

National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for Disabled Young People

A Statement of Intent

September 2023

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Introduction

Becoming an adult is an important time in a young person's life. It can be exciting, but also daunting. It can be a time of hope, but also of uncertainty. We know that for many disabled young people the transition to young adult life presents challenges. It is therefore critical that we support disabled young people to have as positive an experience as possible during this time of change.

Across the Scottish Government, there is already a range of legislation and policies in place that support the objective of improving transitions to adulthood for disabled young people, and we are committed to doing more. In the 2021 [Programme for Government](#), Scottish Ministers committed to introducing Scotland's first National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for disabled young people in this Parliamentary term, to ensure there is a joined up approach so that all disabled young people can experience a supported and positive transition to adult life. This was reaffirmed in the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills' policy priorities outlined in the First Minister's [Policy Prospectus](#), published on 18 April 2023.

This commitment to disabled young people in their transition to adulthood supports our ambition to enhance and embed children's human rights, and the rights of disabled people in every aspect of life in Scotland. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the internationally mandated children's rights treaty that informs our strategies and programmes. Article 23 states:

'States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community...'

It also contributes more broadly towards [Getting it Right for Every Child \(GIRFEC\)](#), and the following key outcomes within our [National Performance Framework](#):

- children and young people grow up loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential;
- we live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe; and
- we respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination.

We want to build upon the solid foundations of the existing policy and legislative framework, as well as effective practice, research and stakeholder views, to develop Scotland's first National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy. To support this, we have:

- Formed an [External Strategic Working Group](#) to co-develop the strategy and support its implementation.
- Discussed transitions with disabled young people – Children in Scotland's Inclusion Ambassadors; Independent Living Fund's (ILF) Young Ambassadors for Inclusion; and the Association for Real Change (ARC) Scotland's Divergent Influencers.

- Supported ARC Scotland, a third sector organisation who run the Scottish Transitions Forum, to trial [Principles into Practice](#) in 10 local authority areas to improve the lived experiences of young people who need additional support as they make the transition to young adult life, and to develop [‘Compass’](#) – a web-based tool which provides tailored information and advice to young people, parent carers and professionals to help navigate transitions.
- Supported a sub-group of the Disabled Children and Young People’s Advisory Group to find out what matters to disabled young people with complex needs and whose voices are seldom heard, and their parent carers and families.

We want to thank all of the partners who have contributed to this work so far, and whose valuable insights have helped shape this Statement of Intent.

This Statement of Intent summarises what we have heard to date through our research and engagement. Based on that evidence, it signals our ambition by setting out what we think a strategy should focus on to improve the lived experiences of Scotland’s disabled young people as they make the transition to adulthood.

The following pages set out the rationale along with the proposed scope, vision and priorities for Scotland’s first National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy. It is not the final strategy; it is an opportunity for you to tell us whether you agree with what we have heard so far.

We want to gather wider views on whether the draft vision and priorities are the right ones, ultimately for inclusion in the strategy. Your feedback on this Statement of Intent will help to shape the strategy and a set of aims and measurable actions which will be consulted on more widely in 2024.

By working together, we can ensure that all disabled young people making the transition to adulthood in Scotland are empowered to achieve their full potential.



Natalie Don,
Minister for
Children, Young
People & Keeping
the Promise



Emma Roddick,
Minister for
Equalities,
Migration and
Refugees

Why we need a strategy

“ I always get really anxious to the point of feeling sick about all transitions. Had to hit rock bottom to get any form of support... it felt like a tick box”

Young Person

There is already well-documented evidence that the planning and support for disabled young people who are making the transition to young adult life could be improved.

In February 2023, the Scottish Government published a [literature review](#) of existing Scottish, UK and International evidence on the experiences of disabled young people during their transition to adulthood, taking account of both ‘institutional transitions’ (e.g. from child to adult services) and ‘life-course transitions’ (the changes that occur as a result of a young person entering a new life-stage e.g. leaving school or pursuing independent living).

“ Transitions from school can be scary; change is a big thing to navigate, and knowing what it will entail is hard”

Young Person

Findings from the literature review, along with the views of disabled young people and the External Strategic Working Group suggest common experiences of transitions can include:

- Stress and uncertainty for the young person;
- Difficulties transferring from child to adult services;
- Changes in eligibility for services, and support arrangements;
- A sharp drop in support;
- Inadequate transitions planning;
- Lack of clear information about the transitions process;
- Lack of joined-up working (such as communication and collaboration) between services and other partners;
- Inadequate account being taken of young people’s capabilities, views, needs and aspirations; and
- Stress and difficulties faced by family members relating to their young person’s transition.

In addition, we are currently co-designing Getting It Right For Everyone (GIRFE) with place-based pathfinders across Scotland. GIRFE pathfinders are working across five thematic areas, including young people in transition from GIRFEC to GIRFE. Whilst GIRFE is still being co-designed, insights from the discovery phase echo the common experiences of transitions detailed above.

We want to change this narrative and are determined to make the transitions journey for every disabled young person a smoother and more positive one.

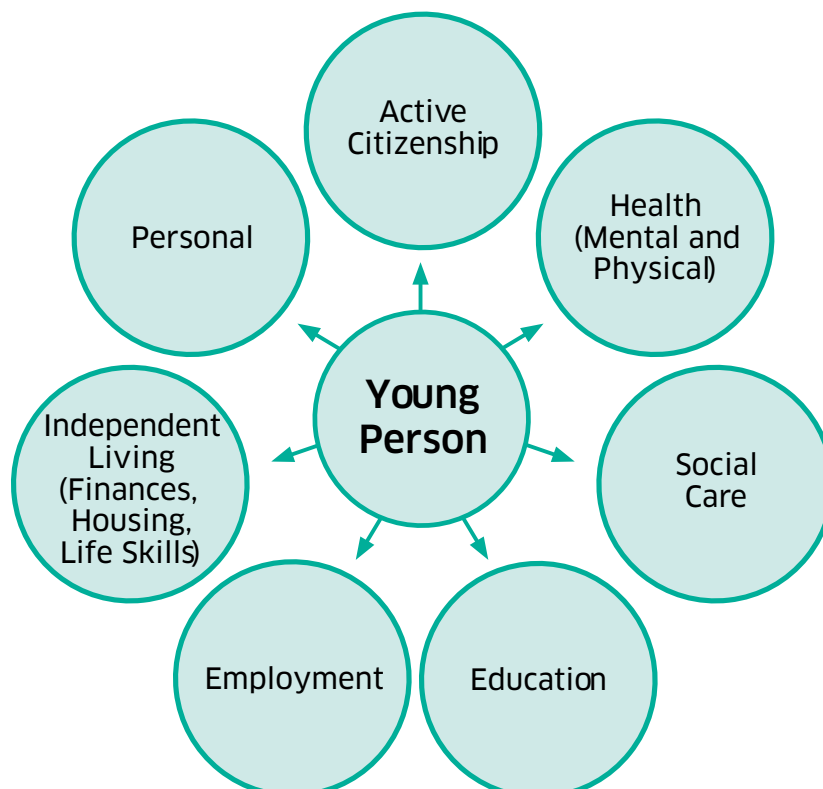
Who will the strategy be for?

Transition to Adulthood

For the purposes of this strategy, we propose the transition to adulthood will refer to the period when young people develop from children to young adults. This is not a single event, but a process which takes place over a number of years. It is a period of personal development which can involve changes in every area of life. The diagram below illustrates some of these areas.

In line with ARC Scotland's widely endorsed [Principles of Good Transitions](#), we propose to focus on disabled young people aged 14-25 years old, however we know that the transition to adulthood will mean different things to different young people, and as such will be achieved in many different ways and timescales. We also know that this period of transition can also impact on the family or those who care for the young person.

Planning and support provided during this time should therefore be person-centred and respond flexibly to the stage of development and unique needs and aspirations of each young person.



Disabled Young People

The Scottish Government is committed to the social model of disability that says that people are disabled by barriers in society; not by their impairment or difference and, as such, the term 'disabled people' rather than 'people with disabilities' is preferred.

For the purposes of the strategy, we propose that our definition of disability is the same as that which is used within the Equality Act (2010). This means young people are said to be disabled if they have a 'physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to carry out normal daily activities'.

This reflects feedback from partners in our External Strategic Working Group who are clear the strategy should work on a pan-impairment basis, and that a lack of diagnosis should not prevent a young person accessing the support they need.

However, we also recognise that some individuals who may require additional support to make the transition to young adult life may not identify with the terminology of 'disabled'.

Vision

Our proposed vision is that ‘disabled young people feel happy and confident in the transition to adulthood, and are empowered and supported to control their own path to success’.

Many young disabled people express optimism and excitement about the future and are keen to move on to the next stage of their lives, but need support to be more empowered, listened to and to be able to direct the transitions process.

In order to achieve this, disabled young people must receive the high quality and timely planning, care and support they need to transition effectively and with continued optimism. Planning should be person-centred; taking account of young person’s needs and aspirations and should support them on the path to whichever goals they choose for themselves.

What young people have already told us...

“ We should feel happy, supported and confident as we move towards whatever comes next”

“ [Support should] help disabled young people and students with additional support needs transition to whatever destination they want to go to”

“ Good support means having a good team, a good manager and getting the pitch conditions right”

“ Not everyone will have the same path; success looks different for everyone... People shouldn't dictate what you do, you should decide what support you need”

“ Make time, we need extra support and that's fine...Ask the question - what is it you actually need? Talk through all the support and check that it works for me”

Priorities

We are not starting from scratch and will develop a strategy with solutions drawn from effective practice and the voices and expertise of those with lived experience of transitions to adulthood. This includes drawing upon the [key learning](#) from ARC Scotland's Principles into Practice trials; their widely-endorsed [Principles of Good Transitions](#) and the similar characteristics of good transitions outlined in our [literature review](#):

ARC Scotland's Seven Principles of Good Transitions:

- Planning and decision-making should be carried out in a person-centred way
- Support should be co-ordinated across all services
- Planning should start early and continue up to age 25
- All young people should get the support they need
- Young people, parents and carers must have access to the information they need
- Families and carers need support
- A continued focus on transitions in our area

Characteristics of good transitions from our literature review:

- Early and sustained transition planning
- Holistic and coordinated wrap-around support
- Services delivered in partnership
- Designated keyworkers as a coordinating point of contact and continuity
- Person-centred support and preparation
- Family involvement in planning and decision-making
- Parental and familial support throughout the transition
- The provision of clear and accessible information
- Adequate services, resources and staffing

We want to further embed these principles and characteristics of good transitions into practice across Scotland so that all disabled young people can have a supported and positive transition to adult life.

The delivery of the proposed vision and priorities will also be interdependent with the range of legislation and policies already in place that support the objective of improving transitions to adulthood for disabled young people.

We want a strategy that can complement and help bring a more co-ordinated and joined-up approach to this broader landscape so that young people, their families and the practitioners who support them are better able to navigate it.

In order to achieve our ambitions, we propose a focus on five priority areas which are based on what we have heard will make the biggest difference from young people, and the families and organisations supporting them:

1. Choice, control and empowerment for the young person

Disabled young people should be at the centre of planning and decision making for their future. Early transitions planning should be available to disabled young people and should adopt a holistic, person-centred approach to empower young people to dream big and identify and pursue their goals and aspirations.

“ I tell *him* the plan

A good plan will allow young people to decide what's in it”

Young person

2. Clear and coherent information

Disabled young people, their families and others that support them should be aware of their rights and entitlements, and the support and services available during different points of transitions. The provision of national and local information should be clear and accessible.

“ Parents must seek out support and services for their child's needs

I stumbled across support”

Parent carer

3. Co-ordination of individual support and communication across sectors

Support for disabled young people during the transition to adulthood can require a multidisciplinary and multiagency approach (e.g health, social work, education, third sector, employment etc). Support from trusted professionals and consistent relationships are key to effective support during this time. Communication across all partners involved in transitions – including disabled young people and their families – with clearly defined roles and responsibilities are vital for ensuring a smooth transition.

“Transitions can be...exciting if handled properly, with a coherent set of people communicating efficiently so that the young person is at the centre of the planning process”

Young person

4. Consistency of practice and support across Scotland

Professionals who support disabled young people during their transition to young adult life should work to incorporate the principles and characteristics of good transitions into policy, planning and practice to ensure consistency of practice across Scotland. Professionals should be given the support and guidance they

need to explore and improve transitions practices. Disabled young people, their families and professionals supporting them should have access to learning opportunities to support better transitions.

“Postcode lottery”

Parent carer

5. Collection of data to measure progress and improvements

The measures of successful transitions to adulthood should consider life courses, in addition to traditionally-understood positive destinations. Data relating to young people's experiences of their transitions to adulthood should be collected, analysed and reported upon regularly in order to understand the extent to which young people are experiencing a positive and supported transition to young adult life.

“[S6 in school] was mainly on writing personal statements for uni or college... I think money management, travel and cooking skills would've been better... it makes you feel more of an adult – you're not relying on other people to help you be independent”

Young person

Next Steps

We now want to sense-check the scope, vision and priorities we have proposed in this Statement of Intent. If you would like to tell us whether you think they are the right ones or not, we have created a survey for you to do this anonymously.

We will use any feedback we receive to help us to draft the strategy, and a set of aims and measurable actions which will further set out how we will make the vision, which is ultimately included in the strategy, a reality for disabled young people in Scotland.

This [survey](#) will be open until 30 November 2023.



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