



Bedfordshire and Luton Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Waiting times for Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) Assessment for young people age 13 and over. Current waiting times are up to 12 months for an assessment following initial contact.

How long is the wait for the first appointment?



Waiting times for first contact from CAMHS following the first referral is that 97 – 99% of referrals are contacted within 12 weeks of referral. This includes contacts to our Neuro-Developmental Team (NDT) which completes the assessments to find out if a young person has ASC.

How long is the waiting time for a full ASC assessment?



- Waiting times for a full ASC assessment to commence vary over time and in different parts of Bedfordshire and Luton. Relatively recently, waiting times for a full assessment to commence in parts of Bedfordshire following the initial contact were around 8 months. However, we are now advising that waiting times can be as long as 12 months. Waiting times depend on a range of factors – set out in the next box. Our aim is to reduce this over the next 3-4 months as we take on new staff to help us with this task.
- In July 2022, there were 222 young people age 13 plus waiting for an assessment to commence and 43 assessments for ASC were being progressed by the Bedfordshire and Luton CAMHS Neuro-Developmental Team.

Why are waiting times for an ASC assessment so long?



Factors impacting on waiting times are:

- ASC assessments are complex. It is essential that we get the assessments right. A full assessment can take between 12 – 15 hours of clinical time including assessment, observation, review of scores from family and educational setting and multi-disciplinary discussion. The time taken to complete a full ASC assessment can vary – on average it can take 2 to 3 months. We wait until we have everything complete before we give the feedback to the young person and their family. It should be borne in mind that these are lifetime diagnoses so we take this work seriously and undertake each assessment diligently which takes time.
- ASC assessments are completed in addition to the other work of the CAMHS Neuro-Developmental Team. This includes longer term cases as some children and young people are on medication which requires ongoing clinical review.
- Staff turnover – there are currently several vacancies in our Neuro-Developmental Team.
- The number of young people being referred for assessment has increased dramatically since lockdown and the trend continues to show rising numbers requesting assessment.
- The complexity of the cases. We continue to respond to the individual needs of each young person we are assessing. For example, some young people cannot come into the CAMHS clinic, or feel unable to meet with people either at home or elsewhere. Others will need to meet a CAMHS practitioner several times before they feel able to attend an assessment appointment.
- Sometimes (albeit not often) young people don't attend for their appointments which impacts on others waiting as we then need to offer a repeat appointment.
- The caseload of the Neuro-Developmental Team is becoming more demanding in terms of higher number of cases and greater complexity of cases. This means staff have less time to carry out the assessments, write reports and give feedback.
- Some young people are just not well enough when their assessment is due to commence and we will need to wait until they are more stable, which can extend their waiting time.

What is being done to reduce waiting lists?



- We understand the challenges associated with waiting for an ASC diagnosis and we are working really hard to reduce waiting times.
- We have recently recruited two senior members of the Neuro-Developmental Team (NDT) with the specific role of reducing waiting lists. However, due to recent staff turnover, the 2 new staff members are having to participate in other ASC pathway roles and are not able to offer as many assessments as hoped at this stage due to other staff vacancies.
- To mitigate this, we have recently taken on 3 locum staff to support the team including a new Principal Psychologist who starts with us in November 2022. There is also a new substantive dedicated ASC assessment nurse appointed who will join the assessment team in November
- We work closely with colleagues in the wider SEND system – schools, local authorities and other health professionals to support children and young people regardless of whether there is a diagnosis. We aim to work with all our partners to ensure that children and young people have their needs met and achieve their best outcomes. This includes providing input to Education, Health and Care needs assessment to see if a child/young person requires an Educational, Health and Care Plan.
- We have new project underway tracking the experience of YP whilst they are waiting for their assessment. Our aim is:
 - to improve user satisfaction and experience on the pathway
 - finding ways to improve the pathway efficiency
 - looking at new support pathways to reduce re-referral into CAMHS after an ASC assessment
 - looking at other ways to reduce wait times
 - the overall aim of this project is to reduce the time it takes to complete assessment (from referral to diagnosis) by 50%.
- We are using a trusted outsource agency (Healios) to offer assessments and support us in our work so reducing waiting times.

Where can I go for help while we are waiting?



- Autism Bedfordshire provides support for families waiting for an ASC assessment.
- The Local Authority Local Offers also have details of their SEND Advisory teams/SEN support teams which can provide advice and support and also other local groups including the Parent Carer Forums.
- CAMHS is a member of a working group, which includes the Parent Carer Forums, which is developing a pre-diagnosis information support pack for families.
- The National Autistic Society.
- CAMHS Discovery College provides a range of online and in-person sessions for young people age 13 to 18. All of the sessions have been planned and designed with young people. Any young person in Bedfordshire and Luton can get involved with the Discovery College.