

‘Leading the way to improving transitions for learners with additional support needs’

[Lead Scotland](#) (Specialists in Linking Education & Disability) works to widen access to learning for disabled young people and adults and carers across Scotland.

Purpose of this briefing

This briefing summarises the key findings from Lead Scotland’s ‘solution-focused’ focus groups to discuss transitions for learners with additional support needs. These focus groups allowed us to hear from those working with learners as a means of:

- building evidence around where things are working well (and where they are not)
- sharing good practice
- helping Lead develop recommendations to address current concerns and improve practice.

The discussions covered transitions at all stages, including between learning, transition into employment, and transition between children’s and adult services.

Why is change needed?

Disabled people experience considerable inequalities in relation to education, employment and income, and overall life chances. In comparison with their non-disabled peers, they are around twice as likely to be unemployed¹ (and nearly 4 times as likely for disabled *young people*), around 3 times as likely not to hold any qualifications² and twice as likely to live in poverty³.

Removing the barriers to inclusive learning is therefore vital in terms of facilitating equality of opportunity, improving educational and employment prospects, and enabling access to life-enhancing experiences.

Background

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, e.g. support to meet disability-related learning needs, physical adaptations, social work/healthcare support, welfare benefits, etc.

There’s been a lot of excellent work in both the public and voluntary sector around transitions in recent years⁴, however significant problems still remain for learners with additional support needs. Lead Scotland therefore raised these issues with the previous 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.

¹ The Annual Population Survey, March 2013

² Labour Force Survey, Quarter 2, 2012

³ Employers’ Forum on Disability, 2012

⁴ See Appendix: Background information

What participants told us

As current concerns around transitions have been well documented in recent years⁵, participants were instead asked to unpack the key issues and generate solutions and recommendations.

In relation to **younger learners**, participants urged that

- 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

In relation to **older learners**, participants urged that

- transitions planning and support for older learners should be better coordinated
- pre-access courses should be expanded
- more targeted support for older learners should be available

In relation to **all learners**, participants urged that

- multi-agency working should be further developed and promoted
- relevant legislation should be improved and clarified
- 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.

In relation to **transition to employment**, participants urged that

- volunteering opportunities should be supported and expanded
- further investment in (and awareness of) supported employment opportunities
- employers need to do more to make work more accessible for learners with additional support needs
- further support for learners to prepare for their exit from learning

Lead Scotland's recommendations

A project group⁶ was convened to consider and distil these findings and generate recommendations on the most effective means of improving transitions for all learners. Given the wide range of actions generated by participants, it was felt it would be more appropriate for our recommendations to focus on creating a more effective national framework for transitions as a means of addressing multiple issues. We therefore recommend that:

1. There should be a statutory requirement to set up a Transitions Forum in each local authority region⁷

This would allow each region to take forward actions to address local needs and concerns, as well as coming together to identify solutions at a national level. These forums could build upon existing 'Partnership Matters' forums, and should:

⁵ See Appendix: Background Information

⁶ Lead Scotland, Education Scotland, Children in Scotland, and the Scottish Transitions Forum

⁷ The Scottish Transitions Forum have started work on trialling 3 local authority transitions forums of this nature (further information available from Scott Richardson-Read, Scottish Transitions Forum: scott.read@arcuk.org.uk)

- include representation from all relevant partner agencies (e.g. education authorities, social work, learning providers, NHS, Jobcentre, voluntary sector);
- work closely with existing local forums, including Community Planning Partnerships, local health and social care partnerships, and More Choices More Chances Partnerships;
- have a remit which focuses on coordinating and improving local policy and practice, sharing information, and considering individual cases.

We are aware of a number of examples of good practice in setting up such forums across Scotland, and would recommend that further work is undertaken to identify the most appropriate model to use as a benchmark for best practice.

2. There should be a national ‘Transitions Coordinator’ to coordinate developments in this area, and ensure that national policy and guidance relating to transitions is joined-up across all relevant policy areas

The aim of this post should be to:

- coordinate and support local and national developments relating to transitions;
- ‘champion’ transitions at a national level, and ensure a joined-up approach across all relevant policy and legislative areas
- support the work of the 32 local Transitions Forums and facilitate twice yearly meetings with a representative from each forum. This would allow the forums to share good practice, generate solutions to ongoing concerns, and help inform policy development relating to transitions.

3. The ‘Partnership Matters’ review should ensure it is fit for purpose in relation to transitions

Rather than create a separate strategy/guidance regarding transitions, we recommend that the current ‘Partnership Matters’ review should ensure that it provides appropriate guidance around transitions. It should:

- extend its breadth to include adult/community learning provision, transition to employment, welfare, and transport;
- become more accessible (i.e. an electronic portal to support learner journeys) to allow it to be used by both families and professionals, and should include mapping of relevant support services available in all local authority areas⁸;
- include reference to broader measurements of ‘success’/positive destinations for learners with additional support needs, including positive wellbeing, improved confidence, social skills, etc.

Lead Scotland has endorsed the Scottish Transitions Forum’s 7 ‘principles of good transition’⁹, and our recommendations reflect the ethos of these principles.

How Lead Scotland can support work in this area

Lead has excellent relationships with other organisations taking forward work in this area, and we will continue to work in partnership to ensure that we provide appropriate information, advice and guidance to learners and their families via Lead’s national Helpline. We also work directly with learners in 7 local authority areas, and are exploring opportunities for extending our reach across Scotland.

⁸ This could take a similar format to Enquire’s map of services for children and young people with additional support needs aged under 16.

⁹ See Appendix: Background information