1. The Royal College of General Practitioners welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on proposals for mandatory learning disability and autism training for health and care staff.

2. The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is the largest membership organisation in the United Kingdom solely for GPs. Founded in 1952, it has over 53,000 members who are committed to improving patient care, developing their own skills and promoting general practice as a discipline. The RCGP is an independent professional body with expertise in patient-centred generalist clinical care.

3. The RCGP is broadly supportive of developing a framework and resources that educate professionals on the needs and providing the best care for people with learning disabilities and autism, especially in partnership with those with lived experience of those conditions.

4. However, the RCGP believes that legally mandating training in this area will lead to bureaucratic implementation rather than meaningful learning and would not be the most effective way to achieve the aims of this policy. The RCGP believes it is more effective to utilise the culture of self-directed learning, inherent in GP continuing professional development, to promote evidence-based resources to GPs and promote learning in a more organic fashion.
Developing a framework and materials

5. The RCGP is supportive of developing a framework to guide professionals in developing an understanding of what learning disabilities and autism mean for different people. This can only be meaningfully achieved with meaningful involvement from those who are ‘experts by experience’.

6. RCGP recognises the urgent need to improve healthcare for people with learning disabilities and autism. To this end, the college has developed a clinical toolkit that aims to be a 'one stop shop', a user-friendly guide to autism for primary care professionals, people affected by autism, clinical commissioning groups, as well as interested members of the general public.¹ This resource is freely available on our website.

Mandating training and evaluating effects of training

7. For GPs as expert generalists, treating the whole patient, must already cover learning disabilities and autistic patients in order to qualify as a general practitioner. The General Practice curriculum includes this area, which will be expanded in the new version once it is agreed with the General Medical Council. This learning must continue throughout the career of a GP, as they must maintain and develop their skills as part of revalidation.

8. A broad array of training requirements already fall under the category of “mandatory training” for GPs. These include safeguarding children, safeguarding adults, basic life support, equality and diversity, and more. All added together, mandatory training represents a significant burden on GP time and contribute to the already significant workload. Undertaking e-learning modules or attending training days takes resource away from daily practice or self-directed continued professional development activities. This is particularly frustrating if the training does not feel relevant or is merely a repetition of knowledge already used, and has led to deep cynicism across the profession when any training is mandated from the top-down.

9. There is limited evidence that mandated training has the anticipated effect on the attitudes and behaviours.² However, there is evidence that compelling adults to undertake training that they do not perceive as useful leads to a decline in learning motivation and engagement with the material.³ This will limit the success of any mandated training.

10. Mandating training at a government level will lead to a top-down, bureaucratic implementation that alienates GPs. This type of implementation does not address the learning needs of people, rather it requires practitioners to attend training that is often not relevant to them or their practice. This has a detrimental effect on their engagement and consequently on the success of the training. This would be better achieved through self-directed learning, which would be facilitated by an evidence-based framework, relevant guidelines and the best resources developed in partnership with experts by experience.