

SUBMISSION FROM THE GRAMPIAN AUTISTIC SOCIETY

Strategy:

1. Legislation which seeks to set out a strategy for meeting the needs of people in Scotland with Autism will have a number of benefits, not least to those with Autism. Should the strategy be supported with appropriate resources, the effectiveness of which would be supported by the National Audit Office (NAO) research, the Scottish Government will be making a significant contribution towards creating a Scotland fairer for all. A strategy for autism, supported by appropriate legislation and local authority guidance, would ensure consistency of approach nationwide. This will remove, at a stroke, differentials between local authority approaches to service provision for those with autism and bring Scotland into line with the rest of the UK.
2. It is the case that individuals, particularly at the higher end of the spectrum, are being refused access to necessary supports owing to them falling outwith departmental structures such as learning disability and mental health. This Bill would contribute towards removing the structural disadvantage people with autism face. Appropriate guidance backed up with legislation is one way of ensuring services are delivered appropriately. A strategy should also increase public knowledge and understanding of this disorder which would have numerous advantages to Scottish society.
3. There is a need for specialised support for people who have diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). They have a disability that makes inclusion in the school or work place difficult. As a result they often miss out on opportunities to achieve their potential and bring their particular talents to the work place. Consequently many can become dependent upon benefits when in fact they are more than able to contribute to the workplace. An autism bill would recognise the unique nature of people with ASD and bring recognition that they should receive appropriate support in the work place

Guidance by Ministers:

4. Grampian Autistic Society believes that guidance is required to ensure all relevant bodies have a clear understanding of their respective responsibilities in relation to the implementation of the Act. The Act could go further and highlight the need for implementation groups, possibly local, and inclusive of those with autism where reasonable. However it is still beneficial to have legislation in place which supports the promotion of good quality services for those with autism. Without this legislation and guidance there would be a concern that strategic drift may occur and the status quo prevail which in these current economic circumstances is no longer an option. We believe that the Government will see the economic benefit of adopting this Bill through more efficient use of resources. Appropriate guidance will provide clarity of expectations and responsibilities for the benefit of those seeking to

access appropriate services. This clarity will reduce some of the stresses and anxieties faced by families and/or relevant professionals who often find it extremely difficult and exhausting to navigate a path towards appropriate service provision and we know this will be of benefit to families concerned. Currently families can become completely exasperated by the process and often experience further disadvantage as a result of the health impacts upon the families as a whole.

5. Guidance is also required with regards to diagnostic and assessment services as it is clear that there is a lack of consistency throughout Scotland. To provide appropriate support it is critical that those suspected or confirmed as having an ASD are assessed by someone with knowledge and experience of assessing individuals with an ASD. This task is currently undertaken by individuals or teams of professionals from differing backgrounds who may have had many years experience in their current roles however little or no training in autism.
6. Guidance on training is necessary not only for those who deliver services but also for those who plan services. This guidance could lead to improved communications between departments, improve multi-agency co-operation and in general increase the dialogue between policy makers, service providers and practitioners and service users which intuitively will improve the quality of life experienced by those with autism.
7. Grampian Autistic Society is committed to contributing towards multi-disciplinary working and this consultation process affords us this opportunity and we welcome your approach to consultation. We can provide evidence and are willing to provide this in written or verbal form as appropriate.

Grampian Autistic Society
8 October 2010