

Talking points: Preparing for Adulthood

The NNPCF is a membership organisation and our mission states that “we aim to empower our members to ensure that their voice is heard at a local, regional and national level.”

Working with our membership we have identified a number of key “talking points” - these are topics and themes that are the most important to our membership and the ones that have been prioritised by the NNPCF.

Based on feedback from our membership and from other partners and stakeholders, the “talking point” summarise:

- The lived experience of our members about each topic,
- What is working and what is not working, and
- What we would like to see changed.

The talking points have been created using a range of feedback which includes:

- Surveys (including the SEND surveys)
- Feedback from our annual conferences
- The topics raised at regional meetings
- Themes and topics raised by our membership on social media
- Face to face conversations with our membership

This is the latest version of the Preparing for Adulthood Talking Point.

Preparing for Adulthood

Preparing for Adulthood from the earliest years is a key element of the SEND reforms Code of Practice. Chapter 8 gives clear guidance to all professionals working with children and young people with SEND but in particular to those who work with young people aged 14 and over. This includes children and adult social care practitioners as well as health practitioners.

High yet realistic aspirations for all is a key to success¹ and all work being done with children and young people should bear in mind the 4 themes of preparing for adulthood:

- Education and employment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Being part of the community, having friends and relationships
- Independent living and housing options

These outcomes must be considered holistically, with the right focus on all elements to meet the personalised outcomes of each young person.

Families report a number of consistent issues across the country².

- There is an overwhelming experience of a lack of support for both parent carers and young people or of support being of poor quality.
- Joined up working across adult and children's services is limited in many areas leading to delays or a cliff edge.
- The coordination between education, health and social care services is often poor.
- Whilst there are often good, co-produced Preparing for Adulthood strategies and intentions, provision of services is lacking in many areas.
- Areas that have successfully implemented the government's reforms are jointly commissioning the services that parents need and this leads to better outcomes for young people.
- In many cases planning is not started soon enough and is often ineffective.
- The quality of EHC plans is variable, and too many contain weak or no contributions from care services.
- Information about preparing for adulthood is limited and confusing both nationally and locally.
- Planning and non-statutory support for young people at SEN Support level is variable.

Some of these experiences were echoed in the findings of Amanda Spielman, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Ofsted in her annual report 2018/19³.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-201920-education-childrens-services-and-skills>

² https://contact.org.uk/media/1605592/transitions_survey_report.pdf

³ https://contact.org.uk/media/1605592/transitions_survey_report.pdf

“We inspected 90 post 16 providers with high-needs funding. Of these, just 1% were judged outstanding for overall effectiveness”.

For those providers judged to be inadequate the reasons included lack of preparation for adulthood.

There are plans to change SEND inspections following the Chief Inspector’s findings. The NNPCF welcomes Ofsted’s proposal⁴ to introduce 4 new measures to the further education and skills inspections. The outcomes will be added to official statistics from June 2021. These measures will analyse the quality of provision across England for:

- education programmes for young people in further education
- adult learning programmes
- apprenticeships
- provision for learners with high needs

A lack of support for young people

DfE guidance⁵ states that local authorities should consider the need to provide young people with EHC plans with a full package of support across education, health and care 5 days a week, if appropriate. Families report that often only part time education provision (generally 3 days a week) is offered for their young person, with no or inadequate provision offered on the other days. Holistic packages could involve amounts of time at different providers and in different settings and may include periods outside education institutions with appropriate support such as:

- volunteering or community participation
- work experience
- independent travel training
- skills for living in semi-supported or independent accommodation
- and /or training to develop and maintain friendships

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-publication-of-statistics-on-further-education-and-skills-inspections-and-outcomes/experimental-measures-on-the-quality-of-provision>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-19-to-25-year-olds-entitlement-to-ehc-plans/send-19-to-25-year-olds-entitlement-to-ehc-plans>

The NNPCF would like to see local authorities consistently providing 5 day a week packages which meet the needs of Young People, with the required follow up from the DfE and inspectors. We strongly champion a coproduction approach as a way of delivering services more effectively.

Many parents report that their young people in mainstream educational settings who do not have adequate support struggle to cope. Just over 5,500 pupils with SEND left their school between Years 10 and 11. Some of them may have been off-rolled. Nationally pupils with SEND account for 15% of all pupils but 27% of those who leave their school⁶.

Under statutory guidance accompanying the Autism Strategy, SEN Co-ordinators (SENCOs) should inform young people with autism of their right to a community care assessment and their parents of the right to a carer's assessment. This should be built into preparing for adulthood review meetings for those with EHC plans. As good practice SENCOs should also include it in a SEN reviews for young people on SEN Support.

For more information relating to preparing for adult for young people on SEN Support see Appendix A.

Poor co-ordination between adult and children's services

Families describe their young people approaching school leaving age as "the cliff edge". Fewer than half of parents felt they were included in planning and decisions or that their views were valued. More worryingly only just over a third felt that practitioners were supportive of the young person and their wishes. These figures are worryingly low and are an indicator of why the overall experience of transition from children's to adult services for families of disabled children is predominantly poor. Parent carer forums similarly report very patchy co-ordination between adult and children's services in many local areas. This is amplified by the differing ages at which a young person becomes an "adult" across different pieces of legislation with different services transitioning at different ages ranging between 16, 18, 19, and 25. Very often there are gaps in provision.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-201920-education-childrens-services-and-skills>

Co-ordination between services: Education, health and social care

Ofsted recognise that for 16+ providers judged ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ the needs of young people were identified effectively and that education, health and care professionals then worked together in a joined-up way to improve outcomes for these young people. In a national survey fewer than 20% of families agreed that practitioners communicated with each other and less than a quarter of families had the support of one individual who co-ordinated the process, despite this being fundamental to improving transitions.⁷

The NNPCF would like to see a named individual in each area identified as the local PFA officer who is responsible to co-ordinating the provision of services across a local area to prevent gaps in provision. As noted above more areas are moving towards this.

Whilst in school or further education, parent carers understand the provision and support their young person is receiving and can align this with the outcomes for their young person. However, upon leaving education the offer from many, if not most local areas, is less clear and very often families are unable to see how the services and provision available will serve to deliver the best possible outcomes for their young people.

The NNPCF believes that each Local Authority should have an Employment pathway as part of their Preparing for Adulthood strategy. The strategy and information about Employment support for young people with SEND should be on published on the Local Offer. We also believe there needs to be a clearer understanding of how local authorities and providers within the post-16 high needs system can work together to manage an increased demand for support for High Needs students to prepare them for employment, and what more can be done to make best use of resources. Funding also needs to be made available to FE colleges to support students with lower level SEN.

Coproduced strategies – but no provision.

There is a significant gap between projected demand and existing supply of education places Post 16. Even where the provision does exist, it may not be in

⁷ <https://feweeek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/LGA-AoC-Natspec-final-report-30-11-21.pdf>

the most convenient place for the young person. For example, in London, 44% of young people with EHCPs cross local authority boundaries for their post-16 provision⁸.

Many parent carer forums report that their local area has good quality, co-produced preparing for adulthood strategies with some stating that transition representatives, PFA officers and employment co-ordinators have been appointed (For example London Borough of Islington has introduced a commissioning sub group to their EHC statutory decision making panel while Bedford Borough has a PfA Strategy). However, many parent carers report that services on the ground are often lacking. Areas commonly identified are low numbers of supported internships, apprenticeships and employment opportunities for young people with SEND. In addition, availability of appropriate housing is also highlighted with low stocks, little or no choice on what is available.

NNPCF would like to see the data from effectively completed EHCPs brought together in a single data source to provide aggregate data to be used as part of the evidence base for commissioning specific post-16

Late / poor planning and variable EHCP quality.

It's important that young people start to think about their aspirations as early as possible. It's critical that, from year 9 at the latest, local authorities help young people, along with their parents and carers, start to plan for a successful transition to adulthood. This includes considering any further education or training that will enable young people to secure paid work, or other opportunities for a positive adult life⁹. This is not being experienced by families.

EHCPs should be completed effectively so they can be used to plan from year 9 onwards as a minimum. Some local authorities have adopted the four PFA themes and integrated them into their EHCPs from year 9 onwards. We would like to see this practice rolled out in all local authorities

⁸ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_send_post-16_review_0.pdf

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-19-to-25-year-olds-entitlement-to-ehc-plans/send-19-to-25-year-olds-entitlement-to-ehc-plans>

As a result of poor planning and a lack of coordination between services, many families seek to retain an education health and care plan (EHCP) after the age of 19 believing that educational provision is the only viable option for their young person. Frequently parents will understand that options other than education may better suit their young person but a lack of provision and information mean they do not believe this will actually be delivered. The percentage of young people aged 20-25 with an EHC plan has increased since the introduction of EHC plans in 2014, rising to 6% of all plans in 2020¹⁰. These EHCP numbers continue to increase, despite many families continuing to report that EHCPs are being withdrawn even if their child's education outcomes have not been met. In determining whether to withdraw a plan a local authority must have regard to whether the educational or training outcomes specified in the plan have been achieved.

The NNPCF would like to see greater focus on preparing from adulthood from the earliest ages – to quote one forum “PFA begins at birth”.

A young person's progress whilst they have an EHC plan can be recognised in a variety of ways, including when they don't undertake formal qualifications. This includes RARPA ('Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement') - a 5-stage process to measure the progress and achievement of learners on non-accredited learning programmes¹¹.

The NNPCF would like to see local authorities consider the quality and relevance of non-education services available to a young person's outcomes when assessing whether to cease an EHCP. If no appropriate non-educational provision is available, the young person should continue in an educational setting with an EHCP.

Nationally 5,876 (2%) of YP with an EHCP are classed as not in education, employment or training (NEET). This is the first year this data has been available.¹² A further 1,508 Young People aged 16 and over were not currently

¹⁰ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-health-and-care-plans>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-19-to-25-year-olds-entitlement-to-ehc-plans/send-19-to-25-year-olds-entitlement-to-ehc-plans>

¹² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805014/SE_N2_2019_text.pdf

in an education setting as they are still awaiting placement in the setting named on their plan because, for example, there is insufficient capacity in the setting. In London, considerable variability between local authorities in the format and quality of content of EHCPs. Although they are often clearly written, there are gaps in the information required to allow them to be used effectively in post-16 commissioning. Overall, more than half of the EHCPs reviewed lacked a clear focus on Preparing for Adulthood outcomes, and this was particularly true in certain LAs. Until these problems are addressed, the education outcomes for YP with SEND will continue to be worse than their peers without SEND.

The NNPCF recognize the pressures on SEN Funding and have seen an increase in concerns from forums that their local areas cannot deliver the legal requirements of the Children and Families Act with constrained resources. This message is shared by the LGA who in a recently published report highlight a raised parental expectations and aspirations of the young people as well as the extension of EHC plans to age 25 as contributory factors to the financial pressures faced by Local Authorities¹³.

Age appropriate services

Many parent carer forums report that adult social care services in particular are overwhelmingly focussed on old people's care. Young people with SEND are often offered services that are not appropriate for them. Those offered housing with older people or offered respite services with older people are reluctant to use these services because they do not meet their needs or help to deliver their desired outcomes.

The NNPCF would like to see more age appropriate services for young people with SEND delivered across the country.

Lack of PfA information

Both locally and nationally the information available to parents and young people about the services and provisions offered is difficult to find or to understand. Some Local Offers are very limited or just confusing. Forums also

¹³ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-childrens-services/bright-futures-send-funding>

describe lack of information regarding the Mental Capacity Act, Deprivation of Liberty (DOLS) and deputyship¹⁴

Local offers need to be better focussed on preparing for adulthood services. The NNPCF would like to see an increased focus from local authorities, the DfE and regulators on the availability of information about local services and the identification of gaps through the local offer.

Pathways to employment

Parents report that the pathways into employment for their young people are confusing and at times difficult to access. There are many different routes available such as:

- Study programmes
- Supported internships
- Traineeships
- Apprenticeships
- Access to work

However, families do not necessarily understand the differences between these programmes, who provides them, how long they last, where they are delivered. In addition, often information about what is available locally is very poor¹⁵.

The NNPCF would like to see a clear national guidance that cover these different pathways and outlines which may be relevant for their circumstances and how to access them. We must also recognise that work may not be the right outcome for all young people with SEND. Those young people for whom employment, education or training is not the right answer, should be offered alternative choices and meaningful day opportunities.

For further information please see the Employment Talking Point¹⁶ and in addition NDTI has published some information on pathways into employment.

¹⁴ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/18/pdfs/ukpgaen_20190018_en.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/SiteAssets/Downloads/babe3dpt636529021741981638.pdf>

¹⁶ Talking Point on Employment can be found here <http://www.nnpcf.org.uk/about-the-nnpcf/talking-points/>

Health and wellbeing

Forums share that parents lack confidence in the transfer from children's health to adults. They report that adult health services frequently do not have a great understanding of the young people with SEND and this is often reflected in the lack of availability of appropriate services.

Forums have also have raised concerns about the lack of GP engagement with the community of SEND young people including access to **Learning Disability Health Checks**.¹⁷

People with a learning disability have worse physical and mental health than people without a learning disability. On average, the life expectancy of women with a learning disability is 17 years shorter than for women in the general population; and the life expectancy of men with a learning disability is 14 years shorter than for men in the general population (NHS Digital 2019)¹⁸

The learning disabilities health check scheme is designed to encourage practices to identify all patients aged 14 and over with learning disabilities, to maintain a learning disabilities 'health check' register and offer these patients an annual health check, which includes producing a health action plan. Forums report parents have a very low awareness of this programme and hence there is a very low take up. The NNPCF have worked with CONTACT and Bromley Parent Voice to develop resources to raise awareness and uptake of the Learning Disability Health Check.¹⁹

The NNPCF would like to see more joint working from Year 9 onwards with regards to health services from community's teams to the acute hospitals including a focus on the role of GPs.

Corona Virus

¹⁷ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/learning-disabilities/improving-health/annual-health-checks/>

¹⁸ <https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/SiteAssets/Downloads/babe3dpt636529021741981638.pdf>

¹⁹ https://contact.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/annual_health_checks_parents.pdf

The guidance for school and colleges has been continually updated throughout the pandemic but the underlying message has been clear: that in the spirit of coproduction, schools should contact parents and young people over the age of 16 with an EHCP and involve them in planning for their young person’s return to their school²⁰. The NNPCF has coproduced DfE guidance for schools and FE colleges and has reinforced the message that risk assessments should inform a plan of action which focuses on supporting attendance and engagement and should incorporate the views of the young person. Where a student with an EHC plan has a social worker, the social worker should also be involved in the risk assessment. The national picture has been mixed but we have feedback that some areas have followed guidance and used visits to the school, social stories, and other approaches that specialist settings normally use to enable a young person with SEND, who has spent some time out of education, to return to full provision whatever their setting. In terms of the curriculum, adjustments for students with SEND could include the use of extra learning support assistants or asking specialist staff to work with young people in different cohorts. For students in FE colleges if access to workplace or community settings is limited for students at the start of the academic year, then the setting should consider rearranging schemes of work. For example, moving any preparation for adulthood skills sessions that can be covered on-site into earlier terms.

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>

Appendix A – SEN Support and Preparing for Adulthood

The relevant sections of the SEND COP that refer to preparing for adulthood for young people receiving SEN Support are set out below:

5.47: “SEN support should include planning and preparing for transition, before a child moves into another setting or school. This can also include a review of the SEN support being provided or the EHC plan. To support the transition, information should be shared by the current setting with the receiving setting or school. The current setting should agree with parents the information to be shared as part of this planning process.”

6.57: “SEN support should include planning and preparation for the transitions between phases of education and preparation for adult life. To support transition, the school should share information with the school, college or other setting the child or young person is moving to. Schools should agree with parents and pupils the information to be shared as part of this planning process. Where a pupil is remaining at the school for post-16 provision, this planning and preparation should include consideration of how to provide a high quality study programme, as set out in paragraph 8.32.”

8.20: “Young people entering post-16 education and training should be accessing provision which supports them to build on their achievements at school and which helps them progress towards adulthood. Young people with EHC plans are likely to need more tailored post-16 pathways.”

8.21: “As children approach the transition point, schools and colleges should help children and their families with more detailed planning. For example, in Year 9, they should aim to help children explore their aspirations and how different post-16 education options can help them meet them. FE colleges and sixth form colleges can now recruit students directly from age 14, and so this will be an option in some cases. In Year 10 they should aim to support the child and their family to explore more specific courses or places to study (for example, through taster days and visits) so they can draw up provisional plans. In Year 11 they should aim to support the child and their family to firm up their plans for their post-16 options and familiarise themselves with the expected new setting. This should include contingency planning and the child and their family should know what to do if plans change (because of exam results for example).”

8.22: “It is important that information about previous SEN provision is shared with the further education or training provider. Schools should share information before the young person takes up their place, preferably in the spring term prior to the new course, so that the provider can develop a suitable study programme and prepare appropriate support. Where a change in education setting is planned, in the period leading up to that transition schools should work with children and young people and their families, and the new college or school, to ensure that their new setting has a good understanding of what the young person’s aspirations are

and how they would like to be supported. This will enable the new setting to plan support around the individual. Some children and young people will want a fresh start when leaving school to attend college and any sharing of information about their SEN should be sensitive to their concerns and done with their agreement."

8.23: "Schools and colleges should work in partnership to provide opportunities such as taster courses, link programmes and mentoring which enable young people with SEN to familiarise themselves with the college environment and gain some experience of college life and study. This can include, for example, visits and taster days so that young people can become familiar with the size of the college, and how their studies will be structured, including how many days a week their programme covers. These will enable them to make more informed choices, and help them make a good transition into college life. Schools and colleges should agree a 'tell us once' approach so that families and young people do not have to repeat the same information unnecessarily."

8.25: "Where SEN has been identified at school, colleges should use any information they have from the school about the young person. In some cases, SEN may have been identified at school, and information passed to the college in advance, and colleges should use this information, and seek clarification and further advice when needed from the school (or other agencies where relevant), to ensure they are ready to meet the needs of the student and that the student is ready for the move to college."

8.27: "Maintained schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) have a statutory duty under section 42A of the Education Act 1997 to ensure pupils from Year 8 until Year 13 are provided with independent careers guidance. Academies, including 16-19 academies, and free schools are subject to this duty through their Funding Agreements. FE colleges also have equivalent requirements in their Funding Agreements – their duty applies for all students up to and including age 18 and will apply to 19- to 25-year-olds with EHC plans."

8.28: "Schools and colleges should raise the career aspirations of their SEN students and broaden their employment horizons. They should use a wide range of imaginative approaches, such as taster opportunities, work experience, mentoring, exploring entrepreneurial options, role models and inspiring speakers."

8.30: "All students aged 16 to 19 (and, where they will have an EHC plan, up to the age of 25) should follow a coherent study programme which provides stretch and progression and enables them to achieve the best possible outcomes in adult life. Schools and colleges are expected to design study programmes which enable students to progress to a higher level of study than their prior attainment, take rigorous, substantial qualifications, study English and maths, participate in meaningful work experience and non-qualification activity. They should not be repeating learning they have already completed successfully. For students who are not taking qualifications, their study programme should focus on high quality work experience, and on non-qualification activity which prepares them well for employment, independent living, being healthy adults and participating in society."

8.31: *“All young people should be helped to develop the skills and experience, and achieve the qualifications they need, to succeed in their careers. The vast majority of young people with SEN are capable of sustainable paid employment with the right preparation and support. All professionals working with them should share that presumption. Colleges that offer courses which are designed to provide pathways to employment should have a clear focus on preparing students with SEN for work. This includes identifying the skills that employers value, and helping young people to develop them.”*

8.32: *“One of the most effective ways to prepare young people with SEN for employment is to arrange work-based learning that enables them to have first-hand experience of work, such as:*

- *Apprenticeships: These are paid jobs that incorporate training, leading to nationally recognised qualifications. Apprentices earn as they learn and gain practical skills in the workplace. Many lead to highly skilled careers.*
- *Traineeships: These are education and training programmes with work experience, focused on giving young people the skills and experience they need to help them compete for an apprenticeship or other jobs. Traineeships last a maximum of six months and include core components of work preparation training, English and maths (unless GCSE A*-C standard has already been achieved) and a high quality work experience placement. “They are currently open to young people aged 16 to 24, including those with EHC plans. Young people with EHC plans can retain their plan when undertaking a traineeship.*
- *Supported internships: These are structured study programmes for young people with an EHC plan, based primarily at an employer. Internships normally last for a year and include extended unpaid work placements of at least six months. Wherever possible, they support the young person to move into paid employment at the end of the programme. Students complete a personalised study programme which includes the chance to study for relevant substantial qualifications, if suitable, and English and maths to an appropriate level.”*

8.33: *“When considering a work placement as part of a study programme, such as a supported internship, schools or colleges should match students carefully with the available placements. A thorough understanding of the student’s potential, abilities, interests and areas they want to develop should inform honest conversations with potential employers. This is more likely to result in a positive experience for the student and the employer.”*

8.34: *“Schools and colleges should consider funding from Access to Work, available from the Department for Work and Pensions, as a potential source of practical support for people with disabilities or health (including mental health) conditions on entering work and apprenticeships, as well as the in-work elements of traineeships or supported internships. More information is available from the GOV.UK website and the Preparing for Adulthood website – links to both are given in the Reference section under Chapter 8.”*

8.35: *“In preparing young people for employment, local authorities, schools and colleges should be aware of the different employment options for disabled adults. This should include ‘job-carving’ – tailoring a job so it is suitable for a particular worker and their skills. This*

approach not only generates employment opportunities for young people with SEN, but can lead to improved productivity in the employer organisation."

8.36: "Help to support young people with SEN into work is available from supported employment services. These can provide expert, individualised support to secure sustainable, paid work. This includes support in matching students to suitable work placements, searching for a suitable job and providing training (for example, from job coaches) in the workplace when a job has been secured. Local authorities should include supported employment services in their Local Offer (see Chapter 4, The Local Offer)."

8.37: "Education and training should include help for students who need it to develop skills which will prepare them for work, such as communication and social skills, using assistive technology, and independent travel training. It can also include support for students who may want to be self-employed, such as setting up a micro-enterprise."

8.38: "It helps young people to know what support they may receive from adult services, when considering employment options. Where a young person may need support from adult services, local authorities should consider undertaking a transition assessment to aid discussions around pathways to employment."

8.43: "Securing a place in higher education is a positive outcome for many young people with SEN. Where a young person has this ambition, the right level of provision and support should be provided to help them to achieve that goal, wherever possible."

8.44: "The local authority must make young people aware through their local offer of the support available to them in higher education and how to claim it, including the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). DSAs are available to help students in higher education with the extra costs they may incur on their course because of a disability. This can include an ongoing health condition, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia. Students need to make an application to Student Finance England (for students domiciled in England), providing accompanying medical evidence."

8.45: "Applications for DSA can be made as soon as the student finance application service opens. This varies from year to year, but is generally at least six months before the start of the academic year in which a young person is expecting to take up a place in higher education. Local authorities should encourage young people to make an early claim for DSA so that support is in place when their course begins. Where a young person with an EHC plan makes a claim for DSA, the local authority must pass a copy of their plan to the relevant DSA assessor, to support and inform the application as soon as possible, where they are asked to do so by the young person. This should include relevant supporting diagnostic and medical information and assessments where the young person agrees."