

Rt Hon Paulette Hamilton MP
Interim Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

CC: Helen Hayes MP
Chair, Education Select Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

26 June 2025

Dear Ms Hamilton and Committee Members,

Re: Follow-up evidence to oral session on autism and ADHS diagnostic pathways for children and young people (25 June 2025).

On behalf of Ambitious about Autism, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's recent oral evidence session examining autism diagnosis pathways. It was a privilege to share insights alongside colleagues from KIDS and ADHD UK. We are writing to provide additional written evidence to complement our oral contribution, as invited by the Committee.

1. In response to Andrew George MP's question on diagnosis and labelling

We appreciate the important questions posed by Mr George concerning diagnosis prevalence and the implications of labelling. During the session, we cited the figure of 1.2 million autistic people in England. This figure is derived from the 2023 study from the University College of London, published in *The Lancet Regional Health Europe*, which estimated how many adults in England may have undiagnosed autism.

Regarding the question of "labelling," we want to reiterate and expand on our oral response. A diagnosis is not a negative label; for many, it is an empowering identity and a vital route to recognition, support, and understanding. If we, as a society, believe that a diagnosis could be damaging, the solution must not be to withhold or restrict access to it. Instead, we must dismantle the barriers that create harm—such as stigma, poor support, and inadequate understanding—and ensure that diagnosis is not the only way to access what should be universal rights and inclusive services.

Even in a perfectly functioning, needs-led system, many people would still seek and benefit from diagnosis. Diagnosis affirms identity, provides clarity, and supports self-

advocacy. The question is not whether we overdiagnose, but whether we provide the right support in a timely, inclusive way.

2. In response to Paulette Hamilton MP's question on what is driving demand for diagnosis

We welcome Ms Hamilton's question about the drivers behind rising demand. Our evidence clearly shows that unmet need—especially in education—is a core factor. Families often find themselves forced to pursue diagnosis because basic adjustments and support are routinely denied without one.

Our recent report [When Will We Learn? Lost Learning](#) found that 71% of autistic pupils in mainstream education had experienced lost learning, with many pushed out of school or unable to participate meaningfully. This is often the result of an unbalanced system in which school staff lack the knowledge and confidence to support autistic pupils. Simple adjustments—such as access to a quiet space or alternative communication tools—are frequently refused until a diagnosis is obtained and sometimes even in the presence of one. This creates a bottleneck, where diagnosis becomes the only route to recognition and support.

Moreover, our evidence shows that the impact of this system on mental health is profound. Autistic children and young people often face an impossible choice: remain in school environments that harm them or disengage and risk falling behind. As one participant explained: *“If I had continued to force my children in, they would be dead by now. School traumatised them so much.”* We support the view raised by KIDS that wellbeing must come first. Forcing change—whether attendance or placement—without first ensuring inclusive environments will only compound harm.

3. In response to Josh Fenton-Glynn MP on why the Autism Strategy is not delivering despite investment

We welcome Mr Fenton-Glynn's line of questioning. In our view, the problem lies not only in the level of investment, but in how that investment is deployed. The system remains stuck in a reactive model, with funding used to plug crises rather than enable transformation. This approach leads to escalating demand and entrenched costs, rather than sustainable, preventative solutions.

One clear example is teacher training. Successive governments have invested in fragmented bursts of SEND, autism, and neurodiversity training for the last five decades. Yet, a generation of teachers and school staff remain underprepared for the reality of teaching autistic pupils:

- In our most recent survey, over 4 in 5 (84%) pupils and families rated teachers' knowledge of autism as below average, and 78% say that autism-specific training for teachers and school staff is their top priority.
- 90% of teachers experienced stress related to their SEND responsibilities (NASUWT survey, 2023) and most teachers (61%) receive less than half a day of autism-specific training (National Autistic Society, 2023)

We also agree with Mr Fenton-Glynn's observation that schools are overstretched and often forced to prioritise neurotypical students. That is precisely why we call for stronger government leadership and support.

Our report highlights worrying levels of overconfidence among some school leaders about their school's capacity to include autistic pupils, which is not mirrored by the views of teachers or families – a concern when Continuous Professional Development (CPD) decisions are currently left to individual schools and headteachers. We can no longer afford for autism and neurodiversity training to remain optional, underfunded, inconsistent – and ultimately ineffective. System change requires more than goodwill; it requires national coordination.

4. In response to Ben Coleman MP on what can be done without new funding

We thank Mr Coleman for his question. While long-term transformation will require investment, there are clear and cost-neutral steps the government can take now:

- **Undertake an urgent review of the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) to ensure that all new teachers are trained to understand and support autistic and neurodivergent pupils.** While the ITTECF was recently reviewed, the new government's commitment to a more ambitious and inclusive education agenda makes it essential that its mandatory content on inclusion is comprehensively updated to reflect current expectations, including a stronger emphasis on autism and neurodiversity.
- **Develop a National Framework for Autism and Neurodiversity CPD, setting consistent standards for ongoing staff training.** This framework should be co-produced at three levels—with autistic people (lived experience), families (learned experience), and professionals—to ensure it is credible, relevant, and ambitious.
- **Begin a phased roll-out of mandatory training, building towards universal coverage that is regularly updated.** While this will require dedicated funding, early progress can and should begin now. It is essential that we demonstrate intent, lay foundations, and signal to schools and families that change is underway.

5. In response to Ben Coleman MP's follow-up question on innovation on the diagnosis pathway

We highlighted the work of Autism Initiatives in Scotland, who provide a bespoke diagnostic service that offers pre- and post-diagnosis support.

We would also like to echo the Autism Alliance's key recommendation for the government to find a long-term solution to the crisis in autism assessment by testing evidence-based ways of identifying and supporting autistic people. The building blocks should include:

- Early detection in the community
- Neurodevelopmental screening
- A strength and needs profile
- A new pathway for autistic/neurodivergent people based on the expectation that basic needs are met
- A programme to increase understanding of autism/neurodivergence across services and society

All of this will need investment in research, policy development, and significant change management across the system, all co-produced with autistic young people and their families. This is a 5–10-year programme of work that must be a top priority for the 2026 Autism Strategy.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. We hope this additional information is helpful and would welcome the opportunity to provide any further evidence.

Yours sincerely,



Jolanta Lasota

Chief Executive