

Scottish Women's Convention response to:

The Scottish Parliament Education Committee

Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill

January 2021

Introduction

The proposal for a Bill to require the Scottish Ministers to introduce, and to implement, a National Transitions Strategy to improve outcomes for children and young people with a disability in the transition to adulthood, and to require local authorities to introduce a transitions plan to ensure each child and young person with a disability receives appropriate care and support before, and during, the transition to adulthood; and for connected purposes

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to women's equality.

The SWC is currently engaging with women through digital roadshows, online surveys, asking women to comment by email and by telephoning those who want to talk. We are also using our wide network to ask women to collate views in their local communities and forward these to us on a regular basis. We are continuing to review innovative ways of engaging with women throughout Scotland using whichever medium is appropriate to them.

Do you agree with the overall aims of the Bill? If so, do you think the Bill can meet these aims?

In consultation with women across Scotland, the SWC is supportive of the overall aims of the Bill as detailed here to give statutory footing in ensuring support for children transitioning into adulthood.

Children and young people who present with disabilities often require distinct forms of additional support throughout key stages of their lifetime. The lack of numerous mechanisms which could bolster individual's lives and work towards equality continue to be significantly missing. Women have voiced these worries before the onset of the current pandemic, but this has now been more sharply exacerbated as a result of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown restrictions.

The pressing impact of the switch to home schooling and the withdrawal or pausing of support will further heighten support needs of all young people, but particularly those with disabilities. With this group continuing to be disproportionately worst hit in terms of employment and finances during the current time, any statutory support that can be directed is crucial.

We would particularly welcome the emphasis within the proposed Bill on tailoring support towards the space between schooling and adult hood, rather than simply seeing both periods as contrasting forces. This is crucial for not just ensuring disabled young people find long-term sustainable employment, but that it is also best suited to their wants and needs. This is highly beneficial for the outcomes that this can have for employment and income inequality, but also for other health and social outcomes. Other reasons include:

- It allows for a streamlined and strategic implementation of policy from which all complex aspects can be coordinated surrounding transition for young people.
- The additional benefit of boosting confidence for many young people who may feel their own needs are not accounted for within the current system.
- The positive impact on the families and carers of disabled persons who currently receive little to no help.
- It may allow for a more open dialogue between disabled persons and those responsible for providing support. This in turn can lead to the best opportunities being identified for individuals.
- Provides additional publicity to the wider public regarding the needs of disabled children and young people.

The Bill would require the Scottish Government to introduce a National Transitions (sections 1 to 6 of the Bill). Do you agree with introducing a strategy, and a Scottish Minister to be in charge of it?

Women on the whole agree with the introduction of a main strategy by which a framework to build transitions for individualised persons within Scotland can be built. This is particularly pertinent for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds who may face the additional obstacles of poverty and the attainment gap as well as disability discrimination.

Whilst it has been noted that designating a Scottish Minister is crucial to ensure accountability of the strategy, it must also be noted that such a remit for support should also stretch across all government. In doing so, this may gain more effectiveness rather than treating disabled children and young people as one homogenous category which may deter from intersectional characteristics and individualised needs.

For the purpose of ensuring certain individuals are not overlooked, however, national guidance should be produced detailing how exactly transition plans will be undertaken and work throughout this period. This should also include how often this is to be reported on and what steps will be taken where support mechanisms have not sufficiently been put in place. Other issues must also be examined in order to recognise the burden that falls on young people and this should account for:

- Personalised and tailored support based on the individual and the ways in which they navigate the education system.
- A joined up and collaborative approach between different governmental portfolios such as employment, education and health and social care when considering the transition for disabled persons.
- The correlation between physical and mental health regarding transitions to adulthood and other areas of a disabled person's life.

It must also be stressed that such proposed legislation is not treated with a “one size fits all” approach which fails to rectify many of the significant imbalances that disabled young people face.

The Bill places a duty on local councils to prepare and implement transition plans for each disabled child and young person within their local authority area (sections 7 to 13 of the Bill). They would also have to explain how plans were going to be prepared and managed, what would happen if there was a disagreement about what was in a plan or how it was working. Do you agree with these proposals?

Yes, women are in agreement with placing such a duty on local authorities in regard to preparing and implementing transition plans. This is particularly acute in laying out what is to happen if there is a disagreement and the formal steps that can be taken by the individual in such a situation. This must seek to note the voice of those with lived experience and ensure that children and young people are given a clear view and are directed to be in charge of their own plans. Other key features highlighted by women include:

- Harnessing such plans to further the realisation of children and young people's personal goals.
- A clear commitment to use such support as a way of tackling discrimination within society by enlisting support of the public, private and third sector.
- Appropriate guidance and best practice as to the implementation of such transitional support plans which are informed by local and regional factors.

What financial impact do you think the Bill may have, either on the Scottish Government, local councils, or other bodies?

Whilst there may be slight financial impact nationally in terms of the administration and implementation of such plans, many women noted that this should be seen as an investment that is sorely needed to rectify the high number of imbalances felt within a disabled persons life. This is seen as particular crucial in the aftermath of the current pandemic and what inequalities this will bring for years to come.

Women with disabled children often take on a non-paid care role to help look after them. Transitions for every disabled child going into adulthood would mean more positive destinations and better outcomes for them. Therefore, these women could take the skills they have learned looking after their children out into the workforce and contribute financially to the economy. This would reduce costs on statutory services that most local authorities provide and would save them money in the long term.

Conclusion

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Parliament's Education Committee's Call for Views regarding the Disabled Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to young people and the effect of such policies on equality at both a reserved and devolved level.

For further information, please contact
The Scottish Women's Convention
Email – info@scottishwomensconvention.org
Telephone – 0141 339 4797
www.scottishwomensconvention.org

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission paper provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to women's equality.

Scottish Women's Convention is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered in Scotland No. SC0327308. Registered office 2nd Floor, The Albany Centre, 44 Ashley Street Glasgow G3 6DS.

The Scottish Women's Convention is a Charity registered in Scotland No. SC039852.