

# Disability and Youth Transitions

Policy Brief, April 2024



## About this project

[Disability and Youth Transitions](#) is an ESRC-funded, 30-month project **exploring the experiences of disabled young people** as they move towards adulthood in **Glasgow and its surrounding areas** and **across the North East of England**, led by researchers at Newcastle University, the University of Glasgow and University of York.

Through this research, we are working to understand more about all aspects of disabled young people's lives – including education and training, housing, employment and volunteering, health and social care, social lives and relationships – exploring what works and what does not work in supporting disabled young people during this crucial period of their lives. We are doing this by talking with disabled young people over time about their lives; talking with families, advocacy groups and other organisations about supporting disabled young people; and bringing disabled young people together to identify differences and similarities in their experiences.

The project's work is informed and strengthened by an expert advisory group, chaired by Disability North and including representatives from Glasgow Disability Alliance, ARC Scotland (Scottish Transitions Forum), Children North East and Investing in Children. Most importantly, disabled young people are involved as partners in both sites and across the lifetime of the project, to shape how we undertake all parts of this research.



## Key asks

Whilst we have had heard about some examples of good practice, several areas of concern have been consistently raised in our research to date, highlighting how challenging the transition to adulthood can be for disabled young people if the right support and services across all aspects of their lives are not in place. Based on the emerging findings of our project, we recommend that:

- **The UK Government** – and all political parties – should urgently confirm how they intend to work with disabled young people and their families to improve the transition to adulthood across *all* aspects of disabled young people's lives, including through improved co-ordination of services and support provided at all levels of Government.
- **The Scottish Government** should provide greater clarity on the mechanisms through which the aims of its National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy will be achieved and monitored, and how this work will be resourced to ensure consistent implementation across all areas.
- **Mayoral combined authorities in the North East of England** should convene and work with local authorities, health, voluntary/community sector and other key partners to build on the examples of good work that is taking place within the region to improve transitions to adulthood – to deliver a consistent, good offer for all disabled young people across their combined authority areas.

## Transitions and the UK Government Disability Action Plan

The UK Government published its [Disability Action Plan](#) (DAP) in February 2024 to outline ‘the immediate actions the Government will take in 2024 to improve disabled people’s everyday lives’. The Government states that the DAP is intended to complement the [National Disability Strategy](#), which ‘sets out the long-term vision to transform disabled people’s lives for the better’.

This followed consultation on a [draft Disability Action Plan](#) which included a proposed cross-government taskforce on ‘wellbeing and opportunities for disabled children’ led by the Cabinet Office Disability Unit, ‘to improve the way Government services for disabled children work together’, with transitions to adulthood being one of the taskforce’s four intended areas of focus.

We strongly welcomed this proposal in [our consultation submission on the draft DAP](#), given **the early findings of our research (overleaf) indicate the lack of a co-ordinated or holistic approach to supporting the transition to adulthood for disabled young people is a significant challenge**. This applies not only to services that are delivered by, or the direct responsibility of, central Government, but also to services planned and delivered at a local or subnational level (e.g. social care, healthcare and housing) – and our consultation response therefore urged that the proposed taskforce should consider how services for disabled young people can be better co-ordinated across *all* levels of Government.

However, the final version of the DAP disappointingly did not commit to take forward the proposed taskforce – pledging instead to create ‘a disabled people’s experience panel’, to ‘address a number of issues raised in this consultation where there is opportunity to make a difference in the short-term’. **It is unclear whether this will include any work on improving the transition to adulthood for disabled young people, or the way in which support services can work better together**. And, whilst the DAP did reference the ‘development of new Transitions Guides to assist disabled young people across all stages of education and post-16 settings’, this commitment was first made in the Government’s [SEND and AP Improvement Plan](#) in March 2023 and the lengthy timeframe for this to happen remains ‘[by the end of 2025](#)’. We are further concerned that these guides will only cover transitions within educational/employment settings, but not other – equally important – aspects of disabled young people’s lives (that can be fundamental in enabling them to remain in education and/or to secure and sustain employment).

## Scottish Government National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy

This contrasts with the position in Scotland, where the co-development of a [National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy](#) is well underway with publication by the Scottish Government due by the end of 2024.

This strategy aims to embed the [Principles of Good Transitions](#) that have been piloted in a number of Scottish local authority areas by our project partner ARC Scotland/the Scottish Transitions Forum – through adopting a comprehensive, joined-up and person-centred approach to planning the transition to adulthood with disabled young people and their families, which recognises the importance of supporting *every* aspect of their lives. This work has been strengthened by [Compass](#), a new online tool for disabled young people, parents, carers and professionals – providing a one-stop source of personalised information and guidance tailored to each young person’s needs and interests.

The Scottish Government’s statement of intent for this welcome strategy has identified five important priorities: choice, control and empowerment for the young person; clear and coherent information; co-ordination of individual support and communication across all sectors; consistency of practice and support across Scotland; and collection of data to measure progress and improvements. However, greater clarity is needed on the mechanisms through which these aims will be achieved and monitored, and how this work will be adequately resourced.

## Consistent areas of concern raised in our research

- **A lack of co-ordination and information across services** – with different cut-off ages for different provision when transitioning from children's to adult services; delays in this transition taking place, which makes planning impossible and creates additional stress; frequently having to restate impairment and needs when transitioning, despite these remaining stable; and young people and their families struggling to find the information they need, at the right time, to support them through this period.
- **The longer-term impact of adverse childhood experiences** – with experiences of bullying, discrimination and abuse (including by peers, family members and/or professionals) resulting in significant mental health impacts into adulthood, thereby limiting future education, employment and other opportunities.
- **Education and training** – a lack of understanding and accommodation of young people's needs (in day-to-day school life, or exams); a lack of support in obtaining diagnoses; staff perceiving young people as being 'naughty' and damaging disciplinary measures – all of which are particularly prevalent for neurodivergent young people. In addition, we have consistently heard concerns about young people feeling 'singled out' in mainstream education; a rigid or 'results driven' system which does not support disabled young people to maximise their strengths; and college programmes which do not provide meaningful opportunities for young people to develop skills or prepare for employment.
- **Employment** – inflexible, 'one size fits all' employment initiatives; low expectations of disabled young people and their capabilities; a lack of or insufficient reasonable adjustments; employers misunderstanding neurodivergent behaviours; issues in recruitment processes (e.g. the failure to provide feedback on job/volunteering applications); and a sense of 'tokenism' on the part of employers, with disabled young people often feeling that they are 'making up the numbers'.
- **Health and social care** – with issues including delayed diagnoses (particularly for autism); inadequate mental health provision; challenges in securing GP appointments; a lack of information about, and consistency in, social care provision; challenges in finding/retaining carers or PAs; increased costs for adult social care; and cut-off age limits (often 25) in free or subsidised support groups.
- **Transport** – with concerns about long waiting times for the Motability scheme; rising public transport costs; inaccessible timetables; cuts to bus routes and frequency; and the expense of travelling to DWP-related appointments. These issues are particularly felt by disabled young people living in rural areas.

## Find out more

If you would like to hear more about this project, please contact Professor Janice McLaughlin via [janice.mclaughlin@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:janice.mclaughlin@newcastle.ac.uk)

You can also take a look at our website: <https://disabilityandyouthtransitions.co.uk/> - where you can [sign up here](#) to receive project updates, or follow us on social media:

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