



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

**PUBLIC PETITION NO.**

**PE01789**

### **Name of petitioner**

James A Mackie on behalf of the 1673 Network

### **Petition title**

Learning difficulties and disability qualifications.

### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to increase the number of professionals such as speech and language therapists, educational psychologists, physiotherapists, psychiatrists and occupational therapists qualified to assess children and parents with learning disabilities/difficulties and other behavioural problems, to reduce the number of children taken into care.

### **Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition**

Discussions with MSPs and professionals.

### **Petition background information**

Most families, particularly mothers, notice children at a very young age having learning/behavioural problems. They look for help when they notice changes in behaviour or where the child is developing differently from others.

Staff in pre-school, nursery or primary school, social workers, speech and language or occupational therapists and some health professionals do not have the necessary training or qualifications in assessing children to identify the learning difficulty/disability and/or behavioural problem that the children - or even their parent - may have.

Staff, as mentioned above, may agree with the parents that the child does not present as a 'typical child', but do not have the qualifications to give a full and proper assessment.

Learning disabilities/difficulties include Autistic Spectrum disorders, Dyspraxia, Dyslexia and others. Often these conditions can cross over in the one child. Learning disabilities/difficulties are often described as being like the Olympic Rings in that they are both individual but interlinked.

It is well known that the sooner an intervention can be made for the child, the better the long term outcomes for both the child and family. It is not unusual for parents to have



their own learning disability/difficulty first identified when seeking help for their children.

There are procedures/protocols in place to have the child professionally examined by a fully qualified psychologist/psychiatrist or any other trained professional person. However, these cannot always be put into practice due to the low numbers of professionals qualified to carry out such assessments.

A full and proper assessment at an early stage in a child's life enables them to get the correct support through their educational years. It also reduces the stresses within the family and, in particular, on the mother.

A full and proper assessment allows the parents to understand the child and care for them in a manner that accommodates the learning disability/difficulty. In normal practice and, depending on the Local Authority, it takes between 2 and 10 years for the child to get their first assessment appointment.

The sole problem is that no-one other than fully qualified psychologists and psychiatrists can give a full assessment of any person with a learning disability/difficulty or other behavioural problem.

Until such times as an assessment is made, the school cannot put special needs support in place for a child. Without a full assessment, the parents have little help.

For parents with their own unassessed learning disabilities/difficulties, they can suffer the consequences of their own problems, aggravated by not getting the support both they and their children need.

CAMHS teams can take 6 to 12 months to assess a child once they have accepted a referral. School staff can identify a child as having learning difficulties/disabilities but may not have the powers/authority to refer children to a CAMHS team and/or restricted access to an educational psychologist.

The net result is that parents who have not had the assessment for their children have absolutely no support for the child or themselves when they ask for help.

Parents may turn to social workers for additional support or go through the named person system. Social workers often have no training or qualifications in identifying and working with parents and/or children with LDD/behavioural problems. The main response from social workers may be to blame the parents for "bad parenting" and offer no support or help.

In a large number of cases, social workers apply to a Sheriff or the Children's Hearing for a Compulsory Supervision Order and the children are taken into care. That happens even when there is an assessment given by an appropriate qualified professional.

Families report that when their children are looked after without the proper care and knowledge of their problems, they end up being shuttled from foster carer to foster carer, making their situation/condition worse. It has been known for local authorities to move a child from one area to another to avoid a professional assessment of the LDD/behaviour when required to do so by a Children's Hearing.

In the current system, Sheriffs and Children's Hearings are asked to make life changing decisions for the child and family purely based on an assessment by unqualified professionals. Sheriffs and Children Panel members do not have the knowledge/qualifications to challenge such assessments.

In 2000, an article produced by Tim Booth, Professor of Social Policy, Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield, suggested that there was a small and growing body of international research on parenting by people with learning difficulties which showed that these families often received a raw deal from the statutory services. He suggested that this is characterised by an 'over-zealous' approach to the assessment of risks and an underinvestment in the kind of services and supports that might enable them to bring up their children.

He goes on to suggest that the work of professionals tended to be focused on child protection, rather than on the provision of support services.



His findings are as relevant and accurate for Scotland now as they were when they were first written. The current system of procedures and Scottish Government guidelines are failing children and their families because professionals do not have the qualifications and training to identify and work with parents and children with a wide range of learning disabilities, difficulties and behavioural problems.

**Unique web address**

<https://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/LDDqualifications>

**Related information for petition**

**Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?**

YES

**How many signatures have you collected so far?**

0

**Closing date for collecting signatures online**

03 / 03 / 2020

**Comments to stimulate online discussion**

Should the Scottish Government spend more money on supporting families with LDD?  
What type of support should be available?  
Who should make assessments of LDD children and families' needs?  
When should these assessments take place?