



Proposal for a Scottish Autism Strategy

ATL's response to the Member's Bill consultation

1 April 2010

ATL – the education union

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), as a leading education union, recognise the link between education policy and our members' conditions of employment. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate from a position of strength. We champion good practice and achieve better working lives for our members. We help our members, as their careers develop, through first-rate research, advice, information and legal support. Our 160,000 members – teachers, lecturers, headteachers, support staff and students – are empowered to get active locally and nationally.

ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). The union is a member of the Social Partnership – working with the UK Government, employers and other unions on education issues. ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

Consultation Questions

Q1 Would people in Scotland benefit from a national strategic approach?

It is widely recognised that Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) present many challenges to professionals who work with children and young people. The Additional Support for Learning legislation guides schools in how to meet their needs but it remains the case that many schools are still insufficiently prepared for supporting pupils with autism.

Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) is an important statement on how children and young people should be supported in all aspects of their lives, not just at school. A national ASD strategy should help deliver *GIRFEC* by assisting with the identification of autism, promoting appropriate support and training.

Another aspect a national strategy can assist with is in improving the transition from school education to adult life. There is evidence of teachers being left to handle the responsibility for handling transition planning and supporting young people with autism after they have left school, simply because no one else has been identified to help them.

Q2 Is a Scottish Autism Act needed to make a national ASD strategy effective?

We support a parity of approach with the provision being made by the Westminster Government. Autism Spectrum Disorders are presenting a significant challenge across education services and if they are not to be seen as simply another condition then improving the legal basis for identifying and supporting people will be beneficial.

Q3 Are the duties proposed appropriate to enabling a national ASD strategy for Scotland?

Yes, the provisions mirror those of the Autism Act 2009 and should also consider the process the Scottish Government should go through when forming a national strategy including consultation and review.

Q4 Are the duties proposed appropriate to guide local agencies to take a strategic approach to autism services in their area?

The proposed duties need to consider how a national strategy can be delivered by a variety of agencies. Local planning and protocols for joint working need to be more strongly pushed than is the case with current guidance.

All professionals such as teachers and other school staff should be adequately trained, through initial training and ongoing professional development, if they are to be expected to work with children and young people on the autism spectrum.

Q5 Are there any other comments you wish to make about this proposal?

If a national strategy is to be adopted then there must be clear lines of accountability; in respect of schools this must lie with local authorities. The issue of meeting the needs of pupils with ASD cannot be left to schools alone to deal with, nor should it be left to schools to co-ordinate solutions across multi-sector teams. We would also stress the need for clear lines of responsibility and that all of this cannot be achieved without the appropriate level of resources.

**This submission was prepared on behalf of
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