



THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION

A BLETHER ON...

Autism



April 2025

Autism Acceptance Month

To mark the beginning of Autism Acceptance Month in April 2025, the SWC Team asked women to provide their experiences and views of autism. Autism Acceptance Month aims to raise awareness of autism and celebrate the contributions of autistic people across society.

Discussions centred around key themes: **diagnosis**, **education**, **employment** and **inclusive governance**. The following report contains a summary of each theme, alongside key recommendations which highlight what women would like to see to improve the lives of autistic people in Scotland.

Key Recommendations:

- **Ensure all medical professionals are provided with a good understanding of autism, and its traits, in girls and women, to improve the likelihood of diagnosis.**
- **Embed training on autism and neurodivergence in all school settings, ensuring that teaching and support staff are assisted to engage.**
- **Improve childcare availability for children with additional support needs, by increasing flexibility and reducing costs.**
- **Work alongside those with lived experience and associated specialist organisations, to include marginalised voices across decision-making processes.**

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK, and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

Women's Views

Diagnosis

"I would say that getting a diagnosis for autism for my grandson's was quite simple, the school were very good, but my granddaughter, who I would say is autistic, hasn't been able to receive a diagnosis yet."

To begin conversations, SWC staff enquired about attendee's experiences of accessing healthcare as an autistic woman in Scotland. This process varied by quality, with some stating that healthcare professionals lacked knowledge on autism and neurodivergence. However, some did state that they received effective support for either themselves or their autistic child. A consistent theme, in relation to this process, was that of an autism diagnosis. Women explained that accessing an official diagnosis of autism for themselves or their daughters/granddaughters was difficult through the NHS. This process was identified to be easier for boys and men, highlighting a disparity in healthcare experiences. Women called for improved training for medical professionals surrounding autism and neurodivergence, and in particular believed more knowledge-gathering must be completed surrounding women and girls' autism traits.

- "My son's diagnosis was very easy, whereas for my daughter, it was a longer journey"
- "From my own diagnosis, I went private because I didn't feel confident. I actually felt quite embarrassed, like I was some sort of fraud. I knew how long the waiting lists were, and there I was, this woman in her 40s, an adult, taking up space."

Education

"...consistently throughout Scotland, it is a bit of a postcode lottery and there seems to be a huge difference between support offered in primary school compared to secondary school"

Attendees were also asked to provide their views on education in Scotland, namely if this was effectively supporting autistic girls. Many believed that support varied widely, with individual teachers often making a significant difference to pupils' learning experience. The transition from primary to secondary school was also identified as particularly difficult for autistic children, with the secondary school environment being largely unsuitable. Parents explained that high schools usually catered to large student populations, and the lack of consistency with regards to classrooms and teachers, made learning more difficult for autistic pupils. Some attendees explained that this was as a result of mainstreaming policies, whereby students with additional support needs are entitled to remain within mainstream schools. While exclusionary policies were not viewed as suitable alternatives, women believed that there should be improved training and resourcing surrounding neurodivergence for education staff.

One attendee asked, "I wonder how many autism-specialist school places go to boys vs girls nationally? Are autistic girls expected to be in mainstream more than autistic boys?"

[Scottish Government data](#) reveals that of the 4,282 autistic pupils attending an additional support school, **972 were girls compared to 3,310 boys.**

- "There is a presumption of mainstream, that means many autistic children will attend mainstream school, but the funding and wide-reaching training is not there"
- "We should have specialist teachers who have the knowledge and skills to deal with children or young people with additional support needs"

Employment

“In workplaces, there will always be policies, but it’s just a tick box exercise. In reality, if you ask an employer if they have disabled employees, they’ll fail on that.”

With regards to employment, women in attendance believed that despite regulation and policy championing the rights of disabled employees, little change had occurred in reality. Women likened their experiences and that of loved ones to a “tick box exercise”, explaining that employers regularly lacked effective processes to support autistic employees. They stated that this had resulted in autistic women not disclosing their autism, believing it could result in discrimination. Additionally, attendees explained that workplaces often prioritise the needs of neurotypical employees, taking an ableist viewpoint on society. This therefore prevents autistic women from entering and remaining in the workplace. To counter this, attendees believed that flexible working environments should be provided, to enable autistic women to remain in work. Flexibility was also viewed as a must for those with autistic children, without which accessing appropriate childcare was unlikely.

- “The whole system discriminates against disabled women, like interviews are a perfect example, they’re very much based around a neurotypical person’s approach”
- “I have a very supportive employer...I have a very flexible work schedule...and I can work from home all the time. My home is my safe space...In other organisations I wouldn’t maybe have shared my diagnosis”
- “I think flexibility would be great for autistic women, and also for women with autistic children. Childcare for autistic kids is very difficult to organise, it can be expensive and difficult to access”

Inclusive Governance

“It should be that the world fits around autistic children, not autistic children trying to fit into the world.”

We went on to ask attendees to provide their views on national and local governments. They explained that they often did not feel that their needs were effectively considered, with much national policy not translating into tangible outcomes. An attendee provided examples of official communications lacking accessibility, with this varying from Scottish Government consultations to local bus timetables and council tax letters. They proposed that through an inclusive governance approach, which embedded lived experience throughout, autistic women’s and children’s needs could be effectively considered. It was also stated that accountability mechanisms must work in conjunction across government processes, with multiple attendees stating that there is much talk surrounding neurodiversity inclusion, but this is not associated with action.

- “It’s important to connect autistic people directly with politicians, I think that makes a difference, if they can see who it’s impacting, that can be huge.”
- “The Scottish Government are trying to sort issues or understand our issues, but it’s not logical to not include the people with lived experience, as we parents or our children, need to be given safe spaces to express our needs and frustration.”
- “I think on the Scottish Government, they tend to talk the talk, and I think they do have an understanding of autism and neurodivergence, but it doesn’t impact real people’s lives on the ground, it doesn’t translate.”

Thank You!

Thank you to the women who shared their experiences with us. We will continue to advocate for women across Scotland so that their views are included in the policy-making process.



SWC CONTACT DETAILS

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