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'Urgent need to improve international access to autism resources and training', say Birmingham experts

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As **World Autism Day (https://www.un.org/en/events/autismday/)** approaches (2 April) the Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER) at the University of Birmingham plans to extend its work to provide international training resources, strategies and programmes for practitioners and carers in different countries around the world.

World Autism Day is a global initiative instigated by the United Nations to help raise awareness. Current figures indicate that one in 100 people are on the autism spectrum and the importance of education in enabling people with autism to reach their potential is paramount.

ACER at the University of Birmingham works collaboratively with practitioners, policy makers, people with autism and their families. The centre was commissioned by the Autism Education Trust to produce a flagship programme which was launched in September 2012 and has already trained 11,000 people in the UK, but the researchers have recognised that there is also an urgent need for international practitioners and carers to be able to access similar resources and training. Work has already begun with partners in India to develop appropriate training and tools.

Dr Karen Guldberg, Senior Lecturer in Autism Studies and Director of ACER at the University of Birmingham, says: “It’s important that our work is now being extended and developed to provide international training resources, strategies and programmes for different national contexts. We want to build on the positive work undertaken in the UK so we can make a difference to as many people with autism and their families as possible. World Autism Day is a timely reminder of the importance of this work.”

The programme focuses on four themes based on what ACER’s research has identified as the key principles for good practice in autism education.

The first theme: ‘The Individual Pupil’, emphasises the importance of understanding autism and how it impacts on the individual child. People with autism have particular difficulties in key areas of development, such as social communication, rigidity of thinking and behaviour, with many individuals experiencing sensory processing difficulties. Individuals with autism also have unique strengths and it is crucial for practitioners to find ways of identifying and developing these strengths.

The second theme: ‘Building Relationships’ highlights that pupils with autism can have particular difficulties with social understanding and interaction, and this is an area in which these pupils need support. This theme also highlights the importance of developing good relationships with parents/carers and effective communication across the whole school staff.

The third theme: ‘Curriculum and Learning’ illustrates the importance of understanding how pupils with autism learn differently, and what this means in terms of making adjustments to the curriculum.

The final theme: ‘Enabling Environments’ focuses on what it means to create the right environment for pupils with autism to flourish. This includes adapting our own communication style and mode of interaction as well as the physical environment to accommodate needs.

Dr Guldberg adds: “These themes are central to the development of good autism practice in education but they also illustrate what constitutes good educational practice for all children.”

Notes to Editors

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