As a representative of ENABLE Scotland, I welcome the opportunity to respond to the submissions made to the Public Petitions Committee in respect to petition PE1409 – Bridging the Training Gap. We would also like to thank the Public Petitions Committee for their time and consideration to date.


General comments

Petition PE1409 was instigated by members of our Young Families Support Committee and is backed by Scottish Government statistics on exclusions. According to the Summary Statistics of Schools in Scotland 2010\(^1\) pupils with a disability were almost twice as likely to be excluded from school than those without a disability and five times as likely to be excluded if they had additional support needs.

We are keen not to isolate any particular conditions in our petition other than learning disability in its broadest sense. The Public Petitions Committee’s question on “planning to ensure the confidence of new teachers” asked for responses especially around dyslexia and autistic spectrum disorder. Some of the responses received by the Committee have picked up on this, making the point that all barriers to learning need to be addressed by training programmes. ENABLE Scotland supports this position and believes that support should be needs-based not diagnosis-based.

We recognise the challenges faced by local authorities in achieving full training for all staff, especially in the current financial climate. However, we would like to encourage the best possible outcomes for all children in Scotland. We believe that encouraging education staff to create a supportive learning environment will also have the effect of greatly reducing the need to use exclusions in response to disruptive or challenging behaviour in the classroom. Exclusion can impact negatively on a young person’s life well beyond their school years, as well as having an impact on the lives of parents and carers.

ENABLE Scotland is pleased to note that many of the local authority respondents share the aspiration of the petition and that concerted effort is

going into raising awareness of learning disability and/or autistic spectrum disorders in many of these areas.

Some examples of good practice were highlighted in the responses from local authorities and we hope that these can be shared with others. These include:

- East Renfrewshire Council – Educational Psychological Service has promoted the notion of coaching in context in order to support staff in situ, during the learning and teaching process

- West Lothian Council – Child Disability Service and Education have recently sent out a questionnaire to parents with a view to identifying what training parents would find most beneficial. Unfortunately this questionnaire was not sent to parents in grant-aided or special schools, whose views would have been extremely valuable in developing effective training programmes.

We were pleased to note that the Scottish Government, the General Teaching Council for Scotland and Education Scotland responses all acknowledge the need to improve in the area of additional support needs training for teachers.

We note with disappointment the lack of a response from the Association of Head Teachers and Deputes in Scotland which we feel could add a significant voice to our petition.

Individual responses

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) agrees that often support assistants only receive basic training and that the timing of the petition is "apposite as Scottish teacher education works towards responding to the recommendations of Teaching Scotland’s Future (2011)". GTCS also accept that "many of the required elements to address additional support needs are already in place but as can be seen in Teaching Scotland's Future students regularly express a lack of confidence in dealing with such issues."

Education Scotland concur with our view that there is “considerable scope to improve training for all staff working with children and young people to ensure that the needs of those with additional support needs are met more effectively.”

The Scottish Government’s response comments that Teaching Scotland’s Future “identifies a number of areas in which teachers experience greatest difficulty”, including additional support needs. The NPG (National Partnership Group) has been established to take forward the recommendations of TSF.”

We remain concerned that the membership of the NPG and its Strategic Reference Group does not include a representative from a learning disability organisation such as ENABLE Scotland or the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability. It is vital that decision-making bodies take the views of

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people who have learning disabilities and their parents and carers into account.

Local authorities take differing views in their responses. Whilst it appears there are good intentions and practical initiatives being carried out by Councils across Scotland, there is a lack of evidence being presented that training and support is being delivered or taken up by front line staff. In addition, Councils’ responses reinforced the findings of our “Bridging the Training Gap” research\(^3\), in that Continuing Professional Development opportunities are on a voluntary basis. As Aberdeen City Council noted “there is no requirement for mainstream teachers to undertake specific training in supporting pupils with learning disabilities.”

However, we were pleased to note that a number of initiatives are already underway to identify the needs of young people who have learning disabilities. In particular, we are pleased to note the initiative being carried out by West Lothian Council, to send all parents a questionnaire with a view to identifying what training parents feel is needed and then commissioning other agencies to deliver that training. We believe that this should be highlighted as an example of good practice for other local authorities to consider adopting.

East Ayrshire Council make some interesting points about the difficulties of staff receiving training in the controlled environment of a training room as opposed to real life situations. They say that mandatory training in itself will not result in all staff feeling confident about supporting young people with ASN. This is true, however mandatory training would at the very least provide a basic level of understanding and some practical strategies which can then be built on and developed. Without this basis, it’s a bit like building a house without first putting down foundations.

ENABLE Scotland would like to re-state our position that mandatory training on communication and behaviour management strategies and learning disability/ASD awareness is vital to ensure that teaching staff have the basic tools they need to effectively support children and young people with additional support needs in their classrooms.

**Next steps**

ENABLE Scotland would like to invite the Public Petitions Committee to consider referring the petition to the Education and Culture Committee to consider the issues it raises. We would also like the Public Petitions Committee to consider how we can gather further examples of good practice and promote these more widely across Scotland’s local authorities.

**Linda Whitmore**

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\(^3\)http://www.enable.org.uk/enabledirect/publications/Documents/Bridging_the_Training_Gap_270411.pdf