



Submission to the Education & Skills Committee Inquiry on the Draft Budget 2018/19

December 2017

Introduction

ENABLE Scotland is the largest voluntary organisation in Scotland of and for children and adults who have learning disabilities and their families. We are a charitable organisation founded in 1954 by the parents of children who had learning disabilities in order to ensure that people who have learning disabilities have the same choices and opportunities in life as everyone else. We have a strong voluntary network with over 5,000 members across 37 local branches. Around a third of our members have a learning disability.

ENABLE Scotland campaigns with our members to improve the lives of people with learning disabilities and their families and carers. We also provide a wide range of person-centred services designed to ensure that people who have learning disabilities can live the life they want and actively participate in their communities.

We welcome this opportunity to make a submission to the Education and Skills Committee's Inquiry on the Draft Budget 2018/19. ENABLE Scotland published [#IncludED in the Main?! – 22 steps on the journey to inclusion for every pupil who has a learning disability](#) in December 2016, and in the first year of our award-winning campaign, we have succeeded in starting a serious conversation about the presumption of mainstreaming and securing four significant commitments from the Scottish Government which we believe represent the first steps on the journey to genuine inclusion for every pupil.

We have focused this submission on the delivery of those commitments and the measures which we believe will achieve the policy objectives laid out by the Deputy First Minister.

Additional Support for Learning

We welcome the Deputy First Minister's commitment to pursue the delivery of excellence and equity for all pupils, and in particular, his recognition of the importance of additional support for learning in achieving that objective.

It is vital that additional support for learning is properly resourced in order to ensure that every pupil who has an additional support need is appropriately supported in fulfilling their potential.

Whilst the presumption to mainstream has created the opportunity for children who have learning disabilities to be educated alongside their wider peer group, this has also meant the number of specialist units, schools, and (consequently) access to specialist knowledge of the educational support needs of children who have learning disabilities has reduced.

Our research for #IncludED in the Main?! found that 78% of education staff agreed that: "there are not enough additional support for learning staff in my school to support children and young people who have learning disabilities."

It is clear that access to specialist input has a positive impact on education experiences. Through #IncludED in the Main?!, this is most clearly demonstrated by the greatest number of positive responses being received from those children attending a mainstream school with an additional support needs base.

An equal society for every person who has a learning disability

Additional support for learning teachers are specialist resources and a central part of their role is to support classroom/subject teachers to develop their approach through creative curriculum architecture, strategies and models that meet the needs of pupils with additional support needs in their classrooms. For example, this could include accessible curriculum techniques, task-based learning, and positive behaviour support approaches. In the era of presumption to mainstream, this role is critical.

However, the number of additional support for learning teachers in Scotland fell in 2015 to its lowest level since 2007, with just 2,936 teachers with additional support needs as their main subject across Scotland. This number is down on the 2014 figure of 2,963. A total of 22 out of 32 local authority areas reduced their numbers of ASN teachers since 2009.¹

Furthermore, Additional Support for Learning Teachers who attended an *#IncludED in the Main?!* focus group raised the issue of Additional Support for Learning Teachers regularly being deployed as supply teachers.

We believe urgent action is required to ensure that consultative specialist resource is routinely available to education staff to support an inclusive learning environment. We therefore recommend that the Scottish Government and local authorities renew and continue investment in the role of Additional Support for Learning Teachers, including the creation of an elevated post and direct action to recruit and retain skilled staff into these positions.

We note the significant pressures local authority budgets have been under in recent years, and would welcome a commitment by the Scottish Government to provide additional funding to adequately resource additional support for learning. We also note the potential for the new regional improvement collaboratives to take on a role in delivering excellence in additional support for learning across a number of local authority areas, and would welcome potential efficiencies which could be achieved through this approach.

Presumption of Mainstreaming

Recommendation 1 of *#IncludED in the Main?!* is the production of holistic guidance for local authorities on delivering truly inclusive education; properly framing the implementation of the legal presumption to mainstream with the child's best interests and wellbeing at its core.

We therefore warmly welcomed the publication last month of [Excellence and Equity for All](#); the first ever draft Guidance on the Presumption of Mainstreaming. We have already begun gathering the views of our members on this document and will be responding to the Scottish Government's consultation in the new year. It is important that the promotion and understanding of the final Guidance is properly resourced by the Scottish Government.

We also welcome the Deputy First Minister's announcement of independent research into the experiences of children, young people, parents, school staff, education authorities and their partners in relation to additional support for learning. It is important that resources are committed to implementing the learning from this exercise.

Extension of children's rights

We have welcomed the extension of rights to children aged 12 to 15 (who have capacity) to request an assessment of their additional support needs and other rights related to their educational experience.

¹ Answer to Parliamentary Question from John Swinney MSP, 16 June 2016:
<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-00665&ResultsPerPage=10>

However, we feel it is very important that the staff members responsible for making assessments of a child's capacity have had appropriate training. In particular, we would be keen to ensure staff have received training on learning disability to enable them to make an informed assessment of the capacity of a pupil who has a learning disability. Resources should be committed for such training in order to avoid a situation where education staff routinely assume that having a learning disability means a child cannot have capacity.

Regulation of classroom support staff

We welcome the intention outlined in the Deputy First Minister's letter to the Committee that people supporting teachers who have direct contact with pupils as part of the learning process should be regulated.

Our research for #IncludED in the Main?! found that additional classroom support was in high demand but perceived as in low supply. Indeed, 82% of the education workforce surveyed told us there is a shortage of classroom/pupil support assistants available to meet the needs of children with additional support needs educated in a mainstream setting.

Yet when asked what would help in a mainstream setting to teach children and young people who have learning disabilities, 71% of the education workforce said more support assistants.

There is evidence that working with classroom support can lead to improvements in pupils' attitudes, and also to positive effects in terms of teacher morale and reduced stress. Research also suggests that classroom support can also have a positive impact on academic achievement.

However it should be noted that impact varies widely dependent on how that resource is deployed. Indeed, negative impact has been reported where classroom support has substituted rather than supplemented teaching from teachers.

Where classroom support is shown to have a positive impact, it is likely that adequate support and training will have been provided to both assistant and teacher so that both understand how to work together effectively. Research which focuses on assistants who provide one-to-one or small-group support shows a stronger positive benefit. Often such support is based on a clearly specified approach which teaching assistants have been trained to deliver.²

The National Improvement Framework³ is set to measure 'teacher professionalism' as a key improvement driver. Yet many other people contribute to children and young people's learning and development. For young people who have learning disabilities, classroom support has a particularly vital role, yet there is currently no independent regulatory oversight of classroom support.

We therefore welcome this commitment from the Deputy First Minister and look forward to responding to the consultation on the new Education Workforce Council.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge

Additional investment in schools for the Scottish Attainment Challenge presents an opportunity to look at the wider attainment gap for children and young people who have learning disabilities and/or autism spectrum disorders.

² Education Endowment Foundation, Teaching assistants Low impact for high cost, based on limited evidence, 2016 <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/resources/teaching-learning-toolkit/teaching-assistants/>

³ The Scottish Government, National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education - achieving excellence and equity, 2016: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00491758.pdf>

Whilst we know that young people who have learning disabilities are more likely to live in poverty⁴, we cannot hope that the wider attainment gap they experience will be reduced as a coincidental by-product of interventions to challenge the poverty-related attainment gap.

In recognition of that wider gap, the scope of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and associated additional investment should be broadened beyond poverty and targeted at reducing inequality of opportunity for children and young people who have learning disabilities. Furthermore, schools should be supported to make effective use of Scottish Attainment Challenge funds; thinking creatively to deliver better outcomes for young people who have learning disabilities, including supporting their involvement in the whole spectrum of opportunities of a holistic learning experience at school.

We therefore recommend that additional investment in the Scottish Attainment Challenge should be further targeted at reducing inequality of opportunity for children and young people who have learning disabilities.

Teacher training and CPD

We welcomed the Deputy First Minister's announcement last month of his intention to work with Education Scotland to develop inclusive education resources to support headteachers, teachers and support staff in their work.

Our research for #IncludED in the Main?! found that fewer than 12% of the education workforce felt satisfied that they can meet the educational and developmental needs of a child or young person who has a learning disability.

98% of the education workforce told us that initial teacher training education does not adequately prepare teachers for teaching young people who have additional support for learning needs, including learning disability.

The National Improvement Framework will gather evidence on initial teacher education programmes' coverage of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. ENABLE Scotland would contend that there is opportunity here to evaluate how well prepared student teachers are to teach children and young people who have learning disabilities by including coverage of additional support for learning needs within those measurements.

We also believe that modules on Disability Inclusion, Additional Support Needs strategies and Positive Behaviour Support should be incorporated into Initial Teacher Education programmes and the new Masters Qualification for Headship.

Furthermore, 30% of education professionals told us there was not enough specific Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teaching young people who have learning disabilities.

Given the changing needs of the pupil population, there is an argument that Initial Teacher Education can never fully and adequately prepare teachers to meet the specific learning needs of every pupil they will meet. Access to continuous, relevant and timely professional development is equally (if not more) important to support teachers in their role.

We therefore believe the Scottish Government should commission new accredited CPD courses on learning disability, Positive Behaviour Support and supporting families with disabled children. It should monitor uptake by all education staff nationally as part of the National Improvement Framework.

⁴ Almost one in five families with disabled children are missing meals and 18% cannot afford to heat their homes - http://www.cafamily.org.uk/media/381281/counting_the_costs_scotland_insert.pdf

National Centre of Excellence on Learning Disability Education

In order to promote good practice and innovative thinking in education for children and young people who have learning disabilities, education professionals must be given the opportunity to explore and develop their classroom approach with input from experts.

ENABLE Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to accelerate efforts to share best practice through the new National Improvement Hub. Additionally, the commitment to develop a research strategy and national forum to ensure innovative, research-based intervention and strategies are implemented in practice is welcome.⁵

To ensure such commitments deliver for young people who have learning disabilities, *#IncludED in the Main?!* highlights that there is a clear need for renewed focus on developing excellence on learning disability education.

We therefore believe the Scottish Government should establish a National Centre for Excellence on Learning Disability Education to develop and accredit CPD; promote and disseminate best practice; create cutting edge resources; and support teachers to develop teaching strategies.

Lessons on Learning Disability

Prejudice-based bullying remains a huge issue for pupils who have learning disabilities. Research for *#Included in the Main?!* found that two thirds of young people who have learning disabilities and/or autism spectrum disorders have been bullied, and 16% say they don't have any friends.

Supported by funding from Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, ENABLE Scotland's new *#BeTheChange* campaign focuses on promoting positive images of people who have learning disabilities to challenge people's perceptions and break down barriers to an equal society.

[Research by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission in Scotland](#) has highlighted the importance of educating children and young people on difference and building their awareness of protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act.

A key part of *#BetheChange* will therefore be the rollout of [Talking About Learning Disability](#), a series of 5 lessons for S1 and S2 pupils which are the end product of a research and development project commissioned by ENABLE Scotland with the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde.

These school-based resources focus on educating children about learning disability; overcoming the barriers to friendships between young people who have learning disabilities and their peers who do not; and giving them a safe space to talk about why it is important not to stand back and let someone be bullied.

We hope that this work will help to inform the review of the Personal and Social Education (PSE) curriculum moving forward, and that these resources will be adopted in schools across Scotland to ensure they are confident and equipped to teach children and young people about learning disability and the importance of difference; challenging the barriers to forming meaningful friendships.

For more details on any element of this submission, please contact:

Kayleigh Thorpe
Head of Campaigns, Policy and Activism
E: kayleigh.thorpe@enable.org.uk

Frank McKillop
Policy and Research Officer
E: frank.mckillop@enable.org.uk

⁵ The Scottish Government, Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland, 2016
<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00502222.pdf>