

**ESRC Funded Knowledge Exchange Programme:  
Effective communication and dispute resolution  
in additional support needs  
Background to the Scottish Parliament event, 23.05.12**

Local authorities and schools have legal duties to ensure that children with additional support needs receive the help they need to make progress in their education. However, disagreements may sometimes arise between parents and the school or local authority in deciding on the nature of support which is needed and where it should be provided. The Scottish Government is keen to ensure that any disagreements are speedily resolved, using informal negotiation or mediation rather than court or tribunal wherever possible. However, recent research conducted by the Universities of Edinburgh and Manchester found that a significant minority of parents were dissatisfied with the support on offer and the quality of communication, and these parents were likely to consider using a more formal method of dispute resolution (adjudication or tribunal). Building on this research, the University of Edinburgh, Children in Scotland and Common Ground Mediation were successful in obtaining a knowledge exchange grant to disseminate the research findings to a wide audience. Between May 2011 and March 2012, three think tanks took place involving a wide range of parents, practitioners and academics. The focus of each think tank was as follows:

- Think Tank 1 considered what characterises good communication between parents and practitioners and what can be done to improve communication, including the use of independent mediation;
- Think Tank 2 focused on the effective use of adjudication and the ASN tribunal to resolve disagreements when more informal methods of dispute resolution have been exhausted;
- Think Tank 3 explored ways of involving children and young people with additional support needs in important decisions about their education and in dispute resolution procedures.

Details of each think tank, including programmes and presentations, are available on the project web site ([www.creid.ed.ac.uk](http://www.creid.ed.ac.uk)). Findings from the research and the think tanks, including case studies, are available in the publication *Communication Matters: Improving Communication in Additional Support Needs*, which is available on 23<sup>rd</sup> May at the Scottish Parliament event and on the project web site. This is being distributed to all local authorities, schools, voluntary organisations and parents' groups in Scotland, and we hope will contribute to better interaction between parents of children with additional support needs and practitioners.

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