

PE1704/V

Scottish Government submission of 17 June 2019

Thank you for your request dated 20 May 2019. Please find my response below on behalf of the Scottish Government. As Policy lead for Autism I have consulted with relevant policy areas within Scottish Government in order to provide a complete response to the questions raised, which I will respond to in order of ask.

As previously stated, let me reiterate that the Committee can be assured that the Scottish Government is committed to improving the lives of autistic people in Scotland.

1. *Educational Psychologists – the Committee noted evidence provided by the petitioner stating that there was a shortage of educational psychologists as well as a lack of courses to increase the numbers of these professionals.*

How does the Scottish Government respond to these concerns?

The Scottish Government is working with the National Scottish Steering Group for Educational Psychologists to deliver a sustainable and regular supply of educational psychologists to meet future need. The group's work led to the Scottish Government and COSLA agreeing, last year, a new partnership funding package for trainee educational psychologists. The funding, worth more than £4m in the initial 3 years, is for fees and living costs for trainees. The University of Dundee started 29 new trainees under the new arrangements in September 2018.

Historically, The University of Dundee and the University of Strathclyde had offered an MSc in Educational Psychology with intakes in alternate years. The University of Strathclyde last year decided not to invite applications for their planned 2019 intake. We acted quickly to secure alternative provision and instead, the University of Dundee is recruiting a 2019 intake to their Educational Psychology training programme. We expect them to fill up to 30 training places. Dundee University will also recruit, as planned, a 2020 intake.

2. *Autism diagnosis waiting times – the Scottish Government's written submission of 30 October 2018 states that autism diagnosis waiting times are "too long and should be improved".*

How does the Scottish Government intend to improve these waiting times?

The Scottish Government listened to autistic people who responded to our Scottish Strategy for Autism engagement, and as expressed in our previous written submission we recognize that autism diagnosis wait times are too long and should be improved. To address this, the Scottish Government has invested in the creation of the National Autism Implementation Team (NAIT). The NAIT is comprised of experts with advanced clinical knowledge of autism to provide national strategic guidance to individual NHS Health Boards, and other relevant stakeholders. The latter is especially important as genuine partnership working with social care, education and third sector can assist with the diagnostic process.

NAIT specialists will be responsible for developing resources, promoting discussion and sharing of best practice between boards. The team will consider innovative solution to the problems faced by health boards and advise and promote various solutions. This may for example, include assisting a health board to develop a wholly neurodiverse diagnostic

pathways, reducing potential duplication inefficiencies, or the promotion of virtual clinics for use in remote areas and for populations who face difficulty attending hospital.

NAIT will also work closely with NHS Education Scotland (NES) on feeding into national training and promoting the Autism training framework as developed by NES in order for boards to appropriately upskill their staff. They will also advise health boards on the various clinical diagnostic tools available to them, However, the power to make change remains at local and regional level. The work has been funded through the Scottish Strategy for Autism with initial funding until March 2021.

Will the Scottish Government commit to recording, publishing and monitoring autism diagnosis waiting times?

The Scottish Government have been working with colleagues in Information Services Division Scotland (within NHS National Services Scotland) on a number of developments to improve the quality and scope of the data available for all CAMHS Services, which includes autism services. We recognise that current data collection is not adequate for use in planning services more widely, or measuring the impact of investment.

These include confirmation of the waiting times definitions for CAMHS and Psychological Therapies and expanding the range of scenarios to assist clinicians to record waits consistently across NHS Boards. We have expanded the CAMHS waiting time data collection to include a count of the number of children and young people in the CAMHS system. This information will be included in the quarterly waiting times publication from 4 June.

The Scottish Government has mandated all NHS Boards to work with ISD Scotland to put new data collection in place, recognising that some of the current systems used by Boards to record CAMHS and Psychological Therapies require significant improvement. As these improvements take place, better data will drive improvements in the wait times for autistic people and anyone accessing the CAMHS system. These systems will allow health boards and ISD to record and monitor wait times.

There is current work ongoing through the Mental Health Access Improvement Support Programme (MHAIST.) MHAIST is a collaborative programme between Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) and Information Services Divisions (ISD) to deliver a 4 year programme (2016-2020) focused on improving access to Psychological Therapies and CAMHS to improve waiting times.

The MHAIST Mental Health Access Collaborative (a national network of clinical teams focused on access issues, to quickly and effectively spread best practice and innovations) is working on neurodevelopmental pathways for CAMHS. They will provide data and analytical support to Boards to improve the capture, analysis and reporting of data within CAMHS and Psychological Therapies.

Improvements across all CAMHS Services will drive improvements in the wait times of those seeking an autism diagnosis, and will speed up access to services for autistic individuals requiring assistance of a mental health professional.

3. *Teacher support* – *The Committee seeks the Scottish Government's response to the following—*

Are school teachers sufficiently supported by support staff to meet additional support needs?

We are committed to ensuring that all children and young people receive the support that they need to reach their full potential. We are clear that all school staff play a vital role in supporting children and young people within their schools.

The Education (Additional Support for learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended) places duties on education authorities to identify and meet the additional support needs of their pupils. This includes ensuring that there are appropriate staff and resources in place to support children and young people in their learning.

What training and support is there for people who work in schools with young people with autism?

In order to support schools meet the needs of their pupils who have autism, the Scottish Government has supported the development and publication of the “Autism Toolbox”. Published in 2014 as an online resource to support those who work with children and young people with autism, the toolbox includes tools to support understanding of autism, strategies for support and engagement with families and partners., We have committed to updating this resource to ensure that teachers and support staff have access to the most up-to-date information.

The Scottish Government has also invested £1,500 to develop the Inclusion Module. The module covers legislative requirements, Additional Support for Learning, equality, mainstreaming and Getting it Right For Ever Child. This will provide practitioners and local authorities with a free professional learning resource which focuses on inclusion and equality. It also supports teachers in meeting required GTCS standards of professional learning.

A second module is being developed in collaboration with Edinburgh City Council and Queen Margaret University and will be published shortly.

For student teachers, should there be initial additional support needs training?

The teaching standards set by the General Teaching Council for Scotland require teachers to be able to identify and respond appropriately to pupils with difficulties in or barriers to learning. During initial teacher education, student teachers will gain sufficient knowledge of the most common additional support needs for them to be able to support the child in question themselves or to seek specialised information and specialised support if necessary.

A recent trawl of Initial Teacher Education providers to identify examples of how autism is addressed within Initial Teacher Education programmes was undertaken by The Scottish Council of Deans of Education on behalf of the Scottish Government. It found that there is autism specific training provided within each of the programmes offered by providers.

The Deputy First Minister recently established a short-life working group, consisting of a range of stakeholders with an interest in autism in schools. The group has been brought together to agree key messaging and signposting to available resources to help ensure consistency in the quality of baseline content delivered by all ITE providers.

I hope the Committee find this response helpful.