
AUTISM PASSPORT AND TOOL KIT PRESS RELEASE

A unique jobseekers' 'passport' is set to be launched later this month.

And it could make the journey to work for those with disabilities and hidden impairments a much more enjoyable – and realistic – proposition.

In the same way someone travelling internationally can cross borders and enter into places they've never been able to access via the use of the well-known travel passport, it's hoped the 'About Me' Passport will enable those with autism, hidden conditions and other disabilities to cross over into the world of employment.

It is thought that 68% of adults with a known autism spectrum condition (ASC) will be unemployed, regardless of qualifications.

To coincide with World Autism Awareness Month and as part of a Department of Work and Pension's initiative to improve the experience for people with autism or 'invisible' conditions when visiting job centres, interviews and work placements, the new disability passport is being produced in partnership with the nation's leading voices on disabilities and autism.

The Autism Alliance UK, RNIB, St Andrew's Healthcare, Autism Plus, Dimensions, The Dyslexia Association, Autism East Midlands and the North East Autism Society has worked hand in hand with the Department for Work and Pension's to launch this pioneering new initiative.

Alongside the Passport will also be an online Autism and Neurodiversity Toolkit for staff and managers in jobcentres to provide the latest information, guidance and support for people with hidden impairments in, or looking for, work.

Professor Amanda Kirby of the University of South Wales' Discovery Centre, with a chair in Developmental Disorders, also brought her professional experience and knowledge of different disabilities to the process, contributing content for the website, and to the About Me Passport.

In the 'about me' section of the document, passport holders will be able to record personal information such as their address and national insurance number, as well as sections identifying preferred communication method, preferred way to receive information and additional information highlighting situations and triggers for anxiety or difficulties.

It could be noted, for example, that the lighting in the interview room at the Job Centre makes visiting difficult or seeing a different member of staff each time increases anxiety.

Twenty-three-year-old Michael Crewe from Sunderland is currently enrolled in North East Autism Society Employment Futures' Unlock Your Potential programme which supports adults with autism into work. He said: "I think this is a brilliant idea and it would be immensely helpful for me. Just walking into the jobcentre knowing I have something that's official to present, so they know about me rather than me trying to explain it to them would be incredible. Happy to hear this is happening. It's a great idea."

One of the key players in campaigning for the passport and toolkit to be created in the first place was John Phillipson, CEO of the North East Autism Society.

At the project's inception Mr Phillipson was chairman of the Autism Alliance UK.

He said: “When we talked to adults with autism in particular it became clear that experiences of visiting job centres and prospective employers weren’t always good. A lot of people found the whole experience difficult and explaining why they found it difficult even harder.

“I was thrilled when North East Autism Society and Sunderland-based Autism in Mind worked together to talk through this with some adults who would most benefit from support, and we came up with the idea for the passport and what should go in it. Our hope now is that we can change the culture and see more and more adults with autism find meaningful employment but the beauty of the passport is that it can be accessed and used by other users and groups too.”

The move comes following an agreement made jointly with the Secretary of State and Minister for Disabled People, Department for Work and Pension’s and Autism Alliance UK to work together in developing an Autism and Hidden Impairment Taskforce.

The group, which met six times in six months, explored ways to increase the number of people with Autism/ Hidden Impairments being supported into work. The Passport is in part the Government’s commitment to reduce the employment gap for disabled people.

MP Penny Mordaunt said: “As the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, I am eager to improve services for all disabled people, including those with Autism and associated Neuro-Diverse conditions.

“The Department for Work and Pension’s has worked in partnership with Autism Alliance UK and the Autism Task Group with the aim of improving communication and ensuring that appropriate, reasonable adjustments are identified and put in place at the earliest opportunity. I see the Disability Passport ‘About Me’ – and the toolkit - as a positive step towards helping to remove some of the barriers that disabled people face in their day to day lives.”

The Disability Passport will be hosted on the websites of charities and third sector organisations (not by DWP). It will be completed voluntarily by disabled people and only with their permission will it be shared with their Work-coach/ Adviser. The toolkit will be hosted on the Autism Alliance UK website.

The passport is designed to help those seeking jobs, and those dealing with these people as customers, to understand and communicate simply the complexities of life with a disability and / or hidden impairment, especially in situations relating to work or employment.

Current Chair of the UK Autism Alliance, Jane Howson added: “As Chair of AAUK I am delighted we are hosting the Disability Confident: Autism and Neurodiversity toolkit. We hope that it will enable all Government departments and employers to better meet the needs of neuro diverse people. I would like to particularly thank other members of the task group that gave so much of their time to support this initiative and the Department for work and Pension’s for taking such a positive approach.”