

Additional Support for Learning: A Review of System Delivery for Learners



Introduction

The Scottish Government has published 'Additional Support for Learning: A Review of System Delivery for Learners', a review of ASL provision in Scotland by Janie McManus, the former chief inspector of education. UNISON members in pupil support roles play an essential part in delivering ASL, and the review highlighted what those members have been saying for years – there is a growing gap between the support children with additional support needs should receive, and what's being delivered in practice by a system that just isn't capable of meeting the scale or complexity of need. The review correctly identifies some of the problems with ASL delivery, but misses the mark in its failure to recognise the chronic undervaluing of and underinvestment in school support staff. Crucially, the review does not call for any substantial additional funding. Without this, the Scottish Government will continue to let down the 43% of children with additional support needs (ASN), and the staff supporting them. GIRFEC won't happen unless things are right for the staff.

Context

This is the first review of ASL provision since the Morgan Report in 2020. As McManus rightly points out, since the pandemic, demand for ASL has soared. The review was undertaken by former chief inspector of education Janie McManus. In February 2025, the Accounts Commission published a report into ASL delivery in Scotland, which found that ASL is not properly resourced.

Currently 40% of all pupils in Scotland receive ASL and 93% receive this support in mainstream classes. The number of pupils recorded as receiving ASL has increased by 768% since the 2004 ASL Act. Since 2019, there has been a 32% increase in the numbers of pupils receiving ASL. It is expected that this will continue to rise. Staffing numbers have increased at levels far below the increase to demand. The proportion of pupils in the most deprived areas receiving ASL is almost double that in the least deprived areas. One in four pupils are receiving ASL for 'social, emotional or behavioural difficulties'. UNISON members in pupil support roles all too often experience violence at the hands of children and young people whose needs are not being met by a system that is failing them.

Funding

This review does not recommend any specific additional funding for ASL. Without this, it is hard to imagine this review will be anything more than words on a page. Launching the review, Cabinet Secretary for Education Jenny Gilruth announced that the Scottish Government will invest £700,000 in an AI powered app to 'streamline' administrative tasks associated with ASL for teachers. This is the only funding commitment made in relation to the review. It is extremely disappointing that when more funding for support staff and resources is desperately needed, the Scottish Government is choosing to outsource funding to an AI operated app. This is consistent with the recently published public sector reform plans, which set out the government's intention to reduce the public sector workforce and increase automation.

KEY POINTS:

- **McManus review echoes what UNISON has been saying for many years – ASL is underresourced and poorly planned**
- **The review calls for national level delivery models for ASL, but does not call for more funding for ASL**
- **With no funding attached, and no recommendations for improvements to school support staff's access to training and recognition, and protection from violence, there is little reason to believe that this review will lead to the change UNISON members have been crying out for**



Contact UNISON's Bargaining & Campaigns team:

Claire Thomson
C.Thomson@unison.co.uk

Stephen Low
s.low2@unison.co.uk

Susan Galloway
s.galloway@unison.co.uk

Nicola Morris
n.morris@unison.co.uk

0141 342 2811
0800 0 857 857

Children and schools need properly resourced staff, not more automation.

National approaches

The review calls for a clearer national approach to planning and decision making, a delivery model aligned to current levels of demand, and a national delivery model for ASL. Moves towards national level planning and delivery of ASL support could be welcome if done properly. Any move towards a national approach should also guarantee national level consistency for staff. This must also go hand in hand with a nationally consistent approach to monitoring and recording violent incidents in schools.

Workforce

The review calls for 'workforce design' that better reflects the reality of mainstream education, including sustained learning from initial teacher education onwards. The review also highlights that significant variation exists across the country in staff inductions and access to protected learning time. Disappointingly, the review does not call for consistency for pupil support staff, and focuses largely on specific training needs for teachers.

There is a professionalism and training gap between staff, resulting in a two-tier system which is unfair for staff, and detrimental for pupils. In ignoring this, the review perpetuates the problems of the system it sets out to improve. UNISON has long been calling for an accredited qualification and registration programme for pupil support staff, and for access to protected learning time to be consistent across the country. The Scottish Government also published its final update on its ASL action plan which showed that an action to introduce this programme has not been completed. This lack of progress shows a very disappointing lack of commitment.

Early intervention

The review criticises a lack of early intervention and says staff in nurseries have also reported a rise in the number of two and three-year-olds needing support. Early intervention is key to ensure children have the support they need from the crucial early years, and to prevent challenging and violent behavioural patterns from beginning. UNISON members have long been reporting increasing demands for ASL in the early years, with no additional resources or capacity to meet these children's needs. This means that even before primary one, children are being let down by a system that's just not fit for purpose.

The review calls for early intervention to be supported by services across education, health, and social care. More support from other services would of course be welcome, but as UNISON members working in those services know, these services and their staff are also stretched to the limits. With no extra funding, it is hard to see how this recommendation will be anything more than words on paper.

Action for branches

The voices of UNISON members must be heard ahead of any moves to reshape ASL delivery, and in holding the Scottish Government to account in preventing violence and implementing an accredited registration and training pathway for pupil support staff.

- Circulate this briefing to school staff members
- Ask employers what steps they will take to ensure school support staff have the resources and capacity they need to fulfil their vital roles in ASL delivery

Additional reading

- ['Additional Support for Learning: A Review of System Delivery for Learners](#)
- [Additional Support For Learning review action plan: final update](#)
- [Additional support for learning | Audit Scotland](#)
- [Accounts Commission report: Additional Support for Learning – UNISON briefing](#)



Contact UNISON's Bargaining & Campaigns team:

Claire Thomson
C.Thomson@unison.co.uk

Stephen Low
s.low2@unison.co.uk

Susan Galloway
s.galloway@unison.co.uk

Nicola Morris
n.morris@unison.co.uk

0141 342 2811
0800 0 857 857