

Curriculum for Optimising Mainstream Provision for Autistic Spectrum Students **(COMPASS)**

Aims

- To enable teachers to understand and relate to pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs)
- To allow pupils with ASDs in mainstream schools to achieve their full potential, by equipping teachers with the ability to give appropriate support.

Objectives

- To provide a one-year part-time training course giving a thorough grounding in ASDs and strategies relating to them, focusing on mainstream settings
- To equip teachers with both practical and theoretical knowledge of ASDs, through the use of both lecture-based teaching and placements in actual schools
- To provide a thorough background for understanding children with ASDs by discussing issues not directly related to school
- To provide a high standard of knowledge by drawing on the work of experts in the field
- To enable teachers to take a holistic approach to problems, both by teaching many alternative strategies and by encouraging the skills to communicate successfully with other staff members about what is needed

Entrance requirements

This part-time intensive course is open to all teachers and all in teacher training. Candidates are warned that this is an intensive course and as such candidates that did not achieve well in their previous courses may find this very hard. All applicants will be asked to attend an interview, which will include a practical aptitude test involving interaction with a child with Aspergers syndrome or autism. This is necessary to ensure candidates will be able to make effective use of their training. Candidates that fail will not be able to take the course. Candidates that have experience with young people with ASDs will have an advantage.

The course may be taken as part of a teacher training degree or as a stand-alone course by teachers who have already qualified, and a condensed “refresher” version of the course may be taken by those who passed COMPASS more than five years ago, or by those who wish to upgrade their qualification to a higher level.

Timescale

The course is based on a timescale of one academic year consisting of 3 12-week terms, with 4 hours of course lessons per week. However, the course can also be adapted to other timescales.

Lesson Structure

Lessons may consist of:

- Lecture – using power point and white board (may be delivered by guest speakers)

- Question-based format
- Role-playing, and other forms of practical work, which may include gaining experience through working with children in a school classroom.
- Video content
- Reading of texts/ case studies

Coursework

Coursework is conducted in a mainstream school, with the level of schooling (i.e. which key stage the candidate works with) chosen individually by each candidate. They are given three placement weeks in the school, and during these weeks they will be exposed to pupils on the autistic spectrum. In the first week candidates should be meeting these pupils and identifying problems that they currently face in school. They should then devise strategies to solve these problems, and implement these strategies in the two remaining placement weeks. Candidates who are already teaching are permitted to conduct coursework in their own school. Candidates will also have a placement week in an autism-specific school, in order to gain experience of the strategies used in specialist education. The coursework is marked on three sections:

1 - Preliminary notes on their placement schools, detailing facts relevant to their later work, such as strategies they encountered in the specialist schools or useful information on the mainstream school's situation.

2 – Identification of 1 or 2 common problems in the mainstream placement school, and details of proposed solutions

3 –Details of how the proposed solutions were implemented, and an evaluation of the implementation identifying strengths, weaknesses, and ways to improve the strategy.

Candidates will also be expected to work on coursework out of term time.

Homework

Homework is set every week. This may include essays covering the week's work in class, reading a case study and completing questions, reading set texts, or working on coursework.

Mark Scheme

Level of award gained is based directly on percentage scores gained throughout the course. Percentage scores from each section contribute to an overall percentage score, with the weighting of sections as follows:

Coursework (40%)

The content of coursework is detailed above. The contribution of each section to overall coursework marks is as follows:

- Preliminary notes – 10%
- Successful identification of problems – 20%
- Design of solutions – 25%
- Implementation of solutions - 30%

- Evaluation – 15%

Written exam (25%)

Candidates take two 90 minute written exams in which they complete 1 essay from each unit and one synoptic essay. Each essay will be from a choice of 2 possible essays. The first exam covers units 1 and 2, the second covers unit 3 and the synoptic essay.

Practical exams (35%)

There will be two practical exams, to assess the candidate’s ability to relate both to fellow staff members and to children on the autistic spectrum. In the first exam (communication task), candidates must clearly communicate an idea of their choosing from the course to a group of teachers and support workers. In the second (teaching task), the candidate must build a rapport with the child, enabling the candidate to support them in two learning tasks – one academic and one social. Both exams will be videotaped to allow external moderation. The contribution of each section to overall practical exam marks is as follows:

- Communication task – 40%. This includes marks for factual accuracy
- Teaching task – 60%

Grades are as follows:

Mark gained (percentage)	Award	Rough proportion of candidates expected to achieve this award ¹
95	COMPASS distinction	1%
85	COMPASS merit	5%
73	COMPASS level 1	20%
60	COMPASS level 2	35%
50	COMPASS level 3	23%
45	Fail – COMPASS basic	7%
< 45	Fail – no qualification	9%

While the COMPASS basic is considered a fail, candidates who have achieved COMPASS basic may improve this to a pass by taking a “refresher” course. Candidates who failed to receive any qualification may only pass COMPASS by taking the full course again.

Basic Specification

This specification details what must taught, and gives the recommended order for teaching. Candidates will not spend all their lessons learning the specification content, as some lessons will be taken up with the practical examinations and with coursework placements. It is also recommended to have some lessons for writing up and discussing coursework with teachers, and to have some free lessons for revision at the end of the course.

Unit	Contents	Recommended teaching time
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¹ Modelled using a normal distribution with a mean score of 64% and a standard deviation of 14 percentage points

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Unit 1: basic autism	Introduction to autism + Asperger's syndrome, diagnostic criteria, typical autistic behaviour and models for understanding it, including communication. Common conditions occurring alongside ASDs, including sleep disturbance.	6-7 weeks
Unit 2.1: reactions to school	Behaviour in primary and secondary education, common problems and stressors, focusing on exam stress. Transitions between mainstream and specialist education.	3 weeks
Unit 2.2: strategies	Commonly used strategies in education, both mainstream and specialist, and ways to develop new strategies. Evaluation of strategies. Play. Complementary therapies. Care for individuals with low-functioning autism.	4 weeks
Unit 3.1: Home life and relationships	Home life, special diets. Parents and how to relate to them. How autistic individuals approach relationships both with children and adults. Relating to autistic children in order to guide and teach them.	4-5 weeks
Unit 3.2: Beyond the classroom	Education Other Than At School. Statementing, SEN tribunals. Options post-16, focusing on job finding. Making the transition from education to the future.	3 weeks
Practical application	Practical skills lessons, discussion of problems encountered and strategies implemented during coursework. While this is not examined, it is mandatory that it be taught to some extent since it provides candidates with an extremely valuable awareness of their future role.	3 weeks

Coursework may not begin until unit 1 has been completed, and it is recommended that at least the implementation weeks and write-up sections are completed after the teaching of unit 2.2, as the content of this will help candidates greatly with their coursework. The practical exam: teaching task may not be taken until unit 3.1 has been completed. The practical exam: communication task may be taken at any time, provided some teaching has already occurred as candidates will need to demonstrate their understanding of an idea from the course.

Detailed Specification

This specification is merely an example of how the course might be taught. The exact content each week would depend on many factors, e.g. how many hours of lesson time were available per week, the availability of guest speakers, and the term dates of the placement schools. However, the template below is recommended as a suitable way to teach the course.

	Lesson Content	Homework
Week 1	Introducing autism. Candidates are introduced to the idea that there is an autistic spectrum on which all individuals fall, including the candidates themselves. A brief look at famous people who are theorised to have Asperger's syndrome/autism, and how their ASDs helped them. Strengths of autistic individuals and the idea that ASDs are not a disability, just a different set of abilities. Reading – articles about the autistic pride movement. Mention of other	1500 word essay on different types of ASDs

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	conditions on the autistic spectrum, such as PDD-NOS and Rett's syndrome.	
Week 2 and start of Week 3	Theoretical Asperger's/autism. Looking at ways of understanding autistic behaviour patterns, including response to stress, specialist subjects and rules governing interaction. Question and answer session.	Reading - Joshua Muggleton's "Cross-Section of an Aspie" (currently in development). Set questions.
End of Week 3 and Week 4	Communication. How individuals on the autistic spectrum approach communication and how best to communicate with them. Non-verbal cues in communication.	1500 word essay on communication.
Week 5	Autistic behaviour in childhood. Looking at a video examining some of the behaviour of people with autism and Asperger's syndrome, both high and low functioning. Ways in which Asperger's syndrome/ autism may be recognised, including but not limited to diagnostic criteria. Case Study – Wendy Lawson. Diagnosis – when and how to seek it.	Reading - Attwood "Asperger's Syndrome", Holliday Willey "Pretending to be Normal". Case study and questions – recognising autism in young children
Week 6	Common conditions that occur alongside ASDs, such as OCD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and epilepsy. Focusing on sleep disturbance and the factors affecting this. Common therapies, including drugs, other biological treatments, and psychological treatments.	1500 word essay on conditions comorbid to autism
Week 7	Test on Unit 1. Students are introduced to the coursework section and given the opportunity to consider where they would like their placements to be. Introduction to practical exam – communication task.	Preparation for practical exam
Week 8	Looking at autism and Asperger's syndrome in primary education. Video of common behaviour, including interviews with students. Common causes of stress. Common teacher reactions.	Preparation for practical exam
Week 9	Practical exam – communication task. Student-teacher consultations on coursework, catch-up lesson if necessary. Students should specify by the end of this week which key stage they wish to do their placement with.	None
Week 10	Looking at autism and Asperger's syndrome in secondary education and college. Differences between primary and secondary reactions. Common causes of stress and other problems, including class sizes, structure, and the reaction of peers and teachers.	1500 word essay on school stressors – both primary and secondary

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Week 11	A more detailed look at stressors experienced during education, and ways to alleviate this stress. To include stresses caused by the transition between specialist and mainstream education. Exam stress and how to help alleviate this both before and during the exam. Exam concessions for autistic individuals.	Case study and questions
Week 12	Placement week in a mainstream school. Candidates should take notes, identifying relevant facts about the school and potential problems that children with ASDs face there.	Coursework
Winter Break		Coursework
Week 13	Autism and mainstream education. Looking at and evaluating common methods. Considering how new methods may be developed and evaluated. Students are given a problem and have to create a teaching method for a fictional student.	Analysis and evaluation of solution to class problem, including suggested improvements. 1500 words.
Week 14	Autism and specialist schooling. Differences between mainstream and specialist approaches. Strategies used in specialist schools, and evaluation of these. Ways in which specialist strategies may be adapted for use in mainstream education and how they can be evaluated.	1500 word essay on the usefulness of specialist strategies in a mainstream environment
Week 15	Placement week at a specialist school for children with ASDs. Candidates should identify strategies used at the school, and consider how these strategies may be adapted for use in their mainstream placement school.	Coursework
Week 16	Autism and play. Ways to encourage play; ways to use play to teach.	Case study and questions
Week 17	Strategies for taking care of individuals with lower-functioning autism. How to arrange care. Ways of stimulating interaction and social contact. Complementary therapies, e.g. massage, yoga, music. Preliminary notes and problem identification sections of coursework must be handed in by the end of this week if candidates wish them to be returned with comments before the next stage of coursework.	Case study and questions, revision for test
Week 18	Test on unit 2. Catch-up lesson. Student-teacher consultation about coursework.	Coursework, revision for test
Weeks 19 and 20	Placement weeks at mainstream school. During this placement candidates should be implementing their strategies.	Coursework
Week 21	Writing up coursework	Coursework
Week 22	Special diets. Reasons for these – through preference, through necessity, or through perceived benefit. Common special diets. Coursework should be handed in by the end of this week.	Coursework, reading
Week 23	Home life. Looking at common stresses at home (years 0-12), and common hobbies/relaxing pastimes. Case study – a home	Case study and questions

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	life situation with a 6 year old having problems at home – class discussion.	
Week 24	Parents. Looking at stresses on parents of an autistic child. Ways to communicate effectively with parents of autistic children. Coursework returned with comments.	Case study and questions, any improvements to coursework
Easter Break		Any improvements to coursework
Week 25	Relationships with other children. How peer relationships involving autistic individuals work. Considering both friendship and romantic relationships.	1500 word essay on peer relationships
Week 26	Relationships with adults. How autistic children approach relationships with adults, how best to relate to an autistic child. Focus on practical skills including guiding autistic individuals through puberty and the teaching of life skills.	1500 word essay on relating to autistic children
Week 27	Education other than at school service (EOTAS). School action and school action plus. Statementing, SEN tribunals and laws relating to SEN provision. Completed coursework should be handed in by the end of this week.	Case study and questions
Week 28	Post-education. Care options, supported employment and employment. Ways to ease the transition from education to employment.	Case study and questions
Week 29	Job finding. Jobs that suit autistic individuals. Interview strategies. Common job stresses and ways to prepare individuals for these. Case study.	1500 word essay on post-education options.
Week 30	Class discussion – sharing experiences gained during coursework. This is done so candidates gain a wider awareness of strategies used in various levels of schooling.	Exam practice – essay from a past paper
Week 31	Explanation of teaching task of coursework. Practical skills lesson in a school environment.	Exam practice – essay from a past paper
Week 32	Teaching task of coursework. Question and answer session in class, covering parts of the syllabus that students feel uncomfortable with.	Exam practice – essay from a past paper
Week 33 to 35	Revision in class, including sitting two complete past papers – one Unit 1 and 2 paper, and one Unit 3 and Synoptic paper.	Revision, essays from past papers
Week 36	Final Exams	
Mid-August	Results Day	

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