

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

4th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday
22 September 2021

PE1870: Ensure teachers of autistic pupils are
appropriately qualified

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner	Edward Fowler
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce legislation requiring teachers of autistic pupils to be appropriately qualified to improve educational outcomes.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1870

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 24 May 2021.
2. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 1,195 signatures have been received.
4. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe B** of this paper.
5. A submission has been provided by the petitioner. This is included at **Annexe C**.

Scottish Government submission

6. The submission outlines that the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004 (as amended) provides a comprehensive legislative framework for supporting children and young people to overcome barriers to their learning and achieve their full learning potential. The 2004 Act places duties on education authorities to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils, including pupils with autism.
7. The Scottish Government highlights that it has worked with key partners (including the National Autistic Society, Scottish Autism, and Children in Scotland) in delivering a range of professional learning opportunities to help teachers in supporting autistic learners and their families.
8. A variety of work which enables teachers to support autistic children are outlined in the submission, including:
 - revised Teaching Standards (August 2021), which recognises the barriers to wellbeing and learning that pupils with additional support needs, including autism may encounter;
 - the General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS) framework for initial teacher education programmes considers supporting equality and diversity through awareness raising; and
 - the Autism Toolbox which helps teachers to maintain and update their skills by providing information about inclusive practice, guidance and professional opportunities for education practitioners. This has been developed by partners, funded by the Scottish Government and is managed by Education Scotland.
9. A notable publication is the [Autism Action Plan](#) (December 2020) which sets out measures seeking to improve the support to children and young people with autism in Scotland's schools and ensure that meaningful change is implemented to support autistic pupils to reach their full learning potential. The plan was developed collaboratively by stakeholders including the National Autistic Society, Scottish Autism, Children in Scotland, the GTCS and Education Scotland.
10. In response to the plan, the Scottish Government has been involved in the development and launch of Autism resource materials for use within programmes for student teachers. The resource materials are made up of four progressive units with pre-prepared PowerPoint presentations, Key Messages, reflective questions, links to video clips and related reading references. A full script and set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are provided to support lecturers.

11. The submission also points to the [Additional Support for Learning Action Plan](#) (October 2020), which includes a number of actions which seek to ensure that teacher education and development supports teachers to meet the needs of pupils with additional support needs, including those with autism.
12. The SPICe briefing notes that progress made against the action is expected to be monitored and reported on by October 2021.
13. In response to specific qualifications, the Scottish Government highlights that registration is also available in additional support needs (ASN) from the GTCS which covers the 3 to 18 years age range. This involves holding an appropriate ASN award with a sufficiently broad and general content to cover pupils with a range of additional support needs, for example the Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma in Inclusive Practice.
14. In regard to the employment of teachers of hearing-impaired and visually impaired pupils, the submission points out that guidance to support the relevant legislation sets out specific competences that compromise the requirements of teachers. However, it acknowledges that there is a range of pathways, for example, through completion of a post-graduate diploma, accredited prior learning and/or local authority-based, or other training.
15. Therefore, the Scottish Government states that it does not consider that legislation is required at this point in time and that the actions outlined in its submission will provide teachers with the relevant support and resources required.

Petitioner submission

16. In his submission, the petitioner suggests that teachers are not aware of the 'Triad of Impairment', 'sensory issues' or of all the 'co-morbid conditions' attached to Autism which gives the Autistic pupil very complex additional support needs.
17. The petitioner emphasises the consequences of poor educational support for autistic pupils, noting that they can struggle to navigate access benefits and are unable to work due to low or no qualifications. The impact of education about their experiences is highlighted as many people are now seeking answers "as to why they were failed by the education system of Scotland", want to know what can be done to change this and want their voices to be heard.

Action

18. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting —

- [PE1870/A Patricia Hewitt submission of 20 June 2021](#)
- [PE1870/D Annette Masson submission of 13 September 2021](#)

All written submissions received on the petition can be viewed on the petition [webpage](#).

PE1870: ENSURE TEACHERS OF AUTISTIC PUPILS ARE APPROPRIATELY QUALIFIED

Petitioner

Edward Fowler

Date Lodged

21 June 2021

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce legislation requiring teachers of autistic pupils to be appropriately qualified to improve educational outcomes.

Previous action

I have contacted MSPs and spoken with education authorities but things have not changed.

Background information

Special conditions apply to the employment of teachers of hearing-impaired and visually impaired pupils. Both require teachers to obtain appropriate qualifications before they can be employed by education authority to teach such pupils. I would like to petition the Scottish Parliament so teachers who teach children with autism must have an appropriate autism qualification. I would like special conditions to apply to the employment of teachers of autistic pupils. I would like the education authority to only employ teachers with an appropriate autism qualification to teach pupils with autism.

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1870](#): Ensure teachers of autistic pupils are appropriately qualified, lodged by Edward Fowler

Background

The petitioner is seeking legislation to provide that teachers who teach children with autism are qualified to do so. The petitioner draws a comparison with legislation concerning teachers of visually or hearing-impaired pupils.

Teachers in Scotland are required to be registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). To be registered, teachers will have a degree and a postgraduate qualification or a bachelor's degree in education.

[The Requirements for Teachers \(Scotland\) Regulations 2005](#) require local authorities to “employ adequate numbers of teachers in the schools under their management, with the appropriate professional skills and knowledge necessary to enable those teachers to undertake the teaching duties allocated to them.” The Regulations also make provision that the local authority ensure that the teachers employed “wholly or mainly” to teach visually impaired pupils, hearing-impaired pupils, or pupils with both visual and hearing impairment, have “an appropriate qualification to teach such pupils” (or are in the process of gaining such a qualification).

Autism spectrum disorders

The [World Health Organisation \(WHO\) defines Autism spectrum disorders](#) as:

“Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a diverse group of conditions. They are characterised by some degree of difficulty with social interaction and communication. Other characteristics are atypical patterns of activities and behaviours, such as difficulty with transition from one activity to another, a focus on details and unusual reactions to sensations.”

WHO continues:

“The abilities and needs of people with autism vary and can evolve over time. While some people with autism can live independently, others have severe disabilities and require life-long care and support. Autism often has an impact on education and employment opportunities. In addition, the demands on families providing care and support can be significant. Societal attitudes and the level of support provided by local and national authorities are important factors determining the quality of life of people with autism.”

The [National Autistic Society](#) estimates that around 1% of people are on the autism spectrum and there are around 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK.

Autism is likely to be considered an additional support need (ASN). A person has an ASN if, for whatever reason, they are unlikely to be able to benefit from school education without additional support. [The Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#) provides that local authorities identify the additional support required by every child for whose school education it is responsible and “make adequate and efficient provision” for those children.

Wider ASN policy

The Scottish Government [collects statistics](#) on the reasons for pupils requiring additional support in publicly funded schools. In 2020, around 22,000 pupils were identified as having ASD (roughly 3% of pupils). In the same year, around 9,000 (roughly 1%) pupils were identified under the categories of Visual impairment, Hearing impairment, and Deafblind (an individual might appear in more than one category, however).

The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000 provides for a presumption that children with additional support needs will be educated in mainstream schools. The 2020 pupils census also shows that 93% of pupils identified as having an ASN spent all their time in mainstream classes and 5% spent no time in mainstream classes. Taking pupils assessed or declared disabled, a subset of pupils with an ASN, 63% spent all their time in mainstream classes, 31% spent no time in mainstream classes.

The Scottish Government established a review of the implementation of additional support for learning (ASL) in schools

in 2019. [The review reported in June 2020](#). The review made a number of recommendations in relation to teacher education. In response to the review, the Scottish Government and COSLA accepted the recommendations and [set out an action plan in October 2020](#) on how those recommendations would be taken forward. Progress made against the action is expected to be monitored and reported on by October 2021

In September 2018, Children in Scotland, Scottish Autism and the National Autistic Society [published a report about the experiences of children with autism missing education](#).

Teacher education

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses in Scotland are accredited by the GTCS. ITE in Scotland is provided by Higher Education Institutions in partnership with schools and local education authorities.

The programmes for ITE are generally either four year degree programmes or one year Professional Graduate Diploma in Education courses. In either case, the student teacher is required to undertake placements in schools. Newly qualified teachers are Provisionally Registered with the GTCS and only attain Full Registration on successful completion of the Teacher Induction Scheme - their probation year - or through a 'Flexible Route'.

ITE is the beginning of teacher education. After attaining full registration, teachers are expected to be committed to career-long professional learning.

Key Organisations and relevant links

Scottish Government

COSLA

General Teaching Council for Scotland

[Scottish Council of Deans of Education](#)

Teaching trade unions

[Children in Scotland](#)

[Scottish Autism](#)

[National Autistic Society](#)

Parents' organisations - [Connect](#) and [NPFS](#)

Youth organisations, i.e. [Young Scot](#), [SYP](#), and Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland.

Ned Sharratt
Senior Researcher
23/07/2021

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe B

Scottish Government submission of 24 June 2021

PE1870/B

As Committee may be aware, the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004 (as amended) provides a comprehensive legislative framework for supporting children and young people to overcome barriers to their learning and achieve their full learning potential. The 2004 Act places duties on education authorities to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils, including pupils with autism.

The Scottish Government has worked with key partners (including the National Autistic Society, Scottish Autism, and Children in Scotland) in delivering a range of professional learning opportunities to help teachers in supporting autistic learners and their families.

It is important to understand that all teachers are highly likely to meet autistic learners in every school they work in. Around 3% of children have autistic spectrum disorder and 86% of autistic children and young people attend mainstream schools.

A core component of teachers' professional commitment is understanding the needs of all learners. The General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS) recently revised Teaching Standards (which come into effect in August 2021) recognise the barriers to wellbeing and learning that pupils with additional support needs, including autism may encounter. Additionally the GTCS's framework to accredit initial teacher education programmes also considers how programmes support equality and diversity by raising awareness of a range of neuro-developmental differences, including autism.

In December 2020, we published the [Autism Action Plan](#). The action plan sets out measures which seek to improve the support to children and young people with autism in Scotland's schools and ensure that meaningful change is implemented to support autistic pupils to reach their full learning potential. The plan has been developed collaboratively by stakeholders, including the National Autistic Society, Scottish Autism, Children in Scotland, the GTCS and Education Scotland and will support teachers' on-going development in this area.

In response to the Autism Action Plan the Scottish Government has recently been involved in the development and launch of Autism resource materials that Initial Teacher Education (ITE) institutions will use within their programmes for student teachers. Individual providers will incorporate this content into their initial teaching education programmes. ITE providers are moving towards a model where there is a 'golden thread' of inclusion that runs through all learning. This resource comprises four progressive units with pre-prepared PowerPoint presentations, Key Messages, reflective questions, links to video clips and related reading references. A full script and set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are provided to support lecturers.

Additionally the Autism Toolbox helps teachers, at all stages of their careers, to maintain and update their skills and knowledge in this area. This has been developed by partners, funded by the Scottish Government and is managed by Education Scotland. The Tool Box provides:-

- Up to date information set within educational, health and social context of Autism and inclusive practice;
- Free information, guidance and resources and professional opportunities for education practitioners, schools and local authorities in Autism and inclusive practice;
- An overview of the Autism identification and support pathway.

Further, the [Additional Support for Learning Action Plan](#), published in October 2020, in response to [Angela Morgan's Review of Implementation of Additional Support for Learning](#), sets out a range of measures we will take to enhance the experiences of children and young people with additional support needs. This includes a number of actions which seek to ensure that teacher education and development supports teachers to meet the needs of pupils with additional support needs, including those with autism.

The Scottish Government does not, therefore, consider that legislation is required at this point in time, to ensure that teachers of autistic pupils are appropriately qualified. The actions that have been taken will ensure that teachers at all stages of their careers are able to access support and resources that will allow them to assist autistic learners to improve their educational outcomes. Registration is also available in additional support needs (ASN) from the GTCS which covers the 3 to 18 years age range. This involves holding an appropriate ASN award with a

sufficiently broad and general content to cover pupils with a range of additional support needs, for example the Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma in Inclusive Practice.

In regard to the employment of teachers of hearing-impaired and visually impaired pupils, this is covered by The Requirements for Teachers (Scotland) Regulations 2005. The guidance to support these regulations sets out competences that comprise the specialist knowledge, understanding and skills required of teachers. However, it acknowledges that there is a range of pathways, for example, through completion of a post-graduate diploma, accredited prior learning and/or local authority-based, or other, training.

A report on [The Qualification of Teachers of pupils with visual impairment, or pupils with hearing impairment or pupils with multi-sensory impairment](#) (vision and hearing impairment) was published in Oct 2016. Following the outcome of this report which included a survey of local authorities, a new working group was set up by Scottish Government to review the Competency guidance for teachers of children and young people who are hearing impaired or visually impaired or both hearing and visually impaired.

The small working group was set up in January 2019 to review the competency guidance for Teachers of the Deaf and Teachers of the Visually Impaired. Members of the group are the Scottish Sensory Centre, Scottish Government and GTCS. COSLA and ADES have also been kept up to date with the group's work by correspondence. There have been delays in progressing this work due to the impact of COVID-19 and the focus on education recovery. The working group will be re-established shortly and the draft guidance will be reviewed and prepared to go out for public consultation in autumn 2021 with a view to publishing in winter 2021.

I trust that this reassures you of the positive action the Scottish Government is taking to ensure improved educational outcomes for autistic learners and support for their families. We will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure that these initiatives are implemented and effective.

Annexe C

Petitioner submission of 10 September 2021

PE1870/C - Ensure teachers of autistic pupils are appropriately qualified

Autistic children at mainstream schools are not understood by teachers who do not have the knowledge or training in Autism. Teachers are not aware of the 'Triad of Impairment', 'sensory issues' or of all the 'co-morbid conditions' attached to Autism which gives the Autistic pupil very complex additional support needs.

Evidence points that to teach Autistic children, teachers must have training and understanding of the children who have deficits in 'executive functioning', 'theory of mind' and 'cognitive impairment'. At this time teachers do not receive this training. They cannot possibly be expected to be able to teach or understand the behaviours of an Autistic child.

At the very beginning of their primary schooling many autistic pupils are made out to be disruptive or have 'behavioural problems' which sets the precedence of the child's treatment throughout the rest of their mainstream schooling. Many of these children end up on reduced hours, part-time, flexi learning or out of school.

An autism qualified teacher would understand that behind every behaviour of concern (or as the terminology used by education authorities 'challenging behaviour') there is an unmet need.

We know many autistic adults and young people who have been badly let down by their Education Authority. Many had the real potential of attaining good qualifications but were not supported or understood at school and were forced to leave with nothing by age of 16.

Many have just been abandoned and have no purpose in their life even ending up destitute as they do not have the skills to navigate the system to claim benefits they may be entitled to. Some with help receive benefits for the rest of their lives with no prospect of ever attaining a job. Many of these Autistic people could have gone on to have productive lives working and contributing to society, if only they had been given the chance of an appropriate education.

Others have in fact managed to educate themselves in adulthood and are now realising how badly treated they were in education misunderstood and failed. Some can in fact get through university in later life. Many are

now on social media groups stating that they would like answers to why they were failed by the education system of Scotland and what can be done about it, and they want their voices to be heard.

The first case I dealt with 12 years ago was a child excluded from school for challenging behaviours, since then I have helped support many others in a similar situation. All that has changed is more multi agency meetings but still the teachers are not trained to teach the Autistic child.

Recent cases involve Autistic children being put through the children's hearing system for not attending school. Autistic children are being recorded as non-attendance and the children and their families are having the ordeal of going through the criminal justice system.

I am now meeting parents who have gained their own qualifications in Autism, Post Grad and Masters. The parents are far more qualified in Autism than the professionals dealing with their children. These parents get qualified to help understand their own child but when they attend meetings with the professionals dealing with their child they are faced with people who are not on the same level of understanding and they are still being treated as though it's their parenting skills at fault.

The Scottish Government's report, The Microsegmentation of the Autism Spectrum: research project, published in March 2018 stated:

"3.17 In terms of outcomes for families, a number of these have been well documented since the 1970s. Historical findings in relation to parents include the following: mothers of children with autism suffer more stress than mothers of children with Down's Syndrome (Holroyd & McArthur, 1976; Sanders & Morgan, 1997); one third of mothers of children with autism suffer from depression and marital relationships are often adversely affected (DeMyer, 1979); the chronicity of the disorder can leave parents exhausted, pessimistic and at risk of burnout (DeMyer & Goldberg, 1983); and families suffer economic impact and financial worries (Bristol & Schopler, 1983)."

Many of the families we have dealt with over the past 12 years have suffered the experiences above which can all be contributed to their child not receiving the correct help in the education setting.

Our two local Authorities do not have an Autism Strategy that has been actioned which means services and supports that are needed may not be in place. Having teachers qualified in autism would be a positive step.

I ask the Government to introduce legislation requiring teachers of Autistic children to be appropriately qualified to improve educational outcomes.