

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

13th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday  
28 September 2022

PE1870: Ensure teachers of autistic pupils are  
appropriately qualified

## Note by the Clerk

<b>Lodged on</b>	21 June 2021
<b>Petitioner</b>	Edward Fowler
<b>Petition summary</b>	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce legislation requiring teachers of autistic pupils to be appropriately qualified to improve educational outcomes.
<b>Webpage</b>	<a href="https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1870">https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1870</a>

## Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [9 March 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new response from the Scottish Government which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.

6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

## **Action**

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

**Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe A

# PE1870: Ensure teachers of autistic pupils are appropriately qualified

## Petitioner

Edward Fowler

## Date lodged

21 June 2021

## Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce legislation requiring teachers of autistic pupils to be appropriately qualified to improve educational outcomes.

## Previous action

I have contacted MSPs and spoken with education authorities but things have not changed.

## Background information

Special conditions apply to the employment of teachers of hearing-impaired and visually impaired pupils. Both require teachers to obtain appropriate qualifications before they can be employed by education authority to teach such pupils.

I would like to petition the Scottish Parliament so teachers who teach children with autism must have an appropriate autism qualification.

I would like special conditions to apply to the employment of teachers of autistic pupils. I would like the education authority to only employ teachers with an appropriate autism qualification to teach pupils with autism.

## Annexe B

### Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1870 on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022

**The Convener:** The next continued petition is PE1870, lodged by Edward Fowler. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce legislation requiring teachers of autistic pupils to be appropriately qualified to improve educational outcomes.

The petitioner points out that special conditions apply to the employment of teachers of hearing impaired and visually impaired pupils, noting that those teachers are required to obtain appropriate qualifications. The petitioner suggests that the same principles should be applied to teachers who work with pupils with autism.

At our previous consideration of the petition, on 1 December 2021, we agreed to write to teaching unions, and we have since received responses from the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers and the petitioner. The NASUWT notes that initial teacher education is just one element in supporting the wellbeing of pupils and that improved initial teacher education on additional support needs “will not provide a quick fix on its own to guarantee that appropriate ASN support is available to all schools, teachers and learners across Scotland.”

It notes that initial teacher education already covers a wide range of issues and, in order to add in a new topic, consideration would need to be given to the question of which existing topic to remove.

The submission highlights pressures on teachers arising from an on-going reduction in specialist support for pupils with additional support needs, including in relation to managing challenging behaviour in the classroom. In his submission, the petitioner points to a wider issue: he believes that pupils are becoming overwhelmed in mainstream classrooms and are unable to cope. The petitioner explains that many teachers are not sufficiently trained to manage children with autism and co-occurring conditions and that, without the right supports and strategies, that can trigger challenging behaviour.

The petitioner believes that, at the moment, the system is failing both the teachers and the children.

Do any members have comments to make?

**Alexander Stewart:** I have a great deal of sympathy for the petitioner and with the issues that the union has identified. Having a number of individuals in a classroom who require additional support in order to undertake their mainstream education can

be a big issue for schools today, and providing that support potentially has a detrimental effect on the rest of the class.

The petitioner makes some strong points, and I am aware that the local authorities in my region have issues in this regard. I believe that the matter could be looked into more; therefore, it might be useful to write to the Scottish Government to ascertain what assessments are taking place in teacher training and to ask about producing guidance that recognises the link between the communication needs of certain children and the behaviour that takes place in the classroom.

The strain on the teachers is immense. At First Minister's question time the week before last, a question was asked about the situation in Aberdeen. A survey showed that there are daily situations in classrooms because the specific needs of children are not being addressed. That puts a burden on teachers, and the survey showed that a large number of them are contemplating leaving the profession as a result.

There is real scope for us to look at the matter.

**The Convener:** I see that members have no other comments or suggestions to make. We could write to the Scottish Government to ask whether it intends to undertake a child rights impact assessment of initial teacher training and the continuing professional development for teachers to ensure that the needs of all children with additional support needs, including those with autism, are being met, and to produce guidance for teachers along the lines mentioned by Alexander Stewart. Do colleagues agree to that approach?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Annexe C

### Scottish Government submission of 8 June 2022

#### PE1870/N - Ensure teachers of autistic pupils are appropriately qualified

Thank you for your letter of 13 May 2022, following the Committee's further consideration of the above petition at its meeting on 9 March 2022.

As I set out in my letter of 27 October 2021, the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that all children and young people, including autistic learners, get the support that they need in school to reach their full potential.

As Committee is aware, the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 requires education authorities to identify, provide for and to review the additional support needs of their pupils, including those who face barriers to learning due to autism. To support education authorities, the Scottish Government published our progress report against the [Autism in Schools Action Plan](#) in December 2021, which highlights that the majority of actions are complete.

Turning to the specific questions you have asked in your letter, under current legislation it is for the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) to determine what constitutes a recognised teaching qualification. The GTCS may make such provision about the education and training required to attain such a qualification as they think fit. Their current guidelines for accreditation, updated in September 2019, state that "Student teachers should be exposed to national priorities and pedagogies to develop their understanding and practice in key areas such as additional support needs including Autism". All initial teacher education programmes must align with the Standard for Provisional Registration. That standard sets out professional values that commit to motivating and including all learners, taking account of specific learning needs and seeking to reduce barriers to learning. Student teachers are also expected to plan differentiated learning experiences to ensure learning is accessible for every learner.

As I outlined in my previous letter, the GTCS published revised Professional Standards for all teachers in January 2021, which included reference to additional support needs across all five standards, including specific reference to autism. The GTCS also published a suite of guidance on their Additional Support Needs hub in November 2020. This professional guidance offers practical advice for teachers on meeting the needs of learners who require additional support. As part of this, the GTCS created “Meeting the needs of autistic learners” in partnership with the National Autism Implementation Team (NAIT), National Autistic Society Scotland, Scottish Autism and Children in Scotland.

I, therefore, do not consider that a child rights’ impact assessment of initial teacher education is required at this point in time.

Regarding the committee’s second question, I agree that teachers and support staff play a crucial role in supporting all children and young people to reach their full learning potential. A school’s culture, ethos and values are fundamental to promoting positive relationships and behaviour. There are a range of strategies and programmes which schools can and do use to improve relationships and behaviour in schools. These include good behaviour management and behaviour support teams; solution oriented, restorative and nurture approaches and programmes to help develop social, emotional and behavioural skills. At the heart of a nurture approach is a focus on wellbeing and relationships and a drive to support the growth and development of children and young people. The National Improvement Hub provides all of our practitioners, parents and young people themselves with specific good practice models to review.

The Committee may be aware that the Scottish Government set up a working group to develop new, human rights-based, non-statutory guidance to minimise the use of restraint in schools. This new guidance will replace existing advice provided within Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: Preventing and Managing School Exclusions ([Supporting documents - Included, engaged and involved part 2: preventing and managing school exclusions - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2022/06/Supporting_documents_-_Included,_engaged_and_involved_part_2_preventing_and_managing_school_exclusions_-_gov.scot_(www.gov.scot).pdf)).

The Scottish Government is currently preparing this consultation for publication. It is anticipated that the consultation will launch prior to the end of the school year in June. I would be happy to update Committee once the publication date has been finalised.

I hope the committee finds the response helpful.