

SUBMISSION FROM AUTISM INITIATIVES SCOTLAND

1. Autism Initiatives Scotland is a provider of direct support to people with autism and their families. We currently support over 150 adults with autism and over 450 adults with asperger's syndrome have accessed our one stop shop in Edinburgh. We have grown rapidly over the last five years in response to need and now employ almost 400 staff across Scotland.
2. Our experience in addressing unmet needs has highlighted the extent of the gaps in service provision that still exist.
3. We are involved in a variety of autism strategy groups across Scotland and also we have an international presence through our links with Autism Europe and the World Autism Alliance. In these forums, it is evident that that understanding and range of support to people with autism in the UK, and particularly in Scotland, is as advanced as anywhere else. However, in Scotland, significant gaps still exist, particularly in ensuring that good practice is understood and shared.
4. Legislation could provide a framework for ensuring that good practice is embedded in service provision across Scotland.
5. It is increasingly difficult for people with autism to integrate into their communities. Society's willingness to accept anything other than the "norm" is continually decreasing and difference is more noticed and disapproved of than ever. In addition, legislative frameworks, such as care standards are based on a perceived wisdom on what good outcomes for people are and do not take account of the different and atypical lifestyles that some people with autism would aspire to. Legislation specific to autism would underline Scotland's willingness to accept diversity, understanding of the difference of individuals with autism and desire to develop a society based on acceptance, understanding and positive belief in the value of each person.
6. There is clear evidence that people who may have been on the autism spectrum are behind many of society's greatest advancements and achievements. The ability of people with autism to focus on detail and avoid other distractions can lead to great achievements in their chosen field. We need to ensure that Scotland does not waste the contribution that people with autism can make to society.
7. Having condition specific legislation for autism will highlight the importance of the contribution people with autism can make to Scotland's society.
8. We believe that the recent government *Towards a Scottish Autism Strategy* is a significant step in the right direction. However, too many of its recommendations refer to things which should be "considered" or current activities "assessed" and there are not enough recommendations that give clear expectations and responsibilities about long term action and direction.

9. Underpinning this strategy with a legislative framework and clear expectations of statutory agencies would provide a robustness to the strategy which would in time make a positive impact on people with autism and consequently on Scotland's society.
10. It is essential that particular attention is paid to—
 - a) Autism in adults – Whilst there is still progress to be made in children and education services, resources for adults are much less robust and dependent on where someone lives.
 - b) The employability of people with autism – Many people with autism have significant skills which if harnessed could make a dramatic and important contribution to Scotland. However a range of employment support services are required that can meet the unique needs of people with autism. We believe that all people with autism can continue to learn and develop and make an occupational contribution to society. There the introduction of legislation, which would lead to improved services for people with autism in Scotland, could also save significant amounts of money.
11. In development of autism strategies and initiatives, too often resources and attention are easily diverted into identifying the numbers of people with autism and levels of unmet need rather than actually addressing those needs. We hope that legislation would focus attention on action that makes a difference in the lives of people with autism rather than endless analysis of needs, prevalence and diagnosis.
12. Consequently Autism Initiatives Scotland supports the proposal for an Autism (Scotland) Bill.

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