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Centre for Educational Development,  
Appraisal and Research

## **Evaluation of Autism Education Trust Training Hubs Programme**

**Interim report - results from the L2 and L3 pilot  
training sessions and views of hub leads**

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WARWICK**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Autism Education Trust's (AET) training hubs programme comprises the development and delivery of three levels of training (Level 1 awareness raising; Level 2 for individual staff working with pupils with autism; Level 3 for those in leadership roles able to influence whole school practices), as well as the development and roll-out of national Standards and a Competency Framework.

This Interim Report focuses on results from the Level 2 (L2) and Level 3 (L3) pilot training sessions (to end September 2012), as well as presenting the views of the seven hub leads on the AET Programme as a whole. It follows earlier reports of the Level 1 training sessions to end June 2012.

### Headline findings

- Highly significant increases in self-reported knowledge about autism and autism education for both Level 2 and Level 3 pilot sessions ( $p < .001$ )
- Very positive opinions about the training content (L2: 93%; L3: 93%)
- Very high level of interest in further training about autism (L2: 93%; L3: 97%)
- Very positive views of the AET Programme reported by training hub leads

### Detailed findings

#### *Level 2 pilot*

All seven hubs participated in the evaluation of the L2 pilot training sessions. In total, **nine** sessions were held, with **116** participants in all. Of these, we received **99 matched pairs of pre-post data**.

Of those who attended:

- The majority (77%) had **experience of working with one or more pupils on the autism spectrum**.
- Under half (45%) had previously **attended the L1 AET training**. Over half (54%) had previously attended a one day, or more, training on ASD.
- The largest group were **TAs** (40%) followed by **teachers** (31%). Only 4% were SENCOs.
- The majority were **female** (80%), with 20% male.
- The largest group had **university degrees** (48%).
- The majority (82%) ticked '**White-British**'. A wide range of other ethnicities were also represented.
- The largest group were those in their **40s** (37%). Overall, the age range went from those in their 20s to those aged 60 or over.

There was a **statistically highly significant rise in the mean Self-assessment Total Score after the L2 training.**

Views of the L2 training were **very positive** - the average level of positive response to closed answer statements (combining 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses) was **93%**.

The largest number of open comments (n = 26) were **strongly positive comments about the value and impact of the training.**

The level of interest in further training was **very high (93%).**

### *Level 3 pilot*

Five of the seven hubs participated in the evaluation of the L3 pilot training sessions. In total, **seven** sessions were held, with **69** participants in all, forming **66 matched pairs of pre-post data.**

Of those who attended:

- Under half (42%) **held a current leadership role around the education of pupils with autism.**
- Under a fifth (17%) were part of the **senior management/leadership team in their setting.**
- About a third (32%) had **previously attended the L1 AET training.**
- Under half (43%) had **previously attended the L2 AET training.**
- Exactly half (50%) had **previously attended a two day, or more, training on autism.**
- The largest group were **TAs** (46%). Over a fifth (23%) were **teachers** (31%). Under a tenth (9%) were **SENCOs**. A wide range of other roles were also represented (29%), such as advisory teacher, area SENCO, assistant, SENCO, deputy head, governor, learning manager, learning mentor *et cetera*.
- The majority were **female** (83%), with 17% male.
- The largest group had **higher education below degree level** (51%).
- The majority (80%) ticked '**White-British**'. A range of other ethnicities were also represented.
- The largest group were those in their **40s** (37%). Overall, the age range went from those in their 20s to those in their 50s.

There was a **statistically highly significant rise in the mean Self-assessment Total Score after the L3 training.**

Views of the L3 training were **very positive** - the average level of positive response to closed response statements (combining 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses) was **93%**.

The level of interest in further training was **very high (97%)**.

Open responses were **highly positive in terms of content and delivery** and the **overall value of the L3 training**.

#### *Views of the seven hub leads*

It is **a strength of the AET programme** that each hub is independently aligned with programme aims and supportive of the Autism Education Trust.

The **hub structure** and the **interactive and collaborative processes** used in the AET programme have been a success.

All hub leads were involved in commenting on drafts of the materials and appreciated the opportunity to do so.

There was **praise** for how open to feedback the materials development team had been.

In delivery, the materials and the training hubs were not separate parts of the programme but **created an interactive synergy**.

Despite some constructive criticism of the pilot materials for L2 and L3, **the synergy** of the material *plus* the experienced hub trainers *plus* audiences keen to be participating in this level of training meant that **the pilot delivery experience was positive**.

Most of the hub leads would have **preferred the materials to have been produced in PowerPoint, rather than PDF**, in order to make them more flexible in use.

All the hubs were **successful in marketing the AET training** using relatively straightforward approaches. They all also benefitted from **the national status of the AET as the lead organisation** and from AET generated marketing.

Leads were **confident of meeting and even exceeding target demand for L1 training**.

Level 1 training in itself **created a demand for L2 and L3 training**.

Hub leads were **slightly anxious about meeting target demand for Level 2 and Level 3 training *within the timescale of the funded programme*** (i.e. to March 2013) – not because demand did not exist but because of the additional complexities of schools needing to release staff for one or two days respectively and the constraint of the normal lead in time of a year to fit in with schools' development planning.

Hub leads reported **very positive responses to the Level 1 training sessions**.

Those who had experience of **the L2 and L3 pilot sessions** reported **very positive reception from participants**.

The Standards and Competency Framework were viewed **very positively** and seen as absolutely **key to the future development of the AET programme**.

There was **praise for the extensive consultation with parents, children, practitioners and other stakeholders** during the development stage, and a perception that the process had resulted in the team making **'an excellent job'** of the task.

Those who had run L3 pilot sessions reported that the Standards were **'very well received'** with delegates recognising their value for their schools.

The regular Partner Meetings were viewed as **helpful and valuable**. The opportunity to network, to share experience and to discuss the programme and the longer term strategy for the AET were all valued.

Views expressed about the monitoring and evaluation of the programme were **mainly positive**.

All seven hub leads reported that their **hopes and expectations of being involved with programme had been realised or surpassed**.

Concern was expressed about the uncertainty over the future grant funding of the AET. **The need for the AET as a national lead organisation giving 'badge and status' to national developments in autism education was emphasised**.

The hub leads thought **the L2 and L3 training could become self-sustaining** if the price was right but were **keen that the AET should continue to receive a government grant to lead new developments**.

### **Interim conclusion**

To date, the interim data collected indicates that the AET training hubs programme is successful. One hub lead captured the overall picture of the AET programme having met and indeed surpassed expectations:

'It's impressive by any one's standards, what [the AET] have achieved in networking that group of professionals from right across the country in different universities, different local authorities, schools, voluntary sector agencies, people with autism themselves. It's never been done before. [...] It's astonishing what they've achieved in that short time.'

The monitoring and evaluation continues to end March 2013:

CEDAR, 26 October 2012

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Purpose of this interim report**

This Interim Report focuses on results from the Autism Education Trust (AET) Level 2 (L2) and Level 3 (L3) *pilot* training sessions (to end September 2012), as well as presenting the views of the seven hub leads on the AET Programme as a whole. It follows earlier reports of the Level 1 training sessions to end June 2012. It is provided to the AET to inform strategic discussions with the Department for Education (DfE).

### **1.2 Headline findings**

- Highly significant increases in self-reported knowledge about autism and autism education for both Level 2 and Level 3 pilot sessions ( $p < .001$ )
- Very positive opinions about the training content (L2: 93%; L3: 93%)
- Very high level of interest in further training about autism (L2: 93%; L3: 97%)
- Very positive views of the AET Programme reported by training hub leads



## 2 THE LEVEL 2 PILOT

All seven hubs participated in the evaluation of the L2 pilot training sessions. In total, **nine** sessions were held, with **116** participants in all. Of these, we received 103 pre-course questionnaires and 105 post-course questionnaires, forming **99 matched pairs of pre-post data**. About one half-term later, all L2 delegates who gave consent will be e-mailed a follow-up questionnaire. In addition, a sample of delegates from each training hub will be interviewed about what, if any impact the training has subsequently had on their day to day practices supporting the education of pupils with autism.

### 2.1 Who attended?

The L2 training was designed for school staff working directly with one or more pupils with autism. Responses to demographic questions on the pre-training questionnaire ( $N = 103$ ) provide a profile of those who attended. The questions covered experience of working with/teaching one or more pupils on the autism spectrum, amount of previous training on the autism spectrum, job, gender, level of education, ethnicity, and age.

- *Experience*: The majority (77%) had **experience of working with one or more pupils on the autism spectrum**.
- *Previous training*: Under half (45%) had previously **attended the L1 AET training**. Over half (54%) had previously attended a one day, or more, training on ASD.
- *Job*: The largest group were **TAs** (40%) followed by **teachers** (31%). Only 4% were SENCOs.
- *Gender*: The majority were **female** (80%), with 20% male.
- *Level of education*: The largest group had **university degrees** (48%).
- *Ethnicity*: The majority (82%) ticked '**White-British**'. A wide range of other ethnicities were also represented.
- *Age*: The largest group were those in their **40s** (37%). Overall, the age range went from those in their 20s to those aged 60 or over.

### 2.2 Impact on self-assessed knowledge of autism

Before the delivery of the L2 training, all participants were asked to self-assess their knowledge, skills and confidence about pupils on the autism spectrum on a scale of 1 ('strongly disagree') to 4 ('strongly agree'). Appendix 1 shows the L2 statements. After the training, participants were asked to complete the same self-assessment (having previously handed in their pre-course assessment).

To analyse whether or not the post-course responses indicated a statistically significant difference from pre-course responses, a Self-assessment Total Score was calculated for all those who had answered at least 11 of the 13 statements (prorated for those who had completed fewer than 13). Pre- and post-course Self-assessment Total Scores (max. = 52) were calculated and the means compared using a paired *t*-test.

- This showed a **statistically highly significant rise in the mean Self-assessment Total Score after the L2 training** (Table 1).

**Table 1 L2 Mean Self-assessment Total Score after the training (max. =52)**

		Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
All	pre	13-49	34.40	1.18			
	post	13-52	43.80	0.65	13.37	91	<.001

## 2.3 Views of the training

### 2.3.1 Closed responses

After the training, participants were asked to indicate, on a five-point Likert-type scale running from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree'), how much they agreed or disagreed with six statements about the training. The statements and results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 Views about the L2 training (%)**

Statement	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
a) I found this training worthwhile.	0	1	4	24	71
b) This training has increased my knowledge about autism.	0	0	4	21	75
c) I think this training will help me to be more understanding of pupils with autism.	0	0	7	16	77
d) The training provided me with guidelines for working with pupils on the autism spectrum that I expect that I will be able to use in my classroom practice.	0	3	5	25	68
e) The training provided me with activities and ideas for working with pupils on the autism spectrum that I expect to be able to use in my classroom practice.	0	5	9	33	54
f) I feel that my confidence in working with pupils on the autism spectrum has been boosted by today's training.	0	1	6	24	70
g) I know where to find out more about autism.	0	0	7	30	62
h) I am interested in further training about autism.	0	3	4	21	72

Source: post-training questionnaire. *N* varied from 100 to 104.

Table 2 shows that views of the L2 training were **very positive**.

- For statements a-g, the average level of positive response (combining 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses) was **93%**.
- The level of interest in further training was **very high (93%)**.

### **2.3.2 Open responses**

After the Level 2 training delegates were invited to respond to two open questions:

- please state what else, if anything, you would have liked in this training session
- please add any additional thoughts or comments would you have about today's training session.

There were 27 responses to the question asking delegates to state what else they would have liked to have had in the training session. There was a limited range of responses, with the largest number (n = 10) relating to the **delivery** of the session, with these delegates asking for greater variety in terms of delivery, with more activities, more tasks, and more opportunities to interact with other delegates. In terms of **content**, a variety of points were made, with the three most common points relating to:

- the provision of more resources that could be taken directly into the classroom (n = 6)
- more content focused on secondary level education (n = 3)
- more advice on how teaching staff might deal with expectations of educational success in relation to the capabilities of some ASD students (n = 3)

The remaining open responses **sought more information** in relation to a variety of issues: dealing with emotional and physical development; more information on helping pupils with ASD to interact with their peers; more information on balance problems affecting some students with ASD; more focus on younger children; a greater focus on the curriculum; and more film clips showing teaching staff working with pupils with ASD in a classroom setting.

There were 42 responses to the second Level 2 open question, asking for additional thoughts or comments on the training session. **The largest number of comments (n = 26) were strongly positive comments about the value and impact of the training.** Typical comments included:

- 'It was informative, eye-opening, and gave me plenty of food for thought. I feel more able and equipped to deal with the difficulties/problems that autistic children face, and to know how to respond to these needs.' (1033)
- 'It was fantastic training, very informative and I feel I have a better understanding of autism.' (1042)
- 'Really useful, invaluable talk. The tutor was really professional/approachable. I feel more confident. Helped to point me in the right direction.' (1072)

The delegates praised the content, the high standard of the tutors' knowledge and delivery skills, and the immediate impact in terms of their own understanding and approach.

Additional comments focused on:

- the benefits gained from the contributions made by the delegates themselves (n = 3)
- the amount of material presented in the one day session, and that it might be possible to cover the material more effectively in two days (n = 5)
- the repetition of material that was covered in the Level 1 training (n = 4)

Other points made included difficulties in engaging in candid discussion in one session where the parent of an ASD child was present; the need for more activities; and more material needed relating to Early Years.

### 3 THE LEVEL 3 PILOT

Five of the seven hubs participated in the evaluation of the L3 pilot training sessions. In total, **seven** sessions were held, with **69** participants in all. Of these, we received 66 pre-course questionnaires and 66 post-course questionnaires, forming **66 matched pairs of pre-post data**.

#### 3.1 Who attended?

The L3 training was designed for school staff with training and/or leadership responsibilities relevant to the education of pupils on the autism spectrum. Responses to demographic questions on the pre-training questionnaire ( $N = 66$ ) provide a profile of those who attended. The questions covered leadership role, amount of previous training on the autism spectrum, job, gender, level of education, ethnicity, and age.

- *Leadership:*
  - Under half (42%) **held a current leadership role around the education of pupils with autism.**
  - Under a fifth (17%) were part of the **senior management/leadership team in their setting.**
- *Previous training:*
  - About a third (32%) had **previously attended the L1 AET training.**
  - Under half (43%) had **previously attended the L2 AET training.**
  - Exactly half (50%) had **previously attended a two day, or more, training on autism.**
- *Job:* The largest group were **TAs** (46%). Over a fifth (23%) were **teachers** (31%). Under a tenth (9%) were SENCOs. A wide range of other roles were also represented (29%), such as advisory teacher, area SENCO, assistant, SENCO, deputy head, governor, learning manager, learning mentor *et cetera*.
- *Gender:* The majority were **female** (83%), with 17% male.
- *Level of education:* The largest group had **higher education below degree level** (51%).
- *Ethnicity:* The majority (80%) ticked '**White-British**'. A range of other ethnicities were also represented.
- *Age:* The largest group were those in their **40s** (37%). Overall, the age range went from those in their 20s to those in their 50s.

#### 3.2 Impact on self-assessed knowledge of autism

Before the delivery of the L3 training, all participants were asked to self-assess their knowledge, skills and confidence about pupils on the autism spectrum on a scale of 1

(‘strongly disagree’) to 4 (‘strongly agree’). Appendix 2 shows the L3 statements. After the training, participants were asked to complete the same self-assessment (having previously handed in their pre-course assessment).

To analyse whether or not the post-course responses indicated a statistically significant difference from pre-course responses, a Self-assessment Total Score was calculated for all those who had answered at least 11 of the 13 statements (prorated for those who had completed fewer than 13). Pre- and post-course Self-assessment Total Scores (max. = 52) were calculated and the means compared using a paired *t*-test.

- This showed a **statistically highly significant rise in the mean Self-assessment Total Score after the L3 training** (Table 3).

**Table 3 L3 Mean Self-assessment Total Score after the training (max. =68)**

		Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
All	pre	24-65	33.15	7.77			
	post	47-68	58.68	5.95	16.70	64	<.001

### 3.3 Views of the training

#### 3.3.1 Closed responses

After the training, participants were asked to indicate, on a five-point Likert-type scale running from 1 (‘strongly disagree’) to 5 (‘strongly agree’), how much they agreed or disagreed with six statements about the training. The statements and results are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4 Views about the L3 training (%)**

Statement	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	
a) I found this training worthwhile.	0	0	5	15	80	
b) This training has increased my understanding about autism.	0	2	6	14	79	
c) Because of this training, I have a better understanding of good practice in autism education.	0	0	5	15	80	
d) I think this training will help me to be more effective as an advocate for pupils with autism in my setting.	0	0	3	12	85	
e) The training improved my knowledge of how to evaluate practice around the education of pupils on the autism spectrum in my setting.	0	0	6	23	71	
f) The training gave me the opportunity to try out some practical ways of improving practice around working with pupils on the autism spectrum.	0	2	12	30	56	
g) My confidence in relation to working with colleagues to support pupils on the autism spectrum has been boosted by this training.	0	0	6	27	67	
h) I am interested in further training about autism.	0	0	3	16	81	

Source: L3 post-training questionnaire. *N* varied from 64 to 66.

Table 4 shows that views of the L3 training were **very positive**.

- For statements a-g, the average level of positive response (combining ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ responses) was **93%**.
- The level of interest in further training was **very high (97%)**.

### **3.3.2 Open responses**

As part of the Level 3 training post-course questionnaire, delegates were also asked two open questions:

- please state what, if anything, disappointed you about this training course
- please state what was most effective for you about this training course.



There were 20 responses to the question asking delegates to state what they were disappointed with in the Level 3 training. These tended to be rather **minor issues**. For example, the most frequently mentioned issue was based on a misunderstanding on the part of the delegates, with four wanting to be given handouts of the 'PowerPoint' slides. In fact the presentation is not a PowerPoint presentation and, in consequence, it is not possible to provide handouts in that fashion. Two delegates thought that the Level 3 training could be condensed into a single day, while two other delegates noted that there was not enough time to cover the training properly in just two days. In addition, two delegates would have liked to have been able to buy the AET 'Toolkit' at a reduced price at the training session, and two delegates would have liked more time for delegates to discuss issues arising from their own settings. The remaining responses to the open question were varied, with single requests, for example, for more subject specific material, more ideas to take into the classroom, the view that the training was a bit repetitive.

There were 54 responses to the second open question, asking for details of what was the most effective part of the training for the delegate. The responses were all **highly positive in terms of content and delivery**. There was a narrow range of points made, with some overlap as delegates made a number of points in response to the open question.

Nineteen delegates made general, highly positive comments about **the overall value of the Level 3 training**. Examples included:

- 'Motivating and inspiring. Clear with excellent links. Excellent practical materials for taking back to school. Excellent balance of activities, discussion and information.' (1015)
- 'I found this training very useful, it has made me think about my practice and the lessons that I deliver.' (1052)
- 'A good combination of information and discussion, delivered in a very interesting and humorous way. Really enjoyed the experience and it has given me loads to think about and put into practice next term. I now feel more confident in my ability to teach more effectively.' (1057)

The **opportunity to discuss practice, ideas and experiences** with other colleagues from different settings was also welcomed, with 16 delegates identifying this aspect of the training session. For example,

I valued the practical advice, and sharing experiences and practice with other schools and educational establishments' (1008).

The **expertise, knowledge and delivery skills of the tutors** were also valued, with seven delegates noting this as an important aspect of the training. The **provision of practical resources** that could be taken back to schools was mentioned by five delegates. Finally, **the Standards and the Competency Framework** were also important to delegates, with nine delegates identifying these aspects of the session as being of value. For example:

- 'The Framework and Standards are clear.' (1022)
- 'The Standards are important to look at school's practice and staff.' (1032)
- 'The Framework for analysing the school in relation to autism awareness.' (1009).

## 4 Interviews with training hub leads

### 4.1 Introduction

Semi-structured telephone interviews were held with a lead representative from six of the AET training hubs just before or just after the school summer holidays, 2012. The seventh hub lead provided responses by e-mail.

The interview covered nine areas:

- the decision to apply to become a training hub
- the training materials
- enrolling participants
- participants' responses
- the National Standards and the Competency Framework
- the partner meetings
- the monitoring and evaluation of the programme
- reflection on experience of the programme so far
- looking ahead to the possibility of sustainability beyond March 2013

### 4.2 Decision to apply to become a training hub

All the reasons given by the hub leads for why their organisation had wanted to become a training hub were consistent with the aims and purposes of the AET programme. Although this may seem obvious, in fact it is not something that can be taken-for-granted; rather it should be viewed as **a strength of the programme** that each hub is independently aligned with programme aims and supportive of the Autism Education Trust.

Reasons why hub organisations wanted to be involved with the programme included:

- wanting to be part of a *national* training programme (the reason most often cited)
- being keen to offer cutting-edge, up-to-date training, with the possibility of accreditation of the higher levels
- being able to offer free training to a wide range of people (the Level 1 training)
- having a vested interest in the success of the Autism Education Trust as a member organisation and wanting to be part of that success
- being keen to be involved in developments led by the Autism Education Trust
- a desire to promote the autism voice, especially in mainstream schools.

Each hub lead believed his/her hub made a **special contribution** to the training hubs programme, such as:

- being able to field a large training team to deliver a large quantity of the training
- having useful local networks that would enable the training to reach out to enough participants to meet or exceed delivery targets
- having a wealth of school-based knowledge and training delivery experience to draw on to make the national materials relevant and engaging for local participants from a range of settings and roles
- having a bank of effective existing training materials to offer to inform the AET materials and/or to augment them
- ensuring that the voice of those with autism as part of complex needs was included in the training.

As well as having something to offer the AET training hubs programme, the hub leads also hoped their organisations would **benefit from being involved**. For example, they hoped that taking part in the programme would:

- open doors to more consultancy and/or training delivery work
- enable their training offer to be updated
- raise the profile and/or influence of their organisation
- make a contribution to change [for the better].

In short, having training hubs as part of the AET programme was seen as a **win-win structure**.

### **4.3 The training materials**

#### ***4.3.1 Involvement in developing or commenting on the materials***

The training materials were developed by a team from the University of Birmingham. Members of the Oxfordshire autism learning support team were also involved in developing the Level 1 materials. None of the hub leads interviewed were directly involved in that initial development process. **All of them were involved in commenting on drafts of the materials and appreciated the opportunity to do so.** The extent to which comments were made varied from hub lead to hub lead and, for each hub lead, by level of material (L1, L2, L3). For example, some commented 'line by line' on the materials via the online wiki or were invited to spend time with the developers making detailed comments, while others only commented during presentations about the materials at the relevant partners' meeting or training day. Overall, the draft Level 2 training materials received the least feedback because

there was a smaller window of time available to offer comments before the pilot began.

Overall, the hub leads believed that **it was worthwhile to comment** on the draft materials as they saw that most of their comments had been taken on board in redrafts. There was recognition that in any collaborative process not every comment would equate to a change being made and there was **praise for how open to feedback the materials development team had been**. The wiki and e-mail had enabled this process; the main constraint on commenting on drafts of the three levels of training materials was pressure of hub leads' other work leaving limited time to be involved.

#### **4.3.2 Views of the appropriateness of the content and format of the materials**

The interactive and collaborative nature of the AET programme has ensured that the views of the hub leads on the appropriateness of the content and format of the materials have been sought and responded to as an integral part of the programme. The topic was included in the interview schedule as an independent check of this process and has confirmed that the internal feedback loop worked well. Rather than report comments in detail here (especially for the L2 and L3 materials which were still in pilot form at the time of the interviews), we present a summary of key messages. The most important finding is that **the hub structure and the interactive and collaborative processes used in the AET programme have been a success**, having benefitted from learning from the Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) of the strengths of using regional expertise (the hubs) and the necessity of piloting new training materials with practitioners prior to roll-out.

##### **4.3.2.1 Content**

The hub leads made detailed comments on the content of each level of the training materials but no-one reported comments to the evaluators that they had not already felt able to feed in to the programme's consultation and feedback mechanisms. The comments on the material content are best understood in the light of a key point made directly or by implication by each lead - that, **in delivery, the materials and the training hubs** were not separate parts of the programme but **created an interactive synergy**. This was nicely put by one hub lead:

'We need to supplement [the materials] but that is why there are hubs, to attach that issue-specific information where it needs further development. I'd like to say that I think it is an amazing coming together of views and experiences, right across England, to come up with something which is so adequate in the face of the challenge. It's a process I've been really pleased to be involved in.'

Most comments about content were level-specific but two related to the whole. One such overall comment was that the materials were geared to mainstream rather than special settings (two hub leads). The second overall comment was made by one lead only – this was that the elements of the programme development process had been commissioned in the wrong order. In this lead’s view the National Standards and the Competency Framework ought to have been developed first, so that the training materials could have been developed to map on to these explicitly rather than the other way round.

### Level 1

- At the time of interview, hub leads were commenting on the Level 1 materials in their final, post-piloting form.

The remit for the development of the Level 1 materials was that they should be suitable for a wide range of school staff, including lunchtime staff, school receptionists, and to related workers, such as school transport drivers. Consequently, the material was deliberately pitched at the level of awareness of adults with little or no knowledge about autism. Some leads valued the breadth of this remit, with one saying the material was ‘hugely successful in reaching out to a broad audience’ or that ‘the breadth works well’. Another viewed L1 as ‘a great bite sized introduction’.

Although a wide range of people have attended Level 1 sessions, the majority have been teachers or teaching assistants (TAs) – see previous evaluation reports of the L1 training. Two hub leads thought that this resulted in the L1 content being not at quite the right level for the awareness of autism of the achieved audience mix (as opposed to the intended audience) – one suggested that perhaps the development process could have benefitted from more involvement of teachers and SENCOs to address this.

Nevertheless, all interviewees agreed that the great strength of the L1 material, which enabled it both to meet and transcend its original brief of reaching out to a wide audience with little or no awareness of autism, was **the rich array of video clips of young people with autism and parents talking about their experiences**. This point is captured well in the following quote, which also highlights **other aspects viewed as working well at Level 1**:

‘What works really well is all the clips. [Participants] absolutely love the film clips. The way that [autism] is expressed as a difference, not a deficit; introducing them to the four areas of difference, the balance of material and activity, all of that works really well at Level 1.’

By the time of interview, one large hub had already replaced its own core training materials with the AET L1 material ('We're no longer using our own materials. This is what we're using.' H7). In two other areas the L1 material was deemed too basic for use in local schools as these already had autism specialist teachers and so was used to reach out to other schools and audiences where awareness levels were lower.

#### Level 2 pilot version

- At time of interview, hub leads were commenting on the L2 *pilot* version, knowing that this would be redrafted in the light of the feedback they gave directly to the development team.

The Level 2 materials were aimed at teachers and TAs working with individual pupils with autism. More than one hub lead thought it had been **a weakness that the pilot version of the L2 materials development team had not included people with recent in-depth experience of the day-to-day life of schools**. Consequently, four of the six hub leads described trainers having to 'gloss over' bits they believed to be inadequate and **having to add in a lot of examples and material to make the pilot content relevant** to the varied settings of the audiences – i.e. primary, secondary, special schools, early years, Reception class. The other three hub leads were positive about the L2 material describing it respectively as '**good**', '**well-received**', and as having '**enough content**' but requiring '**judicious application**'..

#### Level 3 pilot version

- At time of interview, hub leads were commenting on the L3 *pilot* version, knowing that this would be redrafted in the light of the feedback they gave directly to the development team.

**Most** (5/7) of the hub leads **were positive** about the pilot Level 3 materials which are aimed at senior leaders in a school – those with responsibility for leadership and/or training of other staff. Linking this level of training to the National Standards was particularly valued. **A minority** (2/6) **were disappointed** by them, viewing them respectively as not sufficiently up to date in engaging with the latest research and debates and 'too simple, too patronising' for the audience.

Constructive criticism included that there was too much repetition of material covered in L2, and that the curriculum and learning section was particularly weak (although this was rectified by trainers during delivery adding in their own material).

Despite some criticism of the pilot materials for L2 and L3, **the synergy of the material plus the experienced hub trainers plus audiences keen to be participating** in this level of training meant that **the pilot delivery experience was positive**:

‘[Pilot Level 2 and Level 3 materials] are being very, very well received. I guess that’s because people are self-selecting at that stage. They want to be there. They’re keen to be on the course and they’re very keen to engage with the materials, to reflect on their own practice and so on.’

‘In the Level 3 pilot, we did two days and the opportunity to do two days with seniorish staff – you get to discuss the issues that schools face working with young people with autism and how to respond to issues that staff raise and have a strategic approach. It was the best two days training, the most enjoyable that I’ve done.’

#### 4.3.2.2 *Format*

**Most of the hub leads would have preferred the materials to have been produced in PowerPoint, rather than PDF.** The PDF format, rather than the more familiar teaching format of PowerPoint, was at least an initial barrier for five of the seven leads and continued to be a barrier to other team members using the materials in at least two hubs. As trainers, they missed the flexibility of PowerPoint and reported audiences being disappointed that the familiar PowerPoint practice of being given a copy of the slides as a handout was not possible with the PDF format. However, as experienced trainers, they all found ways of overcoming this to enable adjustments in delivery to suit different audiences – but often this involved additional work; for example, making a list of the order and content of each slide so as to be able to use them flexibly during delivery.

**A minority were happy with the PDF format and the rationale for its use (consistency):**

‘I respect the argument that’s been put forward about not doing PowerPoints because you can’t change PDFs and PowerPoints can be messed around with. That seems to me to be perfectly reasonable. [...] It’s actually been relatively easy to work around.’

Otherwise, comments on the format of the materials were **positive**:



'I think it's well produced. It looks as if it's been professionally produced. [...] It's way above anything we can do because we don't have those kinds of resources so that's fine.' H3

#### 4.4 Enrolling participants

All the hubs were **successful in marketing the AET training** using relatively straightforward approaches:

- fitting this in to their other work with schools e.g. taking AET programme fliers in to caseload schools
- using existing relationships with schools, LAs and local universities (initial teacher training) to build demand
- direct marketing to LAs, schools and groups (such as transport guides and drivers) beyond existing networks
- using local SENCO conferences and headteacher termly meetings as places to showcase the programme

They all also benefitted from **the national status of the AET as the lead organisation** and from AET generated marketing:

- information available on the AET website
- information put in to LA and headteacher bulletins

Leads were **confident of meeting and even exceeding target demand for L1 training**. Most talked about it being 'easy' to recruit to this level and reported many unsolicited enquiries coming in. Simple marketing strategies worked well. For example, one hub lead described how showcasing the AET programme at a local SENCO conference resulted in level 1 bookings up to April 2013:

[At this SENCO Conference], I talked about the AET in general, about the Standards and the forthcoming Competencies and what they could get from the AET website. Then I said, 'And here's the L1 training' and I'm practically booked up now until the end of April [2013]. So there's no shortage of demand.'

One voluntary sector hub reported meeting resistance to the hub role in delivering this training from the local LA autism outreach team who saw this as an invasion of their territory, despite the local head of service being supportive. The hub response was to target neighbouring LAs who responded positively to the offer of **training that**

came with the AET's nationally recognised status as the lead organisation for autism education.

While reporting that Level 1 training in itself **created a demand for L2 and L3 training**, hub leads were **slightly anxious about meeting target demand for Level 2 and Level 3 training *within the timescale of the funded programme*** (i.e. to March 2013) – not because demand did not exist but because of the additional complexities of schools needing to release staff for one or two days respectively and the constraint of the normal lead in time of a year required to **fit with schools' development planning whereby INSET and staff development plans are set for the following, rather than the current academic year**. To address this, hubs were, for example:

- offering both central events to which schools could send individuals and INSET events for groups of staff from a single school;
- giving schools as much lead in time as possible e.g. one hub was running L2 and L3 events in October and February;
- marketing the L2 and L3 training directly to LAs to buy in for their schools.

The school development planning cycle made **the short-term nature of funding for the AET itself a live issue for hub leads** as it meant they were unable to plan ahead for delivery of the L2 and L3 training beyond the funded life of the organisation:

'I've had requests from three schools now for Level 2 INSET days. They are people who came on Level 1 training who have then gone ahead and said, 'We'd like to book this for an INSET day', but one of the issues is schools book for the year ahead, a year in advance, so it's after the end of March and so I can't confirm anything because I don't know what we'll be doing.'

One hub lead argued that, had the Standards and Competencies been developed first, and the training mapped on to them, then demand from schools would have been even greater as head teachers and senior leaders became aware through these documents of the expectations on schools and staff. **Promotion of the Standards and Competency framework by the AET and the training hubs**, would, she believed, stimulate further and continuing demand for the training by highlighting areas for development and gaps in current school practices.

#### 4.5 Participants' responses to the training

At time of interview, the hub leads had most experience of delivering the L1 sessions so most comments were about how participants responded to that level.

Hub leads reported **very positive responses to the Level 1 training sessions:**

‘The response from Level 1 is really hugely positive and I think it really strikes a chord. I think that what it gives them is that perspective, that insight into individuals, and I think that for many of them, that is really very moving. I think the Level 1 has had a very positive impact.’

‘I think Level 1 is good. It works well. I haven’t had a bad response to Level 1 and you know it as a trainer pretty much. [...] I have had really good feedback and they all want to do Level 2.’

Particularly positive elements picked out in more than one comment included:

- Materials that were ‘succinct’ and ‘visually appealing’ and ‘with a bit of interactivity’
- Video clips that ‘strike a chord’ and provide the voice of people with autism (one hub also very successfully involved a young person with autism in delivery)
- The inclusivity of the audience – ‘some teaching assistants, midday supervisors, have said ‘it’s nice to be included and it was really helpful’

One hub lead was less positive about the L1 materials than the others because they did not include practical application but got round this in practice by using the hub’s own handout materials to provide the practical element of what it all means for teaching and learning. Another hub lead talked about the fact that Level 1 was deliberately designed *not* to include the practical application to teaching and learning but noting that delegates often wanted this.

Comments on participant responses to the pilot L2 and L3 sessions were limited as, at time of interview, some hubs had not yet run pilot sessions or had run only one.

**Those who had experience of the L2 and L3 pilot sessions reported very positive reception from participants.**

Across all levels, participants were reported as valuing:

- the voice of young people with autism (the videos)
- anything practical

## 4.6 The Standards and Competency Framework

The Standards and Competency Framework were viewed **very positively** and seen as absolutely **key to the future development of the AET programme** and as the way forward for improving the education of children with autism.

### 4.6.1 *Involvement*

Four of the hub leads had commented on the Standards and Competency Framework drafts on the wiki or during discussions when these were presented at Partner meetings. Three others had been more directly involved – lead persons from two hubs were involved in developing the Standards and the lead from a third hub had given a line by line feedback on the draft Standards and had completed a survey sent out about the draft Competency framework. Everyone seemed **pleased with the level of involvement** they had. There was **praise for the extensive consultation with parents, children, practitioners and other stakeholders** during the development stage, and a perception that the process had resulted in the team making **‘an excellent job’** of the task.

### 4.6.2 *Hub lead views*

The Standards were viewed positively – leads used phrases such as ‘very useful and very appropriate’ with one describing them as ‘a powerful tool’ for autism planning in all schools and as a tool for quality assurance in specialist provision. One hub lead regarded them as a bit anodyne but recognised that this was perhaps because they had to apply to every setting. The Competency Framework was also viewed as a very practical and useful way of driving improvement in everyday practices.

### 4.6.3 *Participant responses*

At time of interviews, the Standards were available and had been incorporated in to the L3 pilot sessions but the Competency Framework was still in development. Those who had run L3 pilot sessions reported that the Standards were **‘very well received’** with delegates recognising their value for their schools. One hub lead reported the Competency Framework was ‘quite well received’ when discussed with L3 delegates and described how one Academy school with a unit for pupils with autism had used it towards their self-evaluation evidence for OfSTED. Another hub lead had used the Standards and Framework with one school/department reporting that this ‘has been extremely successful’.

## 4.7 The Partner Meetings

Throughout the programme, regular day long meetings of all the programme partners have been held in London. Most of the leads reported finding these meetings **helpful and valuable**. The opportunity to network, to share experience and to discuss the programme and the longer term strategy for the AET were all valued. The **one dissenting voice** was critical, not of the meetings per se, but of the sense that too much time was taken up by information giving (which could be done in advance) rather than sharing experiences and discussing important issues.

Suggestions for improving the meetings included:

- Written information giving in advance of the meeting – e.g. about number of courses delivered, delegate numbers, types of school etc.
- A tighter structure to make best use of the time – recognising that the informal parts of the day were regarded as very valuable for networking
- More time given to sharing approaches to delivery that had worked well and, for example, discussion of how best to incorporate the Standards into the training

In addition to the Partner Meetings, one lead suggested that there could be value in trainers visiting other hubs to watch and learn from each other.

## 4.8 The monitoring and evaluation of the programme

We recognise that it is difficult for us to gain a ‘warts and all’ report of hub leads’ views of our monitoring and evaluation of the programme by asking them directly. On the other hand, as we invited the leads to discuss all the other aspects of the overall programme, it seemed important to offer the opportunity to air their views about our element.

Views expressed were **mainly positive**, but with acknowledgment that the process inevitably requires time and effort from the hub trainers and from delegates. The pre- and post-L1 questionnaires created additional time pressures in that short awareness raising session, although it was acknowledged that the resulting information was useful. Not everyone was convinced that the L1 ‘knowledge quiz’ provided a real measure of change and there was some concern that even such a short quiz was too much to ask some L1 delegates. One lead thought the process gave too much emphasis to monitoring rather than ‘real evaluation’ but accepted that the next phase of the work which focuses on following up a sample of delegates from each level of

the training should provide the desired data about how the training impacts on participants.

All hub leads had had the opportunity to provide feedback on draft versions of the evaluation questionnaires and several took this up. For each Level of training, the draft questionnaires were modified in the light of these comments for the post-pilot sessions.

During the interview, hub leads were asked to give their views about the types of impact that could reasonably be expected from attending each level of the training respectively and from using the Standards and Competency Framework. In summary, expected impacts are that:

- L1 will lead to greater understanding of what autism is and hopefully will lead to more positive attitudes to people with autism
- L2 plus the Competency Framework will lead to individual participants making adjustments and adaptations in day to day practice to better support their pupils with autism
- L3 plus the Standards will lead to systemic whole school adaptations and adjustments to promote the educational well-being of pupils with autism

These views have informed the drafting of the interview schedules for the qualitative follow-up phase of the evaluation.

#### **4.9 Reflecting back on the Programme so far**

All seven hub leads reported that their **hopes and expectations of being involved with programme had been realised and, in some cases, surpassed**. Illustrative quotations included:

[Hopes and expectations] have been fully realised to date – great experience and commitment.'

'It's gone better than I would expect and [I would] want to be involved in bidding for further input come March [2013]. I would want to maintain the involvement with it because I've felt it's been quite a good process. [...] It's been very valuable to our service to be part of it.'

'I think [my hopes and expectations] have certainly been met and maybe even exceeded so I feel very positive about it. [...] The response from schools has probably been even better than we hoped it would be.'

'We have been amazed at the impact that it's had, not just within [place name] but the demand beyond the local authority for training. I think it's been staggering really and also the feedback has been hugely positive. [...] Not just the numbers but the range of settings has surprised us. And the fact that it's had such an impact on our core delivery. It will now be the vehicle for basic training. That's perhaps surpassed our expectations.'

Several spoke about the value of being involved with the AET as a national organisation and learning from other partners:

'The AET as a whole, the whole concept of having it national is really interesting for me and I think that is a key part of the training and of making it positive and being involved.'

'It has been good being involved with it all. Quite exciting. It's been a challenge. I've learned lots of new things, particularly from working with [adult with autism] on the Competencies. That's been fantastic.'

One lead captured that overall picture of the AET programme having met and indeed surpassed expectations:

'It's impressive by any one's standards, what [the AET] have achieved in networking that group of professionals from right across the country in different universities, different local authorities, schools, voluntary sector agencies, people with autism themselves. It's never been done before. [...] It's astonishing what they've achieved in that short time.'

#### **4.10 Looking ahead to sustainability**

Concern was expressed about the uncertainty over the future grant funding of the AET. **The need for the AET as a national lead organisation giving 'badge and status' to national developments in autism education was emphasised.** Without the AET's stamp, it was feared that the Standards, Competency Framework and training would lose status and impetus; conversely, having nationally recognised AET training was a marketable product.

The hub leads thought **the L2 and L3 training could become self-sustaining** if the price was right (and suggested different models for this, including one where hubs created and quality assured satellites under license) but were **keen that the AET should continue to receive a government grant to lead new developments**, such as expanding into the Early Years and the Further Education sectors, as the availability of the AET training to the 5-18s had highlighted these gaps.





## **5 Conclusion and next steps**

To date, the interim data collected indicates that the AET training hubs programme is successful. The monitoring and evaluation continues to end March 2013:

- The L2 and L3 pilot questionnaires were revised in the light of feedback from trainers. All L2 and L3 sessions from 21 September 2012 have been using these revised versions.
- The next phase of work focuses on qualitative follow-up of a sample of delegates from each level and each hub to explore the longer term impact, if any, of the training
- In addition, follow-up questionnaires will be e-mailed to all L2 and L3 consenting participants about one half term after their training
- The final report of the evaluation, including updated L1 data, updated and follow-up data from L2 and L3 participants, and qualitative case studies of the impact of the training, will be produced by end of March 2013.

## Appendix 1 The L2 self-assessment statements

1a. I am confident that I can identify strengths and challenges faced by pupils on the autism spectrum in a range of social, educational & environmental contexts.
1b. I am aware of the sensory and balance difficulties a pupil on the autism spectrum might have.
1c. I am confident that I could support an autism spectrum pupil's sensory and balance related needs.
1d. I am confident that I know how best to support a pupil on the autism spectrum in their learning.
1e. I feel that I am able to effectively communicate planning about a pupil's needs across a whole school setting.
1f. I am confident that I know the range of people to ask about the individual needs of each pupil on the autism spectrum that I work with.
1g. I am confident that I know how to enable supportive peer group interactions for pupils on the autism spectrum.
1h. I understand the importance of special interests in engaging pupils on the autism spectrum in learning.
1i. I am confident that I know what effects environment might have on a pupil on the autism spectrum.
1j. I am confident that I know how to adapt my classroom & the school environment to meet the needs of a pupil on the autism spectrum.
1k. I am confident that I can tailor my teaching and interactions with pupils on the autism spectrum so as to reduce anxiety and stress.
1l. I am confident that I understand the degrees of differentiation that may be necessary to support the progress of a pupil on the autism spectrum.
1m. I feel that my current practice in the classroom is well attuned to the needs of pupils on the autism spectrum.

## Appendix 2 The L3 self-assessment statements

1.1a. I know how to create a pupil profile identifying the strengths and challenges faced by pupils on the autism spectrum.
1.1b. I am able to support colleagues to understand the implications of autism for pupils they teach.
1.1c. I am aware of the implications for teaching of different theories around understanding autism.
1.1d. I know a range of strategies to suggest to colleagues about how best to support a pupil on the autism spectrum in their learning.
1.2a. I know how to enable parents to express their views on how their child is supported in school.
1.2b. I know a range of strategies to use to prevent bullying of pupils with autism.
1.3a. I have a good understanding of how different activities and/or subject areas might present challenges for pupils on the autism spectrum.
1.3b. I am confident that I know a range of ways to support colleagues to make adjustments to engage pupils on the autism spectrum in learning.
1.3c. I know where to look for teaching and learning resources to support the engagement of pupils on the autism spectrum in learning.
1.4a I am confident that I know how to audit any environment in my setting for the effects it might have on specific pupils on the autism spectrum.
1.4b I know a range of ways that any environment in my setting can be adapted to meet the specific needs of individual pupils on the autism spectrum.
1.4c. I know how to support staff to think analytically about reasons underlying the behaviours they find challenging in pupils with autism.
1.4d I know where to find resources to support staff to make adjustments to reduce stresses on pupils with autism.
1.4e I know enough to be able to guide colleagues on how to improve communication with pupils with autism.
1.5a I am confident that I know how to audit staff knowledge about the autism spectrum.
1.5b I know how to use the AET National Standards in Autism Education to create an action plan for my school setting.
1.5c I understand how to use the AET Competency Framework to assess my own skills and knowledge.