



HOUSE OF LORDS

Committee on The Autism Act 2009

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15 July 2025

Dear Ministers Kinnock, McGovern and McKinnell

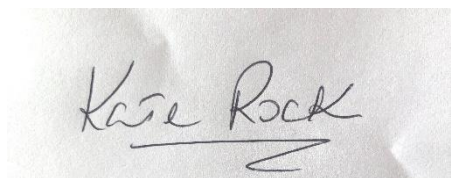
Thank you for appearing before the House of Lords Committee on the Autism Act 2009 on 30 June. The Committee was very grateful for your evidence. I am writing to invite you to respond to a number of follow-up questions that were either put at the evidence session or have arisen in the Committee's consideration of your evidence, including in the evidence put to the Committee by representatives of the principal autism charities on 7 July.

1. At Q172, Minister McGovern spoke about Jobcentre reform and the creation of a new jobs and careers service. How will the Government evaluate whether the jobs and careers service Pathfinder works well for autistic people?
2. At Q179, Minister Kinnock said that, between April 2019 and March 2025, the number of people with an open referral for suspected autism increased twelvefold from 17,411 to 224,382. Autism charities have expressed concern that the published figures underestimate the size of the diagnosis waiting list in 2019 and are therefore not reliable as a comparator or to base policy decisions on. Could you set out the strengths and limitations of the autism assessment waiting times statistics (for adults and children) and confirm what the most appropriate baseline is for a comparison of change over time?
3. Also at Q179, Minister McKinnell noted that plans for SEND reform will be set out in a schools white paper in the autumn. How is the Government involving autistic children and young people and their families/carers in the SEND reform policy development process? Will the Government set outcome-based metrics for how reforms will improve access to education and transitions to adulthood for autistic children and young people and evaluate progress against those metrics?
4. As referred to by Minister Kinnock at Q181, could you explain your understanding of the Secretary of State's power to take action against a local authority or NHS body for failing to comply with statutory guidance to the Autism Act? In addition:

- Given that statutory guidance to the Autism Act has the status of general guidance issued under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, does the power derive from this Act?
 - Could you set out your understanding of how this power could be exercised in practice?
 - Can you explain what is meant by the Minister for Care's statement that "the Secretary of State has the right to deploy a judicial review if that is needed"?
5. At Q182, Minister McKinnell referred to the work of the Neurodivergence Task and Finish Group. Could you provide an update on this group's work and confirm when its report will be published?
 6. At Q183, Minister Kinnock offered to write with further information about a survey on autism assessment services. Could you set out the purpose of this survey, who is being surveyed, the timeframe and the expected output?
 7. At Q184, Minister McKinnell referred to the allocation of capital funding to support inclusive education. Could you set out how the Government will evaluate the impact of this capital funding on access to education for autistic children and young people?
 8. At Q185, Minister Kinnock said that he wanted to see better early intervention for autistic people, reducing demand for assessment. What is the Government's and NHS England's understanding of the evidence base on early identification tools and intervention models for children and adults who may be autistic; how and where they are being used; and their benefits and risks?
 9. At Q188, Minister Kinnock said that autistic people would be at the heart of the three shifts in the NHS 10 Year Plan. Now that the Plan has been published, could you set out how you expect it to drive better outcomes for autistic people and how you will evaluate whether it has done so?
 10. Also at Q188, Minister Kinnock said that the CEO of NHS England is leading work on the abolition of NHS England and the transformation and restructuring of ICBs. Could you invite NHS England to provide information on how it will take into account the importance of ensuring there are clear lines of responsibility for improving services for autistic people (including the roles of the NHS England national autism team and executive leads for autism in each ICB), and the timeframe for making those changes?
 11. At Q189 Lord Wigley noted that the Committee has heard that local authorities and the NHS often have little incentive to provide timely preventative support to autistic people and they may fall into gaps between mental health services and social care. We have also heard that there is little integration of local authority and NHS funding for autistic people, increasing the risk of cost-shunting and meaning opportunities to avert crises can be missed. What consideration has the Government given to addressing this, including through mandating the integration of local authority and NHS funding for support for autistic people and through ensuring provision of effective forms of lower-level support (such as peer support)?
 12. At Q189 Minister McKinnell spoke about the Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) programme. Could you set out any interim evidence on the impact of the PINS programme on access to education for autistic children and young people and how the independent evaluation of the programme will assess this? We have heard that takes time for school staff to assess and meet the needs of children with special educational needs, including autistic children. What will you do to ensure all schools have staff with the expertise, capacity and time to assess and meet the needs of autistic children, including through changes to the workforce and curriculum reform?

We would be grateful for a response by 15 August 2025, so that we have time to take your reply into account before publication of the Committee's final report in the autumn. Please send your response to HLAutismAct2009@parliament.uk. Your reply will be published on the Committee's website and cited in its final report.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper. The signature reads "Kate Rock" in a cursive style. The word "Kate" is written with a large 'K' and a small 'a', and "Rock" is written with a large 'R' and a small 'o'. A horizontal line is drawn under the word "Rock", and a small flourish or underline extends from the end of the signature.

Baroness Kate Rock
Chair, House of Lords Committee on the Autism Act 2025

