

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 21 May 2025
9th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2141: Support the neurodiverse community by providing funding for psychoeducation

Introduction

Petitioner Luis Robertson

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve the support available to the neurodiverse community by providing fully-funded psychoeducation, and sensory aids, which allow for greater community integration pre- and post-diagnosis.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2141>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 10 February 2025.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 20 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks a view from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received submissions from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
May 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2141: Support the neurodiverse community by providing funding for psychoeducation

Petitioner

Luis Robertson

Date Lodged

10 February 2025

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve the support available to the neurodiverse community by providing fully-funded psychoeducation, and sensory aids, which allow for greater community integration pre- and post-diagnosis.

Background information

Psychoeducation is crucial for autistic individuals as it empowers them with the knowledge and tools to better understand themselves and their unique experiences. By learning about autism, they can identify their strengths, navigate challenges, and develop coping strategies tailored to their needs. This understanding promotes self-acceptance, reduces feelings of isolation, and supports mental health by normalising their experiences. Furthermore, psychoeducation fosters improved communication and relationship skills, enabling autistic individuals to articulate their needs and connect with others effectively. It also encourages self-advocacy, equipping them to seek appropriate accommodations and challenge stigma, ultimately enhancing their autonomy and integration into society.

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2141



Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

[PE2141](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve the support available to the neurodiverse community by providing fully-funded psychoeducation and sensory aids, which allow for greater community integration pre- and post-diagnosis.

Neurodiversity in Scotland

[Neurodiverse groups include](#) people with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), intellectual disabilities, and learning differences such as dyslexia. [It is estimated that 15-20% of Scotland's population is neurodiverse.](#)

What is psychoeducation?

[Psychoeducation provides service users and their family, carers or friends](#) with the information they need to understand their condition, and empower them to manage any challenges they face. [Psychoeducation interventions](#) are typically structured, fixed-term, condition-specific sessions, delivered by a qualified professional. The sessions offer information, education, and simple therapeutic work.

In the context of neurodiversity, psychoeducation can help people diagnosed with conditions such as autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to understand their diagnosis and find effective self-management strategies. Psychoeducation can also help parents and other family, carers and friends of neurodiverse people to access information about their condition. Psychoeducation is an emergent field, and the evidence base is therefore relatively small. However, [research conducted to date suggests that psychoeducation can play a positive role in supporting neurodiverse groups post-diagnosis, particularly if the resources shared are co-produced by neurodiverse people.](#)

Where psychoeducation is available, it is commonly delivered as part of the post-diagnostic support offered to people diagnosed with particular conditions. Consequently, long waiting times for assessment for autism, ADHD, and other neurodevelopmental conditions may affect patients' ability to access psychoeducation resources.

Current provision of psychoeducation and sensory aids in Scotland

There are some psychoeducation resources available to neurodiverse people and their family, carers and friends in Scotland, though not necessarily in the form of a structured intervention. For example, [NHS Lothian's website lists a number of](#)

[psychoeducation resources](#) related to autism. [The Edinburgh Psychoeducation Intervention for Children and Young People \(EPIC\) research programme](#) has produced a series of psychoeducation resources for neurodiverse children and their families.

[The use of sensory aids can vary greatly](#) depending on an individual neurodiverse person's needs. They may include fidget toys, weighted blankets, therapy balls, visual timers, and a number of other options. Though healthcare practitioners may suggest appropriate sensory aids and suppliers, these aids do not currently appear to be routinely provided by NHS Boards.

Scottish Government actions

In 2020, [the Scottish Government funded a pilot national post-diagnostic support programme for people diagnosed with autism](#). The programme included the provision of information and training for autistic people and their families. Originally scheduled for six months, the pilot ran from December 2020 to March 2023. An [evaluation of the pilot programme](#) recommended the development of consistent post-diagnostic support for autistic people and their loved ones.

Scottish Parliament actions

There has been no Parliamentary action on this topic prior to consideration of this petition.

Sarah Swift

Researcher

12 March 2025

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

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C: Written submissions

Scottish Government written submission, 17 April 2025

PE2141/A: Support the neurodiverse community by providing funding for psychoeducation

In this response, we have explained how organisations funded through the Scottish Government's Autistic Adult Support Fund (AASF) provide support that achieves similar aims to those of psychoeducation, and explained how existing providers of psychoeducation and sensory aids can apply for funding.

We have also outlined how psychoeducation providers might fit within wider Scottish Government ambitions to implement Adult Neurodevelopmental Pathways across Scotland.

Background on Psychoeducation

Psychoeducation provides service users and their family, carers or friends with the information they need to understand their condition, and empower them to manage any challenges they face.¹

Psychoeducation interventions are typically structured, fixed-term, condition-specific sessions, delivered by a qualified professional. The sessions offer information, education, and simple therapeutic work.²

In the context of neurodiversity, psychoeducation can help people diagnosed with conditions such as autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to understand their diagnosis and find effective self-management strategies. Psychoeducation can also help parents and other family, carers and friends of neurodiverse people to access information about their condition.

Psychoeducation is an emergent field, and the evidence base is therefore relatively small. However, research conducted to date suggests that psychoeducation can play a positive role in supporting neurodiverse groups post-diagnosis, particularly if the resources shared are co-produced by neurodiverse people³.

Autistic Adult Support Fund (AASF)

The AASF aims to help adults with an autism diagnosis, self-identified autistic adults, and their families and carers understand what neurodivergence means for them and improve their wellbeing.

The fund has supported and will support organisations across Scotland to deliver a range of projects to meet these aims. Facilitated by Inspiring Scotland and funded by the Scottish Government, the AASF builds on the work of a pilot which ran between 2020 and 2021 to provide post diagnostic support to autistic people.

¹ <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/reacttoolkit/toolkit/treatment-options/psychoeducation/>

² [Incorporating Psychoeducational Care in the Autism Diagnosis Pathway](#)

³ [Co-production of a Neurodiversity-Affirmative Anxiety Intervention for Autistic Children](#)

Psychoeducation seeks to help people understand their diagnoses and find effective self-management strategies, through both group and one-to-one sessions provided by projects.

Feedback from organisations who received funding during the October 2023 – September 2025 funding period confirms that they have achieved many of the same objectives which psychoeducation strives to deliver. The feedback has identified that the support provided led to autistic people having a greater understanding of what autism means to them, feeling more able to advocate for themselves, experiencing improved quality of life, and reporting that they were better at coping with day-to-day challenges. We have commissioned an external evaluation which will be published later this year.

The AASF has now opened to new applications, with a deadline of 21 May 2025. We would encourage providers of psychoeducation and sensory aids who fulfil the application criteria to apply for support from the Fund. They can do so here: [Apply to the Autistic Adult Support Fund - Inspiring Scotland](#)

Adult Neurodevelopmental Pathways

The National Autism Implementation Team (NAIT) is currently supporting NHS Boards to develop, enhance and redesign existing local neurodevelopmental services.

The Scottish Government piloted Adult Neurodevelopmental Pathways in four Health Boards to support a single diagnostic pathway for ADHD and Autism. The results of this work, including a final report, have been published. The Scottish Government has accepted all 10 of the report's recommendations, and we are taking work forward to implement these.

The aim of this work is to implement stepped care approaches to neurodevelopmental diagnosis and support across Scotland. This means that multidisciplinary teams within each Health Board will be able to provide care and support tailored to the individual needs of each neurodivergent person who approaches them. Health Boards are responsible for deciding what support is provided locally but this may include professionals trained in psychoeducational methods within such teams.

Educational Resources for Healthcare Providers

I also wish to draw your attention to broader work that the Scottish Government has funded to ensure that the pre- and post-diagnostic work that healthcare providers undertake with neurodivergent people is able to meet their needs and empower them. Whilst this is not equivalent to psychoeducation or the provision of sensory aids, our view is that it achieves some of the same aims.

We are funding NHS Education for Scotland (NES) to deliver the Enhanced Psychological Practice (EPP) programme, a post-graduate certificate level education programme, which enables staff to deliver high-quality, evidence-based psychological interventions for mild to moderate difficulties in a way that can be efficiently brought to scale.

NES deliver education and training to upskill staff in assessment and diagnosis, consistent with the NES "Autism Training Framework" to improve the equity of access to Autism diagnoses and promote good practice. Since the publication of the training framework in 2014 there has been an increasing understanding that autism forms part of a range of potential neuro-diversities, such as ADHD and Learning Disabilities. The current NES training plans and developing plans aim to reflect this view and support workforce development for neuro-developmental services across the lifespan. We recognise that it is important that Boards prioritise this as part of their workforce training plans.

NES has developed a knowledge hub available via TURAS Learn, for all staff, to ensure they have the appropriate knowledge to help them to meet the needs of Autistic people, relevant to their role. This hub is under continual development based on new resources which become available. NES also delivers a range of skilled, enhanced and specialist mental health intervention training packages, for delivery to autistic and neuro-diverse individuals across the lifespan.

In 2022-23, funding provided to NES enabled training across mental health, including for those who have neurodiversity including Autism and ADHD across the lifespan. This included training to administer the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, training to upskill multidisciplinary staff in neuro-developmental assessments, and delivery of adapted Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for co-occurring mental health conditions in autistic children and young people and adults. NES has liaised with a range of stakeholders including local boards, neurodevelopmental networks and NAIT and has identified key priorities for training and educational developments to meet the needs of staff working in Learning Disabilities services across health and social care.

In 2024, a NES Assessing ADHD webinar was attended by 321 staff and 78 have accessed the recording. In the same year, a NES Understanding ADHD in Girls and Women Webinar covered a range of issues and was attended by 922 staff, the recording has been viewed an additional 2111 times.

We are aware that current data suggests that up to 50-70% of autistic people also have ADHD and we have current developments and future plans to continue to upskill the workforce with regards to knowledge about ADHD. This has included a webinar on Understanding ADHD in girls and women which contained a focus on hormone changes in adolescence and menopause which can exacerbate ADHD symptoms. This webinar has been viewed almost 3000 times by staff across Scotland via Turas Learn. Future developments also include additional events to support staff working in a wide range of settings to understand the impact of hormones on mental health for women and girls with ADHD, with specific focus on integrating this information as part of a formulation-based approach.

Conclusion

Our initial view is that psychoeducation interventions can be one of a variety of approaches to supporting neurodivergent people. As outlined, various Scottish Government-supported initiatives achieve many of the aims articulated by psychoeducation and provided by sensory aids.

However, we are open to exploring the possibility of integrating psychoeducational approaches, and the use of sensory aids, into these existing frameworks, and will continue to engage with relevant bodies such as NAIT to understand how this might be achieved.

Yours sincerely,

Neurodivergence and Learning Disabilities Unit

Petitioner written submission, 1 May 2025

PE2141/B: Support the neurodiverse community by providing funding for psychoeducation

Psychoeducation for neurodiversity educates individuals, families, and communities about neurodevelopmental conditions like autism, ADHD, and dyslexia, promoting acceptance and effective support. It provides insights into unique cognitive and behavioural traits, fostering self-advocacy and reducing stigma. Delivered through workshops or individual sessions, it emphasises strengths-based strategies and accommodations to enhance daily functioning and well-being. Research underscores its role in improving self-esteem and social inclusion for neurodivergent individuals⁴. By embracing neurodiversity, psychoeducation empowers individuals to thrive, celebrating differences and supporting equitable opportunities.

Importance of psychoeducation

Psychoeducation plays a critical role in supporting neurodiverse individuals by fostering understanding, self-acceptance, and effective coping strategies for conditions such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia. It equips individuals, families, and communities with knowledge about neurodiverse traits, reducing stigma and promoting inclusion. By providing evidence-based information on strengths, challenges, and accommodations, psychoeducation empowers neurodiverse individuals to navigate social, educational, and professional environments more effectively. For instance, understanding sensory sensitivities or executive functioning differences can lead to tailored interventions that enhance quality of life. Research highlights its efficacy: a 2019 study by Gordon et al. in 'Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders' found that psychoeducation improved family communication and reduced stress in households with autistic children⁵. Similarly, Barkley's 2013 work on ADHD emphasizes psychoeducation's role in improving self-regulation and adherence to treatment plans⁶. By bridging knowledge gaps, psychoeducation fosters a more inclusive society that values neurodiversity.

Importance of lived experience

⁴ Happé, F., & Frith, U. (2020). Annual Research Review: Looking back to look forward – changes in the concept of autism and implications for future research. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines*, 61(3), 218–232. Doi: 10.1111/jcpp.13176

⁵ Gordon, K., et al. (2019). Psychoeducation for families of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 49(5), 1901-1912.

⁶ Barkley, R. A. (2013). *Taking Charge of ADHD: The Complete, Authoritative Guide for Parents*. Guilford Press.

The development and delivery of psychoeducational programs by individuals with lived experience of neurodiversity, such as those who are autistic or otherwise neurodivergent, are critical for fostering authentic, empowering, and equitable support systems that resonate with the communities they serve. When individuals with firsthand experience lead these programs, they bring an unparalleled depth of understanding to the unique challenges, strengths, and perspectives of neurodivergent individuals, ensuring that content is not only accurate but also culturally and emotionally relevant. This authenticity helps dismantle stereotypes and deficit-based narratives often perpetuated by traditional, clinician-led models, replacing them with strengths-based approaches that celebrate neurodiversity and promote positive self-identity. For instance, lived experience informs the creation of tools and strategies that reflect real-world needs, such as sensory-friendly communication methods or practical coping mechanisms for navigating social stigma, as highlighted in works like Crane et al. (2019), which emphasize the need for autism-aware support⁷. Moreover, involving neurodivergent individuals in program design and facilitation fosters trust and engagement, as participants see their experiences mirrored and validated, enhancing the programs' impact on mental health and self-efficacy. This participatory approach, endorsed by Happé & Frith (2020), aligns with the neurodiversity paradigm's call for co-produced knowledge, ensuring that psychoeducation not only educates but also empowers individuals to thrive by advocating for their own needs and fostering inclusive environments. By centring lived experience, these programs challenge systemic inequities in mental health and educational services, creating pathways for meaningful societal change and equitable opportunities for all neurodivergent individuals.

The role of sensory aids

Sensory aids, such as noise-cancelling headphones, weighted blankets, and fidget tools, play a pivotal role in fostering social inclusion for neurodivergent individuals, particularly those with autism or sensory processing differences, by mitigating sensory overload and enabling participation in public and social environments. In Scotland, where the Scottish Government has committed to promoting equality and inclusion through policies like the Scottish Strategy for Autism, providing these aids is a practical step towards ensuring neurodivergent individuals can engage fully in community life. Sensory overload, as highlighted in research like Crane et al. (2019), can lead to anxiety and social withdrawal, excluding individuals from education, employment, and social activities. By supplying sensory aids, the Scottish Government could empower individuals to navigate challenging environments—such as busy classrooms, workplaces, or public transport—thus reducing barriers to inclusion. For instance, noise-cancelling headphones can enable an autistic person to attend a community event without distress, while weighted vests can provide calming sensory input during stressful social interactions. Funding these aids aligns with the neurodiversity paradigm, as discussed by Happé & Frith (2020), which advocates for environmental adjustments over deficit-focused interventions. The Scottish Government should prioritise subsidising or distributing sensory aids

⁷ Crane, L., Adams, F., Harper, G., Welch, J., & Pellicano, E. (2019). "Something needs to change": Mental health experiences of young autistic adults in England. *Autism*, 23(2), 477–493. Doi: 10.1177/1362361318757048

through existing frameworks, such as the NHS or local authorities, to ensure equitable access, particularly for low-income families. Additionally, integrating sensory aid provision with psychoeducational programmes led by neurodivergent individuals could enhance their effectiveness, ensuring aids are tailored to lived experiences. By investing in sensory aids, the Scottish Government would demonstrate a commitment to tangible, inclusive solutions that celebrate neurodiversity, reduce social exclusion, and uphold the rights of all Scots to participate fully in society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, combining psychoeducational programmes led by neurodivergent individuals with sensory aids, like noise-cancelling headphones, fosters social inclusion in Scotland. Psychoeducation, rooted in neurodiversity principles (Happé & Frith, 2020), promotes self-acceptance and reduces stigma, while sensory aids mitigate overload, enabling participation (Crane et al., 2019). By funding these initiatives, the Scottish Government can ensure equitable access, dismantle barriers, and empower neurodivergent individuals to thrive in an inclusive society.