



Understanding & Supporting Autistic Learners Professional Learning Framework for Education Staff

The NHS Education for Scotland (NES) Autism Training Framework 'Optimising Outcomes' (2014) sets out four levels of skill (informed, skilled, enhanced and expertise levels), which are based on the professional's frequency of contact with autistic people and their level of responsibility.

It is expected that all education staff will meet autistic people in the course of their day-to-day work. The NES model has been adapted to inform Aberdeenshire's approach to ensuring that education staff have access to appropriate professional learning to help them understand and support the needs of Autistic Learners.

The purpose of this Professional Learning Framework is to ensure that there is an Aberdeenshire-wide core level of knowledge and understanding across the education workforce, as well as recognised pathways for developing more advanced knowledge and skills.

It is for the individual school or cluster to determine the level of training required by their staff. However, Senior Leaders are encouraged to view the training levels as incremental, ensuring that staff have completed informed level training before undertaking skilled level training, skilled level before undertaking enhanced level and so on.

Senior Leaders are also encouraged to use *Aberdeenshire's Understanding & Supporting Autistic Learners School Self-Evaluation Tool* to help inform school improvement planning.

Level 1: Informed

Encouraged for all staff who regularly work in settings where autistic children and young people may attend. This includes the broader workforce involved in the running of the school.

All staff should be directed to the Aberdeenshire Educational Psychology factsheet About Autism:

[What-is-autism-update.pdf \(glowscotland.org.uk\)](https://www.glowscotland.org.uk/what-is-autism-update.pdf)

Level 2: Skilled

Assumes Level 1 knowledge and understanding.

Encouraged for all staff who have direct and / or substantial contact with autistic children and young people.

Level 2 professional learning is the ALDO course, *Understanding and Supporting Autistic Learners Universal Autism Training*. There are 5 modules, each taking around an hour to complete:



- Key Messages
- Module 1 - About Autism, we were expecting you
- Module 2 - Cognitive Theories
- Module 3 - Communication
- Module 4 - Understanding Sensory Behaviours
- Module 5 - Anxiety
- Revisiting Key Messages

The following resources are also likely to be helpful at this level:

- Autism Toolbox (www.autismtoolbox.co.uk)
- Meeting the needs of autistic learners. A professional guide for teachers
<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/professional-guide-meeting-needs-autistic-learners.pdf>
- Education Scotland online modules
(<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/index.php?categoryid=359>)
(<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=6935>)
- Understanding Sensory Behaviours ALDO course ([Course: Understanding Sensory Behaviours \(aberdeenshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/courses/understanding-sensory-behaviours))
- NAIT website (www.thirdspace.scot/NAIT)

Level 3: Enhanced

Assumes level 1 and 2 knowledge and understanding.

Encouraged for staff who have a role in providing direct targeted support to autistic children and young people.

Level 3 training focuses on specific evidence-based approaches or interventions. It will vary for individual schools and clusters according to need. Training may be arranged for individual staff to build knowledge and skills relevant to their role and/or to meet the needs of specific pupils.

Level 3 Professional Learning Training includes approaches summarised in the NAIT Evidence Based Toolkit (www.thirdspace.scot/nait/education-resources). This includes, for example, more in-depth courses provided by Speech and Language Therapy (Intensive interaction, Makaton, Talking Mats, The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Social Stories)

Level 4 Expertise

Assumes Levels 1, 2 and 3 knowledge and understanding.

Encouraged for staff who have a role in providing direct targeted support to autistic children and young people, and wish to participate in deeper study and learning that meets with GTCS standard for career-long professional learning (i.e. sustained, significant professional learning based on enquiry and research).



This professional learning is likely to be delivered external to the local authority, be accredited at the level of post-graduate certificate or above, and involve participation in research.

On an annual basis the Inclusion, Equity & Wellbeing Team invites applications from teaching staff to apply for a funded place (one per cluster) on either the **Post Graduate Certificate in Autism and Learning** or the **Post Graduate Certificate in Inclusive Practice** at the University of Aberdeen. For more information contact marian.youngson@aberdeenshire.gov.uk (Quality Improvement Officer, Inclusion, Equity and Wellbeing)

Level 4 professional learning may also involve expert level autism courses, such as TEACCH. [Introduction to Structured Teaching based on TEACCH® model \(autism.org.uk\)](https://www.autism.org.uk)