



# Autism CRC 2017 Research Academy

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dr Olivia Gatfield

Ms Judy Brewer

Dr Wenn Lawson

Ms Rochelle Johnson

Ms Tori Haar

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**AutismCRC**  
Research Academy



Australian Government  
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Innovation and Science

**Business**  
Cooperative Research  
Centres Programme

[autismcrc.com.au](http://autismcrc.com.au)

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**Dr Olivia Gatfield**

Senior Research Officer, Autism CRC

**Ms Judy Brewer AO**

Chair of the Board, Autism CRC

**Dr Wenn Lawson**

Other participant, Autism CRC

**Ms Rochelle Johnson**

Research Academy Alumni

**Ms Tori Haar**

Research Academy Alumni

Research Assistant, Autism CRC

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[autismcrc.com.au](http://autismcrc.com.au).

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## **About the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC)**

The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC) is the world's first national, cooperative research effort focused on autism. Taking a whole-of-life approach to autism focusing on diagnosis, education and adult life, Autism CRC researchers are working with end-users to provide evidence-based outcomes which can be translated into practical solutions for governments, service providers, education and health professionals, families and people on the autism spectrum.

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## Background

To meet the objective of enabling autism research underpinned by inclusive practices, Autism CRC's Research Academy was instituted. The Research Academy are members of the Autistic community and autism researchers who have been upskilled in peer research (also termed 'co-production'). Through delivery of a workshop, and assessment for autism researchers, 14 Autistic adults and 12 autism researchers were graduated into the Academy in 2015. Based on feedback from 2015 delivery, a modified format was developed.

The format for delivery in 2017 incorporated, for Autistic adults: eight custom modules related to research practices and processes, delivered through a custom e-learning platform; and, a 3-day residential workshop. For autism researchers, prescribed readings and videos promoting neurodiversity, the lived-experience and inclusive research practices; assessment; and a 1-day residential workshop coinciding with the Autistic attendees. Through this, 14 Autistic adults and 5 autism researchers graduated. This document provides a summary of the evaluation for the 2017 Academy delivery. The full report can be viewed at [autismcrc.com.au](http://autismcrc.com.au).

## Evaluation Description

To evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of the online training and residential workshop, fit-for-purpose surveys were completed with the autism researchers (n=5) and Autistic adults (n=12). In addition, a focus group was undertaken with the Autistic adults (n=14).

## Summary of Findings

Analysis of survey data indicated high approval ratings for the online components and the residential workshop. All participants indicated these as 'good' or 'excellent'. In addition, the quality and value of assessment tasks for researchers was highly valued, with all ratings being 'good' or 'excellent'. The majority of Autistic adults indicated increased competence to engage in peer research and undertake various aspects of peer research, such as giving opinions on research design, techniques and findings. Similarly, all researchers who completed the evaluation indicated increased competence to and likeliness to engage in peer research.

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Qualitative data supported positive ratings elicited through survey. In relation to *methods and processes* it was additionally highlighted that:

- module content was informative and helpful in preparing for the workshop;
- information booklets with preparatory information (including: photos of people they would meet, the venue; menus; what to expect; what to bring and wear etc.) was valuable for reducing anxiety;
- responsiveness to needs and desires enabled people to be their ‘true-selves’;
- it was appreciated that most sessions were run by Autistic presenters but through co-presenting, peer research was continually demonstrated.

With regard to *format* it was indicated that:

- having time as a group before autism researchers attended the workshop allowed the group to bond with ‘their tribe’;
- the time with the researchers was not long enough to enable effective networking.

## Conclusions

The evaluation data indicated highly successful and appropriate delivery in-line with the objectives of the Academy project. This suggests similar processes, methods and format should be utilised, with consideration also given to the amount of time the autism researchers and Autistic participants have together at the residential component. Further consideration should be given to the benefits of delivery as enabling people to ‘find their tribe’, as indicated in reflections of the project team and a number of graduates. Accordingly, participation was indicated as significant to empowerment and community inclusion, and potentially more heightened for those newly diagnosed or self-identified. As such, the inclusion of empowerment as a key outcome and objective for future Research Academy delivery and other initiatives should be considered.



AutismCRC

**Autism CRC**

The University of Queensland  
Long Pocket Precinct  
Level 3, Foxtail Building  
80 Meiers Road  
Indooroopilly QLD 4068

**T** +61 7 3377 0600

**E** [info@autismcrc.com.au](mailto:info@autismcrc.com.au)

**W** [autismcrc.com.au](http://autismcrc.com.au)



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