

'DON'T HOLD BACK'

Achieving the best for young people
with **learning disabilities**



Rapid Review of Evidence, by Dr Axel Kaehne and colleagues at Edge Hill University

Executive Summary

Transition for young people with learning disabilities remains a difficult process for everyone involved. It is widely recognised that transitions impact on several life domains at different times: education, health and social care, as well as employment and housing. These service transitions take place before the background of significant biological and developmental changes for young people.

The needs of young people with learning disabilities during the time of transition vary considerably depending on the severity of their disability and the availability of social support they can draw on. There has been substantial research and policy around transition for young people over the last two decades. A sizeable number of transition studies has been conducted producing good evidence as to the needs of young people with regard to employment, education and health and social care.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales (CCfW) asked a team, led by Dr Axel Kaehne of Edge Hill University, to obtain and analyse existing evidence around transition for young people with learning disabilities in four distinct yet interrelated domains: education, employment, health and social care and housing.

The research team proposed to conduct a rapid review of published peer reviewed and grey literature to obtain information about the following four questions:

1. What are the needs of young people with learning disabilities during times of transition from children's to adult sector provision in housing, education and training, health and social care and employment?
2. Which positive support for young people with learning disabilities and their support networks is currently available in Wales and what is considered best practice?
3. What are the gaps in support provision in Wales for this population and how can it be addressed?
4. What should be the priorities of future work by the CCfW in the field of transition and how can it best be facilitated with the existing capacity in Wales?

The review produced robust evidence about transition needs of young people in three domains: education, health and social care, and employment. Housing transitions emerged as a distinctly under-researched area for this population.

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Educational transitions remain the cornerstone of transition planning for young people with learning disabilities and the most visible part of their transition experience. Planning of transition starts around the age of 14 and there are a number of well-developed and validated tools to facilitate transition planning in schools. The numbers of young people actually involved in transition planning through person-centred planning processes however still appears to be low, and transition plans are often specific to educational transition. Fully integrated transition planning across health, social care, education and employment is extremely rare.

For most young people with learning disabilities transition to employment occurs after college. Whilst some schools organise exemplary work placements in the community, colleges may or may not identify suitable placements for young people in real life contexts. A significant barrier to successful transitions into employment remains the fact that the statutory transition process does not continue beyond college graduation for many young people with learning disabilities. This makes it difficult to plan ahead and develop meaningful employment options for some young people who want to work after college. There is however robust evidence that supported employment, where delivered effectively, produces good employment outcomes for young people with learning disabilities at all levels of functioning.

The review found a significant amount of evidence regarding the social and health care transition of young people. It is widely felt that joint clinics between children's and adult health care providers are perceived as positive by young people and their families. Overall, however the field of transition is marked by service fragmentation, differing eligibility criteria in the adult social care sector leading to a reduction of services for some young people and underprepared or underfunded adult specialist health care services which struggle to cater for the particular needs of this population. In addition, mental health provision for adolescents remains a persistent and serious service gap for young people with learning disabilities. The issue of continuity of care is often addressed by retaining young adults in child services in the NHS, in particular in specialist paediatric settings. This however creates issues around suitability of services and costs.

Housing is the only domain that offers little robust published evidence on transition of young people with learning disabilities. There is some research around out-of-area placements and the impact of those on young people's pathways through education. However, the housing needs of young people and how to accommodate a growing young population with learning disabilities is currently not adequately reflected in research and evaluation studies.

The researchers note the following gaps in evidence, which will be useful points of consideration for researchers and Government:

- Evaluate the impact of the Welsh additional learning needs strategy on transition planning and transition outcomes for young people.
- Obtain and analyse data regarding transition outcomes/destinations for young people with learning disabilities in Wales.

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- Explore the barriers to include all young people with learning disabilities in their transition planning in school and FE colleges.
- Obtain national data on destinations and transition outcomes of school leavers and those leaving colleges to ascertain access rates of young people to employment support.
- Examine the facilitators and hindrances to include SE employment options in the transition planning for every young person in school and college.
- Identify suitable ways to disseminate best practice in supported employment across Wales and facilitate shared learning in the field.
- Gather relevant data on health transitions of young people with learning disabilities in Wales.
- Review transition tools developed by Welsh local authorities and health care providers and assess their effectiveness.
- Obtain and analyse relevant Welsh data pertaining to housing transitions.
- Identify capacity of the housing sector to provide suitable supported living opportunities for young people in line with future demand.
- Identify trends in, and reasons for, out of area/residential placements for young people moving from school to college.

A copy of the full report can be found [here](#).

July 2018