

PE1953/K: Review Education Support staff roles

Petitioner written submission, 1 March 2025

Since my last submission in March 2023, I am still awaiting an update on the Bute House Agreement: Explore in collaboration with trade unions and other key stakeholders options for the development of an accredited qualification and registration programme for Additional Support Needs Assistants.

This specific report on these outcomes comes from the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party – Shared Policy Programme, Public Services Recovery and Reform in 2021.

According to an article published by The Scotsman on the 27th of February this year, the Scottish Government were urged to ‘hold a major review of staffing and funding after a 768% rise in pupils with ASN.’ Audit Scotland’s recent report on the number of pupils with Additional Support Needs in Scottish schools found that it has increased by eight-fold since 2004; it states that now over 40% of children attending Scottish schools have additional support needs or disabilities. Whilst the exponential rise of Autism and ADHD in children and young people is a concerning issue, the root cause is unknown. Both teachers and support staff in schools are not adequately equipped to deal with this. Support staff in particular still require no training upon entering and working with the most vulnerable children.

I recently dealt with a case in which an Education Support Staff employee in an ASL school had been employed with no induction, training on risk assessments, knowledge of health and safety, de-escalation training, BSL certification, Makaton certification, or any specialist knowledge of complex disabilities and CALMS-intervention training. This member of staff within the first year of employment suffered serious workplace injuries that prevented them from working and financially suffered as a result. Education Support Staff in ASL schools often carry out medical duties including oxygen tanks, insertion of catheters, administration of medications and hoisting or lifting for intimate care. If the same member of staff were employed by the NHS they would be paid double and required to register as a trained paediatric nurse for children with disabilities.

I was told final proposals for the exploration in collaboration with trade unions and other key stakeholders options for the development of an accredited qualification and registration programme for Additional Support Needs Assistant would be brought forward in Autumn 2023, we are now in 2025.

According to the Additional Support for Learning: Action Plan, published in 2020, 4.1.1: Recommendation 'assessing spending on additional support for learning across services...outcomes for children and young people... highlighting good practice and gaps.' Good practice starts with regulation and certificated training. However, this is not required in our roles. Recommendation 1.2.4, 'The investment in Pupil Support Assistants must be measured for impact and improvement on children and young people.' How can Pupil Support Assistants educate and support children with complex and additional needs if they do not have required training in BSL or Makaton? How are these children expected to learn when these staff have no required qualifications or training to communicate with children who are nonverbal and have extremely complex medical and physical disabilities?

There are already qualifications in place for education support staff such as Higher National Certificate and Diploma in Additional Support Needs. This could allow pupil support staff to register with GTCS and offer a career pathway.

I would ask the Committee to liaise with the Cabinet Secretary to provide an update on what action will be taken from the upcoming draft report from Bute House Agreement: Explore in collaboration with trade unions and other key stakeholders options for the development of an accredited qualification and registration programme for Additional Support Needs Assistants.

It is time to put all these policies and action plans into place. Councils are crying out for support staff in schools and are unable to recruit or retain these staff due to workplace violence, lack of training, low pay and no career pathways.