

SUBMISSION FROM MARK STEWART

1. Our son was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome when he was five years of age. Our subsequent dealings with professional bodies and in particular the local education authority put great strain on him as well as ourselves. Whilst we encountered some knowledgeable and well intentioned people, it must be said that on the whole ignorance prevailed. As an instance, a speech therapist who understood the condition unfortunately left to be replaced by one who claimed to have knowledge but was unable to demonstrate this, putting his difficulties down to poor parenting. We found the educational authorities to be, largely, particularly ignorant and arrogant, placing intolerable pressure on our family unit. The legislation in place (Record of Needs) proved to be ineffectual – so many obstacles were placed in your way to prevent access to the necessary provision, (ie, it took the best part of a year to win an appeal over the terms of the record - our son's immediate needs had understandably changed over this period of time and this cycle simply repeated itself over the years). Any new legislation must be more responsive and readily accountable to be effective.
2. Since leaving school, adult learning assessed our son as having a learning disability but was not in a position to prioritise him enough to offer any help – again, the onus is thrown back on ourselves to find support. Appropriate further education opportunities are scarce and future employment opportunities virtually non-existent – yet, with the appropriate support and understanding, the undoubted abilities and skills our son and many other autistic people could develop are beyond doubt. We hope that future provision brings us a step closer to realising this goal.

Mark Stewart
4 October 2010