



## **UNISON Scotland response:**

### **Scotland's Strategy for the Learning Provision for Children and Young People with Complex Additional Support Needs 2017-2026**

#### **Introduction**

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union with members across the public, private and voluntary sectors. UNISON members work in a range of settings in both local government, health and in the third sector delivering education and care services for children with complex additional support needs. UNISON therefore welcomes the opportunity to take part in this consultation.

#### **General comments**

UNISON members are clear that currently we are not getting it right for children with additional support needs. The strategy in itself will not work 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 strategy therefore needs to ensure that it includes all staff not just teachers whether that's in local authority settings or in the case of this proposal for strategic commissioning of services for children and young people with complex additional support needs.

The Education and Skills Committee report<sup>i</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 great strategies and policy commitments to support children with additional support needs but these have not been matched with adequate funding to enable their implementation or recruitment, training and support for the staff needed to meet those needs.

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. This therefore has an impact on provision of services for other children relying on that budget. The Scottish government needs to develop much more detail on the demand for both the strategic services proposed in the strategy and those services that will remain in local authority control. There then needs to be funding to meet those costs. It is also clear that there is a risk that those from better-off backgrounds have higher chances of winning those battles and so further increasing the attainment gap. We fully support the education committee's call for review of the finances available to deliver on the widely supported aims of the original Bill and the new strategy outlined in the consultation paper.

UNISON conducted a survey of school staff earlier<sup>ii</sup> in the year and while the survey was about the impact of cuts on schools, members working with children with ASN consistently responded saying that they were not getting adequate training and support to deal with the complex needs of the children they were supposed to be supporting.

It is also increasingly clear that some children are not best served by mainstream schooling and that there continues to be a need for specialist support. UNISON is therefore not opposed to the strategy in principle. This though cannot be a route to outsourcing of local government services or to a race to the bottom in staff wages or terms in conditions. The

needs of children will only be met by properly trained and supported staff with pay and terms and conditions to reflect their skill.

The strategy document ignores the fact that it is not generally teachers who are working closely with children with ASN. It is support workers, classroom assistants and pupil support assistants. since 2010 the number of pupils with additional support needs has doubled but there are 1841 fewer support staff in local authorities. Sadly there are no official figures for the third sector but the experience of our members there is of tight budgets, increased workloads and job cuts. Across Scotland our members are telling us that they are dealing with children with complex physical and behavioural support needs with minimal training and support. Getting it right for every child with additional support needs cannot be done on the cheap. There needs to be more staff and better training and professional development for all staff not just teachers.

There is very little mention of GIRFEC or of SHANARI in the strategy document. These should surely be the key aims and outcomes and should therefore be imbedded in the strategic document and the strategy itself.

### **Consultation questions**

**Scotland's Strategy for the Learning Provision for Children and Young People with Complex Additional Support Needs 2017-20206 aims to support improved outcomes for children and young people with complex additional support needs through strategic commissioning of national services; with particular focus on the provision of education. While this strategy also recognises the critical role played by social services and health in supporting educational outcomes, the strategy is set within the context of The Additional Support for Learning Act 2004.**

### **STRUCTURE**

**1) Is this structure correct? Does the content of the document flow in a logical order?**

☐ No

#### **Please explain your response:**

UNISON believes that GIRFEC principles and SHANARI outcomes are missing from the document. They should both be clearly outlined and then referred to throughout the paper. There should also be reference to Scottish government procurement guidance with an emphasis on Fair Work.

**2) Does the structure help the reader to follow the strategy effectively**

☐ Yes

The document would be improved if, as well as referencing legislation, it also referenced the guidance for example the two sets of guidance on ASN and healthcare in schools that are also currently being consulted on.

## CONTENT

### Section 1. Our Vision, Aim and Objectives

Section 1 provides information on the vision, aim and objectives of the strategy.

- 3) **Do you think the aims of this Strategy and the four objectives are the right ones to achieve the Scottish Government's purpose of improving outcomes for children and young people with complex additional support needs through strategic commissioning of services?**

☐ No

**Please explain your response and provide any relevant evidence.**

The objectives need to be set in the context of GIRFEC and SHANARI in the document. UNISON would also like to see the inclusion of adequate funding as a principle as without this the strategy, no matter how good, will be undeliverable.

Objective 2 mentions six key drivers including teacher professionalism. This again ignores the roles of the actual workers that spend most time working face to face with children with additional support needs. There is no mention of collaborative working across all staff again a key driver. This suggests lack of organisational equity, lack of transparency and lack of recognition of the efforts across the range of staff that play critical roles. A more transparent and more widely accessible model for professional development of all staff is required. Training at all levels should be available to all practitioners. It should also be clear that professionalism requires proper training, not watching video clips on your own or one person in a team attending seminars then cascading what they remember to the rest of the team.

Objective 4 is insufficiently defined and fails to mention what constitutes evidence and which parties contribute. This objective might benefit from S.M.A.R.T targeting. Can it be agreed from the outset that evidence gathering should be an inclusive activity harnessing all staff contributions in a capacity of more than consultation if robust decision making is dependent on evidence of a practical nature.

### **Section 2. Why we need Strategic Commissioning for Learners with Complex Additional Support Needs?**

- 4) **Within the context of The Doran Review recommendations – do you agree with the explanation of why we need Strategic Commissioning for national provision/services for learners with complex additional support needs?**

☐ Yes

Please explain your response:

While UNISON supports the mainstreaming agenda for children with additional needs it is clear that some children are not best served by mainstream schooling and that there continues to be a need for specialist support. UNISON is therefore not opposed to the strategy in principle. This though cannot be a route to outsourcing of local government services or to a race to the bottom in staff wages or terms in conditions. Local democratic accountability for services is as important for children with additional needs as any other service user.

5) **The ‘Scope of Services to be commissioned’ on page 8 relate to education, care and health, research and training and is informed by the Doran Review recommendations and the National Needs Analysis, which was completed in 2015. Can you please comment on any services within those headings which you would particularly wish to see featured here? Please tell us if you think it should exclude any aspects or include any others?**

**Comments:**

### **Training**

It is vital that training is available for all staff. Again and again there are references to teacher training rather than the staff that actually work directly with children with additional support needs. In both local authority schools and in third sector organisations, delivering services to children with additional support needs, the day to day work is done by support workers, classroom assistants and pupil support workers. Members tell us they are rarely allowed to take part in the training offered on “in service” days in schools far less to attend training out with the schools where they work.

If we are to Get It Right for Every Child there needs to be recognition of who the workforce is and investment in their training. It should also be clear that professionalism requires proper training, not watching video clips on your own or one person in a team attending seminars then cascading what they remember to the rest of the team.

Specialist input must include improved access to in service training by specialists from psychological services. Historically this provision greatly improved staff effectiveness in this sector. There has been a deterioration of service due to withdrawal of this specialist input . The proposed strategy would be seriously lacking if this keystone to improvement was missing.

### **Commissioning process**

**UNISON welcomes the statements on the commissioning process but is concerned about how will be implemented and monitored.**

- **based on assessed need;**

This is a vital statement and has been written into many strategies none the less there needs to be assurances of adequate funding to allow this to happen. We currently see many parents fighting for services their children need and this has implications for the rest of the pupils in an establishment if services have to be paid from for the basic allocation.

- **based on the principle of provision being locally provided wherever possible and inclusive in nature;**

Again this is an important principle, UNISON would welcome the addition of “by democratically accountable public bodies”. Democratic accountability is what gives users a say in the services they need.

- **able to support parents and carers;**

There has always been a commitment to this however cuts have dramatically reduced Family Support and Support staff provision. There needs to be a commitment to appropriate finance to ensure the principles can be implemented

- **able to capitalise on the expertise and experience developed by partners, building services and capacity locally and centrally which best meet children and young people’s needs.**

There are a range of organisations able to provide support and expertise for children with specific issues and their support is vital for many children. That is not the same as forcing parents to rely on charities because of cuts in the public sector

- **able to provide a mix of long-term services of learning and support and short-term focused support to meet particular needs;**

This is welcome but again will require adequate funding.

- **located equitably across Scotland;**

This depends on the definition of equitable. It could lead to a one size fits all solution when what parents want is the needs of their child to be met. Some areas will require more support than others because of demand in those areas. This again will be very much dependent of adequate funding and recognition that there are extra costs for rural locations and that in order to ensure equality for less well off families and areas will need more funding to close the attainment gap.

- **able to ensure regional support to ensure equality of access to centralised services;**

This again will be very much dependent of adequate funding and a recognition that there are extra costs for rural locations and that in order to ensure equality of less well off families and areas will need more funding to close the attainment gap.

- **co-ordinated to prevent duplication, and thereby improve efficiency and effectiveness.**

..This statement usually leads not to improved efficiency and effectiveness for public services but to job cuts, centralisation and a top down one size fits all service.

### **Section 3. 10 Year Strategy**

**This provides detail on the strategy for the first 10 years on the proposed approach to strategic commissioning of national provision/services for children and young people with complex additional support needs.**

- 6) **What are your views on the National Commissioning Groups proposal that the first phase of strategic commissioning will focus on pathfinder (testing) activity on training, development and research? Are there any particular areas of training which should be focussed on?**

#### **Comments:**

Training should focus on the staff who are actually delivering the service. That means support workers, classroom and pupils support staff. These are the key workers in both schools and the voluntary sector. There needs to be proper inclusion of services for children in their early years in the strategy as the correct intervention and support in the early years can make the most difference for many children.

7) For the purposes of this document the National Improvement Framework drivers have been adapted and therefore reflect particular concerns related to children with complex additional support needs? Do you have any suggestions for additions or alternative wording which should be included? Please set it out against the relevant heading below.

**Comments:**

The recommendation in the Doran report advising integrated assessment at the earliest stage of development is contentious. UNISON believes this should be amended with emphasis on appropriate stage rather than earliest stage. That stage should be judged by the collective "Team" of staff in daily contact with the child. Chronological age is unsuitable as a guide to development in cases of complex learning needs. This needs to be made clear.

8) Do you agree that the Governance arrangements detailed on page 14 are appropriate? If not, what else should be included?

☐ Yes

**General**

9) In relation to the overall 10 Year Strategy - are there any areas missing, requiring strengthening, or which are not required and could be removed?

☐ Yes

Please explain your response:

This strategy needs to ensure that it includes all those who are working with children with additional support needs. Again the focus is on teachers rather than the staff who are doing the work.

The strategy needs to include early years, Scotland has a "three to eighteen curriculum" but this is not reflected in the document.

Some children with additional support needs have complex health as well as educational support needs. The strategy also needs to offer routes to improved links with health services given the medical support needs of some children with additional support needs. Links to further and higher education are also missing and these transition points are often very difficult.

10) Are there any general comments you would wish to make about '**Scotland's Strategy for the Learning Provision for Children and Young People with Complex Additional Support Needs 2017-2026**'

## **Conclusion**

UNISON members work in a range of roles supporting children with additional support needs in education, health and the third sector. UNISON therefore welcomes the opportunity to take part in this consultation. Our members are clear that currently we are not getting it right for children with additional support needs and UNISON supports the introduction of a new strategy. It is clear that in order for that strategy to work there needs to be 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 strategy needs to ensure that includes all staff not just teachers and covers the whole three to eighteen curriculum.

## **UNISON Scotland August 2017**

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<sup>i</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)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.unison-scotland.org/2017/01/16/hard-lessons-support-staff-struggling-to-maintain-standards-for-pupils-because-of-cuts/>