

NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US: ADDRESSING HEALTH INEQUALITIES FOR PATIENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND AUTISM



**INTERIM FINDINGS FROM A PILOT AT BUCKINGHAMSHIRE NEW UNIVERSITY
INTRODUCING THE OLIVER MCGOWAN MANDATORY TRAINING AT THE
PRE-QUALIFICATION STAGE**

AUTHORS:

*THEO GAVRIELIDES, GEORGE EDWARD NTOW
AND NATHAN SQUILLANTE*



www.theogavrielides.com/omt

<https://www.rj4allpublications.com/>

contact@rj4allpublications.com | www.rj4all.info

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Scopus Author ID: 24070323000
ResearcherID: C-5508-2014
Loop profile: 240258
UK

44(0) 7732569000 | Email: T.Gavrielides@RJ4All.org
30 Plough Way SE16 2LJ London,

[ScholarGPS](#) | [X](#) | [Linkedin](#) | [Google Scholar](#)





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Executive summary

www.theogavrielides.com



In March 2023, Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) was commissioned from the National Health System (NHS) England to pilot the integration of the **Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism (Oliver's training)** into pre-registration nursing and midwifery education. Oliver's training is NHS England's preferred training to meet the statutory requirements of the *Health and Care Act 2022*.

This ebook presents the interim findings of a research project that was commissioned from BNU to assess the impact of Oliver's Training on Learning Disability and Autism at the pre-qualification stage. The team (Annex A) conducting the research was separate and independent from the training delivery team at BNU. In particular, the research aimed to test the following hypothesis and answer a series of questions that were agreed with National Health System England (NHSE): *The integration of the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism into Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) approved pre-qualifying Curricula can better serve the aims of the Health and Care Act 2022, and help address health inequalities*. The key research objective was to find out whether Oliver's training should be integrated into pre-qualifying NMC approved Nursing and Midwifery curricula.

By the end of Phase 1, we directly spoke to 22 BNU students, 8 BNU staff, 9 training providers (other than BNU), 6 registered nurses and midwives and 4 NHSE and BNU project staff.

Research Method

The research started in January 2025 and was split into two phases. This ebook reports on Phase 1, which concluded in May 2025, and focused on collecting data from students and staff who had already been trained as well as other stakeholders. Phase 2 will focus on conducting live evaluations with students and staff at BNU who will receive Oliver's training, and will also focus on building a business case by engaging relevant stakeholders through semi-structured interviews.

Design: Mixed-method informed by employing in-depth interviews, focus group discussions to gather qualitative data from students and staff of BNU and training providers while online survey gathered quantitative responses from - registered nurses and midwives, training providers and potential employers. Case study design was integrated to gather detailed practical insights from training providers on best practices.

Data analysis: This method was chosen using predefined categories. NVivo14 software used for coding and theme development. Frequency distribution tables, pie and bar charts were used to present the findings.

Scopus Author ID: 24070323000
ResearcherID: C-5508-2014
Loop profile: 240258
UK



44(0) 7732569000 | Email: T.Gavrielides@RJ4All.org
30 Plough Way SE16 2LJ London,

[ScholarGPS](#) | [X](#) | [Linkedin](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Interim findings

Trained BNU Students

- ✓ The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism fostered a more person-centred approach in students, improving their understanding of individuals with autism and learning disabilities.
- ✓ Emphasis was placed on the importance of listening to family members, reviewing care plans and patient passports.
- ✓ Training raised awareness of managing stress and preventing emotional and physical risks during potentially triggering interactions.
- ✓ Students felt more equipped to deliver equitable care, indicating the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism's role in reducing health disparities.

Trained BNU Staff

- ✓ We experienced a positive shift in attitudes and increased responsiveness to individual patient needs and families.
- ✓ We noted an improved perspective which helped to enhance both patient care and their ability to teach empathetic, informed approaches to students.
- ✓ Staff confirmed the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism's potential in addressing health inequalities through holistic and individualized care approaches.

Oliver's Training Providers

- ✓ In-person training was rated most effective vs virtual trainings.
- ✓ Providers indicated a number of barriers to learning such as:
 - Time constraints
 - Prior trauma or personal experience
 - Difficulty applying training in real-world settings
- ✓ Providers highlighted emerging training needs such as ADHD awareness and practical application by additional training.
- ✓ There was an emphasis on structured needs assessments and feedback mechanisms post-modules for students who completed the training.
- ✓ Providers called for stronger focus on communication and de-escalation techniques.

Registered Nurses and Midwives

- ✓ Most participants reported applying the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning



Disability and Autism knowledge in practice.

- ✓ Two-thirds believed training should be part of basic/pre-qualification training and the awareness level on the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism and its importance for caring for people with autism and learning disabilities be increased among healthcare professionals and employers.
- ✓ Suggestions from registered nurses and midwives for improving support included:
 - Greater access to specialist support teams
 - Enhanced communication tools
 - Extending the face-to-face and having more practical sessions for students as well as making the Oliver's training widely accessible.

Interim recommendations

Initial research findings show that:

- ✓ the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism is effective at the prequalification stage, significantly enhancing participants' knowledge and confidence in supporting individuals with autism and learning disabilities.
- ✓ students, staff, nurses, and midwives reported improved understanding of individualized care and the importance of engaging with patients' families.
- ✓ there is a clear need for additional resources, including:
 - more time, funding, and post-training support (including a potential follow up and more practical training—to further strengthen the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism's impact. The findings also suggest the need for increasing pre-awareness on the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism to increase willingness and participation among trainees.

Overall recommendations

- **Pre-awareness** on the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism before rollout was considered essential. It can help shift preconceptions shaped by past experiences with individuals with autism or learning disabilities. This can be delivered through workshops, webinars, or open forums.
- **Introduce a post-training assessment** (compulsory assessment) among students. This would encourage students to take the training more seriously, enhance engagement, support reflection, and improve long-term retention for future application.
- **Extend the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism's duration to have more practical sessions:** Students and staff feel the current one-off training is too brief and information heavy. Training providers recommended introducing follow up and more practical training. Direct engagement with experts with lived experience has been shown to boost trainees' confidence and competence in supporting individuals



Scopus Author ID: 24070323000
 ResearcherID: C-5508-2014
 Loop profile: 240258
 UK

44(0) 7732569000 | Email: T.Gavrielides@RJ4All.org
 30 Plough Way SE16 2LJ London,

[ScholarGPS](#) | [X](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Google Scholar](#)





with autism and learning disabilities.

- **Integrate more case studies and videos.** The findings suggest that despite the availability of some videos/case studies already embedded in the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism, students and staff request for more of such real-world scenarios to better understand the behaviours of individuals with these conditions and to build more confidence and skills on the subject matter.
- **Provide backup systems during training sessions to manage unexpected triggers:** Some students and staff expressed reluctance to participate in the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism due to fears of potential triggering experiences from experts with the conditions. To promote a sense of safety and encourage participation, especially among students, it is essential to have support measures in place. Cost implication must also be considered.
- **Introduce learning on family involvement and effective communication:** Appropriate communication, active listening, and engaging families—especially when caring for individuals with autism and learning disabilities should be introduced into the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism. This would help healthcare professionals build rapport, understand patient needs and triggers, and enhance care quality

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[ScholarGPS](#) | [X](#) | [Linkedin](#) | [Google Scholar](#)



About the project team

Professor Theo Gavrielides, PhD

He is the Founder and Director of the RJ4All International Institute and the Founder of [RJ4All Publications](#) and [RJ4All Sports](#). Pioneer of user-led research methods, and advisor to the European Commission, and governments. His most recent work involves working with the Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy to collect primary and secondary data that would help develop a Framework for Social Care nurses. This resulted in the publication of three books the latest one being [Gavrielides, T. et al \(2024\). Developing a Framework for Social Care Nurses: Enhanced or Advanced Practice? A critical literature review, London: RJ4All Publications.](#)

Moreover, he worked with the BHSCA, NHS England and the University of Surrey to run (a) the [Preparation for Practice Placements project](#) which aims to pilot a resource for educators to prepare pre-registration healthcare learners for their first practice placement focusing on the non-clinical skill aspects of clinical practice (b) [the Aspirant Educator Masterclasses project](#) to guide healthcare practitioners towards educator roles and give them insight into the range of roles and required preparation.

Between 2009 - 2024, he acted as the Editor-in-Chief for [The International Journal of Human Rights in Healthcare](#), Emerald, previously titled Ethnicity and Inequalities in Health and Social Care Journal. In 2009, he worked with the UK Department of Health to help them create a national delivery plan to support justice in healthcare. This resulted in [Gavrielides, T. \(2009\) "Review by human rights specialist of Improving Health, Supporting Justice: A National Delivery Plan" in Department of Health Equality Impact Assessment of Improving Health, Supporting Justice, Department of Health: London.](#)

In 2007, he was asked by the UK Parliament to give oral evidence to their public inquiry on the treatment of older people by healthcare public sector providers. This resulted in [Gavrielides, T. \(2007\) The Human Rights of older people in healthcare, Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights: London.](#)

Finally, he worked with the UK Ministry of Justice (then Department for Constitutional Affairs) to introduce a Human Rights Strategy in health and social care services, resulting in:

- [Gavrielides, T. \(2006\). Human Rights Insight Project Stage 1 Report: Consumers: Reviewing the evidence on human rights awareness and experiences of consumers of public services: Building a human rights culture, Department for Constitutional Affairs: London.](#)
- [Gavrielides, T. \(2006\) Human Rights through the Education, Information and Advice Strategy, Department for Constitutional Affairs: London.](#)
- [Gavrielides, T. \(2008\) "Human rights and customer satisfaction with public services: a relationship discovered", Vol 12:2 International Journal of Human Rights, 187-202.](#)

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[ScholarGPS](#) | [X](#) | [Linkedin](#) | [Google Scholar](#)



[George Edward Ntow](#)

He is a young researcher with over seven years of experience in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research across West Africa. He specializes in policy research and has long-term interests in community-based projects, infectious diseases, health systems, policies, and interventions aimed at protecting vulnerable groups in remote communities.

He has significant experience in stakeholder engagement, demonstrated through his three-and-a-half-year involvement with the West Africa Network of Emerging Leaders on Health Policies and Systems (WANEL) on an International Development Research Centre (IDRC) funded project on COVID-19. His project experience includes maternal and child health, UNICEF WASH in Ghana, tuberculosis prevention and control, and pandemic response. He is eager to collaborate on initiatives focused on equity, social justice, gender equality, and non-communicable diseases.

[Nathan Squillante](#)

He has experience in conducting research (both in conducting interviews and administering surveys) from his education at the University of Cincinnati and his time with the Urban Appalachian Community Coalition. Additionally, he has experience with data analysis (both qualitative and quantitative analysis, including regression analysis), and writing up his findings in a report. He also has experience creating and giving presentations of his findings.

Further, while he is no expert, Nathan has a small amount of experience with learning disabilities and autism, both from relationships in his personal life as well as through his experience as an Adaptive Gymnastics Volunteer where he assisted in teaching gymnastics to children with developmental disabilities including autism. Because of this, he is aware of some of the challenges people with learning disabilities and autism face.

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Initial research findings show that:

- *Oliver's training is effective at the prequalification stage, significantly enhancing participants' knowledge and confidence in supporting individuals with autism and learning disabilities as well as their families.*
- *students, staff, nurses, and midwives reported improved understanding of individualized care and the importance of engaging with patients' families.*
- *providers called for quality assurance standards across available models and methods of training, and the approval of the Code of Practice for Oliver's Training.*
- *there is a clear need for additional resources, including: more time, funding, and post-training support to further strengthen Oliver's training impact.*

www.theogavrielides.com



44(0) 7732569000 | EMAIL: T.GAVRIELIDES@RJ4ALL.ORG
30 PLOUGH WAY SE16 2LJ LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

@TGAVRIELIDES | TGAVRIELIDES | /RJFORALL

