

# VODG Children and Young People Special Interest Group

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**VODG's Children and Young People Special Interest Group brings together members with expertise in children's and young people's care and support, to explore collaborative opportunities, particularly around transitions for disabled young people into adult services.**

Our September 2025 in-person meeting aimed to identify where we can work together effectively and determine the group's future direction and priorities. Colin Horswell from Cordis Bright joined us to help facilitate this thinking.

## Policy Context

The government has moved quickly on children's policy - from the Law Commission review to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill - with a SEND White Paper expected before Christmas<sup>1</sup>. Multiple bodies including ADASS, ADCS, the Children's Commissioner, and IPPR are focusing on transitions from children to adult support.

VODG is responding to consultations, meeting with MPs and Peers to highlight some of the challenges and good practice that exists, feeding into the Casey Commission on the importance of transitions, and working with existing coalitions to support campaigns around SEND, EHCPs, breakfast clubs, transport and employment opportunities. We also continue to develop our own work on system reform, commissioning, and addressing inequalities across the list course.

## Working Together | Three Big Questions

We considered a number of different ways in which we could work together, if the group were so minded. Colin set out three ideas to kick things off.

### 1. Could we pool our data on transitions?

There is almost no aggregated data on young people transitioning to adult services - numbers, profiles, destinations, or what is spent. Yet members routinely collect at least some of this information. Pooling anonymised data could create a powerful evidence base demonstrating our sector's impact and helping commissioners plan better. Government

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<sup>1</sup> The White Paper has now been postponed until 2026 with a national conversation on SEND launching at the end of 2025 to allow further engagement with young people, parents and those working in the sector.

departments want this data but lack funding to commission it. Members expressed interest in exploring how this might work, noting data protection concerns are surmountable.

## 2. Should we amplify young people's voices through a large-scale study?

Existing transition studies have small sample sizes (20-134 young people) while across the whole group, we could sample a far higher number. The group questioned whether we need another study - transition problems have been documented since 2004. Instead, there was enthusiasm for one powerful story with one clear ask, amplified by all members from different parts of the country. Personal narratives cut through in ways statistics don't. Stories demonstrating "egregious injustice" work best.

Conversations with Cordis Bright since this meeting have started to explore the use of young people and peer researchers to lead this work.

## 3. How do we position not-for-profit providers as government moves away from profit-making?

In Wales, the government is legislating to eliminate profit from social care. In England the government is targeting "excess profit" following the National Audit Office's report on the children's residential care market<sup>2</sup>. Yet commissioners often do not distinguish between for-profit and voluntary sectors, and procurement legislation creates barriers even when they want to favour us.

Members shared the reality of National Insurance increases, a lack of capital, below-inflation uplifts and workforce costs.

We also discussed that the voluntary sector delivers something different - reinvestment, user involvement, family support, professional development, accountability to mission not shareholders. There was agreement we need to articulate this "not-for-profit dividend" and position ourselves as professional, high-quality leaders, not supplementary providers. There was concern the sector appears "complicit" by continuing to accept inadequate funding rather than demonstrating the true impact of underfunding.

A recurring frustration emerged: the expectation that charities will "just fundraise" to fill gaps in statutory provision. The sector needs to reframe this collectively - statutory obligations must be funded; fundraising is for enhancements. Members suggested developing shared principles or a charter and shifting language from "going above and beyond" (which suggests optional extras) to "high-quality, person-centred provision" (which emphasises professionalism).

## The Transitions Crisis

The discussion kept returning to the transition from children to adult services. Young people often move to unknown placements with no preparation. Those who have been in good places since age 7 regress to old behaviours due to anxiety. Looked-after children are particularly vulnerable - losing advocates, support, and continuity at 18. The consequences

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nao.org.uk/press-releases/government-needs-better-oversight-to-tackle-market-failures-in-childrens-residential-care/>

are stark: increased risk of prison, poor health, poverty, and expensive crisis interventions later.

Everyone knows what should happen - joint commissioning, transition coordinators, planning from age 14, statutory accountability. NICE guidance from 2016 and Ofsted recommendations from 2004 say the same things. Yet it's not happening because there are no consequences when transitions fail. Budgets are siloed, departments don't talk, and once a young person turns 18 it becomes "someone else's problem."

The ask is clear: ***make transitions a statutory responsibility with legal duties for Directors of Adult and Children's Services to coordinate, with consequences for failure. Link it to the government's priority on the disability employment gap - small investment in transitions prevents millions spent in crisis later.***

## Employment Barriers

Members highlighted systemic problems preventing young people accessing employment support:

- **DWP's Connect to Work programme** lacks clarity on delivery and expects charities to fundraise for statutory provision.
- **Apprenticeship levy** can't be accessed for young people members support, even though large charities like Mencap pay substantial levies - unlocking this could provide significant resource.
- **Maths and English requirements** are inappropriate barriers (e.g., painting apprentice needing maths GCSE) - though precedent exists from NDSCS successfully substituting BSL GCSE for English.

There's potential for a collective campaign similar to the BSL precedent, and a select committee inquiry on management support for disabled people offers an immediate opportunity.

## What This Group Will Do

Members want to:

- **Work together on policy** - joint submissions, shared messaging, supporting smaller organisations without policy staff.
- **Amplify one powerful story** - with one clear ask, all members speaking from different regions.
- **Share data and insights** - pooling what we know to demonstrate sector impact.
- **Position the sector strategically** - articulating our unique value and addressing growth barriers.
- **Support each other** - relief at discovering challenges are sector-wide, not individual failures.

- **Focus on action not duplication** - no more studies documenting problems we already know about.

Members were particularly keen on

1. repositioning the not-for-profit sector
2. reframing commissioning for transitions and
3. using collective voice for policy influence.

Members value face-to-face connection and favoured a mix of online and in-person meetings going forward.

### Next Meeting

- Start to detail priorities and workplan based on the above
- Introduce idea of peer-led case studies
- Identify key messages and powerful story to use collectively