

SUBMISSION FROM MALCOLM HAMILTON

1. I approach this evidence purely from a personal viewpoint.

Section 2(5)(a)

2. I am a diagnosed High Functioning Asperger's. This means that although I have an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) that by and large I can manage my own day to day affairs.
3. I achieved my diagnosis as an adult, three years ago aged 41. I do wish I had been diagnosed as a child but then the condition was very much unrecognised. This led to a childhood of abject misery consisting mostly of bullying, very few friends and poor social skills.
4. I was lucky enough to have the benefit of a father in the Armed Forces who benefited from a boarding school allowance which at least meant that my education itself was of a sufficient standard to allow my entry into university.
5. With regard to my diagnosis I found myself in the position of approaching my GP who was totally unaware of how to source an adult diagnosis. He initially referred me to a child psychologist who rejected the referral.
6. It was left to me to research the options which I did by contacting the National Autistic Society who informed me of the three locations they knew of at that time who offered an adult diagnosis.
7. I took this list to my GP who then had to make a case to the local unpac committee (unplanned care) of the health board for them to grant approval for the referral. I had already agreed that I would fund my own travel and accommodation costs which helped with their decision.
8. I was duly referred to the Scottish Society for Autism in Alloa who were kind enough to accept me and managed to diagnosis me with only one consultation.
9. I feel that my diagnosis journey was not as simple as it should have been and was totally driven by myself. It started in June 2006 and was completed in April 2008. A total of a 22 month wait for what was in fact a half day assessment and I'm given to understand after speaking to fellow "Aspies" that in fact that was a fairly simple quick diagnosis. I feel that it was only due to the fact that I knew my GP as a fellow health care professional and the nature of our professional relationship that he took me seriously.
10. I suspect that others who do not have the benefit of being as high functioning as myself would struggle in achieving a diagnosis. It would appear at the moment to be very much a matter of chance as to where you live as to your chances of diagnosis.

Section 2(5)(b)

11. I feel that it is important for the correct identification of those with ASD for several reasons.
12. From my own point of view it has helped me with my own mental health, it has helped me rationalise my life, analyse decisions I made in the past and explain some of the choices I made in life.
13. Now that I know my diagnosis I can put in place strategies to help me make correct decisions at appropriate times.
14. My diagnosis has helped me maintain a success personal relationship as both myself and my wife can allow for my Asperger's in our lives, difficult though it is for her.
15. From a work perspective I have had to be open about my Asperger's to ensure that there are no misunderstanding between myself and my work colleagues, as has happened in the past with near disastrous consequences for my employment and my mental health. It was only resolved with the intervention of an advocate.
16. My diagnosis also means that if I was to access such services as health care or the judicial system then I would be able to contact a suitable advocate if necessary.
17. Does the Bill class ASD as a disability that would e covered by the Equalities Act 2010? If so how does somebody know they have protection if they do not know they have a disability?

Section 2(5)(c)

18. Again from a purely personal view I feel I currently have little need of services though I would have welcomed more support as a youngster.
19. I am judged to be high functioning but still require support on occasion, as autism is a spectral disorder there must be range of support needs and thus there needs to be an assessment process to ascertain this.
20. For example as I said I am high functioned have a responsible job yet have great difficulty going for a haircut, from having to sit and wait to the sensations of actually having it cut, without even counting all the inane chatter that usually accompanies a haircut, are all stressful to me, (at least I no longer cry as I did as a child).
21. One aspect that I would have valued support, and still would, is in finance. I find that finance is an area with which I struggle, especially with regard to issues such as tax. It is difficult for many people with ASD to ask for help when they should either due to reluctance to deal with new people, a new situation or their tendency to procrastinate when

faced with a problem. I have had tax difficulties and told HMRC that I had ASD and needed things explained more fully but it was to no avail, what seems like simple information to some people can be completely confusing to those with ASD, especially if just repeated over and over but more slowly.

Section 2(5)(f)

22. Training should be undertaken by all staff who deal with the public but especially those with whom contact may occur in a more stressful environment. The more stressful an environment, the more likely for behaviours to occur.
23. Thus staff such as police, council employees, tax officials, medical staff, dental staff, court officials, prison staff need to have awareness raising and training.

Comments on the consultation process

24. You will no doubt get responses from local authorities stating that although they support the Bill it is unnecessary as they already have provisions in place. In my experience they may have some provisions but usually just for children; unfortunately ASD is a life long condition and there are many undiagnosed adults who require help as well as diagnosed ones.
25. You are asking for evidence from a group of people who by the very nature of their condition are generally more reclusive and less likely to break their routine and contact you. Or if like me they do contact you, find it extremely difficult to exactly express what they mean.

Malcolm Hamilton
4 October 2010