



**UNISON Scotland response:  
Petition PE 01704 Improve Targets and Outcomes for  
Autistic People in Scotland October 2018**

**Introduction**

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union with members across the public, private and voluntary sectors, including social workers, educational psychologists and the staff who support children with a range of additional support needs in schools and early years settings. UNISON therefore welcomes the opportunity to give evidence on Petition PE 01704 Improve Targets and Outcomes for Autistic People in Scotland

**Evidence**

There is no doubt that the needs of children and young people with additional support needs (ASN) are not being fully met in our schools and early years settings. UNISON believes strategies to improve this situation should not focus on one disability: all children with additional support needs should be able to access appropriate support. UNISON believes that rather than new legislation and target setting there should be a substantial investment in staff to both identify additional support needs and staff to meet those needs once they have been identified. This should include funding for staff training and their ongoing professional development. Recent revelations round health targets show that legislation by itself does not guarantee results.

Children with additional support needs are now physically in mainstream schools but many are far from being mainstreamed into school life. The policy has not been supported with adequate funding for the learning support, healthcare needs and behavioural support that children need. There is also widespread misunderstanding about who is actually providing support for children on a day to day basis. The bulk of their support is provided by classroom assistants and there has not been, and is not adequate training, support or appropriate pay for those staff. These proposals would be nothing but kind words without appropriate funding for both the day-to-day delivery of those services and for training and professional development for all the staff working with those children.

The Education and Skills Committee report<sup>1</sup> into Additional Support Needs (ASN) supports UNISON's belief that Scotland is a long way from meeting its aspirations for children with additional support needs. There are some good strategic and policy papers around supporting children but these have not been matched with adequate funding to enable their implementation or recruitment, training and support for the staff in order to ensure they can deliver the correct support. Parents often have to fight to get the additional support their child needs. When parents (who are able to fight) "win" that fight there is no additional funding attached to implement the decision. Schools have to provide support from their existing budget. This has an impact on provision of services for other children relying on that budget. So a child with ASN may get a classroom assistant working directly with them but other pupils in the group now cannot access to the support she could provide.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.parliament.scot/S5\\_Education/Reports/ASN\\_6th\\_Report\\_2017.pdf](http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/Reports/ASN_6th_Report_2017.pdf)

Schools are struggling to meet the needs of pupils because of budget cuts not an absence of legislation, guidance and targets. On top of cuts to resources demand is rising, adding additional pressure. Since 2010 the number of pupils with additional support needs has doubled but there are 1841 fewer support staff in local authorities. UNISON's survey of support staff in schools and government's own research into behaviour in schools<sup>2</sup> indicates that the cuts in support staff are affecting behaviour in schools. While this is not the only reason cited, it is clear that cuts to support staff in schools and to "expert advice" services such as educational psychologists to both support staff and pupils directly is having an impact on the whole school not just children with identified support needs.

Staff do not get the training the need to deal with the wide range of complex additional support needs that children have. These range from disabilities, learning difficulties mental health problems, short-term ill-health, chronic health problems and family crises. Some only need support for a short time others for their whole childhood. UNISON is therefore supportive of moves to ensure that staff working with children with additional support needs have appropriate training to enable them to undertake those roles. When the Scottish government proposed a workforce council for education staff, UNISON found that members did not reject the idea of registration outright but did have concerns about how the proposed council would work in practice. Registration specifically for ASL staff is a complex issue. This would require a great deal of work around agreeing standards for each of these roles. Given the range of workers that could belong to the body this would be complex. Some of the roles require HNDs, degrees and post graduate qualifications others no formal qualifications. As the trade union representing a range of workers who could be involved in the proposed changes UNISON would expect to play a key role in that process if the plans go ahead.

Our members working in early years services already have to register with the SSSC. This brings a cost. The lack of consultation and transparency around the last rise in fees raised significant concerns. Members are disappointed that, despite their initial hopes, registration has not led to improved recognition of their skills in either education or adult care. Across the care and early years sector we have not seen the improvement in wages and terms and conditions that we hoped becoming part of a registered profession would bring. Members in the wider education workforce are therefore not sure what benefits registration would bring to their working lives or the children they work with.

If creating a registered workforce is to improve the skills and qualifications of education support staff then standards will need to be supported by an ongoing programme of training and professional development. This means staff will need to have time and space in their working day to undertake the training and development opportunities. It is not enough to "encourage" staff to engage in learning. Twilight and weekend training is not the answer. It is hard to concentrate after a full day or week of work. Many staff also have caring responsibilities that make attendance impossible. Given the rates of pay on offer for many roles staff also have other jobs in order to make ends meet and also cannot attend out of hours training. This will require substantial resources for training and to ensure that there are enough staff to cover for those on training/development activities.

Many staff in schools, early years centres are poorly paid for the skills required to undertake their current roles. All public sector staff have experienced a prolonged pay

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<sup>2</sup> Behaviour in Scottish School Research 2016 Dec 2017 <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00526338.pdf>

freeze which means in real terms their pay has been cut. Pay and wider terms and conditions which reflect the skills required for the job are the best way to ensure a highly skilled workforce focused on continually improving their skills.

Fees would of course be a key issue. Fees will need to be set at a reasonable level related to the actual pay of the workers covered by the new body. Some of the staff involved are already in registered professions and it is unclear what benefit there would be in an additional body for those staff or the children they support. Again members have experienced a severe long-term pay cut and being asked to pay fees to hold on to their job will be difficult for many. Members registered with the SSSC have really struggled with the substantial increase in fees there. It is important not only the original fee is reasonable but that processes are put in place to protect staff from substantial rises in the cost of fees.

### **Conclusion**

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union with members across the public, private and voluntary sectors, including social workers and the staff who support children with a range of additional support needs in schools and early years settings. UNISON therefore welcomes the opportunity to give evidence on Petition PE 01704 Improve Targets and Outcomes for Autistic People in Scotland. There is no doubt that the needs of children and young people with additional support needs are not being fully met in our schools and early years settings. UNISON believes that there are more effective routes to meeting the petitioner's aims than those suggested in the petition. Improvement should not focus on one disability: all children's additional support needs must be met. Scotland does not need more targets and outcomes what it needs is effective action. UNISON believes that there needs to be a substantial investment in staff to both identify additional support needs and also to meet those needs once they have been identified. This should include funding for staff training and their ongoing professional development.

**UNISON Scotland**  
**October 2018**

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