Working with a person on the autistic spectrum including high functioning/Asperger syndrome

Introduction
Autism is called a "spectrum" condition as it can range from scarcely perceptible difficulties to severe disability. Although a minority of people have learning disabilities, others have average or higher than average intelligence. The latter group usually have the form of autism called Asperger syndrome.

1. **Traits which impact on most people with the condition include:**

- Difficulty in using imagination or abstract thought, including empathising with other people or situations
- Difficulty with "reading" non-verbal communication such as body language, facial expression or tone of voice
- Following particular routines (and possibly a resistance to change in these routines)
- Strong personal interests and hobbies
- A tendency to take words literally (e.g. phrases like "you look like a million dollars" may be very confusing)
- Difficulty with and a dislike of eye contact
- Sensory issues – hypersensitivity to noise, smell, taste or touch

2. **Areas where people with an ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) may excel:**

- Tasks where attention to detail and accuracy is required
- Tasks involving numbers, statistics and facts
- Tasks where there is a clear procedure to follow
- Highly structured tasks with a right or wrong way of doing something

Ways of supporting a person with an ASD in the workplace

Feedback
- Should be open, honest, constructive and tactful

Example:
If a person completes a task incorrectly, it should be explained tactfully but clearly why it is wrong and what they should do instead. Telling the person **how** to do something differently (rather than just pointing out what they are doing wrong) is particularly important as people with an ASD are often good at following specific, clear instructions but may struggle with grasping an implied suggestion. In addition if someone is doing something well, it is helpful to give positive feedback

Making guidance clear
- Clear guidance of what is expected is essential. Instructions or explanations need to be concise and specific

- Break large tasks into steps with a plan of the order in which tasks should be done and/or a timetable indicating when
- Back up verbal instructions with written ones which the person can refer to if and when they need e.g. - creation of a "procedures manual"
- Reinforce instructions over a period of time until the person has assimilated then

Example:
Instead of saying "make sure everyone has a copy of this" say "photocopy this 3 times and give the copies to Robert, Catriona and Audrey"

Explain reasonable margins of error
- Explain helpful ways to overcome potential difficulties. Give concrete solutions as and when necessary

Example:
"When you have filled in the form, photocopy it and file the copy. If the photocopier is broken, use the one on the 1st or 2nd floor instead"

Organisation in the workplace
- Guidelines of where to place work, can be helpful

Example:
If the project requires pieces of work to be created and checked, it may be useful to clearly indicate areas of "work to be done", "work completed" and "work to be checked"

Structure of the day
- Provide a clear idea of exactly what the person should be doing when and the deadline for it
- Have a regular timetable of tasks or spend the start of each session helping the person plan their time