

These notes refer to the Autism (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (c.13) which received Royal Assent on 26 April 2022

Autism (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022

EXPLANATORY NOTES

COMMENTARY ON SECTIONS

Section 1 Autism strategy: consultations and data:

Section 2 of the 2011 Act required the Department of Health to prepare an autism strategy. Section 1 makes two amendments to the 2011 Act.

Firstly, as well as an obligation to consult other Northern Ireland departments before preparing the strategy, the Department is now obliged to consult other persons. This widens the field of persons who may be consulted on the strategy. Secondly, there is now a specific duty upon the Department to request Health and Social Care Trusts to provide data on the prevalence of autism both in adults and in children. Previously the duty was to provide data on the prevalence of autism generally. The duty is now more specific and will provide greater detail on the prevalence of autism.

Section 2 Additional components of autism strategy:

Section 3 of the 2011 Act set out what the autism strategy must contain. Section 2 amends section 3 by adding a number of specific new components to the autism strategy. Firstly, the autism strategy must now include information on the training which is to be provided to civil servants and staff of all public bodies on autism. The training may include accredited training. The training is to assist staff on how best to help autistic people and their families and carers. Secondly, the autism strategy must now set out details of an autism early intervention service. Thirdly, the autism strategy must now include information on a new autism information service. This service must be accessible both face to face and remotely (for example over the phone, or online). The information service is designed to be used by autistic people, their families and carers, and also by professionals working in this field. Fourthly, the autism strategy must now include information specifically on the needs of adults with autism.

Section 3 Methodology of the autism strategy:

Amends the 2011 Act by inserting a new section on the methodology required for the preparation of the autism strategy. The strategy must reflect best

international practice. The strategy must recognise the fact that autistic people have individualised needs. There must be regional consistency across Northern Ireland in the approach to autism. Finally, the strategy must contain hard targets, and these targets can be used to measure whether or not the strategy has been successful.

In addition to the general obligation to consult widely in making this strategy, section 3 also includes a specific obligation to consult organisations working in this area when it comes to setting those measurable targets.

Section 4 Annual autism funding reports:

Amends the 2011 Act by establishing a new requirement for the Minister to prepare an annual report setting out information on the funding of autism. The funding for autism means how the Department, and how other departments allocate money in order to meet the autism strategy. The annual report must be laid before the Assembly. The funding for autism must take into account the autism strategy, the prevalence of autism, the needs of autistic people and their families and carers. The funding must also take into account the possibility of working with charities in this area.

Section 5 Autism reviewer:

Amends the 2011 Act by requiring the appointment of an independent person known as the autism reviewer. The main job of the autism reviewer is to keep under review the Department's functions relating to autism. The reviewer must issue a report annually, which is to be sent to the Department and laid before the Assembly. The reviewer is not a statutory office holder, merely a person appointed by the Department as required by a statute.

Section 6 Short title:

Sets the short title which is the Autism (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.