

SUBMISSION FROM ELSPETH JOHNSON

1. As a grandparent of a child with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), I welcome the Autism (Scotland) Bill and particularly its central focus of an autism strategy for meeting the needs of those with ASD throughout their lives.
2. A strategy is essential and I note that the 'draft' strategy proposed by Shona Robison, Minister for Public Health and Sport, focuses on diagnosis and post-school support, neither of which are currently the full responsibility of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Acts 2004 and 2009. However, surely a strategy for autism will be better implemented and audited within the legal framework of the proposed Bill and embedded within educational legislation? After all, autism is a developmental condition and should be identified and supported within educational provision, whether this is pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary or lifelong. Where other specialists are involved, such as health or social work, then the education sector is well placed to co-ordinate provision.
3. Several local authority respondents appear to consider that the 2004 and 2009 legislation already meet the needs of autistic children, as well as all other children with special needs. However, case study suggests the needs of some ASD children are not met. For example—
 - **Access to Diagnosis:** I shall wait with interest, statistical data re effective and timeous diagnosis of ASD (such data is not available from all authorities). 'Hearsay' evidence suggests it often takes so long to access diagnostic assessment, through NHS, that serious delays in meeting the learning needs of the child occur.
 - **Delayed diagnosis:** may also occur if nursery/school teachers take undue time to make the connection between a child's behaviour and possible ASD. It is commendable that the Education Department has provided every school with an Autism Toolbox that should help teachers in this respect. However, I have yet to meet a single teacher who is aware of the existence of this valuable resource within their school. Without the back-up of training and support for its users, such a resource is a wasted resource.
4. Both these examples are evidence not only of the need of a strategy for autism but for a strategy with 'teeth'!! This is why the strategy must be backed by enabling legislation.
5. A legal framework as proposed by the Bill will demand more specific audit of the guidance and relevant services proposed by the Bill. (Sections 3 and 4). This

should become the process, of continual review and improvement, through which every child and adult with ASD can eventually expect to access the services and support to meet their needs, regardless of where they live in Scotland.

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