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## Autism: the value of supported employment

### The Situation after Graduation

Long before I joined [Auticon](#), I had graduated from Edge Hill University (near Liverpool) with a Masters in Web Development. Even with a Distinction, I was struggling to find permanent work. Under the guidance of several people, I had refined my C.V. until few could find fault with it and then had uploaded it to most of the on-line job boards. Attention was paid to keeping an up-to-date Linked-In profile and a personal website which showcased my skills. I was applying for vacancies, exploring opportunities for self-employment, and volunteering whenever possible. Despite all of this effort, the goal of long term employment was proving surprisingly elusive. Occasionally, I was invited to an interview, but faced stiff competition from others with more of the sought after employment experience, or was sprung a technical test which I found difficult to complete with my level of knowledge. My age (I was in my fifties), was also counting against me.

### [Specialisterne](#) and [Specialists UK](#)

In March 2014, I was invited to a conference run by the Department of Work and Pensions on how Jobcentre Plus could be effective for people on the autistic spectrum. This took place at their headquarters in Central London. A number of employers were invited, and I took advantage of this invitation to broadcast my CV. As a result, I caught the interest of a representative of an agency run by Specialisterne, a Danish information technology company specialising in employing people on the autistic spectrum. In June, I was invited to attend a specially adapted telephone interview for a software testing contract with Ernst and Young in London. The special adaptation was that the agency representative listened in on the interview and so was able to give me feedback on my performance, and that all of the questions were fairly specific, requiring short answers. As a result, I performed very well and was offered the contract.

Two years of successful employment followed during which time Ernst and Young were well pleased with my work.

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I was well supported. This consisted of weekly visits from my agency manager or a specially appointed job coach to discuss issues inside and outside of work. If there was an issue affecting my performance, then this was discussed with my Ernst and Young manager, and steps were taken to resolve it. There were no serious issues, though sometimes, the area of the office allocated for my team became somewhat crowded. When this happened, I was allowed to move to a quieter area to continue my work. There were two serious incidents arising as a result of circumstances which were beyond my control, and which could have resulted in loss of employment or long term clerical work. In these cases, my supporters negotiated a return to interesting and fulfilling work with the Ernst and Young management.

In February 2015, work dried up for six weeks, and the termination of my contract was seriously mooted. It was only through this sort of negotiation that this disaster was averted. A little later on, I was assigned a season of clerical work which made little use of my skills. Again, similar negotiation ensured that this was supplanted by work more appropriate to my skills.

### **From Specialists UK to Auticon**

All good things come to an end, and so did my employment with Ernst and Young. At short notice, I was made redundant because of a new policy such that only middle and senior management roles would be based in the UK. By August (2016), I was again on the market. As 2016 turned into 2017, a person from church chanced upon the Auticon website and felt impelled to send me the link. In perusing this, I was gripped by how suitable working for this company would be for a person in my situation and delighted that they were expanding and looking for staff. However, I realised that competition was tough, and standards were high! Dare I risk the disappointment of my application being rejected? After some deliberation, I decided that an application was well worth the risk.

I was accepted for an interview, which led to a skills assessment. By a remarkable coincidence, Auticon had successfully negotiated for a contract with Experian in Nottingham, a firm factor which could have been an influence in my eventual recruitment. After an apprehensive wait, I was very pleased when an offer of employment with Auticon arrived in my in-box.

### **The Way Forward**

My work with Experian has ended. While working there, I have received support in the form of regular visits or Skype meetings with a job coach to discuss issues inside and outside of work, and how they could be resolved. There have been no work related issues, so discussion has centred on how to deal with challenges to my mental health such as a difficulty in attracting conversation and hence friendship from other people, and intrusive memories of being rejected and bullied at school and elsewhere. Left unchecked, these would have caused intense feelings of low self-esteem and damaging mood swings.

In addition, there are a variety of social events organised at intervals throughout the year....and between contracts, I continue to get paid.

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By now, I am used to a working life of working on contracts, sometimes hundreds of miles from home. This has been a feature of my employment since 2006. I look forward to continuing this work, secure in the knowledge that I will be well supported in an autism friendly environment.