



## e-newsletter: October/November 2008

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Welcome to the October edition of the Autism Education Trust e-newsletter. Sorry it is a bit late – we wanted this newsletter to coincide with the launch of our new research report which is now online.

In this edition:

- AET commissioned research is launched online
- Apply now for a seat on the AET Advisory Council
- A round-up of autism related news from 2008 party conferences
- Lamb Enquiry update
- AET attends autism events in parliament
- New chair for the AET Steering Group
- Inside Asperger syndrome – training course for parents, professionals and people with Asperger syndrome

Thank you for your continued support and best wishes,

Sarah-Jane Critchley  
AET Project Head

### Tell a friend...

Is there someone you think would be interested to hear about the AET? Please forward this newsletter to them and ask them to send us their details so we can keep them up to date.

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### New research highlights lack of specialist support for autism education practitioners

New research carried out for The Autism Education Trust (AET) by The University of Birmingham has highlighted the lack of specialist support for autism education practitioners, including speech and language therapists and occupational therapists. Asked about their biggest challenges in delivering educational provision for children on the autism spectrum, professionals cited lack of knowledge and understanding amongst school staff, increased numbers of diagnosed children on the autism spectrum and lack of therapists as their main concerns. Around 1 in 100 children are now thought to be on the autism spectrum. Timely and appropriate educational support is essential to ensure positive outcomes and future opportunities for all.

The AET is England's only umbrella organisation for autism education. It has today published online the most comprehensive review undertaken to date on the state of autism education in England. The research, carried out by the Autism Centre for Education and Research at the University of Birmingham, reviews current practice, issues and challenges facing professionals, parents and children and young people on the autism spectrum. It draws on existing evidence, as well as new surveys of parents and professionals, to provide detailed recommendations at each stage in a child's journey through the education system.

Bob Lowndes, Chair of the AET Steering Group, said;

“This research can be heralded as a new beginning for our autism education system in England. We are now very clear on the priorities for improvement, as well as the areas of good practice. Its publication comes at a time of exciting awareness of the need for better autism education services, and follows the recent publication of the Bercow Review of the SEN system and his subsequent debate in parliament. “

An important message running through the research is that better cross-agency cooperation and communication is urgently needed to ensure that each child is treated as an individual and an appropriate course of education is planned and implemented. One parent is quoted in the report as saying of her local authority;

“I feel very strongly that each parent whose child receives a diagnosis of any condition should have a multi-agency meeting (within a month of diagnosis) so that everyone is aware of the child and parents can be supported to work with school and vice versa.”

Another says;

“There needs to be less of a ‘them and us’ attitude and more honesty and collaboration. They need to have a better understanding of [autism] and the impact on the family.”

Yet commissioners and practitioners alike can feel powerless due to the sheer volume and diversity of cases on their books. One local authority representative is quoted in the report as saying “those with the greatest needs continue to be failed.”

Bob Lowndes continued; “The AET must now continue to forge alliances to ensure recommendations within this research are acted upon swiftly and efficiently. We have a grounded knowledge of what must be done – and we have a responsibility to all those on the autism spectrum to ensure their education is relevant, tailored and results in positive long-term outcomes for each individual.”

Education is one of the most important issues facing the one in 100 children and young people on the autism spectrum and their families across England. The AET has been established, with funding from the Department for Children, Schools and Families, to help address some of the gaps in appropriate autism education provision and to disseminate good practice.

To read the research report in full, or to find out more about the work of the AET, visit [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk) or call 07795 667749.

To read an article about the report in this week's EducationGuardian visit <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/nov/11/special-needs-autistic-children-education>

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### **AET Advisory Council – apply now to be involved**

Application forms are now available for the AET Advisory Council. The Advisory Council will be made up of key interest groups and will advise the AET Steering Group on plans and issues affecting autism education across England. The Advisory Council and sub-group structures will be the principal means for the AET to actively engage with professionals, parents and carers and children and young people on the autism spectrum. We envisage the Advisory Council will be set up first via an application process and in time, it will draw expertise and opinion from virtual practitioner and user advisory groups from around England. These virtual groups will be set up as soon as the AET website is redesigned and launched in early 2009.

For full details of the Advisory Council, and our future plans for Advisory Groups, please visit the proposal online at:

<http://www.autism.org.uk/content/1/c6/01/75/00/AET%20Advisory%20Council.pdf>

If you are interested in applying for a seat on the AET Advisory Council, please contact Kate Pettifer on 07795 667749 or email [info@autismeducationtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@autismeducationtrust.org.uk)

### 2008 Party Conference round-up

Autism has been high on the political agenda recently. Many voluntary organisations working with and on behalf of the autism community around the UK attended the main political party conferences in September with some successful and interesting debates and events.

Both the National Autistic Society and TreeHouse held interactive discussion events at all three conferences giving MPs and decision-makers, people at the conference, parents and adults with autism the chance to discuss how policy can better reflect the needs of people with autism.

Further details on the NAS events can be viewed online here:

<http://www.think-differently.org.uk/campaign/Whats%20going%20on/Latest%20news/Events/Party%20Conference%20Success.aspx>.

A full review of the TreeHouse events, held in association with the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, has been published on the AET website. Visit [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk) and view the news pages.

### Lamb Inquiry – AET research to be used as evidence

The Lamb Inquiry was set up as part of the Government's response to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee Report *Special Educational Needs: Assessment and Funding*. The Inquiry is being led by Brian Lamb, the Chair of the Special Educational Consortium, and will advise on the most effective ways of increasing parental confidence in the SEN assessment process. The report is due to be published in September 2009.

Brian Lamb and Philippa Stobbs attended the September AET Steering Group meeting to report on their progress to date and seek the views and advice of Steering Group members. They reported that a website is in development to provide a way to feedback findings to interested groups, and allow an easy to use system for interested groups and individuals to submit evidence. We will publicise the website address on the AET website as soon as it goes live.

Current areas of focus for the Inquiry include:

- The issue of separation of assessment from provision
- The role of educational psychologists (EPs), including the accusation that EPs tailor their assessments to what they know is available
- What is happening at school action/school action plus levels - are there really 20% of school children with SEN?
- An assessment of the model of the Early Support framework and whether that is a better framework than Statementing
- Looking at the role of parents and the issue of parental confidence, including the constructive campaigning programme

Further details on the Inquiry can be found online here <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/lambinquiry> or in our April e-newsletter.

### The AET attends reading of Autism - Private Members' Bill in parliament

The AET was invited by Angela Browning MP to attend the National Autistic Society's (NAS) Autism – Private Members' Bill at the House of Commons on 7 October. We were delighted to see the event so well supported by Members of Parliament, parents and representatives of groups from the autism sector as well as by adults with autism. Angela Browning is a passionate advocate for people on the autism spectrum and has worked with the NAS to draft a Bill which could be readily adopted.

The Autism Bill aims to strengthen information about the number of people with autism and their needs, in order to improve local planning and commissioning of services. It aims to improve inter-agency working to secure effective transition for disabled young people with autism from child to adult services. Finally, it aims to ensure effective access to support and services for people with autism in adult life.

The Bill has clauses on information, to make sure that local authorities put into place systems to record the number of people with autism in their area and ensure that they are included in local planning and commissioning societies. It also has clauses on transition to adulthood to put in place effective inter-agency support to help young people adapt to their new situations. The final clauses are on support for adults with autism, 40% of whom live at home with their parents and 61% of whom rely on their families for financial support. Local Authorities tend to be categorised into service groups that do not reflect the fact that autism is a developmental disability, and not a learning disability or a mental health problem which has led to many people with autism, particularly with high functioning autism or Asperger syndrome find themselves 'falling through the gaps' between services that refuse to take responsibility for them.

All of those present were impressed by Robyn Steward, an adult with Asperger syndrome who is both a trainer and mentor. She overcame the distractions of the heavily patterned flock wallpaper in the Strangers' Dining Room to speak eloquently about her experiences at school, the impact of her autism and the positive effect that support made on her life as an adult. You can find out more about Robyn on her website [www.robysteward.com](http://www.robysteward.com).

If adopted, the Bill will make a real difference to the future for children and young people with autism, particularly when they finish their education. MPs present were encouraged to indicate their support for the bill. **If you would like to increase the chances of this Bill becoming law, please contact your MP and ask them to show their support.**

### John Bercow leads debate on autism education in parliament

John Bercow MP, author of the recently published Bercow Report which we reported on in our August e-newsletter, led a debate about autism and education in Parliament on 8 October. The AET was invited to attend.

The debate attracted around 20 Members of Parliament and a wide range of interest and support from all sides of the House. John Bercow congratulated the Secretary of State for Education, Jim Knight, on his support in funding the Autism Education Trust and joined a number of MPs in recognising the work of the NAS and TreeHouse in campaigning and delivering autism-specific schools and the TreeHouse Parent Support Project.

Specific examples of good practice were given which we will try to include in more detail in a later newsletter and on the new website once it has been launched in the New Year. The topics covered included:

- Exclusions
- Bullying

- The role of Ofsted
- Speed of Statementing
- Teacher training
- Transition to adulthood
- Tribunals

The debate can be viewed and heard in full online at

<http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/VideoPlayer.aspx?meetingId=2367&rel=ok>

### **New Chair announced for AET Steering Group**

Ian Wylie, Chief Executive of TreeHouse, stepped down as Chair of the AET Steering Group at the meeting held on 16 September 2008. The Group thanked Ian for his work over the past 18 months, in particular his role in helping to establish the AET in 2007. Bob Lowndes, Chief Executive of The Wessex Autistic Society and representative of Autism Alliance UK, was unanimously voted in by the Steering Group as Ian's successor.

### **Inside Asperger syndrome – Hendrickx Associates training course**

Sarah Hendrickx, trainer and author of four books on Asperger syndrome, is delivering a training course on Tuesday 18 November for parents, professionals and those with Asperger syndrome. The one day course – Inside Asperger syndrome – will be held at The Space Centre, near Kings Cross in Central London and will be co-hosted by Matt Tinsley, an author with Asperger syndrome.

The one day course will cover:

- How to recognise Asperger syndrome, characteristics and background
- Implications and barriers for the individual
- Strategies and approaches for supporting a child or adult with Asperger syndrome
- Activities, exercises, case studies and discussion

The course will run again in Manchester on 8<sup>th</sup> December. To find out more and book a place visit [www.asperger-training.com](http://www.asperger-training.com) or call 01273 711258.

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### **Have Your Say**

We are always keen to hear your thoughts and suggestions for the AET. Please visit the AET website and fill in the online form to tell us about your experiences of autism education. We want to hear from parents, young people with autism and professionals working in the autism education field.

Visit <http://www.autism.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=1502&a=14706> to fill in a form.

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### **Further information**

We hope you would like to continue receiving the AET e-newsletter. However, if you do not wish to receive these updates in future please email [info@autismeducationtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@autismeducationtrust.org.uk) with the word 'unsubscribe' in the subject line. If you have received this newsletter via a third party and would like to be added to the regular mailing list please email the above address to subscribe.

For any further information and feedback please contact us at

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