



## Parliamentary report

### Information for Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

#### Neurodivergence session 20<sup>th</sup> January 2026

Differabled Scotland would like to thank the committee for allowing us to attend the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2026 concerning neurodivergence.

Differabled Scotland would like to comment that we agree with Dr Crabb and Dr Boeing's comments on improving diagnosis and support systems for people with neurodivergence. However, we would like to add a few comments in relation to Dr Crabb's comment below:

Quote from Dr Crabb:

*'The second thing is that we need to have really clear evidence-based advice for the public and family members, so that they do not get stuck waiting for people like us to tell them what might be helpful. We need services such as NHS Inform to make really clear evidence-based guidelines available to the public. People need to know where they are. Guidelines need to inform the whole system, such as health visitors giving advice on things such as screen time, exercise, caffeine and sleep, right through the*

*life course, so that people can start to work through the factors that can make neurodiversity more challenging.'*

Whilst it is very important to have clear, up to date medical evidence for neurodivergent people, we were concerned that the comment could be interpreted that better advice on caffeine use and screentime might reduce neurodivergent 'traits'.

From anecdotal evidence derived from our interactions with parents and carers of neurodivergent young people and neurodivergent adults, the 'traits' of ADHD are real and not caused solely by screen time, lack of exercise, high levels of caffeine and poor sleep. Caffeine, poor sleep and exercise and excessive screen time are factors that can affect anyone – neurotypical and neurodivergent.

Some members of our group have different reactions to caffeine (it makes them drowsy) and some find that a computer game can help them relax after being out in the neurotypical world.

Caffeine metabolism has been identified as having a genetic component (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39438936/>) so advice on consumption should be based on a wide range of evidence.

It is also well-known that neurodivergent people have various sleep difficulties and this does require expert support (not just advice on caffeine intake and video game use) (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36911135/>).

Studies are also discovering genetic links between sleep disturbances and neurodevelopmental conditions (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36791049/> ). Genetic studies are also finding links between genes and problems with circadian rhythms which lead to sleep disorders (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39723615/> ).

The majority of concerns that neurodivergent adults in our group have are dealing with complicated health systems that will not listen to their genuine concerns, and the difficulty in accessing mental health support. Neurodivergent people are more likely to suffer poor mental health (suicide rates, for example, are higher in neurodivergent populations). One paper has shown that 'Recognizing ADHD, comorbid conditions and suicidality is important in prevention.' (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5371172/>).

We feel it would be useful to provide widely available advice on a holistic approach to supporting neurodivergent people, which includes the acceptance that mental health issues and suicidality are higher in this group of people, as well as accepting that problems with sleep and caffeine can be affected by genetic determinants.

There was also very little discussion of sensory processing disorders which can cause huge problems for neurodivergent people and more widely available advice should be developed to support neurodivergent people with these issues.

We do agree with Dr Crabb's statement:

*'We then need to commission, at scale, on a once-for-Scotland basis, initial self-help and peer support groups for people. There are really good models in place—we have so many pilots across Scotland that show that you can take a range of approaches. The models usually involve coaching and peer support—which can be run by third sector partners—that people can access whether they have a diagnosis or not, and they can dip in and out of that support, depending on what is happening in their life. Those things are the bottom tiers of support that society needs to move to a better place.'*

We also agree with Dr Boeing that planning for children services must not get stuck in silos:

*'A cross-government approach is really important. It feels like things get stuck in silos across Government. Given the energy and passion to tackle this wicked problem that we face as a society and a world, we need something in place within Government that transcends silos, so that funding does not get stuck and expertise does not get lost.'*

We also agree with her comments on having a human rights based approach in supporting the needs of neurodivergent children and young people.

As a parent of a neurodivergent teenager and as someone who identifies as autistic (I am on a five year waitlist for diagnosis on the NHS) I have attached my own comments that I sent to the House of Lords inquiry on the Autism Act 2009.

One comment I made about supports for young neurodivergent people is support for the transitions phase from school to work:

*'Anecdotal evidence from my work for a grassroots neurodivergence charity suggests that young neurodivergent people need their right to an education respected with suitable accommodations made to help them with their education journey. They also need a right to a transition plan moving from school to further and higher education, the world of work and adult life. Neurodivergent adults need access to neuroaffirming work environments and easier access to supported work.'*

Published evidence: Res Dev Disabil . 2021 Jul;114:103959. doi: 10.1016/j.ridd.2021.103959. Epub 2021 Apr 24.

**"It's like a ramp for a person in a wheelchair": Workplace accessibility for employees with autism**

Michal Waisman-Nitzan<sup>1</sup>, Eynat Gal<sup>2</sup>, Naomi Schreuer<sup>3</sup>

Differable co-produced a booklet for parents and carers of neurodivergent young people about transitions from school – this outlines what should happen for these young people, but in my son's case this did not happen.

<https://www.sldo.ac.uk/media/2064/supporting-family-carers-navigating-the-post-secondary-school-transition-process.pdf>

At Differabled we feel that parents and carers, who know their children best and are often the advocates for their young people if they cannot speak for themselves, must be included in designing these holistic services for neurodivergent young people. We also believe that neurodivergent adults must be included in the design of services meant to support them (nothing about us without us).

In the discussion held on 20<sup>th</sup> January, Debbie Best pointed out that sensory processing was not discussed in great detail, yet it affects most neurodivergent people and can cause a wide range of barriers to accessing education and health services.

In a paper from 2022 , **‘Barriers to Inclusive Learning for Autistic Individuals**

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12136690/>), the author states:

*‘Although autistic students have the potential to perform successfully academically, one major barrier to their success is that the educational environment is filled with anxiety-provoking sensory input. We call on educational institutions to do more to positively affect the outcomes for autistic students and those with sensory modulation challenges by reducing sensory-related barriers to learning in higher education.’*

#### Self Directed Support – written by Debbie Best

Self Directed support money devolved to local authorities to support neurodivergent individuals is causing extreme distress. The lack of training, awareness and genuine humanity means that people are being denied access to supports, which their care assessment/ plan outlines. Their flexibility to have meaningful choice is nothing short of a tick box exercise. This is a breach of the care standards. Allocated budgets are not taking neurodivergence into account, with no understanding of the different neurology by offering choices inline with a neurotypical person's needs. Instead, the individual has to fit into whatever generic supports are seen as cost effective to SW and local authority finance teams. A small budget that I receive as my autistic son's carer has caused me more distress by East Dunbartonshire council, than what my actual caring role does. I'm expected as an autistic person, to constantly 'shop around' for cheaper wellbeing treatments. If I go to a cheaper local trader, then I'm told that the receipts are sub standard. If I go to a higher end facility, then although the receipt is acceptable, the cost is more. I have had to remind SW that autism is a social and communication disorder, however they still think it is appropriate to make me close down relationships with trusted familiar therapists and familiar therapy rooms and change my wellbeing support, just to save something on the cost. Would a wheelchair user be coerced into using a premises without ramp access?? Of course not! However, it is deemed acceptable to force neurodivergent people to change the therapy and premises without a second thought. Safeguarding is not considered either in relation to cost. As a neurodivergent victim of extreme sexual abuse by a convicted medical practitioner, I have PTSD symptoms and find it difficult to feel safe and build up trust and safe relationships. SW are aware

of this and still don't take any of this into account, they are only interested in saving money and not the safeguarding of me. They like to flag up you signed a contract, but so did they. Then, they block the budget, which is in place to meet the assessed needs, that is breaching the agreed contract, failing to let the person achieve the assessed outcomes. They see this as acceptable. I see it as coercive controlling gatekeeping behaviours and something must be done to stop this now. There is extreme prejudice being shown to neurodivergent people and we are most likely to be the most marginalised of all groups of people worldwide, we are made 'to fit into the norm' regardless of the impact on us.

Submitted to Committee Monday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2026

### Information about Differabled

#### **Who are we?**

We are a Neuro-Affirming organisation created by parents, offering support and information to neurodivergent people and their parents, carers and families.

DIFFERabled understands the importance of having lived experience in our roles, and so we are proud that all staff, volunteers and board members either have or are seeking their own neurodivergent diagnosis or have a neurodivergent member of family to care for.

Our dynamic organisation was discovered in 2014 and became a constituted charity in 2017; based in North Glasgow but stretching across all of Scotland and onwards.

#### **What makes us Neuro-Affirming?**

We believe in a strengths and rights-based approach to developmental differences, aiming to provide support and adaptations that affirm neurodivergent identity. We use respectful language and do our best to create inclusive environments that accommodates different sensory and communication needs. We support individuals to embracing their neurodiversity and advocate for their right to be themselves and promote positive outcomes.

#### **What do we do?**

DIFFERabled offer Neuro-Affirming support, information, and learning opportunities. that empower, enlighten and promote neurodivergent understanding and inclusivity in society.

We aim to equip our community with knowledge; to understand themselves and their loved ones, allowing the ability to self advocate and improve wellbeing

Our caring, informative and supportive organisation has a wonderful network of parents, carers and neurodivergent people of all ages, with or without a formal diagnosis.

DIFFERabled offer a range of services, providing support and aiming to improve the overall wellbeing of our neurodivergent community and their families.

We have recently launched our new Neuro-Affirming Learning and Information Programme for neurodivergent individuals and their families (and carers), which provides an understanding of neurodivergence, promotes self-empowerment, and raises awareness and inclusivity.

As part of our project, we regularly engage with schools and other educational establishments to offer our support and knowledge in the community.

We work with local therapists and wellbeing practitioners to provide treatments for those that need some TLC, to promote a healthy lifestyle and mindset.

DIFFERabled participate in various events and consultations on several pertinent topics, often bringing in expertise from across the Education, Health and Social Care sectors, most recently:

- A collaborative project with university of Glasgow to co-create a booklet and online resource, supporting the post school transition.
- The Scottish Parliament consultation on the subject of “The Presumption of Mainstream Education”.
- Neurodivergence In Scottish Schools symposium with The University of Glasgow; exploring the challenges young people currently face in accessing education, with an aim to challenge and positively change the current system.

## **Our Services**

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### **Parent Carer Support & Information Drop In**

Our parents / carers and neurodivergent community are always at the heart of what we do. We provide a safe space where you are accepted, understood, and encouraged to share your own lived experiences with peers; supporting one another; pre and post diagnosis.

Each group has informal discussions about whatever is relevant at that time, which could be behaviour concerns; sleep issues; benefit guidance; education support; friendships; sensory advice.

Please come along to any of our drop-in groups for a cuppa and a chat, we will be delighted to meet you!

## **Neurodivergent ADULT Friendship Group**

We are a friendship group to enable like-minded people to connect to one another in a safe, accepting and supportive environment.

Participation is free and open to anyone, with or without a formal diagnosis.

## **Events**

We occasionally run events focusing on specific pre arranged topics, chosen by our community. These can include Social Security Scotland, MSP Surgeries, Advocacy Support, Education Information.

Please check the news section of our website for upcoming dates.

## **Dekko Comics**

We organise short weekly workshop courses for young people, focusing on neurodivergent strengths and how to engage and succeed in certain environments, such as school.

## **Neuro-Affirming Learning & Information Programme**

Our programme features a variety of sessions and bespoke workshops delivered by authentic, life experienced neurodivergent consultants and mentors; exploring all neurotypes; created for parents, carers, neurodivergent young people and adults (with or without a formal diagnosis).

## **Social Media**

We have a welcoming and friendly community on Facebook, always happy to offer support and advice if they can.

If you would like to join any of our closed Facebook groups, please click the icon for links.

## **Support & Information**

Our Family Link Workers are available to offer an introductory service to families and people in crisis situations; offering support whilst allowing the opportunity to get to know us and what we can offer.

## **Culturally Diverse / ESOL Support & Information**

We can offer specific organised and / or group Support & Information sessions.



# DIFFERabled

## Our Identity

Our new brand identity was launched in 2024 after much consultation with our board, volunteers and community. This change signified how much DIFFERabled has grown and evolved over the years and has a strong focus on our future.

We'd like to share some information on the meaning behind our new identity and logo, because we are so proud of it:

- Each colour has been carefully chosen:
- Purple / Indigo is a recognised colour to symbolise both Inclusivity, and spirituality.
- Gold / Yellow is identified as the colour for Neurodivergence.
- Red is a nod to maintaining our original brand colour.
- The face is tilted up, looking ahead to symbolise progression for our organisation and the neurodivergent community.
- The circle surrounding the face represents a circle of trust, acceptance and understanding. We also love how this can symbolise being “in our own time and space” which is the Māori definition of Autism; Takiwātanga.
- A shooting star symbolises the future being bright and an awakening - it is not uncommon for neurodivergent people to be in tune with their spiritual senses,
- The brain being in abstract form, represents how neurodivergent people think differently when navigating the world.
- Text is rounded, friendly and easy to read.

For more information, please visit our website: [www.differabledscotland.co.uk](http://www.differabledscotland.co.uk)