Autism Act 2009

Submission to the House of Lords Autism Act 2009 Committee

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)
June 2025

About the CIPD

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years.

It has 160,000 members across all sectors and sizes of organisation and provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Public policy at the CIPD draws on our extensive research and thought leadership, practical advice and guidance, along with the experience and expertise of our diverse membership, to inform and shape debate, government policy and legislation for the benefit of employees and employers. It also seeks to promote and improve best practice in people management and development and to represent the interests of our members.

Our response

Section A: Evidence about autistic people and what they need

In this section we are asking questions about what we know about autistic people in England and what they need from the Government.

You may want to answer the questions in this section if you know about this topic from research you have done.

Question 1

a) What evidence is there about the numbers of autistic people (diagnosed and undiagnosed) in England and their demographic characteristics (for example, age, gender or ethnic background)?

The analysis in this consultation response is based on our analysis of the October to December 2024 Labour Force Survey. We define autistic people as those who have reported having autism (including autism spectrum condition, asperger syndrome) as a listed health condition, and include only those who live in England.

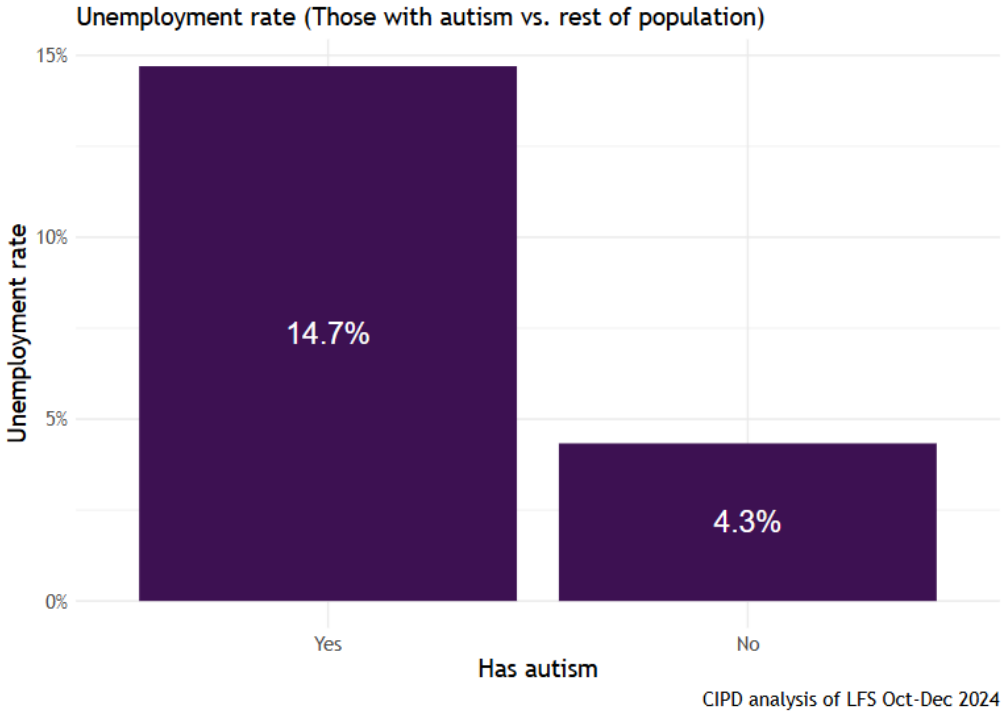
Estimates from the latest Labour Force Survey data (October to December 2024) show 864,251 people of working age (16-64) in England have autism. This represents approximately 2.4% of the working-age population. This is based on self-reported survey data, which will likely be an underestimate due to self-identification issues.

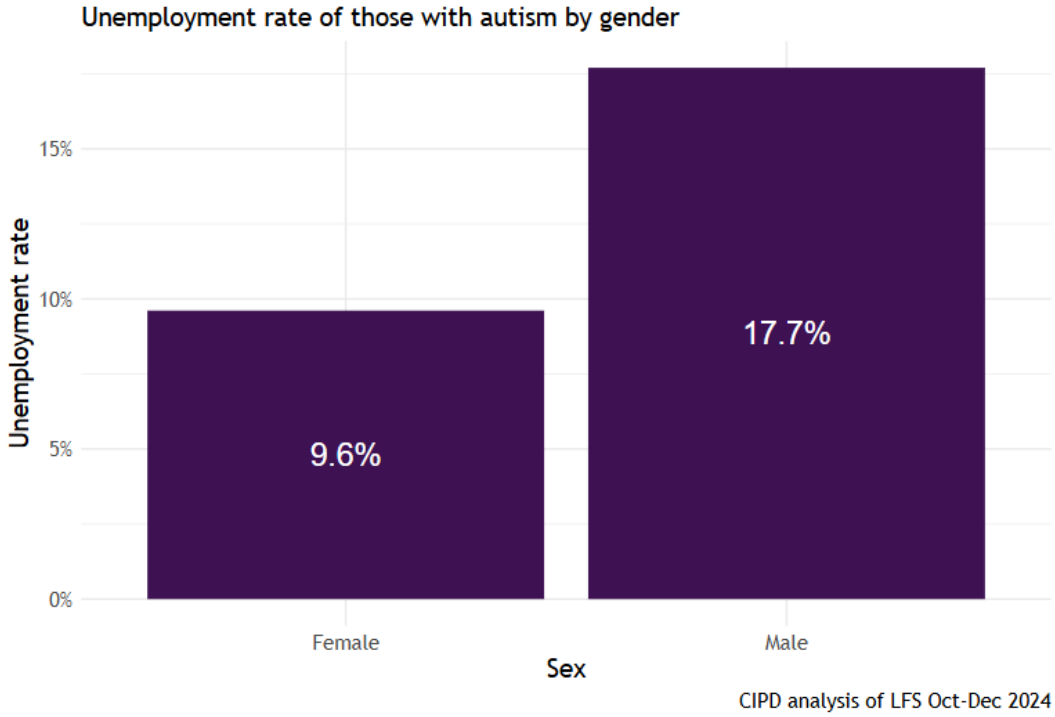
The table below shows estimates for the number of autistic people by age, sex, ethnicity and disability status, and the percentage this represents within each group. The highest prevalence of autism is amongst 16-24 year olds at 6.7%. Followed by the 25-34 year old age group (3.2%). It is more prevalent among men than women and among those with a white background, compared to those with an ethnic minority background. Most people with autism define themselves as Equality Act disabled, with people with autism making up just under one in ten of this group.

Characteristic	LFS estimate	% of working age population (16-64)
Age group		
16-24	420,392	6.7%
25-34	247,490	3.2%
35-44	83,857	1.1%
45-54	67,979	0.9%
55-64	44,533	0.6
Sex		
Men	544,403	3.0%
Women	319,848	1.7%
Ethnicity		
White	779,135	2.7%
Ethnic minority	85,116	1.1%
Disability		
Equality act disabled	766,009	8.9%
Not equality act disabled	93,006	0.3%

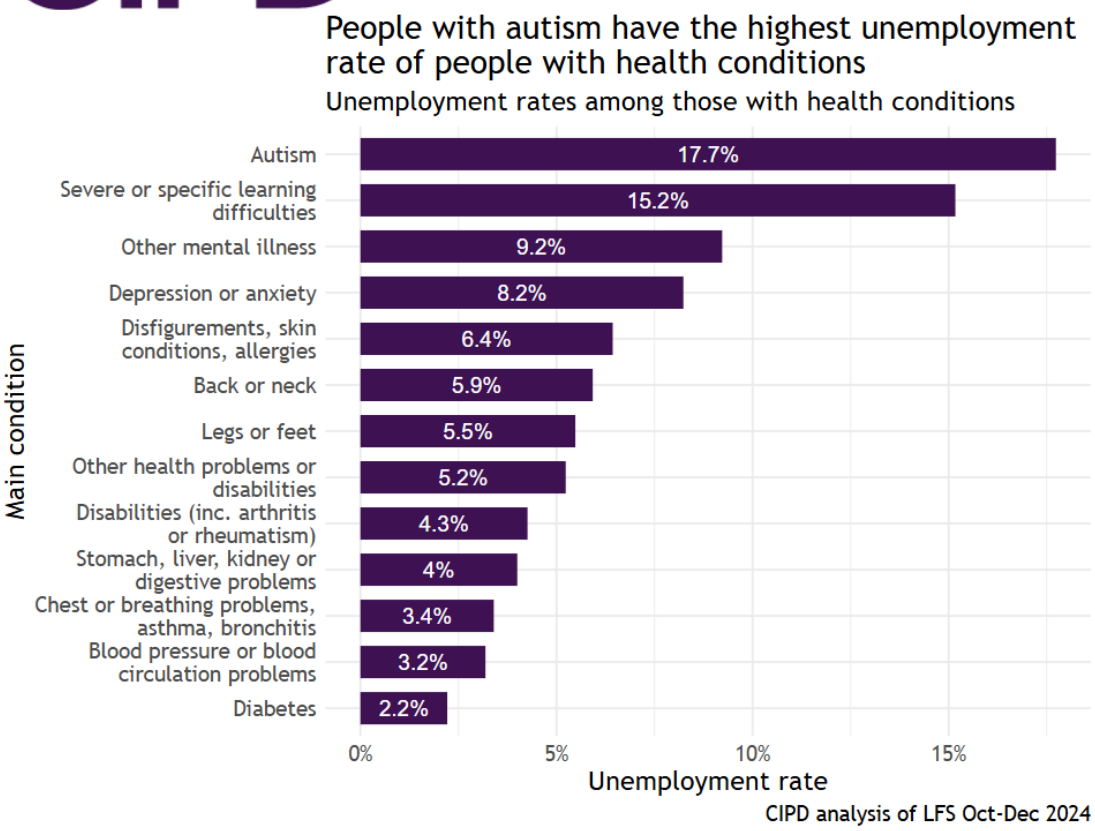
Unemployment rate

Our analysis shows the unemployment rate among all autistic people in England is 14.7%, more than three times the rate in rest of the population. The unemployment rate is much higher among autistic men (17.7%), compared to autistic women (9.6%).

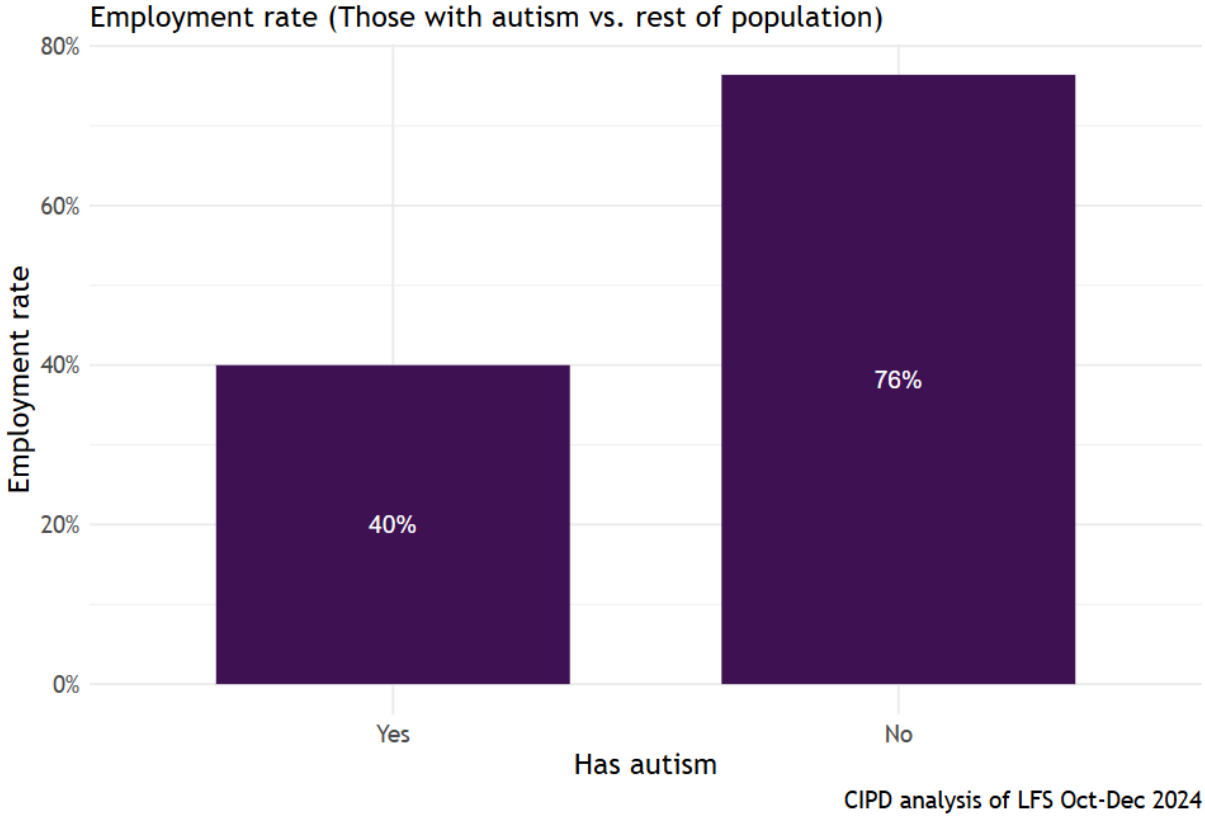




The chart below shows the unemployment rate by people's main health condition. People with autism face the highest unemployment rate at 17.7%, nearly 5 times higher than other health conditions, emphasising systemic gaps in accessibility and employer awareness. The stark contrast underscores the disproportionate employment barriers faced by neurodivergent individuals, particularly those with autism, compared to those with physical or less stigmatised conditions.

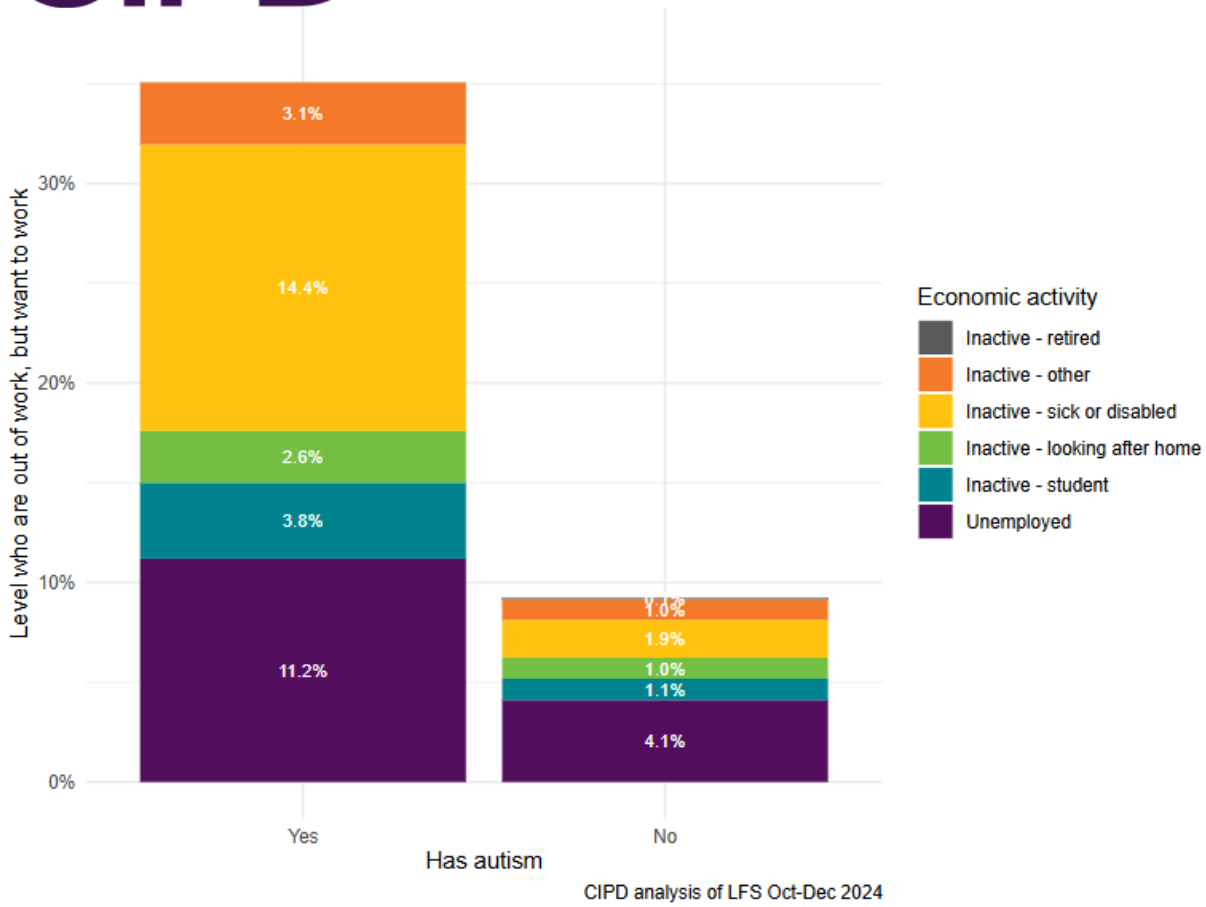


The chart below highlights a stark employment gap between working-age individuals with autism and rest of the population in England. Only 40% of people with autism are employed, compared to 76% of the rest of the population. This dramatic disparity—with autistic adults half as likely to be employed—reveals systemic barriers in hiring practices, workplace accommodations, and societal biases.

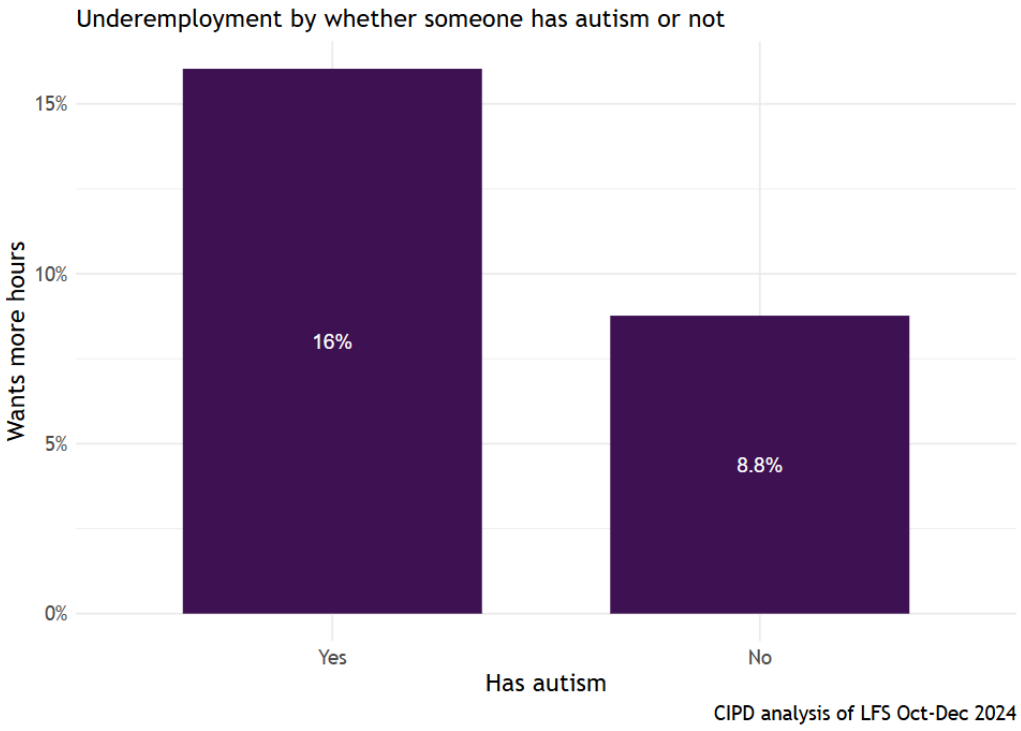


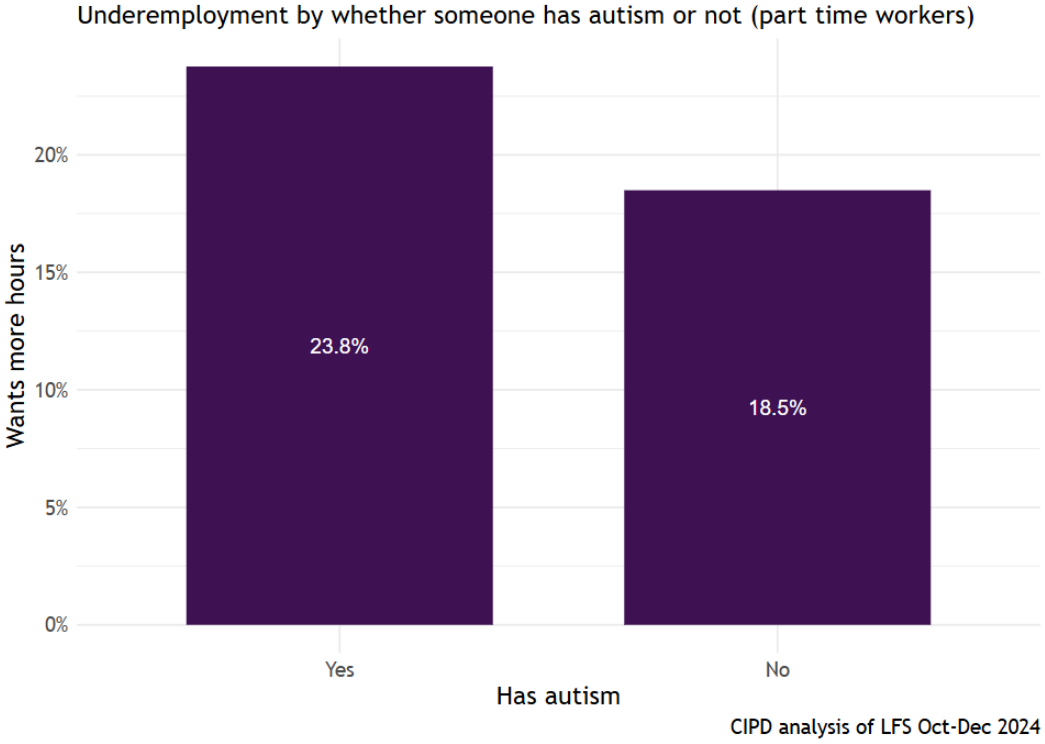
Despite low employment rates, a number of autistic adults express a desire to work. Combined, over a third (35.1%) of autistic people are out of work, but wish to work; the LFS point estimate is 186,675. This compares to less than 10% of the rest of the population. Most are economically inactive (not actively pursuing employment opportunities), rather than unemployed. The figures indicate that many autistic individuals are eager to find employment, but encounter obstacles such as stigma, lack of understanding, and inadequate support in the workplace (for example Day et al. (2024)[1]).

[1] Day, M., Wood, C., Corker, E., & Freeth, M. (2025). Understanding the barriers to hiring autistic people as perceived by employers in the United Kingdom. *Autism : the international journal of research and practice*, *29*(5), 1263–1274. https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613241301493

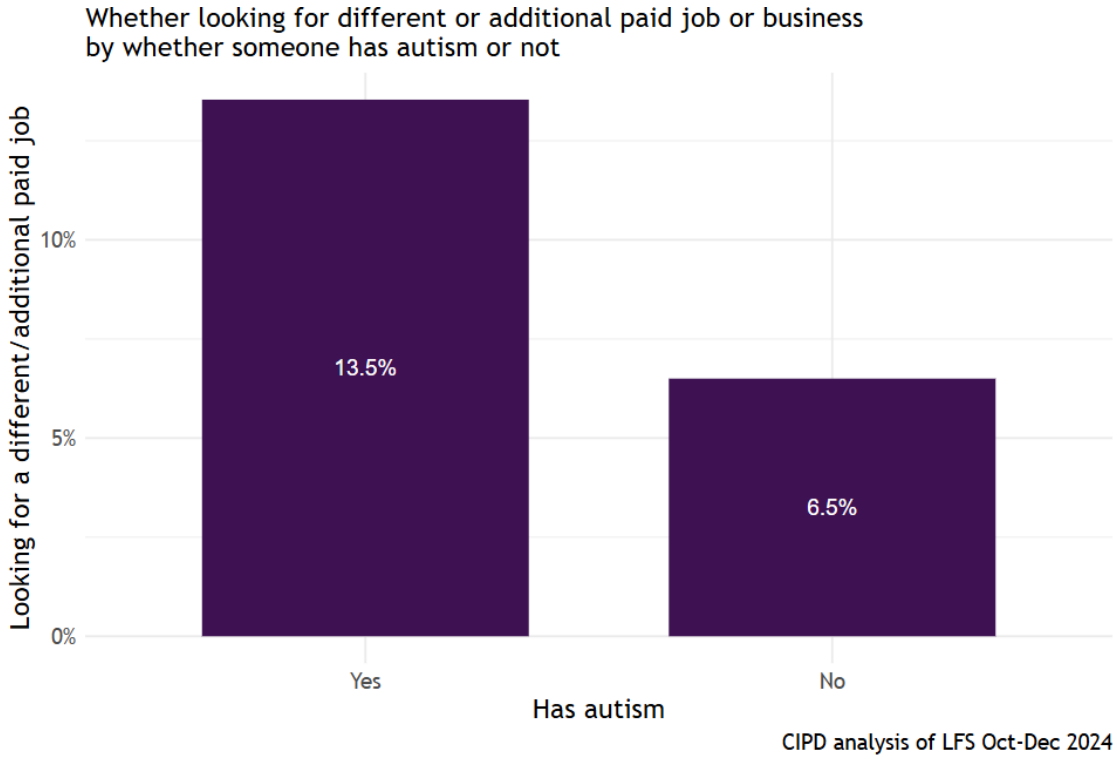


There is also a desire among autistic people currently in work, to work more hours, with autistic people in employment being twice as likely to be underemployed compared to the rest of the population. This figure rises to 23.8% among those who work part-time.





People with autism are also twice as likely to be looking for a different or additional paid job than the rest of the population. This suggests low job satisfaction, and whilst these people have a job, this might not suit their circumstances.

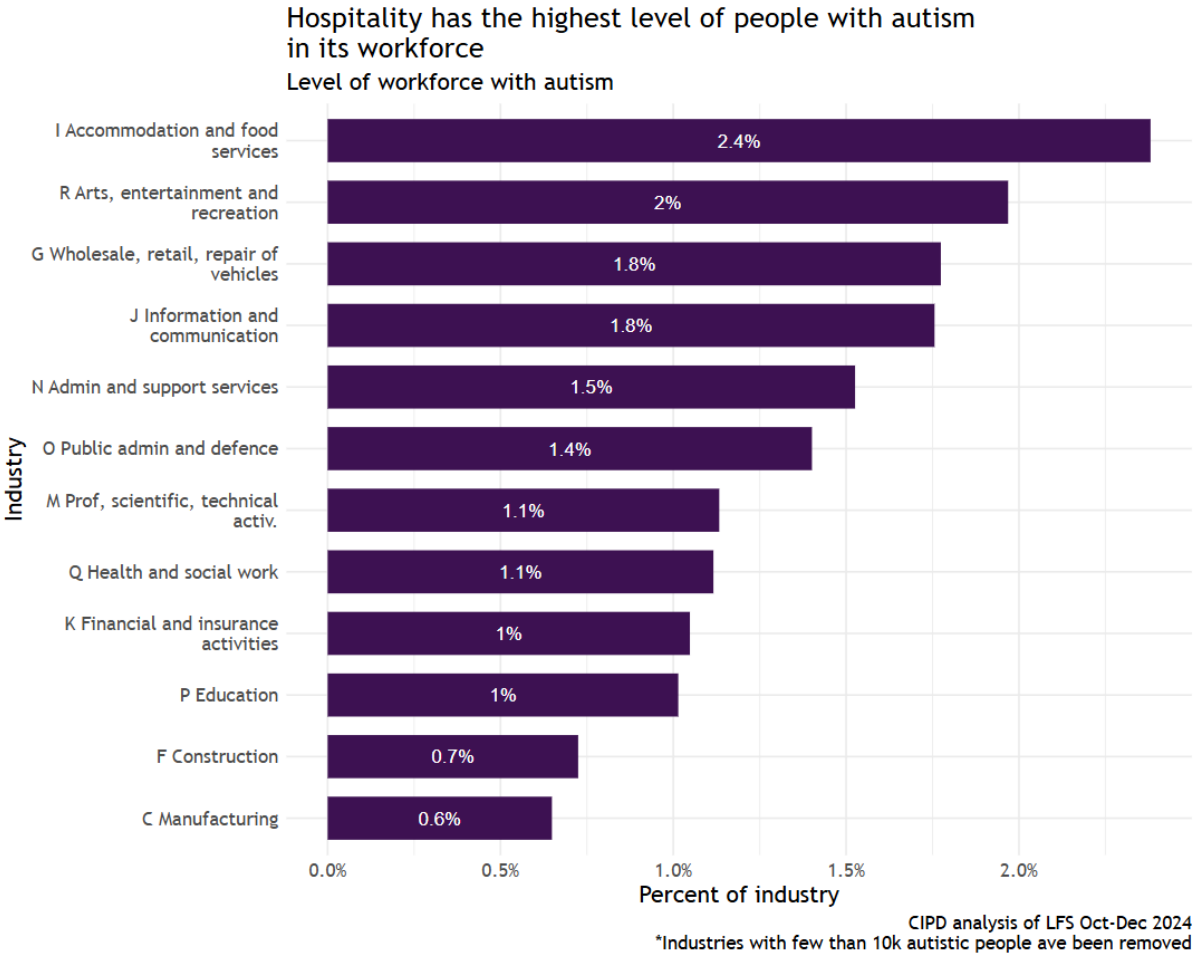


Autistic people employed by industry

The chart below shows the proportion of people with autism across different industries.

- **Hospitality (Accommodation and Food Services)** has the highest share of autistic workers, at **2.4%**.
- Other relatively higher-representation industries include:
    - **Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation** (2%)
    - **Retail and Wholesale Trade** and IT, both at **1.8%**

In contrast, industries such as **Construction** (0.7%), and **Manufacturing** (0.6%) have lower proportions of autistic workers.



This suggests that autistic individuals are more concentrated in industries with lower entry barriers or more casual employment structures. As the prevalence of autism is higher among younger age groups, it is therefore unsurprising that industries with a higher proportion of young people also have these higher rates of autism within their workforce. However, the lower representation in a number of industries may reflect existing structural or accessibility barriers, pointing to the need for more inclusive recruitment and workplace practices across all industries.

b) How is the evidence on the numbers of autistic people (diagnosed and undiagnosed) in England and their demographic characteristics changing over time?

- The actual number is likely much higher due to underdiagnosis and stigma.

- Autistic people span all demographic groups, but research shows delayed diagnosis is more common among women, ethnic minorities, and lower-income households (Under diagnosis of autism in England: a population-based study).
- Increased public awareness has led to more diagnoses, particularly among adults and women who may have been missed in childhood.
- Demographic shifts indicate rising diagnoses in ethnic minority communities and recognition of intersectionality, though gaps persist.
- The data used is this analysis has suffered from reliability issues due to declining sample sizes in recent years. Despite this, all statistics we have shared meet minimum thresholds for report. ONS has recently provided an update on the reliability of the Labour Force Survey, including how representative the data is on disability, which most people with autism are recorded as having.[2]

Question 2

a) What evidence is there about what autistic people need from the Government and public services and the most important policy issues for autistic people and their families/carers?

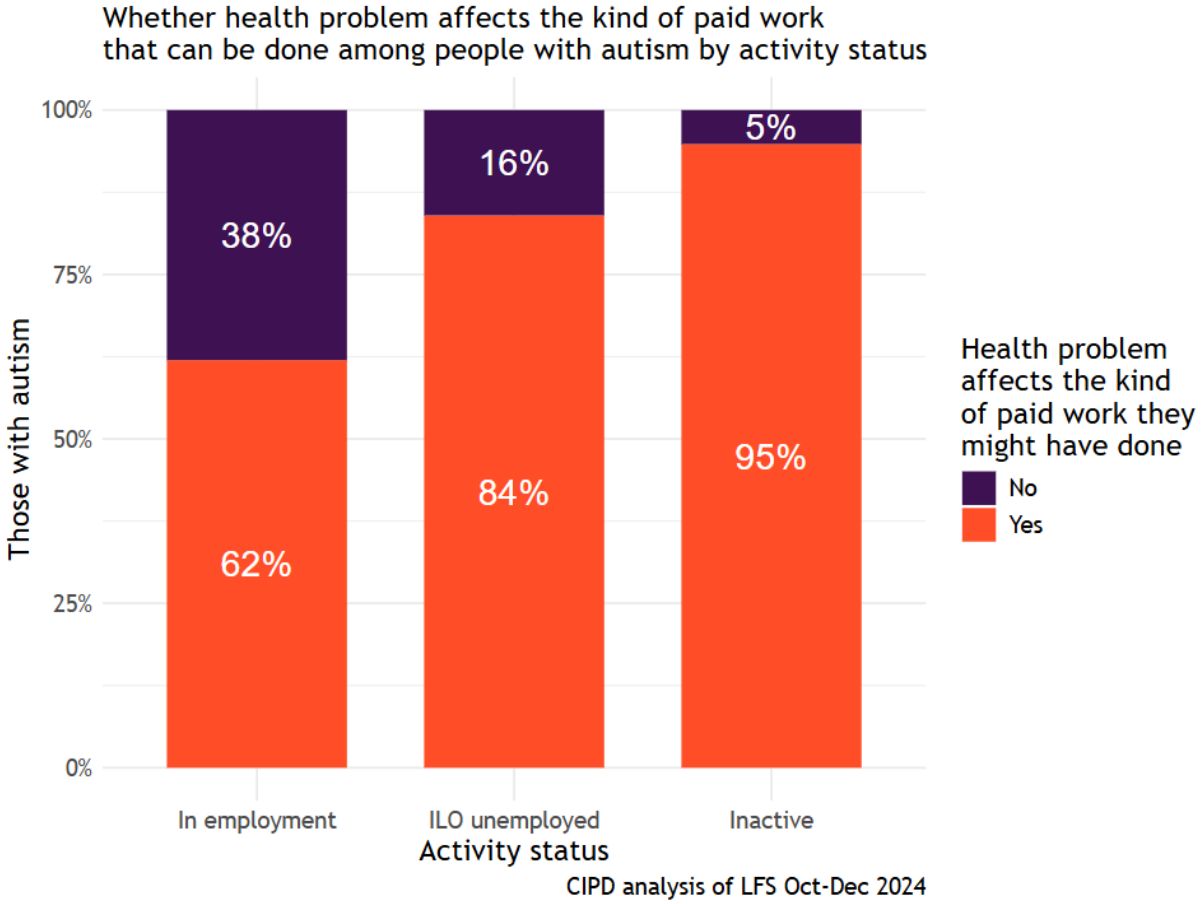
- Autistic people report a strong desire for inclusive employment opportunities, tailored support, and reasonable adjustments in the workplace (Neuroinclusion at work report 2024 CIPD).
- They require accessible and timely health, education, and diagnostic services, alongside post-diagnosis support.
- Stigma reduction, staff training, and sensory-friendly environments in public services are critical to enabling equitable access.
- Families and carers need support in navigating services, securing adjustments at school and work, and accessing financial support.

Our analysis highlights the extent to which autistic individuals report that their health problems limits the kind of work they can do.

- **Among those with autism who are in employment**, **62%** report that a health problem limits the kind of paid work they can do.
- This proportion rises to **84%** among those who are **ILO unemployed** (i.e. actively seeking work).
- It increases further to **95%** among those who are **inactive** (not currently looking for work).

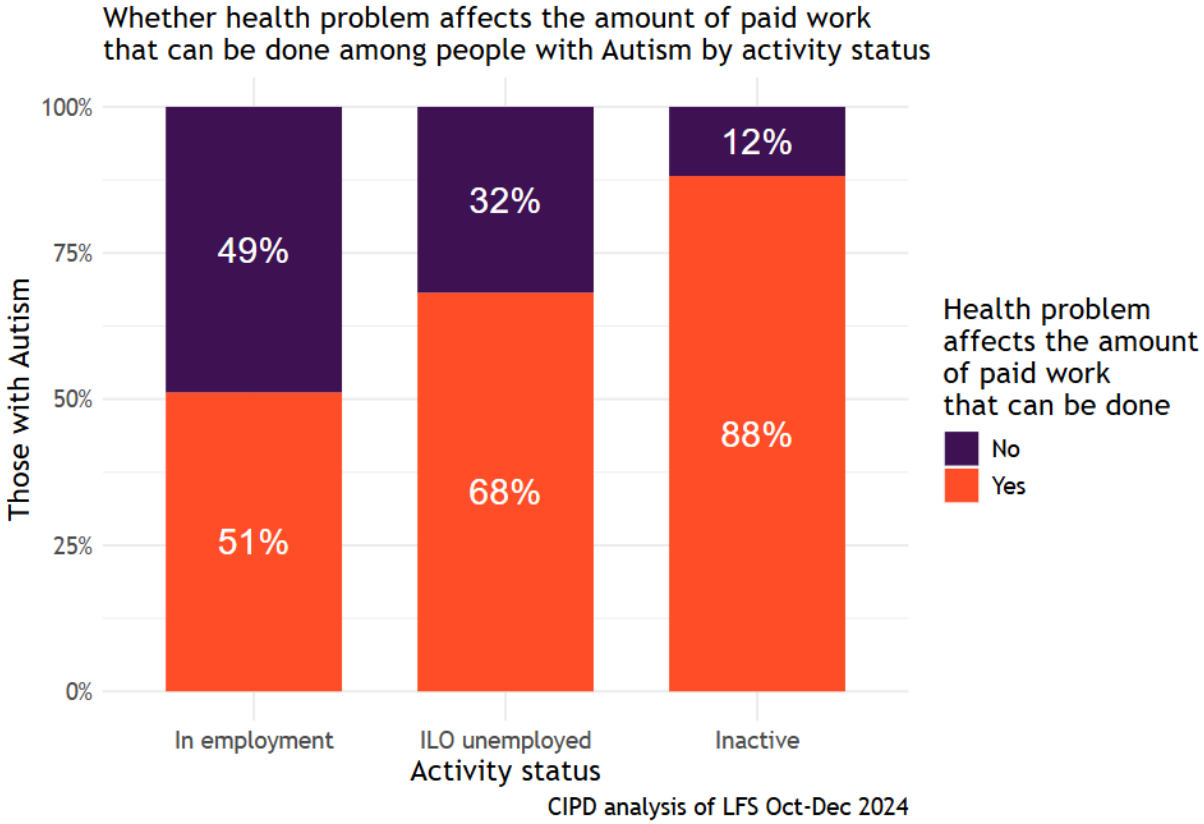
The data clearly shows that health-related limitations—likely including aspects of autism and co-occurring conditions—are a significant barrier to both entering and sustaining employment for autistic people. The fact that two-thirds of those who are already employed still report these limitations underlines the importance of accessible, adapted workplaces and inclusive employment practices. These findings are similar among those who report autism as their main health condition.

[2] Office for National Statistics (May 2025). Labour Force Survey quality update: May 2025. https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourforcesurveyqualityupdate/may2025



The chart below highlights that among autistic people **in employment**, **51%** report that a health problem limits how much paid work they can do. This rises to **68%** among those who are **ILO unemployed** (i.e. available and seeking work). It increases further to **88%** for those who are **economically inactive** (not in or seeking employment).

The data reveals a clear gradient: as employment participation decreases, the reported impact of health-related limitations increases. This suggests that many autistic individuals face not only barriers in the **type** of work but also in the **volume** of work they can sustain—likely due to a combination of sensory, cognitive, and mental health challenges. It underscores the need for more flexible and supportive work environments that consider reduced hours, pacing, and accommodations. These findings are similar among those who report autism as their main health condition.



b) How is this changing over time?

- With growing diagnosis rates, the demand for adult support services has increased, including in mental health and employment.
- The shift towards neurodiversity inclusion means policy must reflect not only disability support but inclusive environments that enable strengths-based employment.
- There is increasing advocacy for intersectional inclusion, recognising race, gender, and LGBTQ+ identity alongside autism. This was shown in the Equality in 2023: how DHSC met the public sector equality duty - GOV.UK and FCDO disability inclusion and rights strategy 2022 to 2030 - GOV.UK

Question 3

a) What new evidence does the Government need in order to make new policies and to plan services for autistic people?

- Longitudinal studies on employment outcomes for autistic individuals.
- Evaluation of workplace adjustments and their effectiveness.
- Data on the transition from education to employment.
- Intersectional data on race, gender identity, and socio-economic status within the autistic population.

b) Who should collect this evidence?

- Government agencies like ONS and NHS Digital.
- Independent research bodies in partnership with universities.

- Collaboration with the voluntary sector and lived experience experts to ensure data is inclusive and robust.

Employment

In these questions we are asking about supporting more autistic people into employment. Your answers could focus on specific parts of this. For example, you could focus on accessing an internship or apprenticeship, accessing supported employment or accessing reasonable adjustments at work.

Question 18

a) What are the main problems for autistic young people in the move from education to work?

- Lack of tailored careers support: Autistic young people often do not receive career guidance aligned with their communication needs and interests. The CIPD Neuroinclusion at work report 2024 highlights that neurodivergent individuals, especially those who are autistic, frequently struggle due to a lack of early support in navigating recruitment and workplace expectations (p. 10).
- Weaknesses in employer understanding: CIPD research has shown just 56% of employers agreed that employees with HR responsibility feel capable and confident to support neurodivergent employees. Similarly, employers told us that only around half (51%) of managers appreciate the value of neurodiversity and the importance of having a neuroinclusive organisation. Less than half (46%) said managers feel capable and confident to support neurodivergent individuals at work.
- Inaccessible recruitment: Traditional hiring methods (e.g., face-to-face interviews, ambiguous job descriptions) disadvantage autistic applicants. The CIPD found that over 50% of neurodivergent employees report that recruitment processes are a barrier to employment (p. 13).

b) What is going well?

- Growing employer awareness: The CIPD report shows that 42% of employers are increasing focus on neuroinclusion, particularly in sectors like tech and finance (p. 5).
- Government and third-sector programmes: Schemes such as the UK Government's Supported internships - GOV.UK offer structured pathways into employment for young people with autism.
- **Peer and family support**: Informal networks often play a crucial role in supporting the transition, according to the Transition to employment toolkit | Ambitious about Autism.

c) How can the move from education to work for autistic children and young people be improved?

Research commissioned by Youth Futures Foundation[3] found eight good practice principles in supporting young people with autism into employment, based on the experiences of young people. These are:

[3] Cordis Bright (2023). *Supporting young people with a learning disability and/or autism into employment: Summary report*. Youth Futures Foundation. https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Summary-Final-1.pdf

- The right practitioners
- Person-centred approaches
- Provision of wraparound support
- Co-production of support
- Early exposure to employment
- Peer support
- Follow-on support

They highlight that for outcomes for young autistic people to improve there needs to be buy-in from senior members of organisations. They state that:

- Employers must be aware of the possibility and the benefits of employing young people with autism.
- There is wider support available that can make it straightforward to recruit and employ a young person with autism

Question 19

a) What are the main problems for autistic people in both finding and staying in work?

- **Lack of workplace adjustments**: CIPD data reveals only 1 in 3 neurodivergent employees feel comfortable asking for adjustments (p. 14). Many environments are too inflexible.
- **Stigma and culture fit**: Many autistic people face challenges with unspoken workplace norms or discrimination. The CIPD found that fear of bias prevents disclosure, particularly during probation periods (p. 16).

b) What is going well?

- Neurodiversity hiring initiatives: Companies such as SAP, Microsoft, and GCHQ have developed autism-specific hiring pathways. The CIPD encourages these as models for inclusive practice (p. 21).
- Public discourse and leadership support: Increasing numbers of organisations are appointing neurodiversity champions and developing ERGs (employee resource groups), as highlighted in the CIPD survey of HR leaders (p. 19).
- Increased training availability: More employers are accessing neurodiversity training

c) How can support for autistic people to find and stay in work be improved?

CIPD's Neuroinclusion at work report 2024 identified that seventy per cent of employers surveyed provide at least one method of support. But almost a quarter (23%) told us their organisation doesn't do anything to create a neuroinclusive organisation. The most common form of support provided is flexible working (for example, flexibility in working hours and where you work), provided by 45% of employers, followed by ensuring clear access to reasonable adjustments, for example, role adjustments or adaptations to the working environment (39%).

However, despite being the most common actions employers have taken, the percentage doing them is low. Three in 10 (30%) employers have carried out education and awareness-raising about neurodiversity and common neurodivergent identities for all staff within the

past two years. Just 19% of employers say they have reviewed formal people management policies to make them neuroinclusive.

- Proactive reasonable adjustments: Workplaces should implement sensory audits, provide quiet spaces, and allow for flexible scheduling. The CIPD lists examples of practical accommodations (p. 15–17).
- Inclusive recruitment redesign: Structured interviews, clear job descriptions, and work trials help autistic candidates demonstrate skills. These are core suggestions in both the Neuroinclusion at work | CIPD and the Making your organisation neuroinclusive - Neurodiversity at work - Acas.
- Autism-confident culture: Fostering inclusive culture through senior leadership buy-in and peer training is critical. The CIPD report emphasises the need for line managers to understand neuroinclusion beyond compliance (p. 17–18).