

## Industry Snapshot

# Institute of Professional Development

Realising the Potential of  
a Neurodiverse Workforce.

**The Institute  
In Professional Development**

Author: Gemma Barstow,  
Director, Spectrum First  
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# Realising the Potential of a Neurodiverse Workforce

Figures released by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) in February 2021, estimated that 21.7% of autistic people were in employment. However, the estimate was also that, in general, around one third (34.6%) of those employed were only employed part-time<sup>1</sup>.



This indicates little improvement in the last few years, despite a broadening of the conversation around neurodiversity and its beneficial impacts on the workplace. When we consider employment research around another key characteristic of neurodiversity, we see a similar story. Research by DEMOS shows individuals with ADHD are more likely to struggle with job instability and are 15% more likely to be claiming benefits<sup>2</sup>.

Research on numbers of autistic students, or students with ADHD, is limited but Spectrum First, who specialise in supporting these learners, have seen an increase over the past twenty years. Despite successfully obtaining degrees, there is little to help them in their transition to a meaningful and successful role in the work force, self-employment or entrepreneurship—all of which many will be extremely well suited for, given the right opportunity. Researchers have shown that without a variety of elements in place (support being one of the key ones), autistic graduates are far less likely to find a job that is suited to them<sup>3</sup>.

For those who make it into employment, a significant proportion of autistic and ADHD people will experience autistic burnout or other mental health problems such as depression or anxiety. Indeed, recent studies have found that work is a significant risk factor in autistic burnout<sup>4</sup>. This is defined as “a state of physical and mental fatigue, heightened stress, and diminished capacity to manage life skills, sensory input, and/or social interactions, which comes from years of being severely overtaxed by the strain of trying to live up to demands that are out of sync with our needs”<sup>5</sup>. Together with depression and anxiety, burnout is a risk in both autism and ADHD and often leads to the individual being signed-off from their work at significant cost to both them and their employers.

All of these factors are why we have created a new format for managing and coaching colleagues that is inclusive and supportive of neurodiversity in the workplace. It is designed by, and for, neurodiverse people and will offer autistic and ADHD employees an opportunity to better understand themselves in the context of their role in an enterprising workplace. It will help employers to create inclusive work environments that harness the full potential of their neurodiverse employees. Alongside this, the programme is likely to enhance the mental health and productivity of neurodiverse employees, which in turn will go some way to reducing the likelihood of autistic burnout.

Our CMI 7 accredited *Leadership Strategies for Neurodiverse Teams* will be running from November 2023.

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2. Vibert, Simone (2018) *Your attention please: the social and economic impact of ADHD*. Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Your-Attention-Please-the-social-and-economic-impact-of-ADHD-.pdf>
3. Vincent, Jonathan (2020) *Employability for UK University Students and Graduates on the Autism Spectrum: Mobilities and Materialities*. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 22 (1). pp. 12-24
4. Mantzalas J, Richdale AL, Dissanayake C. (2022) *A conceptual model of risk and protective factors for autistic burnout*. *Autism Res*: 976-987. doi: 10.1002/aur.2722. Epub 2022 Apr 13. PMID: 35416430
5. Raymaker DM, Teo AR, Steckler NA, Lentz B, Scharer M, Delos Santos A, Kapp SK, Hunter M, Joyce A, Nicolaidis C. (2020) *“Having All of Your Internal Resources Exhausted Beyond Measure and Being Left with No Clean-Up Crew”*: Defining Autistic Burnout. *Autism Adulthood*: 132-143.

