

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee
Neurodivergence in Scotland
20 February 2026

NASUWT welcomes the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee inquiry into Neurodivergence in Scotland.

NASUWT is the Teachers' Union, representing teachers and school leaders in all sectors of education and across all 32 local authorities in Scotland.

SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

NASUWT notes the recent Scottish Parliament Public Audit Committee inquiry into Additional Support for Learning and would direct the Committee to our detailed evidence on ASN support in schools, which in summary set out that:

- *Just 2% of teachers in Scotland say that the pupils they teach who have additional support needs (ASN) always receive the support they are entitled to, with over a third (35%) saying these pupils rarely or never receive the support they need.*
- *While the number of pupils with ASN in Scottish schools is rising and their needs are becoming more complex, funding, support and the number of places in specialist provision are all dwindling.*
- *While 92% of respondents said the number of pupils they teach with ASN has increased in the last five years and 93% said the needs of the pupils*

with ASN that they teach have become more complex during this time, 69% said that the level of support received by pupils they teach with ASN has decreased over the last five years.

- Funding and resource pressures are evident with nearly half (47%) saying that there are pupils in their school who have been identified as needing specialist provision, but remain in their mainstream school because specialist settings are full. 43% said their local authority has reduced the number of places in specialist settings in order to manage budgets.*
- Over half (53%) said the number of specialist teachers employed to support pupils with ASN in their school has declined in the last five years. 62% said the number of specialist support staff has decreased during this period.*
- Unsurprisingly therefore, 94% said that the workload of teachers and school leaders in their school has increased as a result of underfunding for specialist services for ASN.*
- Only 2% of respondents say they always receive the support they need to teach pupils with ASN effectively. 46% say they rarely or never receive the support they need.*

[Consultation Response - Public Audit Committee - Additional Support for Learning](#)

FAIR WORK FOR NEURODIVERGENT TEACHERS PROJECT

While the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee has explored the broad general experience of workers and the experience of children and young people in schools during the inquiry to date, NASUWT is keen that the committee particularly considers the perspective of Neurodivergent teachers as part of the system evaluation. NASUWT is uniquely placed to provide that context as we are currently undertaking a project 'Fair Work for Neurodivergent Teachers'.

From casework and feedback from members, we know that Neurodivergent teachers have had negative workplace experiences and have greater difficulty in accessing Fair Work and leadership opportunities.

NASUWT has been centring the voice of lived experience of our Neurodivergent members to co-create advice and identify workplace supports & campaign actions to build a movement for change in Scottish education. At the first meeting in November 2025, our Neurodivergent teacher members met in-person to share experiences and to start to build a framework to tackle institutional inequality in schools. It was clear from feedback that this approach was well received:

“It was refreshing to hear the bluntness of what we should be doing to ensure inclusion for all Neurodivergent individuals, adults and children alike”

“When is the Revolution? This was personally very moving and captured many of my frustrations over the past 5 years and I would be keen to back this movement!”

“This was the first time I’d hear anyone discuss Neurodivergence accurately”

“Great to be able to be in an honest and open environment to share ideas and solutions”

After the event we saw an increased number of members wish to participate in the NASUWT Neurodiversity Support Network and attend trade union events; one member who has become recently engaged in union activity explained *“I’ve been telling folk what being included and feeling safe is like. To be able to be open and speak freely. Powerful stuff”*

It was very clear after the November event that there was an appetite within our membership to continue to work collaboratively and a wish to build on that first event with a smaller cohort to better develop the concepts underpinning any

advice and proposed campaign. We asked for volunteers from those who attended the November workshop to come together again for a second event.

A second small roundtable took place on 7 February 2026. The next step for NASUWT is to utilise the engagement and feedback gathered from the two workshop events and collate these into a coherent campaign plan and draft advice note: these will then be shared with our engaged activists' group for further comments and feedback, enabling workers with lived experience to continue to direct the work of the union.

For the purpose of this Parliamentary inquiry however, some of the early messages received from members during this project are set out below.

Ethos and Culture

Neurodivergent teachers described the warmth of feeling part of a group and how this compared with their experience in their workplace where they felt separate, not included and undervalued. Many described the feeling of being bullied and made fun of at work.

"It is hard to do the job when you feel like you don't belong"

The importance of good management in listening to workers and how this can impact workplace culture was strongly stressed. Management which relied heavily upon control measures and did not utilise professional trust was considered particularly unsafe.

Equally, the need to be able to centre the voice of lived experience was highlighted.

"If the Council is running an Autism Awareness Day this should be run by autistic people"

Teacher Voice

When Neurodivergent teachers did articulate their experience and had an opportunity to have their voice heard, many found they were not believed.

“Going to the staffroom is overwhelming, but when I explained this I was not believed – why am I not trusted to express my own needs?”

It was noted that school environments were often hierarchical and the perception that networking determined your likelihood of professional progression was clearly articulated.

Nevertheless, having senior leaders who brought their own lived experience of Neurodivergence or autism was viewed very positively and this was identified as a driver for change in education systems as well as shifts in culture.

“Visibility would recognise that the people who are Neurodiverse and show the things they have achieved in society – this must be more meaningful than a laminated sheet of a specific individual on a classroom wall”

School Buildings

Many Neurodivergent teachers found school buildings challenging due to sensory needs and further noted that the onus was often on individuals to raise the requirement for individual adjustments, when no consideration had been made of the overarching working and learning environment:

“It took me seven months to recover from working in an open plan classroom”

Buildings were described as too bright, too noisy, too hot and many times with disruptively loud bells or buzzing noises.

“The environment in schools is extremely othering”

Informed Employers

The awareness and support which is given to pupils, rarely extends to teachers and this incongruence, alongside having to mask at work, causes significant trauma. Teachers reported that Neurodivergence was not seen as a significant condition requiring time or support for staff and that schools and employers did not understand that failing to provide such support would damage the overall health, wellbeing and safety of Neurodivergent teachers.

“What they say and what they do, there is an incongruence - we need to get it right for staff as well as pupils – there is a double standard in teaching”

Teachers described in detail the pain of masking and trying to blend in or cancel your personality and the suffering that resulted from masking.

Positive Contribution

It was noted by our working group that the benefits of Neurodivergence were also overlooked, with many teachers explaining they felt they were on the same wavelength as the Neurodivergent children in the school, but this skill was not recognised or valued.

“If you don’t conform you are seen as a risk, you are the problem, you are being difficult”

Teachers described being able to see problems and work systemically, without hidden agendas or subtext, but noted these skills were viewed as threats. Where a problem was raised, questions were felt to be shut down and viewed negatively. Overall, our members described an absence of Psychological Safety in the workplace which would allow Neurodivergent teachers to safely raise issues of concern.

Supports/Mentoring

Where systems are not set up to support Neurodivergent teachers, the importance of coaching and mentoring projects were underlined. Our members described feeling completely misunderstood at work and that, without supports, they were being pushed out of the workforce:

“Accountability is being weaponised as industrial gaslighting”

“I feel gaslit by management speak”

Teachers also asked for professional supervision, comparing the support available to colleagues in social work settings.

All Neurodivergent teachers who were part of our working group had experienced poor mental health, discrimination, bullying/harassment, gaslighting or had undertaken whistleblowing:

“I was described as obstreperous – difference is a threat”

It is critical that appropriate training is in place for all teachers and that any discussions would thereafter be more likely to be undertaken with empathy.

“Reasonable adjustments are not done by employers unless they are forced by the union”

Inconsistency in management approach was highlighted as causing mental anguish and leading to teachers ending up unwell and off sick.

“Different barriers are created in different employers, so you end up having to repeatedly fight individual discrimination rather than seeing systemic change”

Oftentimes the role was described as performative, that what was rewarded was visibility rather than effort and hard work. Hierarchical management and failures to credit work when undertaken were also routinely raised.

Discriminatory Probation Systems

A perfect example of systems which inhibit support for Neurodivergent teachers is the Probationer scheme. Where a Probationer Teacher has experienced harassment or discrimination they are more likely to drop out of the one year Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS) to participate in the Flexible Route, which offers minimal support and will take longer to complete.

Our member feedback is supported by the recent GTCS report

[The GTC Scotland Register - Registration Snapshot report > 6 > Equality survey of provisionally registered teachers](#)

The number of GTCS respondents with experience of bullying, harassment, racism or other discrimination on the Flexible Route was very high (27.5% compared to 9.9% on the TIS) and further, the GTCS report confirmed that *“there is greater diversity in the Flexible Route cohort across a number of equality characteristics, including age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion and caring responsibilities.”*

There was clear evidence that Neurodivergent teachers found the Teacher Induction Scheme unsuitable, and felt the system was stacked against them:

“Processes seem designed to weed out Neurodivergent teachers”

Intersectional Disadvantage

For those with multiple protected characteristics the disadvantage was often more pronounced, with intersecting experiences of racism and sexism, for example, alongside ableism. The group noted the Motion which was passed at the 2025 NASUWT Scotland Conference (below) agreeing that, while women had been discriminated at point of diagnosis and menopause was highlighted as adding additional complexity to workplace experiences, it was critical that any approach did not overshadow intersex or non-binary experiences and that there could be no one-size-fits-all approach based on gender.

“Neurodiversity and Women

That this Conference notes that more women are being diagnosed as neurodiverse, yet many women are still waiting for tests and a diagnosis of neurodevelopmental disorders.

Conference notes the wide range of waiting times in Scotland highlights the serious issues of postcode lottery to receive a diagnosis and are symptomatic of a wider waiting times crisis in our NHS.

Conference is concerned that many people do not disclose the fact that they are neurodivergent to the employer because there is a fear of losing their job and of the stigma attached.

Conference believes workplaces remain both inaccessible and unsafe for many women, when the employer does not always understand what neurodiversity is and the needs of the person who is neurodivergent.

Conference believes that unions need to support these women to excel and thrive at work and also to educate and be accepted by employers and fellow employees.

Conference believes that unions need to campaign alongside others to reduce the barriers and challenges that neurodivergent workers continue to face and tackle the stigma and misconceptions about neurodiversity and calls on the Scotland Executive Council to:

- develop a model workplace policy focused on neurodiversity and women in the workplace which includes training for reps and activists to enable them to signpost members to the help they need;*
- work with employers to improve workplaces for neurodivergent teachers in Scotland and help to eradicate the stigma;*
- develop, deliver and promote training on neurodiversity for activists and members;*
- consider hosting a workshop at a future Equality conference on this topic;*
- lobby the Government to invest in professional learning for all teachers on neurodiversity in women and girls; and*

- *ensure this is a campaign priority for the union so all neurodivergent teachers can feel safe, supported and needed in their workplace.*

Education System

Teachers told us:

“Education needs to change, the system is torture”

“There has been no change since the 80s – while the social model of disability is applied to pupils, for staff it is the medical model only”

“We need radical change”

“The nature of the job has changed, but the Victorian age teaching has not changed”

“Teaching as a compassionate human process has been forced into a business model”

We are told that changes are required across the board, from point of recruitment onwards, through the content of staff policies, to training and, indeed, to the actions of key personnel. There was a significant variation in the experience of our members: using recruitment models as an example, different schools and authorities worked in different ways in relation to reasonable adjustments, breaks, provision of water, questions in advance, and clarity on success criteria for questions:

“Reasonable adjustments benefit everyone”

Members told us that breaks needed to be built in to support regulation and the ability to decompress:

“Everyone needs time, why should anyone be asked to do lunchtime meetings?”

It was felt that there was no overarching national strategy to support neurodivergent teachers and that a national intersectional approach to neurodivergence was overdue: in particular, disappointment was expressed regarding the delays to the Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill.

Neurodivergent teachers said they wished their rights were articulated more clearly and they knew how to find support and help. There was very limited knowledge of the *“No One Left Behind: employability strategic plan 2024 to 2027”*.

Presumption of Mainstream

Neurodivergent teachers expressed the firm view that the presumption of mainstream policy was about integration and not inclusion:

“We are asked to collude in it, when we are not included either”

The following motions were passed at NASUWT Scotland Conference:

2025: ASN Support in Schools

Conference notes that Audit Scotland, in a recent briefing paper, has called for a fundamental review of planning and resourcing of additional support for learning.

Conference agrees that Scottish Government and councils must fundamentally rethink how they plan, fund and staff additional support for learning as part of core school education in Scotland.

Conference is concerned that teachers are increasingly expected to teach children with such high and complex needs in mainstream classes that they

require almost one-on-one support, at the same time as teaching the rest of their class.

Conference believes that all pupils deserve to have their additional learning needs met with specialist support yet is concerned that the current system is failing pupils with additional support needs, their classmates and the teachers working to support them.

Conference calls on the Scotland Executive Council to:

(i) Engage with Audit Scotland, and thereafter Scottish Government and councils, to improve current data collection practices;

(ii) Lobby Scottish Government to disaggregate data for Support Assistants, setting out those who are identified to support an individual child and those who are supporting the wider school setting;

(iii) Foster links with sister trade unions representing Learning Support Assistants, supporting all relevant campaigns to increase LSA numbers and improve their contractual rights, including time for professional learning;

(iv) Seek increases to national funding from Scottish Government, to support the necessary systemic change;

(v) Bring a motion to SNCT supporting (a) lower ratios for specialist provision and (b) calling for staffing ratios (teacher plus support staff) formulas to be agreed for mainstream classes which would vary dependent upon the number of ASN pupils on the register.

2024: ASN – FAILURE OF CFE

Conference notes that resources and specialist provision for learners with additional support needs, such as neurodivergent conditions, learning disabilities, and physical disabilities that impact learning, are reducing, whereas, with better diagnostic tools, the number of learners being identified as requiring support in learning is increasing.

Conference notes that in many schools, 48% or more learners now have an identified support need for learning. Conference takes into consideration these issues and believes that:

- 1. presumption of the mainstream and integration masquerading as inclusion is not working;*
- 2. children with severe and complex needs, including multiple neurodivergent conditions, should be recognised as having a disability within the definition of the Equalities Act 2010 and be able to access education as part of the wider Single Equality Duty;*
- 3. specialist provision is being eroded with the closure of special schools, while the use of school buildings for enhanced supervision which are not fit for this purpose is often seen as the cheaper option and not based on the needs of children;*
- 4. children are being prevented from accessing meaningful education as is their right;*
- 5. class sizes for learners with ASN/SfL were established in 1985 and do not reflect the situation in 21st-century schools.*

Conference calls for the Scotland Executive Council to campaign for:

- i. the end of the presumption of mainstream and integration masquerading as inclusion;*
- ii. the reopening of special centres for children with severe and complex needs, including multiple neurodivergent conditions;*
- iii. effective staffing and resources of the centres;*
- iv. Effective staffing and resources of ASN provision in mainstream establishments.*
- v. training at a postgraduate level for all teachers who wish to be registered with the GTCS as an ASN specialist;*
- vi. the right of all of our school communities to feel safe.*

FAIR WORK - CONCLUSION

While there was agreement that there is no one-size-fits-all model for all neurodivergent teachers, members asked that the Fair Work Dimensions were better applied to them: effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect. They felt that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was largely ignored and misunderstood.

Our neurodivergent teachers want accessibility in schools: when they are asked to rely on requests for reasonable adjustments this is largely an admission of systemic failure. Instead of focusing on individual issues, we need collective and systemic change which will rectify the issues set out in the feedback above. Within education this will mean a shift in the role and responsibility of HMiE:

“Who measures whether a school system meets the needs of those of us with lived experience”

The information provided to the Committee is taken directly from the Fair Work for Neurodivergent Teachers Project engagement, and the quotes cited above outline the voices of those teachers with lived experience.

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