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Autism Europe adopts the Position on Inclusion held by the National Autistic Society

Autism and Inclusion

BACKGROUND

1. The term inclusion is used to describe an entitlement to education and support for all individuals with a disability within the mainstream of provision. It is a major plank of government policy at European level.
2. Inclusion differs from 'mainstreaming' or 'integration' in that the latter terms describe participation of disabled individuals when it is able to be demonstrated that they are able to benefit and that the mainstream setting will not be adversely affected by their presence within it.
3. Advocates of inclusion argue that segregation, either by disability, diagnosis or other factor or that having to 'earn' the right to be included is not in the interests of the child or adult. Over the past two decades, the impact of ideas; primarily from the USA and from Scandinavia around 'normalisation' have emphasised the importance of promoting valued social roles for those at risk of devaluation by reason of disability or other factors.
4. The development of policy around these ideas has largely reflected ideology rather than individual need. Segregation in large institutions has largely ceased and there has largely been an opening of the way for greater community presence and participation. There are however concerns that some individuals and their families have been seriously disadvantaged as a result of poorly resourced alternatives or the dilution of specialised expertise. In short, services have been based more on dogma than the needs of the disabled person.
5. Autism-Europe has been involved with advocacy on behalf of children and adults with autism and their families since 1985. It promotes good practice in the fields of education and educational approaches, in medical treatment and provision for the residential, support and vocational needs of adults.
6. Autism-Europe strongly advocates experiences for individuals with autism which will maximise their opportunities as citizens regardless of the nature and degree of their disability. These include an entitlement to education, support and freedom from abuse or exploitation. Autism-Europe believes that each individual with autism should receive such services and support within the mainstream of public provision unless this conflicts with their individual needs and requirements.

THE POSITION OF AUTISM-EUROPE

1. Autism-Europe believes that the cornerstone of effective provision is individualisation to ensure that each person receives appropriate education and support in order to achieve and sustain successful functioning as independently as possible and to exercise choice.
2. Inclusion in the mainstream should be based on entitlement, not privilege and reflect the best interests and individual need of each person. Reasonable adjustments should be expected within educational or other facilities to provide better access and sustainable participation and benefit. The Policy of Inclusion should never be used to deny any service to any individual or to provide symbolic or token services which may give the illusion of provision whilst in reality denying opportunity.
3. The policy of inclusion must essentially ensure that appropriate learning or other positive experiences take place. It is not simply about 'where' an individual is educated or receives services or support; it is about its quality and relevance.
4. Autism-Europe emphasises the importance of skilled diagnosis and ongoing specialised assessment and a partnership between parents and professionals in order to determine appropriate educational or other programmes. Autism-Europe advocates that all such programmes be supported by professionals or other persons with acknowledged expertise in autism who can provide all of the necessary practical guidance and assistance, and who can evaluate the effects of such provision.
5. The policy of inclusion does not replace the need for sensitive, individual planning. This is particularly so in the case of complex individuals whose needs are especially difficult to accommodate in mainstream settings or who find such settings distressing.
6. Autism is a spectrum condition requiring a range of individual sophisticated responses. It is hoped that increasingly these will occur within the mainstream of provision, for all or most of the time. There are however those individuals whose lifelong interests are best served by appropriately specialised services that provide the most appropriate and meaningful education and support.