

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2231: CAMHS Staff Need Resources, Children Need Assessments

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide targeted funding for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) neurodevelopmental services, in order for additional staff to be recruited and trained, for transparent waiting-time data to be published, and for maximum waiting-time standards for ADHD and autism assessments to be introduced so that no child is left waiting years for support.

Introduction

Neurodivergence refers to when an individual's neurocognitive functions fall outside the typical range. Neurocognitive functions refer to brain functions such as the ability to learn and use language, to regulate attention, emotions and impulses, social behaviours and processing sensory stimuli.

Neurodivergence includes, but is not limited to, conditions such as [autism](#), [attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#), [dyslexia](#), [dyscalculia](#), [developmental co-ordination disorder \(DCD\)](#), [developmental language disorder \(DLD\)](#), [Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder](#) (FASD) and [Tourette's syndrome](#).

These specific conditions are referred to as neurodevelopmental conditions, although conditions such as dyslexia and dyscalculia are also termed 'learning difficulties' by some people.¹

The most common neurodevelopmental conditions are thought to be dyslexia and dyscalculia, affecting 10% and 6% of the population respectively. ADHD is estimated to affect 5% of school aged children in Scotland, while autism affects roughly 3% of this group.²

In the past, children and young people who were suspected of being neurodivergent were typically referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). However, in recognition of the fact that these children did not have a mental illness requiring treatment, most parts of Scotland now have a specific neurodevelopmental pathway. These pathways usually involve a variety of services such as education, health and social work.

¹ SPICe Briefing (2025) [Neurodevelopmental Pathways and Waiting Times in Scotland – Definitions and language](#)

² SPICe Briefing (2025) [Neurodevelopmental Pathways and Waiting Times in Scotland – Prevalence of neurodivergence in Scotland](#)

Funding

It is difficult to identify how much funding is specifically allocated to services because much of the support is multidisciplinary and will come from universal services.

However, there are sometimes funding allocations associated with specific policies or initiatives. For example, the Scottish Government provided funding for [several pilot programmes](#) to support the implementation of the [National Neurodevelopmental Specification for Children and Young People](#).

Similarly, in [a letter to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee](#), the Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs highlighted the Scottish Government was providing more than £2.9 million in 2025-26 to improve neurodevelopmental support, funding projects that:

- expand autism and ADHD assessment capacity,
- develop digital ADHD support tools,
- help families on waiting lists access support, and
- support service redesign and workforce training through NAIT and Public Services Delivery Scotland.

The letter also highlighted that the Scottish Government provided £2.5 million for the Autistic Adult Support Fund and has committed an additional £7.6 million in 2026-27 to further improve neurodevelopmental assessment and care for young people.

Staffing

There is no published national figure for the number of staff employed in Scotland's neurodevelopmental pathways. This is largely because of the multidisciplinary and cross-sector nature of the workforce involved.

Assessment is often multidisciplinary and teams commonly include:

- Paediatricians
- Child and adolescent psychiatrists
- Clinical Psychologists
- Speech and Language Therapists
- Occupational Therapists
- Specialist Nurses
- Educational Psychologists

- Education staff

However, during the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's inquiry into [ADHD and autism pathways and support](#), variations in available pathways and services between NHS health boards was identified as a key issue.

In written submissions to the Committee's call for views, [the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health](#) identified:

“Inconsistencies in neurodevelopmental pathways and staff makeup within services...[Noting that] these variations contribute to uneven service delivery, exacerbate workforce pressures, and further extend already lengthy waiting lists.”

Often specific tools will be used to assess for different types of neurodivergence. For example, in autism assessments, practitioners may use tools such as ADOS-2 (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule) and ADI-R (Autism Diagnostic Interview Revised). Staff involved in the assessments are usually required to undergo training in the appropriate use of such tools.

Waiting Times

In the past assessment for neurodevelopmental conditions was included in CAMHS waiting time statistics. However, in recent years [these have been separated out](#) in recognition of the fact that neurodivergence is not a mental health condition.

Data concerning waiting times specifically for neurodevelopmental condition assessments is not held by the Scottish Government and has previously only been made available via Freedom of Information requests and one-off publications. However, in 2025, the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee undertook a survey of NHS Boards as part of its inquiry into [ADHD and autism pathways and support](#).

A key finding of the survey was that there were 42,530 children waiting for a neurodevelopmental assessment. This amounts to approximately one in twenty-five children aged 0-18, based on 2023 population estimates. NHS Grampian did not provide any data.

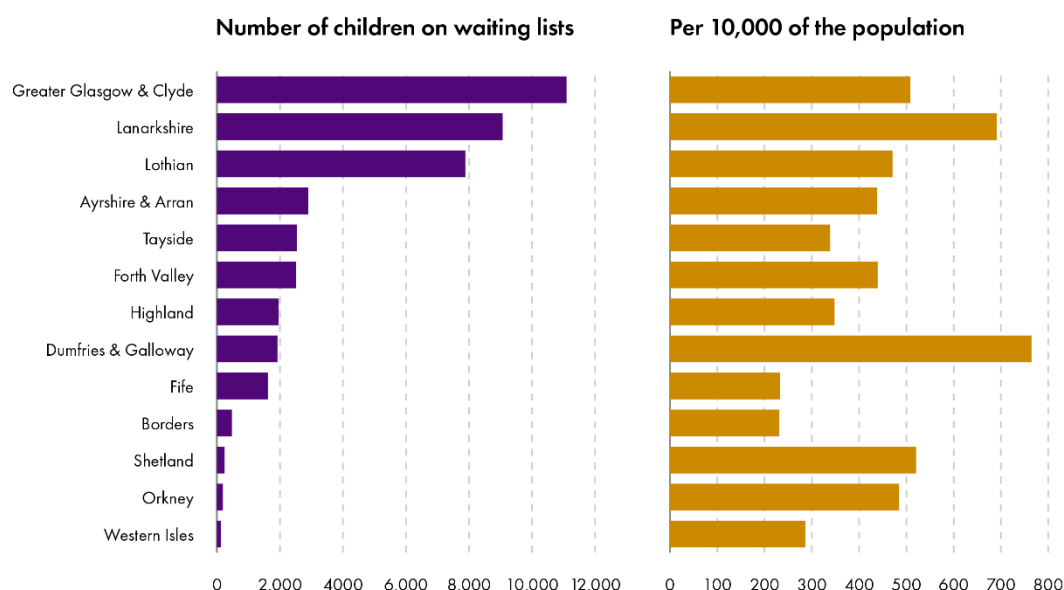


Figure 1: Number of children waiting for neurodevelopmental assessments in Scotland, March 2025

Number of children waiting for neurodevelopmental assessments in each Scottish health board as of March 2025. Totals and numbers per 10,000 of population under the age of 18 shown. No data available for NHS Grampian.

Source: SPICe Briefing (2025) [Neurodevelopmental Pathways and Waiting Times in Scotland](#)

In relation to the amount of time people had been waiting, all health boards reported the median and longest current waiting times for children seeking a neurodevelopmental assessment, except for NHS Grampian and NHS Dumfries and Galloway. These are shown in figure 2 below.

Median waiting times ranged between 22 weeks (NHS Western Isles) and 141 weeks (NHS Ayrshire and Arran), with an average median waiting time of 76 weeks. Longest waiting times ranged between 69 weeks (NHS Fife) and 342 weeks (NHS Ayrshire and Arran), with an average longest waiting time of 196 weeks.

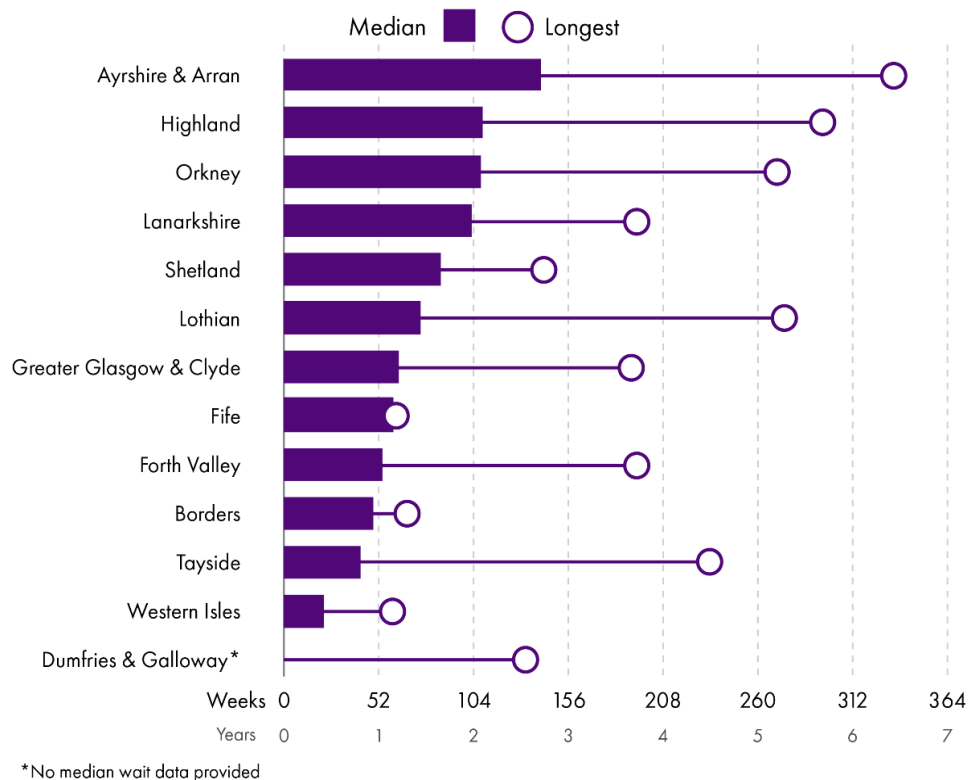


Figure 2: Median and longest waiting times for children to receive a neurodevelopmental assessment in NHS Scotland health boards.

Median and longest waiting times in weeks for children to receive a neurodevelopmental assessment in NHS Ayrshire and Arran, NHS Highland, NHS Orkney, NHS Lanarkshire, NHS Shetland, NHS Lothian, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, NHS Fife, NHS Forth Valley, NHS Borders, NHS Tayside and NHS Dumfries and Galloway as of March 2025. Median waiting time is not available for NHS Dumfries and Galloway. No data available for NHS Grampian or NHS Western Isles.

Source: SPICe Briefing (2025) [Neurodevelopmental Pathways and Waiting Times in Scotland](#)

There is currently no waiting time standard for the assessment of neurodevelopmental conditions.

Key Organisations and relevant links

- [Stronger Together for Autism and Neurodivergence](#) (STAND)
- [National Autism Implementation Team](#) (NAIT)
- [Scottish Autism](#)
- [National Autistic Society Scotland](#)
- [Scottish ADHD Coalition](#)
- [Enquire](#)

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31 August 2026

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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