

**P-05-806 We call for all premises in Wales to be awarded an Access Certificate number – The National Autistic Society Cymru to the Committee, 05.09.18**

### **About the National Autistic Society Cymru**

We are the leading charity for people on the autism spectrum and their families. Since we began over 50 years ago, we have been pioneering new ways to support people and understand autism. We continue to learn every day from the children and adults we support in our schools and care services. Based on our experience, and with support from our members, donors and volunteers, we provide life-changing information and advice to millions of autistic people, their families and friends. And we support professionals, politicians and the public to understand autism better so that more autistic people of all ages can be understood, supported and appreciated for who they are.

Our charity works across Wales alongside our 15 volunteer-led branches and members. We also provide support and specialist services for adults across Wales in a number of settings including residential care, supported living, community-based resource centres, at university and in people's own homes.

Around 34,000 people in Wales are autistic. If you include their families, autism is a part of daily life for 136,000 people throughout Wales.

### **About Autism**

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while all people on the autism spectrum share certain areas of difficulty, their condition will affect them in different ways.

Some people on the autism spectrum are able to live relatively independent lives but others may need a lifetime of specialist support. Autistic people may also experience some form of sensory sensitivity or under-sensitivity, for example to sounds touch, tastes, smells, light or colours. This might mean that sensory input such as a ticking clock or screaming in the playground can be highly stressful. Asperger syndrome is a form of autism.

## **National Autistic Society Cymru response to P-05-806: We call for all premises in Wales to be awarded an Access Certificate number similar to the Food Hygiene Certificate.**

The National Autistic Society Cymru welcomes the opportunity to share with the committee our views on petition P-05-806, currently under consideration. We broadly support the concept of a national 'access certificate' scheme that would help to ensure that communities are more open and welcoming places to autistic people and their families.

For autistic people, the world can seem full of too much information – and too little understanding. That's why we launched our public awareness campaign [Too Much Information](#) to challenge the myths, misconceptions and stereotypes that contribute to 79% of autistic people feeling socially isolated and 64% of autistic people avoiding going to the shops.

Our charity would welcome the implementation of this scheme both within commercial and public services. Our members and supporters tell us that while an inability to access shops and restaurants, for example, can be socially isolating, the same can be said for access to GP surgeries, dentists or council buildings.

To roll out such a scheme in workplaces, as suggested, presents different challenges. While any work that improves an employer's understanding of autistic employees is to be welcomed, it is important that this is seen as a distinct challenge to being accessible to members of the public on the autistic spectrum. That said, training to improve awareness and understanding of autism will be beneficial across all areas of any organisation.

For hidden disabilities such as autism, access to goods and services can often be about making changes to the physical environment. This could include, but is not limited to, providing opportunities for autistic people to access services where the sensory impact that the environment can have is taken into account. This is why we launched our [Autism Hour](#) initiative asking business and shops to be more autism friendly through dimming the lights or reducing the noise levels for one hour. Staff are also given information on how they can be more supportive of autistic shoppers during the hour. Last year almost 5,000 organisations took part and we're on track to support even more organisations this year.

Another way in which such a scheme could encompass the needs of autistic people is by looking at the extent to which organisations provide information about their services to autistic people. A good example of this is the [National Assembly for](#)

[Wales](#), a recipient of the National Autistic Society Cymru's [Autism-Friendly Award](#), who provide a range of helpful information and resources on their website for autistic visitors. This allows autistic visitors to prepare for their visit and make any necessary considerations, enabling them to avoid becoming stressed, anxious or overwhelmed.

Our charity would also welcome disability awareness training, including autism, for all staff who interact with the public.

Whether the scheme is voluntary or compulsory, and exactly how and by whom the scheme will be administered and monitored, are areas where we would seek further evidence on what would be most effective and practical. However, to ensure the success of such a scheme, it would be crucial that it is consistently administered and a clear framework is used to mitigate against the possibility of variation of standards.

Overall, further exploration into the development of this scheme is to be welcomed and, to make the most of the opportunity to provide better access to goods and services for those with a disability, we believe that the needs of those with autism and other hidden disabilities should be embedded from the start. We know that 28% of autistic people have been asked to leave a public space because of behaviour associated with their autism. This needs to change.

To this end, we would welcome any further opportunities to contribute to this process and would like to thank the committee for their consideration of our evidence.