Children with Autism and the successful use of computers and ICT.

Computers:

- are tools for writing / presentation that promotes success;
- do not make social demands;
- follow user's instructions (when given correctly);
- decrease the risk of sensory overload;
- aid education, communication, leisure;
- are a tool for life.

Working with computers can provide children and young people with autism more effective learning environments:

- Reduced stimuli
- Repetition
- Lack of affect
- Predictability
- Interest
- Visual cues
- Clear cut rules
- Structure
- Individually controlled
- Self directed pace

Guidance on setting up:

- A clutter free environment;
- A computer that is permanently on or on at set times;
- Appealing software / children's /student's individual interest, (photos, graphics, sounds, games, wallpaper);
- Children/student success, small step progression;
- Widening/lengthening of children's/students attention by minimising distractions and stress.

Addressing the specific learning style:

Promotion of social awareness, understanding and interaction: children / students and others need to

- Be aware of each other;
- See each other as companions (enjoying spending time together on an equal footing, whilst sharing a mutual interest)

NB: Computer games and activities can provide opportunities for turn taking without intrusive eye contact.

Developing communication:

Effective communication must be between at least two individuals and is based on shared attention or common interest. In making use of the computer the child/ young person with autism need not:

- Meet the other person half way in order to communicate;
- Be motivated to communicate, but simply share the focus of attention;
- Encounter many of the challenges posed by engagement in typical conversation, e.g. sound, speed/pace, meaning, uncertainty, emotion, differing viewpoints or interests.

Developing creativity, playfulness and imagination: computers can

- Promote acceptance of change;
- Allow repetitive actions to produce a creative result;
- Enable better development of poor motor control to achieve perfectly formed results;
- Enable the user to erase mistakes quickly (without agitation);
- Make co-operative easy going companions;
- Foster a sense of competence / self esteem;
- Offer a wide range of possibilities for creative exploration.

Inclusion:

Incorporating mentoring and friendship:

- A computer literate child/student with autism may make a good mentor for a less able peer. This can provide the child/student with respect from others and boost self esteem;
- A child/young person who is sociable and communicative at the computer may be able to develop these skills and abilities into a career or a creative / communicative skill for life. As the child/young person grows older, learning to use email and access the internet can introduce opportunities to communicate online with others with autism.