



LEARNING DISABILITY, AUTISM & SAFER HEALTHCARE

The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training

Learning disability and autism training for
health and social care staff in England.

The key idea

CQC-registered health and social care providers in England must ensure staff receive learning disability and autism training appropriate to their role. The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training is the government's preferred and recommended package for supporting providers to meet this requirement.

Why does this training exist?

The training is named after Oliver McGowan, a young autistic man with a mild learning disability whose death highlighted the need for health and social care staff to have better knowledge and understanding of learning disability and autism. The programme was developed with autistic people, people with a learning disability, family members and carers, and health and social care stakeholders.

Important context

The training is intended to improve knowledge and practice. It should not replace listening to an individual person, making reasonable adjustments or seeking specialist knowledge when a situation requires it.

What does the law require?

The Health and Care Act 2022 introduced a statutory requirement for CQC-registered health and social care providers in England to ensure staff receive learning disability and autism training appropriate to their role. The final Oliver McGowan code of practice became final in September 2025 and sets standards for the content and delivery of that training.

In everyday language

The legal requirement is for appropriate learning disability and autism training. The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training is the government's preferred and recommended package; the law does not say that every provider must use only this named course.

Two tiers of training

The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training has two tiers. Both include e-learning followed by live interactive learning. The appropriate tier depends on the staff member's role and the knowledge and capabilities they need.

Tier 1

For staff who require general awareness of the support autistic people and people with a learning disability may need. It includes e-learning and a one-hour live online interactive session.

Tier 2

For staff who may need to provide care and support, including many direct-care and professional roles. It includes e-learning and a one-day face-to-face session.

What does Tier 1 cover?

Tier 1 covers core awareness: understanding learning disability, understanding autism, reasonable adjustments, and reflection on attitudes and behaviour.

What does Tier 2 add?

Tier 2 builds on general awareness and covers selected capabilities relevant to treatment, care and support. Examples in the code include regulated health professionals, registered managers, team leaders, students and trainees, care assistants, support workers and staff carrying out particular assessments.

Key distinction

Tier 2 is more detailed, but it does not teach every specialist capability. The code notes that diagnosis, interventions and treatments may require further role-specific or specialist training.

Lived experience is part of the model

A defining feature is meaningful involvement of autistic people and people with a learning disability. Live components are co-delivered with people who have lived experience, rather than relying only on professionals speaking about them.

Why this matters

Learning directly from lived experience can challenge assumptions and connect concepts to real experiences. No individual trainer, however, can represent every autistic person or every person with a learning disability.

Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments may involve changes to communication, appointment length or timing, environment, waiting arrangements, information format, sensory demands or how procedures are approached. What is reasonable and useful depends on the individual.

Communication and understanding

Accessible communication means finding out how the person understands and expresses information rather than assuming speech is the only meaningful form of communication. Some people use AAC, signs, gestures, pictures, writing or support from someone who knows their communication well.

Diagnostic overshadowing

Diagnostic overshadowing describes symptoms or changes being incorrectly attributed to an existing disability or diagnosis instead of being properly investigated. Distress or a change in behaviour should not automatically be assumed to be 'because of autism' or a learning disability.

Listening to the person and people who know them well

Good care includes the person's own account and preferences wherever possible. Family, carers, advocates and supporters may also hold important information about communication, baseline presentation, pain, distress and adjustments. Their involvement should reflect the person's wishes and relevant consent or capacity frameworks.

What completing the training does not mean

Completion shows that a member of staff has undertaken the relevant training package. It does not by itself demonstrate expertise in every aspect of autism or learning disability, guarantee that care will always be appropriate, or remove the need for continuing learning, supervision, reflection and individualised practice.

For people using services and families

Knowing about the training can help people understand the standards being developed across health and social care. If an adjustment or communication approach is important, it is still useful to tell the service directly rather than assuming every member of staff will know what is needed.

Practical check

Has the person been asked what helps? Are communication needs understood? Have reasonable adjustments been considered? Is a change in health or behaviour being assessed rather than attributed automatically to disability? Is further specialist knowledge needed?

References & Further Resources

The legal requirement and training standards described in this guide apply to CQC-registered health and social care providers in England.

DHSC - Oliver McGowan code of practice

The final code sets standards for role-appropriate learning disability and autism training, including curriculum, delivery and meaningful involvement of autistic people and people with a learning disability.

GOV.UK - Mandatory training collection

Explains the Health and Care Act 2022 requirement and brings together the code of practice and related government material.

NHS England - Oliver's Training

Provides information about accessing Tier 1 and Tier 2, including the e-learning and live interactive components.

Easy Read code of practice

The Department of Health and Social Care publishes an Easy Read version explaining the legal requirement and training standards in a more accessible format.

How to use these resources

Use the code of practice and government collection for the statutory standards and current policy position. NHS England's training information is useful for the practical structure and access routes. The Easy Read version provides a more accessible explanation of the same framework.