

Briefing for the Petitions Committee

Petition number: P-05-707

Petition title: Teachers' Training Must Include Statutory Training in Autism

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that teachers' training must include statutory training in Autism. One of the major concerns for people caring for people with Autism is the lack of understanding from teachers and others working in the education profession. While teaching in Wales is of high quality, improvements could be made in raising awareness of Autism, especially given how common it has become in society. It is proposed, as part of the English Teacher's training review, Special Education Needs, including Autism will be a key part of teachers' training in England. The review of the Initial Teacher Education in Wales must ensure that teachers get specific and statutory training in supporting people with Autism within the school environment.

Background

Currently the Welsh Government does not specify the content of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses (sometimes also called initial teacher training (ITT)). Institutions accredited to provide ITE courses design the content, structure and delivery of training to enable trainee teachers to demonstrate that they have met the [Qualified Teacher Status \(QTS\) Standards](#). These are outcome statements that outline what ITE trainees must know, understand and be able to do at the end of their course. They are periodically updated by the Welsh Government, the most recent being made in 2009.

In June 2015, the then Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis [said that he accepted the need to revise and align the qualified teacher status standards](#) to the wider professional standards for the education workforce and that he had commissioned an internal reference group to start work on developing the professional standards.

In her letter to the Committee, the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams said that reforms will require accredited ITE providers to design and deliver courses that support the four purposes and the six areas of learning of the new curriculum being developed following [Professor Graham Donaldson's review](#).

Previous Assembly action

The issue of special educational needs (although not specifically autism) and ITE has been considered three times by different Assembly Committees.

The Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's [Inquiry into the early identification of Special Educational Needs](#) (2004), and the Enterprise and Learning Committee [Rapporteur Group on Dyslexia](#) (2008) recommended that ITE should provide trainee teachers with a greater understanding of special educational needs (SEN). The Public Accounts

Committee's consideration of [*Services for children and young people with emotional and mental health needs*](#) (2010) also raised this issue with Welsh Government officials.

The responses provided by the Welsh Government were similar. In summary, they said that the time available in ITE courses for more specialist areas of study is limited and that there cannot be comprehensive coverage of every single aspect. More detailed specialist training in SEN is best undertaken once a teacher has completed their ITE and induction year.

Autism Bill

As part of the deal between Labour and Plaid Cymru following the May 2016 election, a pledge was made to introduce an Autism Bill. In July 2016, the [*First Minister said*](#) that the Welsh Government were considering what legislation might be necessary to strengthen the rights of service users. In July 2016, the First Minister said that the issue of an Autism Bill is being considered by the liaison committee, to consider in what way legislation on autism can be developed, and whether the Autism Action Plan can be strengthened through being placed on a statutory basis.

The National Autistic Society have been lobbying for the Assembly to introduce an Autism Bill. Their [*Act Now: An Autism Act for Wales report*](#) suggests that an Autism Bill could include 'ensuring that there is a clear framework for training for teachers'.

In a [*statement on 12 July 2016*](#), the Cabinet Secretary for Education said:

"All practitioners should have the core skills development to support a wide range of low complexity, but high incidence ALN [additional learning needs] within settings, and access to ongoing professional development. Each school setting should have immediate access to one individual with advanced skills. I want to develop the role of additional learning needs co-ordinators, who will replace the current SENCOs [SEN co-ordinators]. And all education settings should have access to individuals with specialist skills, for instance, educational psychologists, teachers of the visually or hearing impaired, and speech therapy."

At the [*Children, Young People and Education Committee on 13 July 2016*](#), the Cabinet Secretary for Education was asked about specific modules within ITE for autism. She said:

"we are looking at the additional learning needs legislation that we're bringing forward. It is about ensuring that everybody in a classroom situation does have some knowledge of high-incidence, low-complexity additional learning needs."

Teacher Training Review in England

In England, as in Wales, the Government do not specify the content of ITE courses, but ITE providers are required to ensure that the design and provision of courses will enable trainees to demonstrate the standards required to gain QTS.

In March 2015, Stephen Munday CBE was appointed to chair an independent expert group to develop a new core content framework for initial teacher training courses. His report, [*a Framework of Core Content for Initial Teacher Training*](#) was published on 12 July 2016.

In relation to autism the framework states:

“[ITT] Providers should equip trainees to analyse the strengths and needs of all pupils effectively, ensuring that they have an understanding of cognitive, social, emotional, physical and mental health factors that can inhibit or enhance pupils’ education. Providers should ensure that trainees understand the principles of the SEND [special educational needs and disability] Code of Practice, are confident working with the four broad areas of need it identifies, and are able to adapt teaching strategies to ensure that pupils with SEND (including, but not limited to, autism, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), sensory impairment or speech, and language and communication needs (SLCN)) can access and progress within the curriculum. Providers should ensure that SEND training is integrated across the ITT programme.”

In [response](#), Nicky Morgan, the then Secretary for Education accepted the recommendation that the Department for Education adopt the framework. She said that all ITT providers will need to ensure that their programmes align with the framework. The Department expects to use the framework as part of the quality criteria for ITT allocations for the 2018/19 training year.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing 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.