

South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB)

1. SEELB recognises the need for continued support services for people with autism in their transition from education to adult life.
2. SEELB acknowledges and supports the work that DE, DHSSPS and ELBs are already doing to develop co-ordinated Autism Strategies for children and adults.
3. The special educational needs and provision requirements of children and young people with autism are already provided for through existing Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability legislation.
4. Should the Autism Bill (N.I.) 2010 relate to children and young people it would give rise to complexities and possible conflicts with existing SEN and Disability legislation.
5. Difficulties would be created in relation to existing Disability Discrimination legislation if children with Autism were to be given special and preferential legislative treatment relative to children with any of a wide range of other conditions covered by SEN and Disability legislation, e.g. Down Syndrome; Dyslexia; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
6. Unnecessarily complex accountability structures would be created for DHSSPS, DE and ELBs, diverting resources away from frontline services for children and adults with autism.
7. After careful consideration of these issues in England it was decided that, to avoid unnecessary complexities in legislation and to best serve the needs of both children and adults with autism, the Autism Act (2009) would relate to adult services only.
8. SEELB would recommend a similar arrangement in relation to the Autism Bill (N.I.) 2010.
9. To this end, SEELB recommends that Clauses 3 (1), 3(2) and 3(3) of the Bill be amended to replace the word "persons" with the word "adults".
10. The definition of Autism in Clause 4 (1) is likely soon to become outdated with the planned introduction of amendments to international diagnostic classification manuals. For this reason, in the Autism Act 2009 (in England) and the Autism (Scotland) Bill 2010, a definition has not been included in the primary legislation, but is to be included in the (updateable) Autism Strategy. SEELB is of the view that a similar arrangement should apply for the Autism Bill (N.I.) 2010 and therefore recommends that Clause 4 (1) be amended to remove a definition of autism from the Bill.