



# Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Autism-Specific Workplace Tool

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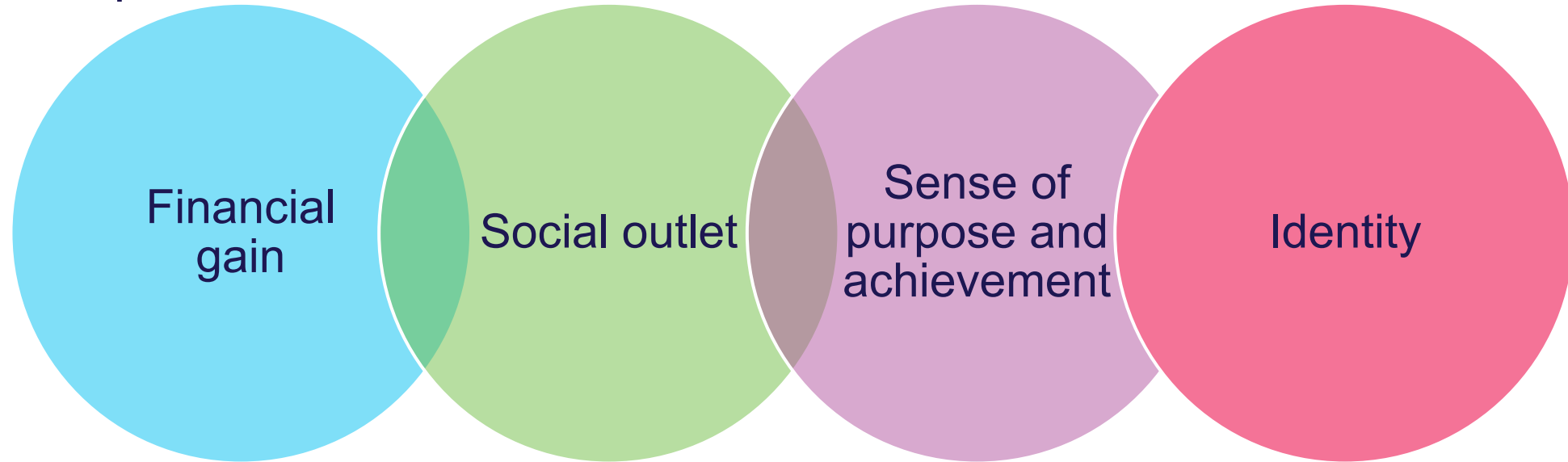


Curtin University

**AUTISM RESEARCH  
GROUP (CARG)**

# Importance of Work

- Employment is the primary aspiration for many young adults
- Work is important because it offers:



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# Finding a Job, Keeping a Job

- Core characteristics associated with autism make securing and maintaining a job challenging
- Adult-based employment interventions are emerging
- Interventions generally target intrinsic personal factors such as difficulties with:
  - social interaction
  - behavioural traits
  - executive functioning



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# External Factors Impacting Employment

Lack of Autism awareness

Transition planning

Lack of autism-specific employment support services

Traditional job interview processes

Employer attitudes

Poor job match



Work environment

# Employers are a Key Environmental Factor

- Employers play an important role in the hiring and supporting autistic employees
- Attitudes and perceptions about disability impact hiring decisions
- Employers are concerned with:
  - Cost
  - Productivity
  - Workplace accommodations
  - Supervision
  - Lack of knowledge about autism



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# Research Objective

To evaluate the effectiveness of an autism-specific workplace tool in improving employers' self-efficacy and knowledge in modifying the work environment to meet the specific needs of their autistic employees.



# Integrated Employment Success Tool (IEST)

- Developed specifically for employers
- Practical workplace manual to be used across a variety of work environments
- Providing employers with:
  - Education about autism
  - Checklists and goal setting activities
  - Workplace modification strategies
  - Work-related resources

**Phase 1:  
Advertising  
the job**

**Phase 2:  
The interview**

**Phase 3:  
Job  
commencement  
and placement**

**Phase 4:  
Workplace  
modifications**

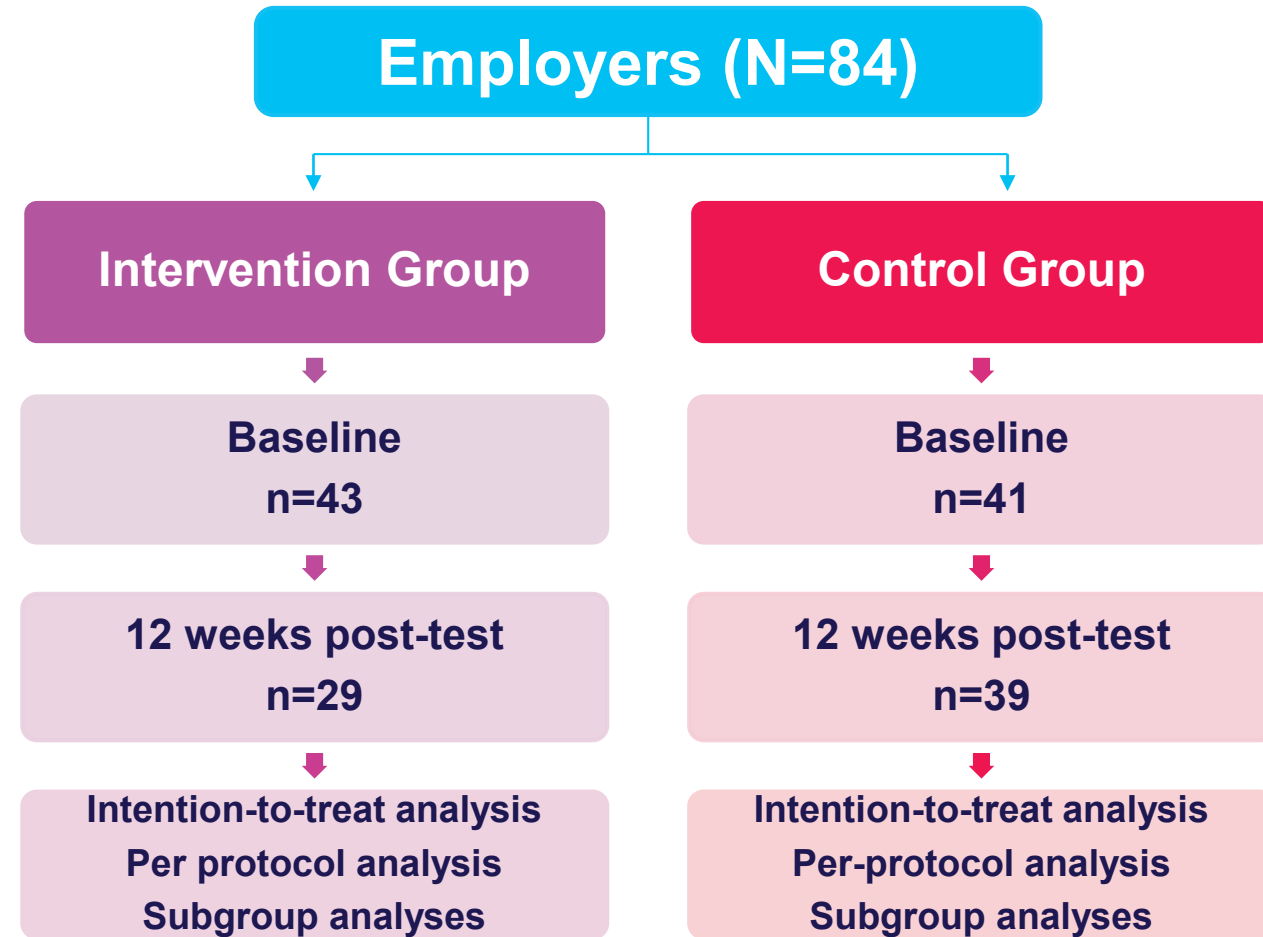
**Phase 5:  
Ongoing  
support**



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# Methods

- A two-armed randomised controlled trial across Australia
- Measurements obtained at baseline and 12 weeks post-test using:
  - Employer Self-Efficacy Scale
  - Scale of Attitudes Toward Workers with Disabilities





# Results

Variables	Intervention group (n=43)					Control group (n=41)					
	Baseline		Post-test		p-value (within)	Baseline		Post-test		p-value (within)	p-value (between)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
<b>Total ESES scores</b>	127.91	41.96	137.40	34.39	0.016*	139.71	36.80	143.27	31.43	0.41	0.42
<b>Total SATWD scores</b>	103.51	12.98	104.67	10.97	0.43	104.59	12.34	104.41	12.24	0.91	0.92

Note: ESES: Employer Self-Efficacy Scale; SATWD: The Scale of Attitudes Toward Workers with Disabilities; SD: Standard deviation; \*p<0.05

# Discussion

- While the study did not find significant differences between groups, the evidence did suggest that the IEST was beneficial to employers in improving their confidence and knowledge in modifying the work environment.
- The IEST was particularly beneficial to employers:
  - With no previous autism-related experience
  - Who did not have support from a disability employment provider

# Process Evaluation

- Process evaluation was conducted following the RCT evaluation of the IEST
- Useful in interpreting the outcomes of the RCT
- Provides valuable insight into the success or failure of an intervention
- Recommendations for future improvement
- Aim:
  - Describe employers' experiences using the IEST
  - Describe the implementation of the IEST
  - Identify perceived barriers and enablers in using the IEST, including recommendations for improvement



# Findings from the Process Evaluation

Usability of the IEST	Satisfaction with the IEST	<i>Preferred format:</i>	Recommend to others
<p><b><i>Usage varied from:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not at all 38%</li><li>• Weekly 10%</li><li>• Fortnightly 10%</li><li>• Monthly 31%</li><li>• Once off 10%</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Very dissatisfied 7%</li><li>• Neutral 28%</li><li>• Satisfied 48%</li><li>• Very satisfied 17%</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paper-based 10%</li><li>• Web-based 21%</li><li>• Both formats 69%</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manager 28%</li><li>• Supervisor 3%</li><li>• Co-worker 24%</li><li>• Mentor 7%</li><li>• DES providers 14%</li><li>• No one else 24%</li></ul>



# Findings from the Process Evaluation

## **Theme one: A 'go-to guide' empowering employers**

- *"A thorough reference guide, not just useful for managers, but also for all employees inside the organisation to learn how to interact with people with autism."*
- *"Anybody that is hiring someone with autism should be given one of those books before they start work."*
- *"When we first understood the program regarding the IEST™, none of us had any knowledge or understanding of autism or anything at all. The IEST™ manual was a Godsend for a reference, when I first started I looked at it a lot. It was very important for us."*
- *"It was interesting to have strategies for each of the employment stages that gave us something to think about."*

## **Theme two: Seeing the workplace from a different perspective**

- *"It helped us to feel like there were not too many unknowns that we were not aware of."*
- *"It's sort of embedded a lot of the positives about people with autism."*
- *"I think for us there was probably some key points that we picked up around on, like the environment was interesting. How we might be able to adjust our environment to suit the person or to be more suitable. And that's not really anything that we've considered before."*
- *"One of the things that we didn't realise is how distracting the workplace environment could be for people with autism."*

## **Theme three: A structured approach to supporting employees on the autism spectrum**

- *"There was a lot of factors listed in IEST™, a lot of checkpoints and it was like a checklist of things that we needed to look out for. Which helped us to really look at and approach the organisation in a very structured way."*
- *"I like the way it is broken up into stages of employment so for us we skipped one and two and went straight into three and beyond."*
- *"Great detail and checklists and you could skip to the areas you needed. A really thorough reference guide."*



# Recommendations for the IEST


- Online web-based application, accessible on a range of electronic devices
- Brief, revised “pocket size” version of the IEST
- Beginner and advanced versions depending on level of experience
- Module addressing mental health and strategies in the workplace



# Where are We Now?

## The Integrated Employment Success Tool (IEST)

An evidence-based guide for employers of autistic adults




Dr Melissa Scott, Dr Marita Falkmer, Prof Sonya Girdler, Prof Torbjørn Falkmer and Prof Sylvia Rodger

### Decision tree

Stage in the employment process

Help you decide where you are in the employment process and direct you to the most appropriate chapter in the employment process journey.

#### Process for employing autistic individuals



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### Summary checklist for advertising a job

To-do	Strategies required	Person responsible	Task complete
Job description			<input type="checkbox"/>
Reasonable adjustments			<input type="checkbox"/>
Advertisement strategy approach			
Contact Disability Employment Service provider			
Increase education and awareness on autism in the workplace			
Additional tasks			

### Steps in the workplace modification process

- 1 Identify the need for modification**
  - Employee requests workplace modifications or the employer recognises the need for modifications
- 2 Assess the need for modification**
  - Include the autistic employee in this process; they are the expert in their individual experience
  - The assessment can be completed internally or externally
  - This may include functional capacity assessments for employees or workplace re-design
  - Financial assistance is available for workplace modifications, see JobAccess Employment Assistance Fund
- 3 Develop and negotiate the modification plan**
  - Establish the details of the modifications in the support plan
  - Discuss the potential modifications with employee, their supervisor/mentor and employment co-ordinator from their DES provider
  - Modification plan to be agreed upon by all involved
- 4 Implement the workplace modifications**
  - Implement the required modifications according to your available workplace resources
  - DES providers can assist with implementing workplace modifications
- 5 Monitor and review the workplace modification**
  - Monitor the employee regularly to ensure that their workplace needs are met through these modifications
  - Set regular review dates to re-assess the workplace modification support plan (twice, monthly, quarterly)
  - Provide the employee with a diary/checkboxes they can keep at their work station to record any concerns or ideas they have between review dates. This allows for instant relief of stress and a proactive approach to self-regulation
  - If the modification support plan is not successful or suitable, begin the workplace modification process again using different modification strategies

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### Helpful tips

#### Important resources for workplace assistance and training

- Resource: Training and education for your co-workers – JobAccess (jobaccess.gov.au)
- Resource: Access & Support
- Resource: Disability
- Resource: Employment (disability)
- Resource: Find a D

During the first week on employment, use external support:

- If your workplace has an Employee Services
- Many autistic employees will be content to find and interview for the job at the workplace until they are integrated
- DES providers also assist employee employees
- If you are an employer whose employee accessed via JobAccess (see Help):
  - DES providers assign an employee job co-ordinator is to:
    - Ensure the right job match for a
    - Develop a support plan
    - Task instructions and demonstrate
    - Workplace modifications and as
    - Provide training and education employee
    - Educate employers about team

### Daily goal planner

Date:

	Today's goals	Time allocated	Goal status
1			<input type="checkbox"/> Complete <input type="checkbox"/> In progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet started
2			<input type="checkbox"/> Complete <input type="checkbox"/> In progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet started
3			<input type="checkbox"/> Complete <input type="checkbox"/> In progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet started
4			<input type="checkbox"/> Complete <input type="checkbox"/> In progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet started
5			<input type="checkbox"/> Complete <input type="checkbox"/> In progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet started

Daily goal planner 1 of 1

# Thank You

