

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: York St John University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 23 Education		
Title of case study: Improving employment opportunities for autistic graduates		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Jonathan Vincent	Senior Lecturer	2014 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Research, led by Dr Jonathan Vincent at York St John University, has been vital in identifying the barriers to employment for graduates with an autism diagnosis and building capacity among a large and diverse range of industry professionals. As a result, this work has led to (1) increased understanding of autism; (2) developed autism-inclusive practices; (3) increased employment opportunities and outcomes; and (4) stimulated changes to policy regarding the employment of autistic graduates. The reach of Vincent's impact has been both national and international, building capacity in universities, government departments, and among employers across the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and Malta.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The research programme led by Dr Vincent (Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, Languages, and Psychology) responds directly to the needs of the increasing population of students disclosing diagnoses of autism spectrum conditions to their universities. Evidence has consistently identified that this group have the worst postgraduate outcomes of any disabled group in higher education, yet there has been little evidence examining this phenomenon. Vincent's research was among the first in the world to specifically address this gap with emphasis across three main areas.</p> <p>The initial area focuses on transitions into and through higher education. Vincent's early outputs utilised participatory action research approaches among university students and graduates with an autism diagnosis to identify social and academic barriers in higher education, as well as novel ways of framing autism within the context of university. Importantly, this participatory approach led to the co-construction of practitioner workshops and the co-authorship of a publication with students and graduates with an autism diagnosis; in so doing it gave this group a legitimate voice in the discourse surrounding their own experience of higher education and raised levels of understanding among higher education staff. Vincent and his autistic co-authors were recognised by the Collaborative Action Research Network for their innovative research in 2017 and their work was published in one of the leading action research journals. This research has since been cited widely among a growing body of literature on increasing researchers' capacity to make their autism research more participatory.</p> <p>The second area of underpinning research for this case study focuses on the transition out of higher education for students with an autism diagnosis. Vincent led the way in identifying and analysing the particular challenges that this group encounters at this stage of the life course. His qualitative findings, based on large samples from across the UK, contributed significant new knowledge regarding the amplified levels of anxiety and additional and specific provision this group require to enable success, including enhanced careers advice,</p>		

practical solutions, and the development of a network of support. In 2017, Vincent was awarded a Winston Churchill Trust Fellowship to identify the best transitional practices for autistic students in the United States and Canada and was awarded further funding in 2020 to address autistic graduates' specific needs in the context of Covid-19 in the UK.

The final area in Vincent's research programme emphasises the practical and attitudinal barriers autistic students and graduates face in accessing the labour market. Whilst there is a body of research focused on employment among autistic populations, Vincent's work was, again, among the first to specifically identify these barriers in relation to higher education. His findings suggest that autistic graduates experience high levels of job rejection and discrimination and that there is a gap in knowledge about autism among industry professionals. Along with Dr Fabri (Leeds Beckett University), Vincent identified an ecosystem of competitive employment for autistic graduates, which includes family, universities, employers, and wider society and recommended the need for enhanced training, specifically in industry. As an indication of his research's impact, Vincent was invited to contribute to an Expert Discussion on Employment for the international journal *Autism in Adulthood*.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Vincent, J. (2015) Developing REAL inclusive teaching and learning at university for autistic students through dialogue: a participatory action research project. *Good Autism Practice*. 16(2) 41-47. [gap_autumn_2015_text.indd \(yorks.ac.uk\)](#)

[3.2] Vincent J., Potts M., Fletcher D., Hodges S., Howells J., Mitchell A. and Mallon B. (2017) 'I think autism is like running on Windows while everyone else is a Mac': using a participatory action research approach with students on the autistic spectrum to rearticulate autism and the lived experience of university. *Educational Action Research*. 25(2), 300-315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2016.1153978>

[3.3] Vincent, J. (2019) It's the fear of the unknown: transition from higher education for young autistic adults. *Autism: International Journal of Research and Practice*. 23(6), 1575-1585. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1362361318822498>. [Impact Factor 4.6]

[3.4] Nicholas, D., Hedley, D., Randolph, ... & Vincent, J. (2019) An Expert Discussion on Employment in Autism. *Autism in Adulthood*. 1(3) 162-169. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2019.29003.djn>

[3.5] Vincent, J. (2020) Employability for UK University Students and Graduates on the Autism Spectrum: Mobilities and Materialities. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*. 22(1) 12-24. <http://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.656>

[3.6] Vincent, J. and Fabri, M. (2020) The ecosystem of competitive employment for autistic university graduates. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*. 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2020.1821874>

Research grants:

[3.7] Winston Churchill Memorial Trust (April 2017) *Launching Lives: Transition from university to employment for students on the autism spectrum*. Awarded to Dr Jonathan Vincent as Principal Investigator (£5500)

[3.8] Winston Churchill Memorial Trust (November 2020) *Supporting autistic graduates into employment*. Awarded to Dr Jonathan Vincent as Principal Investigator (£8500)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

(1) Through the development of evidence-based training packages Vincent's research increased policymakers', university practitioners', and professionals' understanding of autism. Between 2015 and 2020, workshops, keynotes, and presentations based on his research [3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6] were delivered to more than 250 practitioners from over ten universities in England and Scotland, thus representing reach among tens of thousands of students and staff. Industry-focused workshops based on Vincent's later research [3.4; 3.5; 3.6] were also delivered to over 300 professionals throughout the UK [5.2], as well as companies in the United States including Goldman Sachs [5.1]. Companies ranged from SMEs to large multinational corporations and spanned technology, health, tourism, engineering, banking, as well as national bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Professional Development, Career Development Institute, and local and national government departments, including the Ministry of Justice, which employs over 77,000 people. Evidence derived from n=186 workshop evaluations completed by Human Resources personnel, Occupational Psychologists, Hiring Managers, and Careers Advisors indicates a 47.85% increase in understanding of autism based on pre- and post-training evaluations and increases in positive attitudes about autism among 72.6% of the sample [5.2]. Moreover, qualitative data suggests that professionals benefitted from enhanced capacity to identify autistic talent suggesting greater likelihood *'to hire autistic people if I'm in the position to'* [5.2].

(2) Vincent's research has led to improved autism-inclusive practices both nationally and internationally. The Head of Occupational Psychology Services at one of the largest UK Government departments stated, that *"as a result of this workshop we will be setting up a task force to specifically focus on the issues raised and to ensure that our recruitment and induction processes continue to be as inclusive as possible for autistic people"* [5.2]. Moreover, in recognition of the national and international implications of Vincent's research for careers professionals working in universities, the Chair of the Global Career Council for the Institute of Career Certification and President of the Career Development Institute, stated that it was *"so useful in making our members more effective at helping both adults and students gain meaningful and enjoyable employment... If Careers Professionals generally add these skills to their portfolio, I feel it will have a huge impact on the effectiveness of their interactions with people with autism and the results they get"* [5.3]. In Australia, Vincent's research and practical expertise was acknowledged as assisting the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services in *'developing an inclusive hiring initiative for autistic people'* as part of a specific employment programme [5.4].

(3) Vincent has had an impact on improving employment outcomes and opportunities for autistic people and graduates. The Commissioning Manager for Health, Housing and Adult Social Care for the City of York Council commends Vincent's *'expert advice'* and *'research-informed decision-making'* in relation to the All-Age Autism Strategy's focus on employment. She notes that under his sub-group leadership, rates of autistic employment in York have improved. Data from 2020 suggest a 61.2% percentage increase in those accessing paid employment on the previous year (2019) and greater numbers of autistic people, including graduates, accessing specialist employment support [5.5]. The Managing Director of the national charity Living Autism also notes the *'instrumental'* role that Vincent has played in *'leading to better outcomes'* for autistic graduates through training and coaching [5.6].

(4) Finally, Vincent's research programme has stimulated policy debate surrounding autistic university students' postgraduate outcomes both in the United Kingdom and in parts of Europe. As well as at a regional level, Vincent has been invited to present findings to Universities UK and the Association of Careers and Advisory Services; however, the reach of this impact also extends beyond the UK. In November 2019, he was invited to present oral and written evidence to the Ministry for Education and Employment at the Government of Malta and presented his research on the European Union's Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in December 2020 (EPAL) with a focus on opportunity gaps experienced by autistic learners. The Director of Research for Lifelong Learning and Employability referred to Vincent's *"cutting edge social and educational research"* as being *"extremely valuable to policy makers, practitioners, and researchers in Malta... as we move into the next cycle of policy development, we look to*

Impact case study (REF3)

utilise Dr Vincent's novel research to help develop more inclusive education and employment practices for autistic young people in Malta" [5.7].

In summary, Vincent's research has had significant reach and impact beyond academia, with beneficiaries including industry professionals, university careers practitioners, policymakers, and ultimately autistic graduates.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] Testimonial: Assistant Professor, City University New York and co-chair of the international College Autism Network

[5.2] Report: Impact Evaluation Report (integrating 186 evaluations completed by industry professionals post-workshop training)

[5.3] Testimonial: Chair of Global Career Council and President of Career Development Institute

[5.4] Testimonial: Department of Health and Human Services, Melbourne Australia

[5.5] Testimonial: Commissioning Manager Health, Housing and Adult Social Care Directorate, City of York Council

[5.6] Testimonial: Managing Director, Living Autism Ltd

[5.7] Testimonial: Director of Research for Lifelong Learning and Employability, Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta