



Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity



CREID BRIEFING 4

# THE FUTURE DELIVERY OF ADVICE AND INFORMATION SERVICES FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS IN SCOTLAND

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This briefing examines the future profile of advice and information services for additional support needs in Scotland in the light of recent legislative changes. It describes research undertaken for the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) in 2005, focusing on the views of parents and carers, children and young people and professionals in relation to:

- (a) the current type and format of services which are being provided, and
- (b) future preferences for the delivery of advice and information services in the light of the new legislation.

## Main findings

- The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 places a new duty on local authorities to ensure that parents are informed about provision for children with additional support needs and rights to mediation, conciliation and redress.
- Since 1999, Children in Scotland has been funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department to provide Enquire, the national advice and information services for additional support needs.
- Parents felt that ensuring adequate provision to meet their child's needs often felt like a 'struggle'.
- They were generally positive about the service provided by Enquire, but felt that it was a 'well kept secret' and more could be done to raise its profile.
- Some believed that Enquire should not simply act as an advice broker, but should actively advocate on behalf of parents.
- They felt that local authorities could do much more to inform parents of their rights, and that teachers should also be better informed.
- Scottish local authorities had been relatively slow to develop their own advice and information services, but were aware of their new duty.
- There was some residual fears that Enquire might encourage an adversarial approach between parents and professionals.
- Many local authorities recognised the mutual benefits of developing a strong collaborative relationship with Enquire.
- Other advice and information services felt that closer links with Enquire should be developed, and their role as providers of specialist information should be recognised.
- Children's awareness of current sources of advice and information was patchy.
- Overall, there was strong support for the continuation of the existing national advice and information service, but also calls for the provision of information in diverse formats.
- The need for advice and information geared to the needs of children was also recognised

## Background: the legislative context

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 places a duty on local authorities to establish procedures for identifying and meeting the needs of every child requiring additional support in order for them to benefit from education. Whereas the previous special educational needs legislation applied to a narrower group of children and young people with learning difficulties, the new legislation applies to a much wider group including those from the Gypsy/Traveller community; looked after children; children for whom English is a second language; children of refugees and asylum seekers; and those with social emotional and behavioural difficulties, including those at risk of school exclusion.

In order to provide support for all children with additional support needs and to promote multi-agency approaches (Scottish Executive, 2001), there are important differences in the way in which children's

needs are to be identified and reviewed (see Scottish Executive, 2005, for further details about how the new arrangements will work in practice). Co-ordinated Support Plans may be provided for children and young people whose needs are long-lasting and that arise from complex or multiple factors which have a significant adverse effect on their education and who require a range of support from services outwith education. Clearly, much closer inter-agency working will be required in the operationalisation of Co-ordinated Support Plans and the need for key workers to provide information and support on an ongoing basis has been advocated by groups such as the Care Co-ordination Network (Greco et al, 2004). Disagreements over Co-ordinated Support Plans may be referred to the new Additional Support Needs Tribunal. Children and young people who have additional support needs, but who do not qualify for a Co-ordinated Support Plan, must also have their needs identified and met. For these children, it is likely that Individualised Educational Programmes will be used to summarise assessment outcomes, short-term and long-term targets, as well as progress over time (see Banks et al, 2001; Kane et al, 2003 for account of the use of Individualised Educational Programmes in Scotland). Mediation and dispute resolution services will be provided to avoid and resolve disagreements between parents or young people and local authorities. Local authorities have a new duty to ensure that parents are informed of the information, advice and mediation services which are available.

### **Background: Current provision of advice and information services**

Since 1999, Children in Scotland has been funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department to provide Enquire, the national advice service for additional support for learning in Scotland. Since 2004, Enquire has focused on maintaining and developing the telephone advice and information service for parents, families and carers of children and young people with additional support needs across Scotland and for children and young people themselves. It has also implemented a publicity programme, revised and expanded its publications, developed an outreach programme for children and young people and improved its monitoring and evaluation systems.

Many other voluntary sector organisations (e.g. National Deaf Children's Society, Royal National Institute for the Blind, Communication Aids for Language and Learning Centre, Scottish Sensory Centre, Special Needs Information Point, Disability Rights Commission, Care Co-ordination Network UK, Scottish Traveller Education Programme) provide advice and information services in relation to additional support for learning, using a mixture of strategies including telephone advice, one-to-one advocacy and publications. Local authorities have also traditionally provided some information for parents on their special educational needs policy, although recent legislation places a duty on them to do this. In addition, the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002 requires local authorities to publish accessibility strategies for disabled children.

### **Research objectives**

The specific objectives of this research were to examine:

- how current advice and information services are perceived by a range of stakeholders, including parents and carers, children and young people, voluntary sector providers and professionals;
- what the implications are of the additional support for learning legislation for the future provision of information and advice to a range of stakeholders; and
- formats and modes of delivery that are currently being used and what particular groups of stakeholders indicate would be the most effective form and content of future services.

### **Research methods**

A range of methods were used, these included documentary analysis, a survey and interviews as follows:

- interviews with members of the Enquire team, staff of the Scottish Executive Education Department and a range of support organisations,
- an analysis was carried out of Enquire's activities including records of enquiries made to the helpline, website hits, requests for publications and a log of publicity work, including participants in conferences and outreach events,
- two questionnaires: one was sent to a sample of parents/carers, young people and professionals who had contacted the service; the other was administered to local authority representatives,
- discussions were held with parents at four consultation meetings on the new *Parents' Guide to Additional Support for Learning* (Enquire, 2005),
- follow-up interviews were conducted with eleven parents who provided further details of their experiences of advice and information services,
- six focus groups were conducted with children and young people. Three of these took place in special settings, one with 15-16 year old pupils in a special school for children with moderate learning difficulties, one with 12-13 year old pupils in a special school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and one with 15-16 year old pupils in a special school for deaf children. In addition, two focus groups took place with children in a mainstream primary school. The groups included a mix of children from Primary 6 and 7 (aged eleven and twelve) with and without additional support needs. Finally, a group of thirteen year old pupils from a mainstream secondary school completed a questionnaire. The number of pupils in the focus groups varied from four to fifteen.

## **Findings: Contrasting views of the National Advice and Information Services**

### ***Parents' views of advice and information services***

Parents described their efforts to ensure appropriate educational provision for their children as 'a struggle' and believed that some local authorities and schools still had difficulty in seeing parents as equal partners. They were very positive about the service provided by Enquire, but felt that there was much work still to be done in encouraging local authorities to see knowledgeable parents as a help rather than a hindrance in promoting positive educational experiences. They also felt that staff in schools often lacked adequate information.

Parents felt that the Enquire helpline enabled them to deal effectively with local authorities and schools, describing the knowledge gained from the service as fundamentally empowering. They were also very positive about publications, although some felt that more 'bite-sized' chunks of information would be helpful, as well as publications about specific conditions, which might be developed in collaboration with other organisations. There was also enthusiasm for greater use of web-based information, whilst recognising that this would not be a suitable option for all.

Some parents suggested that more local information and individualised advice and support over a longer time-frame would be helpful, with further development of key worker programmes. A number felt that they needed access to an advocacy service, rather than an impartial advice and information service. A general criticism was that there was insufficient awareness of Enquire's services and far more effort could be made by local authorities, schools and health agencies to inform parents of the support available as soon as their child was identified as having difficulties. Similarly, efforts should be made to upgrade professionals' knowledge on a regular basis.

### ***Local authorities' views of advice and information services***

In general, local authorities in Scotland were quite slow to develop advice and information services for parents (Mordaunt, 2001; Riddell, 2002), and there has been no equivalent of England's Parent Partnership Scheme. Enquire was initially set up to promote improvements in parents' access to advice and information about special and additional support needs, and in the early days there was some suspicion amongst local authorities that the service might encourage dissent among parents.

The research identified some residual fears about the development of an 'adversarial' relationship between parents and professionals.

There was also some concern that national services might provide inaccurate information about what was available at local level, so that referral to a named person within the local authority at an early point was essential. However, it appeared that considerable progress had been made in establishing positive relationships between local authority staff and Enquire. Questionnaire and interview respondents were particularly positive about Enquire's publications as a useful source of reference, but were less aware of the telephone helpline and were not sure to what extent parents in their area were using the service. Some local authority staff suggested that generic training was unlikely to meet practitioners' needs, and more audience-specific events should be held.

Despite some continuing tensions, there were hopes of even more constructive working relationships in the future. In particular, local authorities were aware of their new duty under the Additional Support for Learning legislation to publicise mediation and support services to parents, and some hoped that they would be able to develop future collaborative projects with Enquire.

### ***Relationships between the national advice and information service and other support organisations***

Support organisations suggested that Enquire should focus on developing better local knowledge and should forge closer relationships with specialist organisations, for example organisations working with children with visual impairment. Questions were raised about whether Enquire, in endeavouring to provide an impartial service, failed to empathise sufficiently with individual parents. There was a need, it was felt, for services with an advocacy remit to complement the work of Enquire, and this view was supported by some parents. Concerns were also expressed about the ability of the service to provide an adequate service for parents with communication difficulties or in very disadvantaged circumstances. Support organisations supported the criticisms made by parents that advice and information services were difficult to access, arguing that a much higher profile was needed. Overall, much greater cross-referral between agencies was seen as highly desirable.

### ***Advice and information services needed by children with additional support needs***

Children's awareness of current information provision was patchy, with children in special settings knowing more about the service than those in mainstream schools. Many of the children in special schools had heard of Enquire and had come across leaflets and other materials in school. However, they were less clear about what Enquire did as an organisation or about how to access the services directly. By way of contrast, none of the children in mainstream schools had heard of Enquire.

The children spoken to were not aware that Enquire ran a helpline which they could access, although they had all heard of ChildLine. However, doubts were expressed about whether they would actually use ChildLine. There was a relatively high level of awareness of the existence of the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People amongst children in mainstream and special schools. Most children reported that if they had a particular problem, they would prefer to speak to someone face-to-face, in particular a familiar adult. Few felt they would use leaflets, although the materials produced by disability organisations seemed to be a useful resource for teachers. Online information for children and young people, whilst improving access for some, may further exclude already marginalised groups.

It would appear that if advice and information services are targeted primarily at adults, they are unlikely to be greatly used by children and young people. Parents rather than children have traditionally been construed as consumers of education, but there is a desire to encourage children to have much greater ownership of and engagement with educational aims and processes. There is therefore a need for advice and information services which are targeted specifically at children and young

people. These are at a relatively early stage of growth, and should be developed further in the future.

## **Future options for the delivery of advice and information services in Scotland**

### ***Option 1: Maintaining the existing service***

It is evident that there is very strong support for the Enquire service as it currently exists amongst a range of stakeholders. Parents who had used the service spoke extremely enthusiastically about the significant difference Enquire has made to their lives. Without the support of Enquire, many parents feel that they would not have been able to act as effective agents alongside practitioners in helping their children access the support they needed to benefit from education. Parents felt that there was still a reluctance in certain parts of the education system to involve them as equal partners. Furthermore, education staff were not always fully informed about developments in the field of additional support for learning. For example, a parent reported that a request for an Individualised Educational Programme was turned down without a proper explanation, and another request for a Personal Learning Plan was rejected out of hand on the grounds that these were not used in the school. Finally, the new additional support for learning legislation allows local authorities considerable autonomy in terms of implementation, for example in determining which children require an Individualised Education Programme or a Co-ordinated Support Plan. Opportunities for access to a tribunal service, independent mediation and adjudication will ensure that parents have greater recourse to redress if dissatisfied. At the same time, the existence of a national advice and information service underlines the point that there are certain standards to which all local authorities should adhere. This will have a positive effect in terms of ensuring that there is, as far as possible, commonality in interpretation of the legislation in different parts of the country.

### ***Option 2: Alternative mechanisms for service delivery***

Despite the strong endorsement of the existing service, it is evident that there are clear suggestions for further improvements and developments. These include the greater use of publications targeted at different audiences (parents/carers, practitioners, children and young people) with different levels of literacy. Even when great efforts are made to avoid unnecessary jargon, explanations of the legislation inevitably involve a high degree of complexity and abstraction. There is therefore a need for easy-read versions of publications which convey the general principles using simple language and illustration. It is also evident that some parents and carers would welcome the greater use of the internet, with web-sites containing frequently asked questions with links to useful sources of information. Greater use of e-mail, messaging and chatrooms are also welcomed by some people. However, it is also clear that some parents and carers, particularly slightly older people and those in socially disadvantaged circumstances, do not have access to the internet or do not find it a sympathetic medium for a range of reasons. It is therefore extremely important that these diverse preferences are catered for by producing material in a wide range of formats.

### ***Option 3: Radical options***

A number of radical options arise as a result of the information gathered from parents and children and young people. First, some parents expressed the view quite strongly that, whilst they valued access to impartial advice and information, which is the current basis of the Enquire service, they also on occasion required one-to-one support which might be in the form of advocacy or a key worker service. These are functions which probably could not be provided by the Enquire service unless a very large increase in funding was forthcoming. In addition, such services would probably be best delivered at a local level to ensure accessibility and local knowledge. Local authorities are probably best placed to develop key worker services, which have been positively evaluated in England (Mitchell and Sloper, 2000; Greco et al, 2004; Greco et al, 2005).

A key element of advocacy services is that they are independent, and they are generally provided either by voluntary organisations specialising in a particular area, or by generic advocacy groups. In

2002, the Health and Community Care Minister announced significant funding to set up an Advocacy Safeguard Agency and a Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance to develop independent advocacy services for people with health problems, particularly mental health problems and learning disabilities, to give people the best chance of leading independent and autonomous lives. There has been no similar investment in educational advocacy services, however the views expressed in this report suggest that such a development would be welcomed by some parents, who may be experiencing extreme difficulties in their lives.

Finally, there is a need for further thought about the best means of delivering advice and information services to children with additional support needs. Whilst children have clearly benefited from some of the learning resources produced by Enquire, particularly the leaflets and video, the telephone line is little used by this group. However, discussions with children suggested that they would be much more likely to use a helpline specifically targeted at children, and ChildLine was the service with which they were most familiar. Consideration should therefore be given to the provision of a separate helpline targeted specifically at children, or the development of an existing helpline such as ChildLine, to deal with additional support needs queries.

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## Further information

The full report of the study is available on the CREID website ([www.creid.ed.ac.uk](http://www.creid.ed.ac.uk)) and the Scottish Executive websites (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/08/07163137/0>). Further details of the research can be obtained from Sheila Riddell ([sheila.riddell@ed.ac.uk](mailto:sheila.riddell@ed.ac.uk)).

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