

# Children in Scotland

every child - every childhood

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## Scottish Autism Strategy Bill Consultation March 2010

### **Q1. Would people with autism in Scotland benefit from a national strategic approach?**

Children in Scotland has adopted a consistent position in respect of disabilities and chronic conditions. In general, we have opposed the creation of any 'hierarchy' implying preferential status for certain conditions and disabilities, or 'ranking' of plans and intervention strategies which might result in some children being deemed to have a lesser entitlement to appropriate help. For this reason we opposed the (eventually withdrawn) proposed amendment to the ASL Bill 2009 in its passage through Parliament, which would have made a Coordinated Support Plan mandatory for children with a number of listed specific conditions. One of the ASL Act's great strengths is its inclusiveness, e.g. it states that any child or young person needing additional support for learning "for whatever reasons" has the right to get help. This fully applies to children with autism.

We believe that the 2009 Additional Support for Learning Act, *if fully implemented and properly resourced*, provides the legal basis to ensure that children are diagnosed, assessed consistently with the principles of GIRFEC, and supported effectively. We are aware that too often the experience of children and families differs from the Act's intent. Obtaining a diagnosis can be difficult and involve a long wait. Without a diagnosis, however, a child's access to appropriate assessment and support is frequently compromised. Even when a child has been diagnosed and assessed, there are often difficulties in making sure that they receive the support they need, as services across Scotland are patchy and inconsistent.

There is, furthermore, a high correlation between autism and mental health problems in childhood. This, coupled with the stress placed on families coping with the condition, means both that outcomes for the individuals affected are often negative and the social cost of failing to support them high (for example because of the high percentage of adults with autism who are unable to access the labour market). For these reasons we support the introduction of a national strategic approach for adults. For children, we urge that the ASL Act is fully resourced and implemented.

### **Q2. Is a Scottish Autism Strategy Act needed to make a national ASD strategy effective?**

We do not believe that specific legislation is desirable. Our concern is that this may well lead to demands for specific legislation to cover a whole range of other conditions. For

children and young people, the ASL Act provides the legislative base needed.

**Q3. Are the duties proposed appropriate to enabling a national ASD strategy for Scotland?**

Were legislation to be introduced, we would see the range of duties as appropriate. The interface with existing legislation such as the Additional Support for Learning Act needs to be carefully considered.

**Q4. Are the duties proposed appropriate to guide local agencies to take a strategic approach to autism services in their area?**

There is insufficient detail in the consultation document to assess this. Until a draft Bill is published, it would not really be possible to make informed comment on this question.

**Q5. Are there any other comments you wish to make about this proposal?**

Children in Scotland operates Enquire, the national advice service for additional support for learning. Difficulty in obtaining help without a definitive diagnosis is a recurring issue raised by parents calling the Enquire helpline. There is also, in many parts of Scotland, a long waiting list for assessment leading to diagnosis. These experiences clearly underline the need for better access to support.

For further information please contact Marion Macleod, Senior Policy and Parliamentary Officer.

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Children in Scotland is Scotland's national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 450 members, including 90% of Scottish Local Authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and Europe.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve: ASL, Scotland's largest independent education mediation service.