

**Questions and Answers on the Adult Autism Strategy for England**  
Provided courtesy of The National Autistic Society [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

**- What is the adult autism strategy?**

The adult autism strategy is the Government's plan to make sure that adults with autism get the help that they need. This could be things like help to get a job or help at home.

**- What does the adult autism strategy say?**

The strategy sets out actions that the Government will take forward in a number of areas to help improve services and support for adults with autism.

It also sets out recommendations for local services on how they can better support adults with autism.

There are five key areas where action will be taken:

- 1) Increasing awareness and understanding of autism;
- 2) Improving access to diagnosis and ensuring a personalised needs assessment follows a diagnosis
- 3) Improving access for adults with autism to the services and support they need to live independently within the community;
- 4) Helping adults with autism into work and
- 5) Enabling local partners to plan and develop appropriate services for adults with autism to meet identified needs and priorities.

In particular, actions and recommendations set out in the strategy, include:

- Improved training of frontline professionals in autism
- Actions around the development of local autism teams
- Actions for better planning and commissioning of services, including involving people with autism and their parents/carers in this process
- Actions for improving access to diagnosis
- Leadership structures at national, regional and local levels for delivery
- Proposals for reviewing the strategy to make sure that it is working

**- What difference will it make to me, as an adult with autism or a parent/carer of an adult with autism?**

The publication of the strategy is only the first stage in transforming services for adults with autism. It contains a number of actions that central Government will take forward over the next few years. It also contains recommendations that local authorities and local health bodies (such as PCTs) should be implementing.

Change in local services may take a long time and so you may not see the difference straight away. But local commissioners should soon begin planning how they will implement the recommendations in the strategy, and they will need to involve people affected by autism, like you, in that process. This is clearly set out in the strategy.

In the longer term, as a result of the strategy, more frontline professionals will be trained in autism and so in the future you can expect that the needs of adults with autism are better understood by the professionals and their needs better met as a result.

For those seeking diagnosis, the process should become easier in a few years time, once local referral pathways have been fully developed and diagnosis will be linked to an assessment of care needs.

It should also become easier for adults with autism to access local services and support, as local services become more aware of the reasonable adjustments that need to be made for adults with autism.

Staff at Jobcentre Plus should become better at understanding autism and therefore better able to support people with autism into employment.

At a local level, stronger leadership on the development of local autism services and improved ways of planning services should lead to more appropriate support being developed at a local level. This stronger leadership should also help overcome the gap between mental health and learning disability services.

The strategy also encourages the development of local autism teams to help ensure adults with autism can have their needs met locally.

We are currently producing a guide on the implications of the strategy for individuals and will make it available on our website in the next few weeks. An easy read version of this guide will also be available.

***- Is the Autism Strategy legally binding? How can I challenge my local authority / PCT if they are not complying?***

The strategy itself is not legally binding, but local authorities are expected to follow it. The strategy sets out what the Government thinks that local authorities and local health bodies (such as PCTs) should be doing to meet the needs of adults with autism.

If you are unhappy with the services that you as an individual are receiving and you do not think that local authorities or local health bodies are taking forward actions set out in the autism strategy, you can use local complaint procedures. Please see <http://www.autism.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=2270&a=19530> for more details.

If you want further advice on making a complaint, please contact our helpline on 0845 070 4004. See <http://www.autism.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=2150> for more details.

If you don't want to make a complaint about your individual case, but have broader concerns about whether your local authorities and health bodies are implementing the recommendations of the strategy, please email [campaign@nas.org.uk](mailto:campaign@nas.org.uk) or call 020 7923 5799 for further advice about campaigning and how you can influence local services.

Later in 2010, the Government will publish statutory guidance for local authorities and local health bodies (such as PCTs) setting out what they must do to meet the needs of adults with autism. This guidance will be legally binding and will be challengeable in a court. More information about the statutory guidance is below.

**- How does the adult autism strategy link to the Autism Act?**

The Autism Act put a duty on the Secretary of State for Health to introduce a strategy for improving outcomes for adults with autism. By publishing the strategy the Government have met this part of the Act.

The Act also put a duty on the Secretary of State for Health to introduce statutory guidance for local authorities and local health bodies (such as PCTs), to accompany the strategy. This means that there will be a legal obligation on these bodies to do certain things within the strategy.

**- When is the statutory guidance coming out, and what will that do?**

The Autism Act sets out that the statutory guidance must be published by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010. The Government have said that they will consult on the guidance in summer 2010.

The Act sets in stone some of the areas that *must* be covered by the guidance. These are:

- a) providing services for diagnosing autism in adults;
- b) identifying adults with autism;
- c) carrying out needs assessments for adults with autism;
- d) planning appropriate services to young people with autism as they move from children's to adult services;
- e) local planning to provide appropriate services to adults with autism;
- f) training of staff who provide services to adults with autism;
- g) local leadership with regard to providing services to adults with autism.

**- Why does it not cover children?**

The original Autism Bill set out duties for the better planning of services for children with autism. However, during initial negotiations on the Autism Bill the Government agreed to take forward the children's clauses through regulations and guidance coming out of the Apprenticeships, Schools, Children and Learning Act 2009. These clauses sought to make sure that local authorities knew how many children with autism there are in their area, and plan services accordingly.

The Government has consulted on the regulations and guidance, and the regulations will require local authorities and their partners (known as Children's Trusts) to look particularly at the needs of children with SEN and disabilities in their strategic planning (Children and Young People's Plans). Following further discussions with government we expect the final guidance to state that local authorities and their partners should consider the needs of children with specific impairments including autism within their Plans. The guidance is due in March 2010.

The NAS continues to put pressure on the Government to improve services for children with autism. Please see <http://www.autism.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=2287> for more details on our ongoing work for children with autism.

Moreover, the strategy does cover transition into adult services. The improved awareness of autism that the strategy intends to bring about will also benefit children with the condition.

***- What nations does it cover?***

The strategy only covers England. However, there are policy initiatives taking place in the other UK nations including ASD Strategic Action Plans in Wales and in Northern Ireland and an Autism Bill in Scotland.

***- Will the strategy be affected by a change of Government?***

As the strategy was introduced as a result of the Autism Act, this means that a new Government would find it very difficult to simply withdraw the strategy or stop its implementation.

Moreover, the Autism Act binds any future Government to producing statutory guidance for local authorities and local health bodies on autism by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010. A change of Government will not change this.

***- Will the strategy bring new funding for services for adults with autism?***

The Government has committed £500,000 to support a programme of training for health and social care professionals.

However, no commitments have been made for the funding of new services for adults with autism through the strategy. It should be recognised that a number of actions in the strategy will be relatively cost effective to deliver and are likely to save money in the long-run.