

NEWS FOCUS NATIONAL INCLUSION WEEK

Make inclusion part of

In the last in a series of articles marking National Inclusion Week 2025, **Caroline Spencer** shares the latest news from the Jersey Employment Trust, starting with JET Ambassador **Ryan O’Connell**, who talks about his experience in the workplace as an autistic adult



“For neurodiverse people to truly succeed in the workplace, they need to be honest and open about their skills and challenges. And they can only do this when the workplace is safe for them. That means a workplace where diversity and inclusion is not just some words in the yearly training, or on an inspirational poster, but is part of workplace culture

JET Ambassador
Ryan O’Connell

AUTISTIC people are hindered right from the beginning of the employment process, the job description.

I have read many job descriptions where I could not figure out what the day-to-day tasks in the job would be. How can I know if I want to apply for that job, or if I would be any good at it? When I attended interviews, I learnt to ask “what does a typical day look like?” to figure out whether I would be a good fit.

I think people are worried that the job will sound boring if they just come out and say “it’s emailing, answering the phone and filing” but trying to jazz it up is not helpful for autistic people, and probably not for anyone else. Saying something like “no two days are the same” doesn’t help you figure out if a job is for you.

For an autistic person, like me, certainty is very important. What is my job, and what is not my job? That’s a key part of how my brain works, and how I become comfortable. That doesn’t mean that my tasks and responsibilities can never change, they absolutely can, but I need to have clear conversations, and I need to

know what the expectations are on both sides.

Interviews are exhausting for autistic people. Firstly, we’re dealing with unknown people asking random things in an unknown location and secondly, many of us must put on a neurotypical mask.

The best way that any interviewer can become instantly more inclusive is to send out their interview questions ahead of

time, and stick to them. Even if it’s just a loose framework to go on.

Another great thing you can do is include photos when you send out the interview details. Headshots of who the candidate will be meeting, and photos of the entrance of the building, and the reception area if possible.

When I was younger, I found it very difficult to navigate interviews. I thought that if someone offered me a time slot, then no matter how difficult it was, I had to attend. It’s better if interviewers can offer a bit more flexibility, a couple of dates and times instead of just one. I think you will get a better interview experience out of a more relaxed candidate.

As I have got older, I’ve been able to advocate for myself much more effectively, and this is something that I want to help to pass on to all neurodiverse young people. I can attend a job interview and say: “I’m autistic, and I don’t work well with others, I don’t enjoy group projects, and I need a quiet space.”

That might sound off-putting to some employers. Some people might think: “Well, that Ryan sounds like a bit of a jerk. Probably difficult to manage and work with. Not sure I want them on my team.”

But if you get past that, you will find that I am very kind, approachable, willing to help others, and great at sharing my specialist knowledge. Just don’t ask me to sit in a noisy part of the office.

I have been able to succeed in my career by identifying and using my skill-set and ensuring that I spend most of the time doing things that I’m amazing at, and very little time doing things that I’m rubbish at. That’s not the same as saying I never explore other skills. But, because of my disability, there are going to be things that I’m just never going to be good at. I would just end up miserable and burned out. That’s been something that I’ve had to learn through experience.

For neurodiverse people to truly succeed in the workplace, they need to be honest and open about their skills and challenges. And they can only do this when the workplace is safe for them. That means a workplace where diversity and inclusion is not just some words in the yearly training, or on an inspirational poster, but is part of workplace culture, from interviewing through to yearly reviews and one-to-ones, and career planning.

These are the actions that I would like all local employers to undertake:

- Ask candidates if there are any accommodations that they require, in supportive language that indicates that accommodation requests are welcome and respected.
- Write clear job descriptions.
- Send out interview questions in advance.
- Send out as many details on the interviews and interview location as you can.
- Deepen your understanding of issues faced by disabled people. Read some blogs, follow disabled content producers, read some books, attend seminars, and listen to people’s lived experiences.

■ Ryan O’Connell spoke today at the National Inclusion Week breakfast hosted by Maison des Landes Hotel.

Autism at work

- Just three in ten autistic adults are in work, compared to five in ten for all disabled people and eight in ten for non-disabled people.
- Autistic people face the largest pay gap of all disability groups.
- Autistic graduates are most likely to be overqualified for the job they have.

● Source: Buckland Review of Autism Employment, February 2024



■ JET Ambassadors Sasha Russell, Kiley Henley, Tina Palmer, Juliette de Guelle, Sue Gill and Sofia Marques helped with mock interviews in the Level Up programme for young people

your workplace culture



■ JET Ambassadors Tony Greed, Antonia Rubio, Sue Gill, Ana Cengic, Hayley Routier, Kenan Osborne and Claire Reynard at the launch of the programme at the Pomme d’Or Hotel in March. Picture: ROB CURRIE (40943745)

JET’s Ambassador programme is going from strength to strength

IN March, we proudly launched an Ambassador programme in memory of our dear friend and colleague Dean Lowe, a passionate advocate for JET. What began with eight founder members has grown into a vibrant network of 19 Ambassadors, each representing different sectors of the Jersey community.

The initiative was created to honour Dean’s legacy by bringing together individuals committed to making a meaningful impact. Whether through advocacy, employment support, fundraising or community engagement, our Ambassadors are working collaboratively to drive positive change.

They have formed five subgroups, to include raising awareness, promoting inclusive employment, and raising awareness of JET and Acorn.

The employment subgroup is already seeing results in extending reach to work experiences, job tasters, mentoring and work insights. Over the summer, Ambassadors from RBSI NatWest, ASL Recruitment, Zedra, Liberty Bus and the Government of Jersey attended a CV workshop that received positive feedback from our clients and their employment co-ordinators.

Some Ambassadors have favoured a more hands-on initiative, supporting practical projects at Acorn, such as painting the toilets.

Ambassadors have also supported the Level Up programme, run by the Under-25s team to help clients build confidence through work insights and mock interviews. We are grateful to the Seymour Group, RBSI NatWest, and the Government of Jersey for providing these work insights and to the Ambassadors from

Jet Ambassadors

■ Kerry Adams, Luke Canavan, Ana Cengic, Adele Dare, Sue Gill, Juliette de Guelle, Kate Embury, Kiley Henley, Kevin Lacey, Jeff Livingston, Sofia Marques, Ryan O’Connell, Kenan Osborne, Tina Palmer, Dr Adam Perchard, Claire Reynard, Hayley Routier, Antonia Rubio, Sasha Russell.

To read their biographies and why they joined as Ambassadors, please go to www.jet.co.je/about-us/jet-ambassadors/

Whitmill Trust, Zedra, RBSI, Seymour Group and Affinity who helped make the mock interviews a success.

JET business development lead Emma Burns, who is overseeing the Ambassador programme, said: ‘What has truly stood out to me is how the Ambassadors have surpassed expectations. Everyone brings a unique skill to the programme, and it has flourished more quickly and brilliantly than imagined. Their energy, passion, and creativity continue to inspire, and it’s been incredible to witness the impact they’re making. This growing movement is a testament to Dean’s legacy and the power of community-led change. With passion, collaboration and purpose, our Ambassadors are helping shape a more inclusive future for all – just what Dean would have wanted.’

■ We welcome Ambassadors all the time. So long as they share our passion for diversity and inclusion, they are welcome to join. For more information, please email emma.burns@jet.co.je.



■ Ambassadors Sofia Marques and Sasha Russell gave up their weekend time to do some practical work at Acorn