PUPILS WITH AUTISM
UNIT 13
IDENTIFYING THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUAL PUPILS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Trainees will:

- Consider a number of assessment/observational tools with which to ascertain the needs of pupils on the autism spectrum
- Understand that strategies will need to be customised to suit the particular pupil, and
- Appreciate the importance of involving pupils in designing strategies to address their needs.

ONLINE RESOURCES
The content and tasks throughout these PDFs are supported by online resources that are designed to facilitate and supplement your training experience.
Links to these are signposted where appropriate. The resources use graphics and interactive elements to:

- Highlight salient points
- Provide at-a-glance content summaries
- Introduce further points of interest
- Offer visual context
- Break down and clearly present the different stages and elements of processes, tasks, practices, and theories

The online resources offer great benefits, both for concurrent use alongside the PDFs, or as post-reading revision and planning aids.
Please note that the resources cannot be used in isolation without referencing the PDFs. Their purpose is to complement and support your training process, rather than lead it.
You should complete any learning or teaching tasks and additional reading detailed in this PDF to make full use of the Advanced training materials for autism; dyslexia; speech, language and communication; emotional, social and behavioural difficulties; moderate learning difficulties.
To find out more about the resources, how they work, and how they can enhance your training, visit the homepage at: www.education.gov.uk/lamb
The first resource for this unit can be found here:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/individual-needs/intro

BRIEFING 1: IDENTIFYING NEEDS

Firstly, it is important to build a profile of the strengths and weaknesses of the pupil(s) with autism for whom adaptations may need to be made. A number of these are available commercially and it may be useful to review some of these in order to

compile a bespoke profile for use by the specialist teacher for the autism spectrum. Cumine et al. provide examples of profiles that can be used to assess the needs of pupils with autism both in the early years[1] and later[2]. These provide an opportunity to describe the pupil using a word 'picture' to capture the features that are most easily observed. They go on to record progress in key areas linked to the triad and sensory issues by using a rating system of:

- Not present
- Infrequent
- Developing
- Fluent

Skills and behaviours

An example from the early years observation tool is included below. This comes from the section on Communication and is representative of the type of observation required in order to start to build up a general picture of the pupil's functioning. An online version of this observation tool is available.[3]

TABLE 1: EXTRACT FROM OBSERVATION TOOL[4]

1. Understanding simple verbal and non-verbal approaches	N	I	D	F
Responds when his name is called				
Follows simple instructions given 1:1, e.g. 'come here', 'sit down'				
Follows a close point, e.g. at a picture in a book				
Follows a distance point, e.g. at object across the room				
Follows your gaze to an object				
Follows simple instructions in small groups				
Follows simple instructions in large group/class setting, e.g. 'jump', 'run', 'stand still'				
Could bring something on request from another room				

Another, very detailed, approach to assessing a pupil's developmental progress in relation to the triad can be found in the SCERTS assessment manual. The SCERTS Assessment Process (SAP) involves highly detailed observations of the pupil across a number of settings, incorporating the views of the parents/carers as well as staff

[1] Cumine, V., Dunlop, J., and Stevenson, G (2010) Autism in the early years, Oxon; Routledge
[2] Cumine, V., Dunlop, J and Stevenson, G (2009) Asperger Syndrome: A Practical Guide for Teachers, Second edition, London: Taylor Francis
[3] http://www.routledgeeducation.com/resources/download/autism.pdf
[4] Cumine, V., Dunlop, J., and Stevenson, G (2010) Autism in the early years, Oxon; Routledge

members. A description of the main principles of the approach can be found in the unit on Evidence Base for Educational Interventions. The assessment process addresses key areas of functioning in the following areas[5]:

- **Social Communication (SC)** assessment of the pupil's capacity for joint attention (the reason **why** we engage/communicate)

This may extend across some of the following examples:
- Engaging in reciprocal interaction
- Sharing attention
- Sharing emotions
- Sharing intentions for a range of functions
- Persisting in and repairing communication

And assessment of the pupil's capacity for symbol use (**how** we communicate)

This may extend across some of the following examples:
- Expanding learning strategies: imitation, observation, instruction, collaboration
- Understanding non-verbal cues
- Participating in play and recreation
- Use of gesture and n on-verbal behaviour
- Understanding and using generative language to express a variety of meanings
- Following rules of communication

- **Emotional Regulation (ER)** assessment of the pupil's capacity for self regulation (the ability to independently attain an optimal level of arousal)

This may extend across some of the following examples:
- Demonstrating availability for learning and interacting
- Using strategies appropriate to developmental level to regulate level of arousal during familiar activities
- Regulating emotion during new and changing situations
- Recovering from extreme disregulation by self

And assessment of the pupil's capacity for mutual regulation (the ability to solicit and secure assistance from others to regulate own arousal)
This may extend across some of the following examples:
- Expressing a range of emotions

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[5] Prizant, B., Wetherby, A.M., Rubin, E., Laurent, A.C. and Rydell, P. (2006) *The SCERTS Model: A comprehensive educational approach for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.* Baltimore; Brookes Publishing

- Responding to assistance offered by others
- Responding to feedback and guidance regarding behaviour
- Requesting others' assistance to regulate emotional state
- Recovering from extreme dysregulation with support from another

The final part of the SAP observes closely the behaviour of the adult in relation to the pupil on the autism spectrum. This is the **Transactional Support (TS)** and it aims to measure the interpersonal and learning support provided by the adult. The following examples represent again the range of measures available and could form a useful basis when working with the Lesson Study section:
- **Interpersonal support:**
- Adult is responsive to pupil
- Adult fosters interaction
- Adult respects pupil's independence
- Adult sets stage for engagement
- Adult provides developmental support
- Adult adjusts language input
- Adult models appropriate behaviours
- **Learning support:**
- Adult structures activity for active participation
- Adult uses augmentative system to foster development
- Adult uses visual and organisational supports
- Adult modifies goals, activities and learning environment

For specialist teacher who wish to conduct assessments at this level of detail, reference to the SCERTS manuals is highly recommended for assessment[6] and related learning programmer[7] to foster and extend the areas described.

Analysis of a day in the life of or a week in the life of...

One bespoke tool that can be extremely valuable is to gather information leading to an overview of *a week in the life of…* or a *day in the life of….* a pupil on the autism spectrum. Taking the pupil's perspective in this exercise is important to ensure that they are not unnecessarily stressed or distressed by what is offered in school and how it is offered.

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[6] Prizant, B., Wetherby, A.M., Rubin, E., Laurent, A.C. and Rydell, P. (2006) *The SCERTS Model: A comprehensive educational approach for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.* Baltimore; Brookes Publishing

[7] Prizant, B., Wetherby, A.M., Rubin, E., Laurent, A.C. and Rydell, P. (2006) *The SCERTS Model: A comprehensive educational approach for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.* Baltimore; Brookes Publishing

Through this exercise, a pupil's timetable can be analysed to identify crisis points and also times when the pupil seems very confident and engaged. To achieve this, each activity or session is rated out of ten on a number of dimensions, with ten being the most positive score. Observations might focus on the pupil's emotional well-being, how engaged they are in the activity or on how meaningful the session appears to be for the pupil, for example. Then an analysis can be made of both high and low scoring activities in terms of what they have in common and decisions made as to whether to shorten these sessions or whether some of the elements linked to the high scoring sessions might be introduced to sessions that seem to work less well.

Repeated exposure and opportunities to try new activities might be needed before a real interest and enjoyment of an activity develops. Initially, an activity might be too stimulating or confusing to be enjoyable, e.g. assembly or drama, but short sessions, followed by a rewarding activity, can help to build up in duration and frequency gradually.

It is also important to consider situations outside the classroom, at lunchtimes and break times. Pupils often find unstructured times, where they are free to choose what they do, very difficult. Many spend the time alone in repetitive activities or routines. Others attempt to interact with peers but the interaction breaks down. They require support from adults or other pupils to develop their social understanding and to protect them from teasing and bullying.

It will be important to involve pupils in this process wherever possible. Given possible issues with communication and also with imagining something that is outside their immediate experience, many may find it challenging to express their views and to make choices. However, this does not mean that they cannot do so, and all pupils should be supported to make informed decisions and express their views about their own education and support. Pupils with autism can find open questions such as, "What do you think about school?" very difficult to answer. However, asking a very closed question can also be problematic, for example saying, "Do you like school?" may simply get a response of 'yes' or 'no' which may have been chosen at random or is a repetition of the last word they heard.

See online resource:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/individual-needs/diary

TASK **1**

- As the specialist teacher for autism, consider how you would set about the task of compiling information about a particular pupil across a day or possibly a week. Which members of staff might you include in this process? What role could the parents/carers play? How could you involve the pupil themselves?

- Identify both crisis points across the day and the times when the pupil is confident and engaged. What can you learn from these observations?

BRIEFING 2: SELF-ASSESSMENT BY THE PUPIL

Increasingly, the importance of gaining the pupil's views is stressed. Very often pupils' opinions are inferred by others and then decisions made on the basis of those inferences. Good methods for eliciting opinions that actually do reflect what a pupil feels are still in their infancy across all types of SEN. It seems likely that the more work staff and others do on this, the more reliable the methods will become.

If pupils are not helped to develop their ability to assess how they feel during activities and to express choices, they will remain totally reliant on staff and parents to choose for them. Inevitably then, there will be times when the activity or item offered is not what the individual wants. It is also possible that people dismiss the choices that pupils make as unlikely to be real or not in their best interests. This can lead to feelings of rejection and powerlessness for pupils. It is easy, for example, for other pupils and staff to discount the importance of feelings which some with autism attach to particular activities or objects, simply because the general population as a whole does not feel similar passions for these themselves.

If pupils with autism are to take some control over their lives, it is important they are taught strategies to evaluate and report on their:

- Likes and dislikes
- Strengths, interests and difficulties
- Performance on a task and the extent to which they enjoyed the activity
- Short term needs, e.g. decisions about what to wear, what to eat, and what to do, and
- Their long-term needs, e.g. employment or living arrangements.

Three useful questions can be asked of pupils about a particular activity to see how effective it is for them. The questions can also be asked about a situation where the pupil's behaviour is challenging. They are:

- What is the pupil's view of the situation?
- What has been done to help the pupil's understanding of the situation?
- What means and opportunities does the pupil have to express what s/he has experienced?

Answers to these will provide ideas on strategies to enhance outcomes for the pupil.

Providing a checklist of statements, starting with 'I like....', *which have to be ticked or marked in some way,* can be useful. Similarly, true/false or frequency statements

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about themselves can be used where pupils rate 'never/ sometimes/ often in relation to statements such as, 'I am a good listener' or 'I am a calm person', Pupils can also produce checklists of their strengths with items such as, 'I can ride a bike, I can feed the hens,' and 'I would like to...' lists can be generated to help with future plans, using symbols, photos or words. One useful tool for supporting pupils to express their views is a rating scale. This can be done in a number of ways, one of which is suggested here. Provide the pupil with a prepared grid, something like the one shown below.
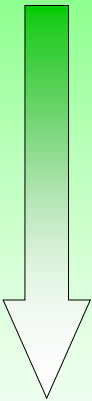
See online resources:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/individual-needs/pupil-view

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/individual-needs/self-assessment

DRAWING 1: SAMPLE RATING GRID

Subjects at school: ratings scale

Subject/activity	Rating	Best (favourite)
	10	
	9	
	8	
	7	
	6	
	5	
	4	
	3	Worst (least favourite)
	2	
	1	

Pupils identify subjects/activities they do at school and each one is written on a thin sticky note (by the adult, the purpose is not a writing exercise). Pupils then place each sticky note where they feel it belongs on the line, 10 being the best and 1 the worst. Each number can be assigned more than one subject/activity. A benefit of this, or

similar rating tools, is that it can exploit natural strengths for many on the autism spectrum who find visual systems a logical and accessible approach.

See online resource:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/individual-needs/rating

For pupils who are non-verbal or who find verbal expression challenging, alternative visual approaches may be used to elicit their views. A choice board can be one option to enable pupils with autism to express their views or make choices without speaking. Choice board represent visually (either with objects; photographs/pictures or symbols with text) all the available options in a situation. These are presented randomly rather than in straight lines. The pupil will select the item which represents his/her choice. When a choice board is first introduced it is helpful to reduce the number of options available and link the choices to concrete and immediate outcomes (for example, a choice board with the possible items for snack time, as soon as the pupil indicates their choice, they receive the item). Once the process of using a choice board is established the more complex undertaking of indicating preferences for certain lessons, style of teaching, working arrangements and so on, can be introduced. Even for those who are able to express themselves verbally, this method gives them more time to think and process, and avoids the situation where they see one choice as being what the person asking the question wants to hear

Pupils can also be asked to write about or draw their ideal school or classroom (Williams and Hanke, 2008) to start a discussion on what they value and what they would like to be different about their current school. This can also be extended to other aspects, such as the qualities they like in teaching staff or peers.

TASK 2

Design and trial a bespoke tool for eliciting the views of a pupil on the autism spectrum. Evaluate its effectiveness and develop further with staff from your school. Start to compile a file of resources you can draw upon to engage pupils in making choices and expressing their opinions

BRIEFING 3: EXTENDING THE PUPIL VOICE - INVOLVEMENT IN WIDER DECISION MAKING
As well as involving pupils on the autism spectrum in decisions about their own education and support, many schools have also involved them in wider decision making through their school councils. The school council can gather feedback from pupils about how to create a more autism-friendly, inclusive environment. It is important to remember that for some pupils with autism, sitting in meetings and working in groups will not be an accessible form of involvement. Consider offering

other options for involvement, such as those listed below in order to help as wide a range of pupils as possible.

- online discussion groups
- contributing views by email
- video diaries, or
- producing materials and questions that an individual can work through with one-to-one support

The following table sets out some points to consider when involving pupils on the autism spectrum in school councils or other decision making groups.

DO	DON'T
Be clear about why you are getting the pupils involved and what you want to achieve.	Don't build unrealistic expectations about what pupils will be doing, or what will change as a result of their involvement. For pupils with autism this is particularly important, as once you have told them that something will happen, it can be very stressful for them if this then doesn't happen.
Give sufficient information to help pupils decide if they want to be involved in the first place and then to help them prepare for what will happen at the meeting. If the venue is unfamiliar, take photos of where you will meet (inside and out) and the people who will be there. Also make sure you send an agenda giving as much information as possible about what will happen and approximately when.	Don't try to pack too much into one session. Remember that pupils with autism may need longer to process what is being discussed, and too much information at once may become overwhelming. Leave plenty of time for breaks and make sure that the information you are giving is accessible for pupils with autism – avoid jargon and use plenty of pictures to support meaning.
Be open-minded and avoid making assumptions about what a pupil might think, or be able to achieve. Pupils on the spectrum may take longer than other pupils to open up, or may need more preparation and help to get involved, but with the right support they can contribute a great deal.	**Don't hold the meeting somewhere where there will be excessive sensory distractions. Look out for background noises (even a ticking clock or a humming fridge can be very distracting and distressing for a young person with sensory sensitivity), bright overhead lights or**

	strong food smells from a kitchen or café nearby, for example. Light, plain and airy spaces are generally best, and make sure you have a separate space that a young person can go to if they need a break or some time out. If you can, it's a good idea to get someone on the spectrum to help you choose the venue as they may pick up on potential problems that you have missed.
Create an environment where the group members feel safe in sharing their experiences. It is helpful in your first session to agree some ground rules with the group – you can get them to give their suggestions first. An example of the rules that one group of pupils with autism set for their sessions is: • Confidentiality • Respect • Listening to each other • Accepting different opinions • No mobile phones • Take a break whenever you want • Don't do anything you are not comfortable with • Tell an adult if you are not happy with something	Don't forget to give feedback. Feedback is what makes the difference between participation being tokenistic and it being meaningful. Tell the pupils what you are going to do as a result of their involvement. If you are not going to do something that they had suggested, explain why not. Don't forget to say what will happen next – for pupils on the spectrum this is especially important so they know what to expect.

See online resource:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/individual-needs/involving-pupils

TASK 3

Audit the current opportunities for the autism voice to be heard in your setting. Develop a plan to enable the pupils on the autism spectrum in your school to give their views about school or to extend exiting arrangements. Invite staff to select at least four pupils with autism and consider the best ways to get their views. This may

vary from pupil to pupil. Your school could have a school council work with the management staff to make sure that it is accessible to pupils with autism.

TASK 4

Review this unit. How will you share the information you have gathered with key members of staff?

Draw up a Pen Portrait of a pupil you have observed using some of the methods described in this unit. This should contain key information about the pupil in a format that can be circulated easily to all staff working with that pupil. It can contain a photo and personal details of the pupil such as their diagnosis and how it affects them, their strengths and interests, and pointers to specific strategies that help. Ideally this portrait would be no more than one side of A4 and should be updated regularly. Parents/carers, staff and the pupil themselves should have input into the content, as discussed above.

Information contained in the Portrait will reflect the profile of the individual pupil but may include any of the following:
- Pupil name and photograph
- Brief description of positive attributes (for example, kind to younger children; likes responsibility; very chatty)
- Critical information (for example, allergies, epilepsy)
- Areas of strength (for example, ICT, music, art, map reading)
- Areas of interest and knowledge (and any links to how these could be used to help the pupil engage in learning)
- Areas of need (for example, fine motor difficulties particularly handwriting; sound sensitivity)
- Successful strategies for addressing areas of need