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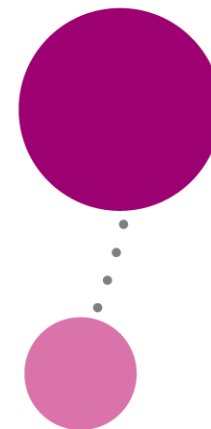


Supporting
Education
Group



Autism Support Practitioner

Level 5 Apprenticeship



An introduction to Autism Support Practitioner



The Autism Support Practitioner Apprenticeship is a Level 5 programme designed to help schools build specialist autism expertise within their existing support teams.

Developed by **Best Practice Network** in partnership with **Liberty Academy Trust**, the programme supports TAs, SEND TAs, LSAs and HLTAs to identify barriers earlier, support autistic pupils more confidently and strengthen inclusive practice across their setting.

Key points

- First autism practitioner apprenticeship for schools
- Awards Liberty Academy Trust Certification & Specialist Teaching Assistant Level 5
- 18-month apprenticeship
- Developed with autism specialists from Liberty Academy Trust
- Designed for TAs, SEND TAs, LSAs and HLTAs
- Builds in-house expertise and confidence
- Supports earlier identification and inclusive provision
- Fully funded through the Apprenticeship Levy

Developed with Liberty Academy Trust

Liberty Academy Trust is a specialist education trust with deep expertise in SEND and autism. The trust is committed to providing an exceptional education for autistic children and young people, combining personalised teaching with therapeutic support to meet the needs of each learner.

Their specialist knowledge has helped shape the Autism Support Practitioner Apprenticeship, ensuring the programme is grounded in real practice, autism-informed approaches and the day-to-day realities of supporting autistic pupils in schools.

Why this partnership matters

- Liberty Academy Trust brings specialist expertise in autism education
- Their schools are designated as autism specific
- Their approach combines personalised teaching and therapeutic support
- The programme is shaped by real classroom practice and learner need
- Best Practice Network brings national apprenticeship delivery, SEND and CPD expertise
- Together, the partnership supports schools to build confident, specialist autism practice from within



How is the programme delivered?

Over 18 months, the Autism Support Practitioner Apprenticeship is delivered through a structured blend of:

- Facilitated online classes
- Monthly coaching
- Online resources
- Workplace learning

This allows participants to build specialist knowledge while applying their learning directly in their school setting.

Delivery Structure



The role of the Apprenticeship Tutor

A key strength of the programme is the dedicated apprenticeship tutor. Learners are not expected to work through the programme alone. Their tutor provides regular support, guidance and coaching, helping them connect the learning to real pupils, real provision and the day-to-day challenges they may face in school.

- Provides regular one-to-one guidance and coaching
- Helps learners apply autism-informed strategies in their setting
- Supports progress against the apprenticeship standard
- Guides portfolio development and evidence collection
- Helps learners reflect on impact and improve practice
- Works with the learner and employer to keep progress on track



Curriculum modules

Wellbeing and
resilience and
study skills

Reflective
practice and
professional
development

Safeguarding

Health and
safety

Equality,
diversity and
inclusion

Curriculum

The learning
environment

Child
development
and how children
learn

Theories of
learning

Pedagogy

Supporting
individual needs

Learning
resources and
technology

Planning

Assessment

Advocating for
learner needs

Effective
teamworking
and partnership
working

Preparation for
EPA

Autism-specific learning

Understanding Autism

Learners develop an understanding of autism, its prevalence and impact in schools, and how it may present in the classroom.

Practical strategies to support pupils

Learners develop strengths-based strategies to identify and remove barriers linked to sensory needs, communication, emotional regulation and behaviour.

Supporting learning, development and inclusion

Learners explore how to create structured, low-arousal environments, use routines and visual supports and build a stronger sense of belonging.

Planning, assessment and improving outcomes

Learners learn how to support curriculum access, observe pupil progress, adapt support and work closely with teachers to meet individual needs.

Working with others to support pupils

Learners develop confidence in sharing observations, advocating for pupils and working with teachers, SENCOs, families and external professionals.

Example materials..

The following pages show example materials and content from the programme.

Making the Most of Professional Development

Why Research Matters for TAs

Detecting Fact from Fiction



PEER-REVIEWED
STUDIES



CLICKBAIT
& FADS

Research helps TAs navigate 'clickbait' and educational fads by prioritising peer-reviewed, reproducible studies over unproven trends.

Cultivate a Growth Mindset

The most effective TAs are lifelong learners who stay open to new ideas and actively look for ways to improve their daily practice.



Reflective Practice

TAs should regularly evaluate how their specific actions affect pupils, using those insights to refine and strengthen their approach.



Seek External Feedback

Strong practitioners look beyond their immediate team for feedback and draw on data to guide their next steps for professional growth.



Driving Towards Social Equity



By providing scientific validity to marginalised voices, research helps TAs address discrimination and foster inclusive environments for diverse pupil populations.

Supporting Health and Wellbeing



Research-informed insights allow TAs to better support student mental health while also safeguarding their own wellbeing in a demanding role.

Inciting Change and Reflection



DISASTERS

SUCCESSES

Engaging with research allows TAs to evaluate both "successes and disasters," providing the power to improve everyday routines and habits.

The Foundation of Professional Growth



Affirming Autistic Learners:

A Guide for Teaching Assistants

Identity-First Language

autistic person

Use terms like "autistic person" to value neurodiversity and avoid deficit-focused or medicalised labels.

The Affirming Mindset



Adopt a Strengths-Based Approach

Focus on a learner's interests and talents to build their confidence and engagement.



Maintain High Expectations

Set challenging, achievable goals without placing artificial limits on what a learner can accomplish.



Foster Learner Agency

Provide regular opportunities for learners to make choices and take ownership of their learning.

Affirming Actions in Practice



Promote acceptance and a culture where difference is valued among peers and the community.



Take Pride in the Impact

Value the relationships you build and the positive ethos created by affirming autistic identity.

The SPELL Framework: A Supportive Approach to Autism



A person-centred framework developed by the National Autistic Society to create predictable, comfortable environments, enabling positive outcomes and autonomy.

S – Structure



Creating clear routines and predictable environments helps reduce the stress and anxiety caused by a world that can often feel chaotic.

P – Positive Approaches and Expectations



Focusing on an individual's strengths, passions, and achievements—rather than just difficulties—prioritises well-being and builds self-esteem.

E – Empathy



Understanding the world from the autistic person's perspective to validate experiences.

L – Low Arousal (Level of Regulation)



Keeping environments calm and reducing sensory pressure allows emotional regulation.

L – Links



Creating strong connections between the individual, their family, and wider support networks ensures consistent care and supports self-advocacy.

Implementation & Impact



Predictable Daily Schedule
Using visual timetables for clarity.



Calm Physical Environments
Reducing sensory overload and clutter.



Collaborative Communication
Sharing information across all settings.



Enabling Autonomy
Offering choices to build confidence.



Support every step of the way

At Best Practice Network, we believe every learner has the potential to succeed. Whether someone has additional learning needs, needs help with organisation or has not completed formal training for a while, support is built into the apprenticeship from the start.

Personalised learner support

Support is tailored to each participant's needs, and learners can ask for help at any point during the programme.

Dedicated tutor guidance

Tutors check progress regularly, identify barriers early and help learners stay confident and on track.

Additional Learning Support

A specialist ALS team is available for learners who need extra support, strategies or reasonable adjustments.

Wellbeing and confidence

Learners are supported with both their development and wellbeing, with regular check-ins and open communication.

Support in the workplace

Mentors are involved so participants can apply their learning effectively in their setting.

Who is this programme for?

Autism Support Practitioner apprenticeship L5

- Designed for teaching assistants and support staff wanting to develop specialist expertise in autism
- Supports learners to have a greater impact on autistic pupils' learning, participation and outcomes
- Ideal for those working with autistic pupils, with a particular focus on:
 - Communication
 - Sensory processing
 - Social interaction
 - Engagement

Benefits for participants

Develop specialist autism knowledge

- Build a deeper understanding of autism, neurodiversity and how autistic pupils may experience school.

Grow confidence in practice

- Learn practical strategies to support communication, sensory needs, regulation, engagement and participation.

Make a greater impact day to day

- Apply learning directly in the classroom and wider school environment.

Progress professionally

- Work towards a Level 5 apprenticeship while developing a more specialist role within the support team.

Receive structured support

- Benefit from online learning, training events and monthly coaching throughout the programme.

Advocate for autistic learners

- Develop confidence in sharing observations, supporting pupil voice and working with others to improve outcomes.

Benefits for schools

Build in-house autism expertise

- Develop existing support staff into confident autism practitioners who can apply specialist strategies across the school.

Strengthen inclusive provision

- Support autistic pupils to access learning, participate more fully and feel a stronger sense of belonging.

Improve consistency of support

- Create a more joined-up approach between TAs, teachers, SENCOs, families and external professionals.

Support earlier identification

- Equip staff to recognise barriers sooner and respond with practical, evidence-informed support.

Reduce pressure on SENCOs and teachers

- Develop practitioners who can contribute more confidently to planning, observations, adaptations and pupil support.

Make effective use of Apprenticeship Levy funding

- The programme is fully funded through the apprenticeship levy, helping schools develop specialist capacity without using standard CPD budgets.

How to apply

1. Apply online

Participants complete a short application through the Best Practice Network website.

2. We arrange the funding

Our friendly funding team will support the employer and manage the Apprenticeship Levy funding process.

3. Start with full support

Participants receive induction, onboarding and guidance before beginning the programme.

Funding

- Participants never pay a penny
- The £12,000 cost is covered by the Apprenticeship Levy (for eligible schools)
- Most schools access this through their local authority or MAT
- Apprenticeship Levy funding is already ringfenced for apprenticeship training

Any Questions?