

Pwyllgor Iechyd, Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol a Chwaraeon
Health, Social Care and Sport Committee
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Dai Lloyd AM/AC
Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor Iechyd, Gofal Cymdeithasol a Chwaraeon / Chair, Health, Social Care
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Annwyl Dai Lloyd

During our evidence session on the Autism (Wales) Bill, on the 3 October 2018 we mentioned that Wales has around 34,000 autistic people. Your fellow committee member Angela Burns AM asked for a breakdown of the total number of children with autism in Wales.

We are happy to clarify that the figures we currently use on numbers of autistic people in Wales are estimates, based on prevalence research applied to the latest census results. Using those estimates, we would say that there were around 5,000 school aged children on the autism spectrum in Wales. The latest statistics from Welsh Government set out that 7,655 children get extra help in school because of their autism.

In addition, it is also worth highlighting that of those who lodged an appeal with the Education Tribunal during 2015-2016, nearly 40 appeals were identified as having autism as their main special education need (SEN). This was the highest figure of all appeals made by the person's SEN. This shows a particular high level of difficulty in the system in getting the right type of help made available for children with this particular disability and why specific attention needs to be paid to the needs of autistic people.

As the NHS in Wales doesn't currently routinely collect data on autism diagnosis, we don't currently have the clear picture on numbers and needs that we need in order to plan effectively.

Could we also take this opportunity to clarify a point made during the evidence session? Fellow member Dawn Bowden quoted from page 10 of the Autism Dividend report, which

said that: 'Yet nearly a decade on, the needs of autistic people are still unmet and the expected economic dividend never materialised.'

However, it is also incredibly important to note that the report also states that: 'The existence of autism legislation [in England] at a time when budgets at local level are under increasing pressure has ensured a focus on autism that would not have been possible without the Act.'

And in relation to the Welsh legislation the report goes on to say that: 'The Welsh Government rejected calls for an Autism Act, believing that other current developments will support autistic people effectively. However, without such legislation, government initiatives lack statutory force resulting in an inability to require local authorities to implement the strategy to the full.' Far from suggesting that legislation isn't the answer, the report actually recommends legislation in Wales.

Finally, we were questioned several times around unintended consequences of legislation in terms of potential for over diagnosis and also concerns that a new law on autism in Wales would lead to calls for a law on other conditions. We would like to make it clear that it is not our experience that this has happened in England or Northern Ireland. Moreover, we know that legislation and policy development in Wales is evidenced-based and so we would suggest to the Committee to consider the evidence on whether any of the potential unintended consequences raised as concerns have come to pass in other UK nations as part of its scrutiny.

Yn gywir iawn

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