

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1870](#): Ensure teachers of autistic pupils are appropriately qualified, lodged by Edward Fowler

Background

The petitioner is seeking legislation to provide that teachers who teach children with autism are qualified to do so. The petitioner draws a comparison with legislation concerning teachers of visually or hearing-impaired pupils.

Teachers in Scotland are required to be registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). To be registered, teachers will have a degree and a postgraduate qualification or a bachelor's degree in education.

[The Requirements for Teachers \(Scotland\) Regulations 2005](#) require local authorities to “employ adequate numbers of teachers in the schools under their management, with the appropriate professional skills and knowledge necessary to enable those teachers to undertake the teaching duties allocated to them.” The Regulations also make provision that the local authority ensure that the teachers employed “wholly or mainly” to teach visually impaired pupils, hearing-impaired pupils, or pupils with both visual and hearing impairment, have “an appropriate qualification to teach such pupils” (or are in the process of gaining such a qualification).

Autism spectrum disorders

The [World Health Organisation \(WHO\) defines Autism spectrum disorders](#) as:

“Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a diverse group of conditions. They are characterised by some degree of difficulty with social interaction and communication. Other characteristics are atypical patterns of activities and behaviours, such as difficulty with transition from one activity to another, a focus on details and unusual reactions to sensations.”

WHO continues:

“The abilities and needs of people with autism vary and can evolve over time. While some people with autism can live independently, others have severe disabilities and require life-long care and support. Autism often has an impact on education and employment opportunities. In addition, the demands on families providing care and support can be significant. Societal attitudes and the level of support provided by local and national authorities are important factors determining the quality of life of people with autism.”

The [National Autistic Society](#) estimates that around 1% of people are on the autism spectrum and there are around 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK.

Autism is likely to be considered an additional support need (ASN). A person has an ASN if, for whatever reason, they are unlikely to be able to benefit from school education without additional support. [The Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#) provides that local authorities identify the additional support required by every child for whose school education it is responsible and “make adequate and efficient provision” for those children.

Wider ASN policy

The Scottish Government [collects statistics](#) on the reasons for pupils requiring additional support in publicly funded schools. In 2020, around 22,000 pupils were identified as having ASD (roughly 3% of pupils). In the same year, around 9,000 (roughly 1%) pupils were identified under the categories of Visual impairment, Hearing impairment, and Deafblind (an individual might appear in more than one category, however).

The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000 provides for a presumption that children with additional support needs will be educated in mainstream schools. The 2020 pupils census also shows that 93% of pupils identified as having an ASN spent all their time in mainstream classes and 5% spent no time in mainstream classes. Taking pupils assessed or declared disabled, a subset of pupils with an ASN, 63% spent all their time in mainstream classes, 31% spent no time in mainstream classes.

The Scottish Government established a review of the implementation of additional support for learning (ASL) in schools

in 2019. [The review reported in June 2020](#). The review made a number of recommendations in relation to teacher education. In response to the review, the Scottish Government and COSLA accepted the recommendations and [set out an action plan in October 2020](#) on how those recommendations would be taken forward. Progress made against the action is expected to be monitored and reported on by October 2021

In September 2018, Children in Scotland, Scottish Autism and the National Autistic Society [published a report about the experiences of children with autism missing education](#).

Teacher education

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses in Scotland are accredited by the GTCS. ITE in Scotland is provided by Higher Education Institutions in partnership with schools and local education authorities.

The programmes for ITE are generally either four year degree programmes or one year Professional Graduate Diploma in Education courses. In either case, the student teacher is required to undertake placements in schools. Newly qualified teachers are Provisionally Registered with the GTCS and only attain Full Registration on successful completion of the Teacher Induction Scheme - their probation year - or through a 'Flexible Route'.

ITE is the beginning of teacher education. After attaining full registration, teachers are expected to be committed to career-long professional learning.

Key Organisations and relevant links

Scottish Government

COSLA

General Teaching Council for Scotland

[Scottish Council of Deans of Education](#)

Teaching trade unions

[Children in Scotland](#)

[Scottish Autism](#)

[National Autistic Society](#)

Parents' organisations - [Connect](#) and [NPFS](#)

Youth organisations, i.e. [Young Scot](#), [SYP](#), and Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland.

Ned Sharratt
Senior Researcher
23/07/2021

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP