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THE TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS & RECENT GRADUATES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a lifelong, developmental condition that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them.

(National Autistic Society)

EVERY AUTISTIC PERSON IS DIFFERENT...

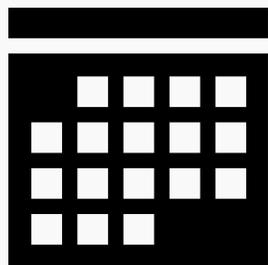
“There is not a single autism, but rather there are hundreds, or even thousands, of ‘autisms’.”

(Mandy, 2018)

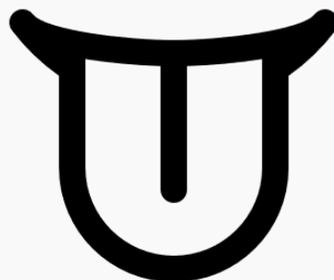
AUTISM: A 'HIDDEN' CONDITION



Social and communication difficulties



Desire for **routine** / 'restricted behaviours'



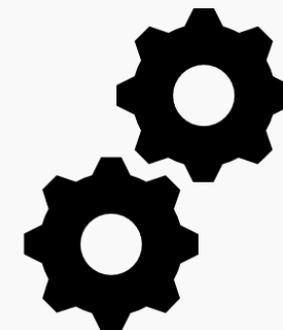
Hypo- or hyper-sensitivity to **sensory stimuli**



Individual and spikey profiles



50% average / above average **intelligence**



Strengths eg working memory, systematic, attention to detail

AUTISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chown et al. (2018) suggest an average of 55 autistic students per UK institution with some catering for **up to 200 students**.

In the United States studies suggest that up to **45% of the approximately 550,000 autistic children** who will be transitioning into adulthood over the next decade are **expected to enrol in a university, college, or technical/vocational school** (Jackson, Hart and Volkmar, 2018).

AGCAS...what happens next?

POORER OUTCOMES AND WIDER SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS



**Least likely to
be in full-time
postgraduate
employment**



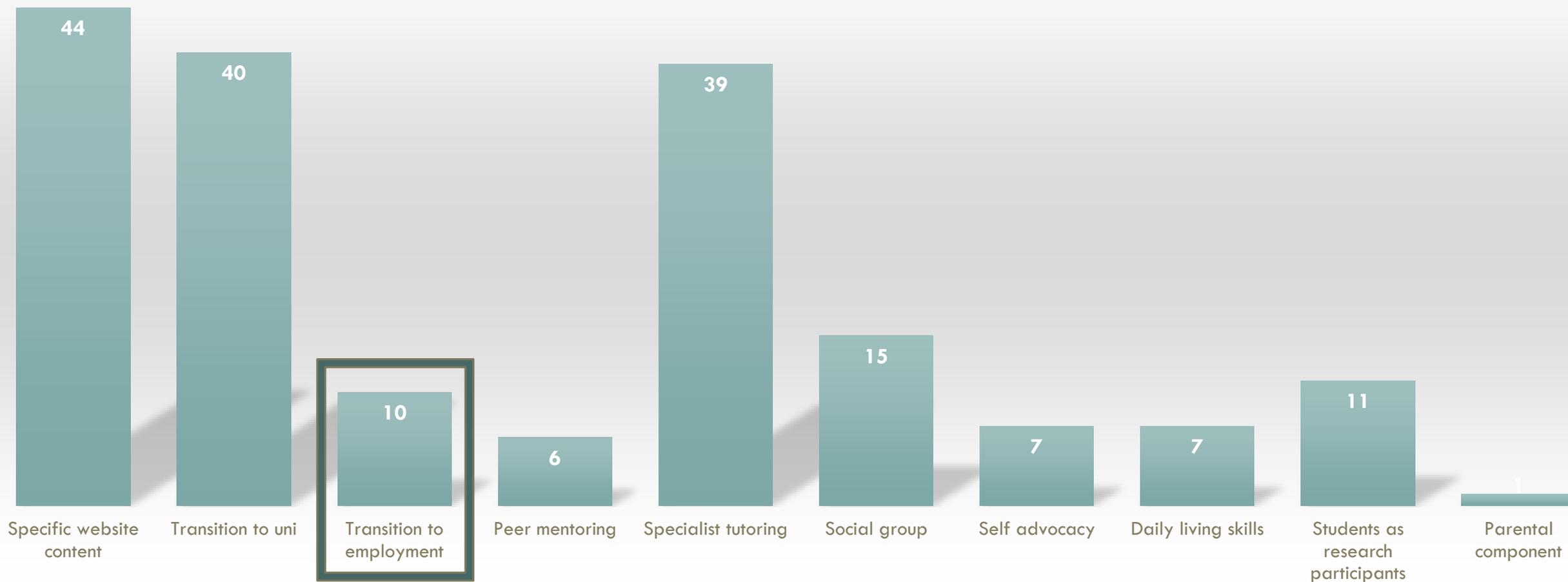
**Poorer mental
health/ quality
of life outcomes**



**Economic costs
estimated at
£920,000 per year**

SCOPING REVIEW OF UK PROVISION IN HE (2019)

No of HEIs providing each different provision



QUALITATIVE STUDY: METHODS

Overall sample of **n=79 participants**

- Semi-structured interviews with **21 autistic students and recent graduates**
- Sixteen focus groups with **58 community stakeholders**

THEMES DERIVED FROM ACCOUNTS

- (1) employment (im)mobilities;
- (2) inaccessible recruitment processes;
- (3) embodied materialities and employment; and
- (4) resourcing employment mobilities

1.EMPLOYMENT (IM)MOBILITIES

“There is so much competition for jobs and it's... it's a lot easier too to have someone that's got no special needs or additional needs.”

(Autistic graduate, focus group)

“You fall under the radar; so many people just end up going through the unemployed-employed cycle forever.”

(Autistic student, focus group)

‘I think it was about 2000 jobs I applied for before I got my [current] job’.

(Autistic graduate, interview)

2. INACCESSIBLE RECRUITMENT PROCESSES: APPLICATIONS

“One thing is the way job descriptions are written – many companies have a formula and it looks very much the same even if it's for different jobs. One section in there is specific for the job and everything else is just standard and I think normally you would understand you don't have to meet all the criteria 100% but if you're autistic and you read really, really carefully; you can probably exclude yourself from all the jobs because you just can't meet everything 100%”

(Autistic graduate, focus groups)

2. INACCESSIBLE RECRUITMENT PROCESSES: DISCLOSURE

“On the application forms there’s an option for people to say have you got a disability ‘yes or no’ and I don’t see myself as disabled because I have Asperger’s”

(Autistic graduate, focus groups)

“There's nothing that tells anyone how to go about it like when is it appropriate to bring it up in the interview, how do you bring it up, do you do it light-heartedly, do you do it kind of jokingly, do you do it seriously? When should you? There's nothing specific I kind of wish there was a little handbook.”

(Autistic graduate, focus groups)

3. EMBODIED MATERIALITIES AND EMPLOYMENT

“Well people with AS are very organised, with excessive worrying they often get things done. Cause I’m always thinking about work, I’m always thinking I’ve got to do this tomorrow and thinking about what needs to be done, because I’m generally a perfectionist it means that it has to be great, it has to be on point.”

(Autistic graduate, interview)

3. EMBODIED MATERIALITIES & EMPLOYMENT

“Yeah my mood will change dramatically in the space of about a minute. I noticed it – because sometimes you don’t always notice it but you feel the physical evidence of it... I just felt this wave of absolute rage coming over me and was like ‘oh dear this isn’t good’. It’s weird because you’re kind of partially conscious of what happening because at that point I was like ‘shit I’m going to have a meltdown and it’s going to be on the shop-floor, great...’. I just literally walked past my colleague and said ‘I’m having a meltdown I’ll be out in the back, tell the manager’.”

(Autistic graduate, interview)

4. RESOURCING EMPLOYMENT MOBILITIES

“Careers staff basically gave me a long list of websites that I could look at but not tell me what kinds of jobs I might be suitable for or how to apply for them.”

(Autistic graduate, interview)

Careers services must understand that ‘if you have Asperger’s you’re not like everyone else, you can’t just go and get a job wherever, you’d have to have a lot of help.’

(Autistic graduate, focus group)

4. RESOURCING EMPLOYMENT MOBILITIES

“I was on the [employment course at the university for students on the autism spectrum], so that was really helpful just for things like building up a CV and that kind of thing which I hadn't really put much thought into either and then I did speak to Careers and they gave me a mentor as they have a scheme where they have people who have already graduated who can mentor you, so I got somebody who worked for the UN so that was very helpful”

(Autistic graduate, interview)

CAREERS GUIDANCE IMPLICATIONS



An **'unevenness'** of **employment mobilities**
>> potential negative implications for **other types of mobilities**



Higher education staff, including careers advisors, disability support workers and academic staff – **potentially positive**



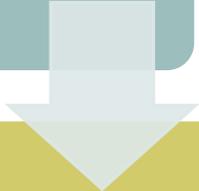
Barriers both **human/social** (employers) and **non-human/material** (adverts, application forms, interview processes, workplaces).



'Differentially embodied (im)mobilities' (Büscher et al. 2016:491)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Empirical level: more comprehensive research



Policy level: strategic planning and resourcing
across HE for disabled / autistic graduates



Practical level: improved practice to support
autistic students / graduates into meaningful work

THANK YOU!

If your company or organisation would like to access free training to support your team to understand more about the employment needs of autistic graduates – please get in touch: j.vincent1@yorks.ac.uk



FIND OUT ABOUT FREE TRAINING

PRO AUTISM

Prospects • Recruitment • Opportunities