ or camouflage Autistic traits to fit into the workplace or having to explain their Autistic support needs or differences to colleagues. For some, concerns surround dealing with workplace misunderstandings, differences in communication styles, or pressure to quickly adopt to new tasks.

d. Disclosure fears

- A significant number of Autistic people in Ireland hesitate to disclose their diagnosis due to fear of stigma or discrimination, which hampers access to necessary adjustments and support. Assurance should be provided to ensure disclosure will not impact their application but will lead to tangible accommodations and support.

e. Limited access to support services

- Shortage of Autism-specific employment supports such as job-coaching and tailored training can limit the opportunities available to some individuals.

f. Fear of losing benefits

- Autistic people receiving Disability Allowance or other income supports may be hesitant to accept work or additional hours or promotions due to:
- Uncertainty about how work affects entitlements.
- Prohibitive rules on retention of benefits versus the number of working hours - this can lead to the fear of loss of other services (e.g. medical card, HAP) making the safer option not to engage.
- Fear of not requalifying for benefit if the job does not work out or the individual circumstances disimprove.

For employers too, there can be a number of barriers to engaging in the employment and support of disabled people in the workplace. There can be a lack of awareness around disability, or a perception of what may be involved in reasonable accommodation, and concerns over major changes or costs. Employers often report wanting to be inclusive but lacking the tools, policies, or confidence to hire neurodivergent or Autistic candidates.

a. Lack of employer awareness and training

- A large proportion of employers in Ireland lack understanding of Autism, leading to:
 - Risks of stereotyping or unconscious bias.
 - Failure to provide adequate reasonable accommodations.
 - A reluctance to hire Autistic candidates due to perceived “risk” or support needs.
 - Fear of legal liability/making a mistake and ending up down a litigious route.
- A lack of knowledge amongst other employees can also contribute to a culture in which Autistic differences are not understood or affirmed and an atmosphere in which Autistic colleagues may feel they need to conceal their differences

⁹ Masking usually consists of social camouflaging and/or compensation techniques an Autistic person might use to appear more ‘neurotypical’ or more sociable, to blend in at work or to suppress socially awkward or unacceptable traits. Techniques might range from observing or mirroring ‘neurotypical’ behaviour or learning social scripts to making eye contact or sublimating Autistic traits. However, it can take a great toll on an Autistic person’s wellbeing and can lead to burnout among Autistic staff who consistently mask over a prolonged period of time. (As I Am – Disclosure: A guide for employers)

- The *Autism in the Workplace* report¹⁰ found that three in four employers feel that their employee's do not know enough about Autism to support an Autistic colleague, while 76% of organisations lack a dedicated Autism-friendly workplace policy.

b. Rigid recruitment practices

- Often employers lack knowledge of how to proceed to proactively attract, recruit and retain a person with a disability. Traditional recruitment practices, together with rigid workplace environments often fail to accommodate Autistic individuals' needs, from sensory differences to communication styles.
- There is a lack of knowledge of the challenges within existing company policies and procedures for disabled people to navigate. Standardised hiring processes, including online psychometric tests, group interviews, or AI video interviews, often disadvantage Autistic applicants.
- A lack of alternative or supportive routes into employment (e.g. work trials, supported internships) limits access.
- The *Autism in the Workplace* report (Irish Jobs, 2021) found only 25% of employers had made reasonable accommodations during recruitment or interviews.

c. Limited specialist supports

- There is a shortage of Autism-specific employment services or job coaches in Ireland. While there are numerous government and NGO supports (e.g. AsIAm employment partnerships, EmployAbility, HSE Occupational Guidance, AHEAD's WAM, Specialisterne Ireland, Not so Different, WALK, Ability@Work etc.), awareness and usage of these schemes among both Autistic people and employers remains low. If awareness and demand for usage grows, the supports available would be wholly inadequate.
- Mainstream employment services, both public (e.g. Intreo) and private, may not understand or be accessible to the specific needs of Autistic individuals.

d. Challenges within the grants available

- While the Government's new Work and Access programme has brought improvements in the set of grants and supports available to help disabled people to get a job or stay in employment, employers report accessing supports to be very administratively burdensome, time consuming and take a long time for processing. Challenges include:
 - Procurement rules requiring three quotes for training which is challenging given the scarcity of trainers in certain areas of expertise, and the lack of pre-approved lists of eligible providers.
 - The onus is on the employer to apply for grant support and employ the person with a disability who is unable to take up the offered work until their supports are in place. This can take a number of weeks and is a costly, prohibitive approach particularly for SME's.
 - The person with the disability has to apply for the same supports each time they change job, even if their needs have not changed. While the terms and conditions of the Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant state that the person with a disability retains ownership of the equipment, it can be problematic if the assistive technology has been incorporated into the premises or standard equipment of the employer.

e. Lack of understanding of reasonable accommodation and in-work support

- Reasonable accommodations refer to practical adjustments made by employers to ensure people with disabilities, including Autism, can access, participate in, and advance in employment. Under the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015, employers must take "appropriate measures" unless these would impose a disproportionate burden based on their financial capacity and operational scale of the organisation.
- These measures can include adapting the physical workplace (e.g., assistive technology, flexible layout), modifying work schedules or duties (e.g., flexible hours, task redistribution), allowing remote work, and providing targeted training or support. Employers must engage with employees to determine suitable accommodations and can avail

¹⁰ https://www.irishjobs.ie/recruiters/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AsIAm-IrishJobs.ie-Autism-in-the-Workplace-Report_April-2021-FINAL.pdf

of government supports from Work and Access for workplace adaptations and disability awareness training.

- Supporting Autistic people to thrive in the workplace requires more than accessible recruitment and onboarding procedures, it is important that Autistic people have access to ongoing support across the career cycle, including access to accessible career progression opportunities.

Such obstacles could limit the likelihood of disabled people participating in the open labour market or prevent an employer from engaging an individual with disabilities in the workplace.

Recommendations

For AsIAM, Ireland's Autism Charity

Support for Autistic Adults

- **Expand the number of Autistic people accessing support:** AsIAM will seek to expand its Career Clinics and Employment Support Groups, in partnership with donors and partner companies, to ensure that any Autistic person seeking employment has access to our supports.
- **Bridge the gap between further and higher education:** Harnessing the Autism-Friendly HEI programme, AsIAM will work in partnership with companies to create work placement, internship and graduate opportunities for Autistic people in further and higher education.
- **Regional support:** Leveraging AsIAM's new One-Stop-Shop model of support, work will be carried out to forge links with small and medium businesses in local communities to ensure Autistic people can access suitable employment opportunities in their locality.
- **Develop supports for Autistic adults in employment:** Working in partnership with government and businesses, AsIAM will seek to further expand the supports offered to Autistic people in paid employment who require post-diagnosis, coaching or career progression supports.

Work in Partnership

- **Co-convene an employer's roundtable:** AsIAM will work with Ibec to convene a roundtable of employers who wish to adopt and implement this roadmap. AsIAM will work to support businesses to join the Employment Partnership Programme and to develop their own action plan for implementation.
- **Develop an industry standard:** Working with business and government, industry-specific charters and standards on Autism accessible employment will be implemented, building on the learnings of the recent AsIAM-Insurance Ireland Industry Charter.
- **Champion Work and Access:** AsIAM will seek to leverage the government's Work and Access programme to maximise the number of companies

accessing training in inclusive employment, recruiting and supporting Autistic talent.

- **Small and Medium Enterprise:** AsIAM will seek to grow the number of small and medium enterprises engaging with employment support programmes to increase the regional spread and range of roles open to Autistic people, including those with higher support needs.

Advocacy & Policy

- **Engagement with government:** Ahead of Budget 2026, AsIAM will seek government engagement on the content of the roadmap to secure appropriate support and investment.
- **Autism Innovation Strategy:** Campaigning will continue for the full implementation of the current Autism Innovation Strategy and the legislative commitment in the Programme for Government for a successor Strategy. The intention would be for the proposed roadmap recommendations to feature at the core of this work.

Research & Evidence

- **Develop an Inclusive Employer Index:** In collaboration with industry and with the support of government, AsIAM will develop an Inclusive Employer Index so companies can monitor their success on the roadmap and appropriately mark key milestones and progress.
- **Annual data collection:** Through the Same Chance Report, and periodic standalone research, data will be collected on the experiences of Autistic people in the workplace and the evidence base for inclusive employment practices.

For Employers

Educate and Raise Awareness

- **Engage in enhanced employer education** to increase awareness and understanding of Autism in the workplace. This could be achieved through practical toolkits or training webinars as well as engagement with specialists in Autism and neurodiversity.
- **Implement Autism awareness training** for HR professionals, recruiters, hiring teams and managers to improve understanding of Autism and reduce stigma. This could be supported

by the Disability, Equality and Inclusion Training Grant, part of Work and Access which offers up to €20,000 for approved training costs. A particular cohort of focus for training are recruitment teams as so much of the initial obstacles at company level can occur at recruitment stage.

- **Leverage the expertise of Autistic people,** family members and allies, within the workplace to build understanding and inform efforts to improve accessibility.

Address Structural Organisational Barriers

- **Develop inclusive recruitment strategies** that accommodate the needs of Autistic employees. This can include reforming hiring practices to focus on skills-based assessments not social performance in interviews, alternative interview formats, practical assessments, and clearer job descriptions that accommodate diverse communication styles.
- **Create inclusive work environments and invest in neuroinclusive design** including sensory-friendly workspaces (e.g., quiet zones, lighting adjustments) to address sensory sensitivities. Consider flexible hours, quiet spaces, and protocols around communication.
- **Foster a workplace culture** where Autistic employees feel safe to disclose and request reasonable accommodations without fear of negative repercussions. This can be supported through the use of the Reasonable Accommodation Passport¹¹ which should be communicated to all employees and included in induction processes.

Targeted Activities

- **Support the development of and participate in supported employment schemes** for Autistic and neurodivergent individuals through work placements and roles.
- **Utilise the workplace needs assessment:** This Government-funded tool, part of Work and Access, helps identify the role's requirements, challenges, and reasonable accommodations. The grant provides funding of up to €2,500 to cover the cost of a qualified professional conducting the assessment to identify the specific supports

needed to effectively perform job duties.

- **Establish support systems** such as mentoring or buddy systems for Autistic employees to aid integration and offer ongoing support.
- **Engage with AsIAM's Employment Partnership and Community of Practice:** This programme enables businesses to build their capacity to recruit and retain Autistic talent, whilst embedding accessibility across workplace practices. Participating businesses receive recruitment support from AsIAM and the opportunity to meet with other businesses to share best practices and learnings.
- **Adopt an Industry Charter** co-created by industry and the Autism sector and supported by the Government (similar to the Women in Finance Charter). The Charter would underpin the ambition to see increased participation of Autistic people at all levels of employment in organisations in Ireland.

For Government

Lead by Example

- As the largest employer in Ireland, it is essential that the public sector leads by example in **raising the employment levels of disabled people in the public sector.**
- **Gather data on the number of Autistic people in employment and their interaction with employment supports,** as part of the National Disability Survey planned for 2026/7. This would enable a clearer picture of the challenge facing Autistic people and determine the types of supports necessary.

Amend and Adjust Payments

- **Change the model of disability allowance** being provided to young adults of 16 years who are still in school, ensuring families continue to receive access to the Domiciliary Care Allowance until the age 18 at the same rate as the current Disability Allowance. This would recognise the additional costs families face without concluding that a young person will not be able to access the workplace should they be able and wish to.

¹¹ The Reasonable Accommodation Passport is a document that records the specific workplace adjustments or accommodations a disabled employee and their employer have agreed upon, which have a built-in review period to ensure they are appropriate. <https://www.employersforchange.ie/Reasonable-Accommodation-Passport-Scheme>

- In tandem, **career guidance needs to be provided at a much earlier stage** (6th class in primary school and extended to all special schools) for disabled people, to minimise any competitive disadvantage they face in education and career choice. This should ensure greater knowledge and build expectations of roles and experiences that will help them build their careers.
- **Further reform the Work and Access scheme** to address the significant administrative burden and provide greater guidance and support around accessing grants and supports.
- Implement the commitment in the Programme for Government of an **Annual Cost of Disability Support Payment**.
- **Increase the Wage Subsidy Scheme payment rate** to 70% of the National Minimum Wage and index it to future increases. In addition, reduce the hours of work to 10 hours per week to enable more individuals to participate.
- **Re-align the Disability Allowance criteria to focus on meeting an Autistic person's support needs within the community** (up to an agreed income threshold), as opposed to linking to the ability to work. This is in line with the approach in a number of European Countries and ensures that a person's support needs in the community are not conflated with the ability or opportunity to work.
- **Link Work and Access benefits directly to the individual** as per practice in other jurisdictions e.g. UK – Access to Work Grant, Australia – National Disability Insurance Scheme, Canada – Opportunities Fund for Disabled people. This would reduce administrative burden and bureaucracy and empower the candidate who would join employment with their supports in place.
- While disabled people can retain their medical card for 3 years subject to an earning disregard (€427 per week for persons on Disability Allowance), consideration should be given to **linking this and other entitlements to medical need and disability status, rather than strictly means-testing**.

Reform and Improve Supports

- **Implement mandatory Autism-specific training for Intreo employees and third-party contractors** on how to conduct a strength and needs assessment for Autistic people seeking work.
- **Increase funding for employment supports** through the allocation of greater resources to Autism-specific employment programmes, including job coaching, workplace mentoring, and tailored training schemes to help Autistic people enter and remain in the workforce.
- **Create an online application platform** for all grants and supports, ensuring full accessibility. Remove the onus from the employer to apply for supports and instead **empower the jobseeker with a disability to seek work with their supports already in place**.
- **Change to EmployAbility¹² criteria regarding candidates they will support** to ensure that Autistic people with the highest level of need are given opportunities to work which meet their needs and likely motivations.
- Using the CSO National Disability Strategy next year, a baseline of the number of Autistic people in employment should be established to **enable the setting of a meaningful employment target to be achieved by 2030**.
- **Develop a framework agreement between the Department of Social Protection and a number of suitably qualified disability training organisations** through a Department tendering process. This would enable employers to choose from an approved list rather than trying to source multiple, often impossible to attain, quotes for training.

Building Understanding and Acceptance

- **Develop national employer education campaigns** and nationwide initiatives to educate employers about Autism, the benefits of neurodiverse workforces, and best practices for inclusive recruitment and retention.
- **A multimedia communication campaign** should be rolled out in collaboration with disability and employer groups, to both disabled people and

¹² EmployAbility is an employment and recruitment service for people with disabilities, mental health difficulties and people in recovery from illness or injury, to support them to get and keep a job.

employers, to dispel perceived challenges through greater awareness raising and sign posting to supports.

- **Consider the development of an Inclusive Employers Index in collaboration with AsIAM** to measure companies against evidence-based best practice. This would enable employers to demonstrate their progress and areas in need of improvement, encourage the development of inclusion strategies that reference neurodiversity and Autism, and indicate to candidates the employers that are supportive of their needs.

Co-creation and Collaboration

- **Ensure cross-departmental coordination** between disability, education, and employment policies. A whole of government approach will be essential to this as the current siloed approach ensures that issues can fall between different areas and this fails members of our existing and potential workforce from fulfilling their potential.
- The Autism Innovation Strategy (AIS) commits the NDA to **updating its guidance document on Autism for employers**. This guidance should be co-created by the Autism community and industry for maximum effectiveness.
- **Introduce a well-resourced national supported employment programme** to meet the needs of disabled people, people who have acquired a disability, and employers, to enable the attainment and retention of mainstream employment. This would require a central coherent national approach, structured methods of support, and strong links with employers.
- **Bring together a national forum representing stakeholders** including social partners to develop the supported employment model fully, monitor progress, and make changes over time to ensure its embedding and success.
- As per the recommendation in the final Joint Oireachtas Committee Report on Autism, **provide funding to allow for the further expansion of the model of the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities across Higher Education Institutions** with an emphasis on skills for employment.

Appendix

1. Examples of reasonable accommodations

Sensory Overload

Challenge: Skilled worker struggles with noise in an open-plan office.

Solution: Providing noise-cancelling headphones enables them to work effectively. Designed quiet areas with dim lighting, comfortable seating and reduced noise.

Task Initiation

Challenge: Employee feels overwhelmed about starting projects.

Solution: A brief check-in with their manager helps them get started, leading to independent completion. Give clear deadlines and break larger tasks into smaller chunks with individual deadlines. Regular feedback meetings to assess priorities.

Verbal communication

Challenge: Employee needs additional time to process verbal communication

Solution: Provide instructions in writing, keep emails clear and free from jargon.

Processing

Challenge: Employee needs additional time to process information

Solution: Give time to prepare and provide agendas and key questions ahead of time. Have frequent short breaks throughout the day. Provide the context around a topic where possible. Enable check ins where questions can be answered.

Meeting engagement

Challenge: Employee finds it difficult to understand their role in the meeting, how they should engage or share inputs.

Solution: Have meetings scheduled and share agenda in advance. Define the expectations and purpose of the meeting and their role within the meeting. Offer alternative modes of participation including follow up meetings or written feedback post-meeting. Set out expectations regarding how to participate with meeting hygiene such as “raise hand” function to be used before commenting or sharing thoughts via chat function in virtual meetings.

2. Supports and Resources

- **The Same Chance Toolkit** - [A step-by-step guide to becoming an Autism friendly employer](#): This resource includes supports for employers around conducting Autism friendly interviews, disclosure, onboarding and reasonable accommodations.
- **AsIAM Employment Partnership Programme:** The AsIAM Employment Partnership programme considers the different stages of the employment lifecycle and supports employers in gaining greater understanding of the Autistic experience in the workplace. The range and depth of content is adapted for each organisation’s size and content covers topics such as Communication, Interview Planning, Onboarding, Line Manager support, and Reasonable Accommodations.

When an organisation completes the education element of the programme, it is invited to join a Communities of Practice forum. Membership of this group has many benefits, including continued education on topics of interest as well as support from AsIAM’s dedicated Employment Officer. They will work with employers to advertise their vacancies within the community of job seekers.

For more details on how to become an AsIAM Employment Partner, contact employmentpartnerships@asiam.ie

