



Scottish Government Education Governance Review

Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve excellence and equity in education, January 2017

Response from Lead Scotland (Specialists in Linking Education and Disability)

Policy Background

Lead Scotland is a charity that enables disabled adults and carers to access inclusive learning opportunities. At a local level, we do this by providing direct support to learners through flexible person-centred learning opportunities and individualised guidance and support to help them plan their learning journeys. At a national level, we provide information and advice on the full range of post-school learning and training opportunities, as well as influencing and informing policy development.

Disabled people account for a significant proportion of Scotland's population, and make a vital contribution to our economy, culture and public life. Yet, they experience considerable inequalities in relation to education, employment and overall life chances. In comparison with their non-disabled counterparts, disabled people are around twice as likely to be unemployed¹, around three times as likely not to hold any qualifications² and twice as likely to live in poverty³.

Removing the barriers to inclusive learning and employment is therefore vital in terms of improving educational attainment and earning potential, reducing reliance on welfare benefits and facilitating access to life-enhancing experiences.

While the focus of our work and expertise is in post-school learning, we felt it was important to respond to this education governance review by raising our current concerns for young disabled people transitioning from school, and questioning

¹ The Annual Population Survey, March 2013

² Labour Force Survey, Quarter 2, 2012

³ Employers' Forum on Disability, 2012

whether a change in governance and increased powers at school level can help to address some of these concerns, as we cannot comment directly on current governance arrangements.

While we acknowledge there have been significant developments and investment into creating positive destinations for young people leaving school in Scotland, evidence from our helpline indicates young disabled people are still disproportionately disadvantaged in achieving equity and excellence in this area. Parents accessing our information service are voicing concerns over the lack of appropriate transition planning for their children leaving school as well as the limited availability of appropriate pathways for them to move on to. Making transitions during key learning and life stages can be a daunting experience. For those with additional support needs, this transition can be particularly difficult due to additional support requirements, for example support to meet disability-related learning needs, physical adaptations, social work/healthcare support and welfare benefits.

There has been a lot of excellent work in both the public and voluntary sector around transitions in recent years, however significant problems still remain for learners with additional support needs. Lead Scotland therefore raised these issues with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning in 2014, and we were asked to take forward further work in this area. We therefore conducted 6 focus groups in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness, involving 71 staff in schools, colleges, universities, local authorities, and other support organisations. We produced a set of recommendations in a briefing for Angela Constance, the previous Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning in 2015, which we have attached in our response. Some of the recommendations produced that could be considered alongside the education governance review include:

- Post-school transitions planning needs to be more effective and consistent
- All learners should be able to access the support of a Key Worker during transition
- There should be improved support for young people making the transition between children's and adults' services
- There needs to be a broader range of post-school learning opportunities
- School-college/university link courses should be expanded and promoted
- Multi-agency working should be further developed and promoted
- There should be further information and support for families
- There should be a transitions coordinator for learners throughout their learning journey in each local authority area
- There should be a 'transitions forum' in each local authority area to discuss concerns and generation solutions.
- There should be a statutory requirement to set up a Transitions Forum in each local authority region

Evidence from our information service confirms these recommendations are still relevant two years later with more work required to support positive transitions for young disabled people. We would particularly welcome an expanded programme of school-college/university link courses. Currently these seem to be offered on a limited basis to learners moving onto supported learning programmes at college. However parents and young people have indicated a wider group of learners could

benefit from bridging programmes and school link courses, for example learners with autism and mental health problems accessing mainstream courses. Parents have also indicated that young people with additional support needs may not be ready to move straight from school to college when they turn 18 or reach their school leaving age as more planning and preparation time is needed. We would therefore welcome an expansion of post-school transition programmes to support the development of life and social skills while preparing for the move to post-school learning settings.

Navigating the complex funding streams for disability related support and understanding their children's rights in post school learning under the Equality Act can be very challenging for parents; particularly as they may be more familiar with the Additional Support for Learning Act which only covers children's rights while they are at school. Lead Scotland offers a free email and telephone information service and produces a set of information booklets to help guide people through this landscape, which is distinct from the funding arrangements and legislation in place at school. We have also delivered ad-hoc information sessions to groups of parents and young disabled people to raise awareness of these changes and facilitate access to appropriate information. Feedback about these sessions have been very positive and there is a clear appetite from organisations for more input around these topics. We believe that having the resources and capacity to develop our information booklets further to make them more accessible would enable us to engage with more parents and schools across Scotland and in turn would have a positive impact on achieving equity and excellence in education for young disabled people. Involving young employed disabled people or disabled students in these sessions would help to raise the aspirations of pupils with additional support needs as we regularly hear anecdotal evidence that expectations are too often lowered for this group of young people. It would also be beneficial to invite local employers, colleges and universities to these sessions to highlight access and inclusion in these settings.

To conclude, we would therefore ask the Scottish Government to consider whether changes in governance arrangements could more effectively:

- Allow schools or school clusters to use funding to access more third sector and local community organisations to provide information, advice and support for parents, young people and teachers around post-school transitions
- Improve the experience of holistic transition planning and expand the choice of post school destinations for pupils with additional support needs, through expanded work in partnership with post school service providers and employers
- Enable parents to feel more emotionally prepared and knowledge equipped for the transition from children to adult services, legislation and the general post school landscape

While these are quite broad recommendations we would very much welcome the opportunity to offer further input and consultation around supporting positive post-school transitions.