

Ensuring an independent future for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND): A critical examination of the impact of education, health and care plans in England

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Abstract: This article examines the implications of the new education, health and care (EHC) planning process for career professionals in England. The new process comes in the wake of a succession of legislation relating to young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in England. There is much to recommend the new process as it represents a shift to a more holistic and person-centred approach. However, there are four main criticisms which can be made of the new process: (1) the policy has an excessive focus on paid work as an outcome which is unrealistic (for some young people); (2) the resourcing in local authorities is too limited to successfully operationalise the policy; (3) there is a lack of clarity about the professional base delivering EHC planning (especially in relation to the career elements); and (4) the policy is too narrowly targeted. While the new legislation offers some major opportunities, realising these will be difficult. In this paper, questions are raised about the resources required to deliver these services; the responsibilities relevant to such services; and the role and scope of these services in supporting the transitions of vulnerable young people into learning and work in an environment where universal careers provision has been substantially diminished.

Keywords: special education, disability, policy, career guidance

Introduction

Young people in England with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) experience a range of challenges in making transitions from school. Such transitions are complex for all young people, but young people with SEND have additional barriers to overcome. In many cases this will include the challenge of moving from an environment where there is a relatively high degree of support to one where there is less support. However, it is important to recognise the wide range of young people, support needs and types of transitions. A key challenge for policy and practice, therefore, is how to address this heterogeneity in ways which are both achievable and helpful.

In this article, we explore the development of policy which addresses the transitions of young people in England. We discuss how policy has impacted practice over the last forty years, before moving on to examine the new framework for practice that is offered by the education, health and care (EHC) planning process that has emerged following the 2014 Children and Families Act.

The challenges of transitioning to independence and adulthood for young people with SEND

There is evidence of the significant challenges that young people with SEND experience in transitioning to adulthood and of the need for improvements to services for this group. Burchardt (2005) drew on youth cohort studies (Hales & Straford, 1999) to indicate that though young people with disabilities have aspirations similar to their non-disabled counterparts, they typically temper these in recognition of the likely obstacles that they perceive in the world of work and assume that career guidance services will be of less relevance to them. This was supported by Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Swedeen & Owens (2010) who found that the participation by young people with disabilities in career development services was low. Navigating the transition from youth to adult services is identified as problematic for both young people and their parents who need to develop professional support and advocacy relationships with a new range of professionals (Rehm, Fuentes-Afflick, Fisher & Chesla, 2012). Families often face additional difficulties in adjusting their relationships with young people as the latter transition to a more independent life (Burchardt, 2005; Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Swedeen & Owens, 2010).

Young people with SEND experience a range of challenges and disadvantages when they are transitioning into the labour market. These include the prejudice and expectations of employers as well as the fact that they are competing for jobs in a labour market where the currency for success are qualifications based on text-heavy programmes of study requiring increasingly sophisticated numeracy and literacy skills. Technology is also rapidly changing the workplace and these changes demand a level of flexibility and responsiveness which some young people with SEND find difficult to demonstrate (Nag, 2014).

A key issue for some young people with SEND is what they are *transitioning to*. Education-to-employment transitions have become more prolonged and complex for all young people (Maguire & Ball, 2012). It is now required that young people stay in education and training until they are 18, and common for them to remain in education until they are 21. Further to this, the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (2009) places a duty on local authorities to secure suitable education and training for young people in their area who are aged 19 or over but under 25 and who are subject to learning difficulty assessment. This means that fewer young people are transitioning

directly from school to *work* and more are transitioning to a range of different kinds of *education and training*.

Despite the lengthening of participation in education, policymakers typically construct the desired and ultimate objective of these transitions as paid work and independent living. The rationale for this is explicitly set out by the government in the document *Valuing Employment Now* (HMSO 2009). The document notes that people with learning disabilities are entitled to 'the same aspirations and life chances as other people, including the opportunity to work' (HMSO 2009: 4). To deny disabled people the right to work is noted as 'a waste of talent for the individuals, employers, society and the wider economy' (HMSO 2009, p.2). The same document also makes the case that supporting those with disabilities into paid work will have a positive impact on the welfare bill. 'The government suggests that Local Authorities should divert their resources from day care services and to refocus these on supported employment' (HMSO 2009, p.14). The government is very clear that work does not include voluntary activity unless it is part of a pathway to paid employment.

There is a lack of recognition in existing policy that, for some young people, paid employment may not be a viable opportunity. However, if we understand 'career' more broadly as a term which describes the individual's passage through life, learning and (all forms of) work it is clear that this group of young people also have career planning and management needs. The outcomes for young people with SEND may be more varied and complex and the corresponding decisions which need to be made may require more time, specialist knowledge and support. In the past, the responsibility for this specialist support lay with those providing career guidance services. In the context of this article we understand 'career guidance' broadly in line with the definition set out by the OECD (2004, p.19) to refer to 'services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers... The activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including help lines and web-based services)'.

Current statutory guidance issued to governing bodies, school leaders and school staff (Department for Education [DfE], 2015, p. 102) makes clear the purpose of career guidance in schools is to prepare young people to 'emerge from school more fully rounded and ready for the world of work'. The need to inspire young people 'about the opportunities offered by the world of work' is a key principle underlying the recent government investment in the The Careers and Enterprise Company, a new agency charged with bringing education and employment together, and reinforces the message that the ultimate destination for all young people is in paid work (DfE, 2014). Such objectives are ideologically charged and contestable. They construct what constitutes both *the good life* and *a valuable social contribution* in narrow terms, for example by diminishing the value of voluntary work. Such a construction of the objectives of transition is particularly challenging for some young people with SEND for whom paid work and independent living may be difficult or impossible (at least within the current social and political context). It also ignores many of the additional transitions that some young people with SEND may need to make alongside the school-to-work transition, for example transitions from child to adult health services (Colver et al., 2013).

Supporting young people with SEND to make effective transitions

There is an extensive tradition of research and practice which has explored how young people with SEND can best be supported to manage these transitions and make progress within their careers. Research has found that starting young people thinking about career and transition (including support for the development of confidence and independent living skills such as household skills, personal care, decision-making and community engagement) early on during their schooling is an effective way of providing transition support (Carter et al., 2010). This needs to be supported by appropriate and relevant career and labour market information and experiences of workplaces (Pallisera, Montserrat & Fullana, 2012). The provision of consistent and committed adult support (Del Quest, Fullerton, Greenen & Powers, 2010) including the involvement of teachers, families and multi-agency collaboration for transition is also seen as critical in supporting effective transition (Davies & Beamish, 2009).

The evidence also highlights the importance of initiatives which act on the demand side of the labour market. For example, this might include interventions which seek to shape the assumptions and practices of employers and post-secondary learning providers with respect to young people with SEND. It might also include the provision of incentives to employers or developing intermediate labour markets (in the form of waged temporary work of value to communities as a stepping stone to the mainstream labour market) and supported employment contexts.

Career guidance has been one of the elements that has been a consistent part of the package of support for young people with SEND prior to and during transitions (Carter et al., 2010; Yates & Roulstone, 2013). Career guidance is seen as particularly important, especially within a support paradigm that focuses on increasing individual capital to engage with the labour market (Hooley and Dodd, 2015). It has the potential to act on human capital by improving the skills of those entering and moving through the labour market. Career guidance also has the power to improve social capital by encouraging and supporting networking and brokering access to adults outside of the young person's immediate social network. Finally, career guidance can provide direct support for transitions to further learning and employment.

Public policy decisions and support for young people with SEND

Both the nature of the transitions that young people with SEND make and the support that they receive whilst making them are highly influenced by public policy decisions. Policy helps to define the relative responsibilities and expectations of learning providers, employers, the state, families and individuals. It also helps to define how far the experience of young people with SEND is viewed as an integral part of the education and employment systems and how far it is addressed as a special case. Pallisera, Vilà and Fullana (2012) have contended that young people with SEND remain disadvantaged unless there is an explicit policy which addresses this issue and provides a framework within which all stakeholders can act.

Yates and Roulstone (2013) have argued that in England policy has shaped both the experience of young people with SEND and the kinds of support that are available for them to access. They argue that since the 1990s policies have focused on providing individually-tailored advice, developing individuals' skills, and motivating appropriate self-investment. There has been a focus on supply side questions about how to support the individual to increase their capital rather than attempting to shape the demand side of the labour and learning markets. They critique this focus, arguing that it individualises SEND and ignores the social and organisational contexts which shape young people's

experience of SEND. They note that the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (i.e. NEET youth) has increased as successive governments have pursued individualised solutions to the participation of young people with SEND in the labour market.

The development of legislative and operational frameworks

The recent history of education and transition legislation and statutory guidance shows that attempts to direct support and develop processes for young people with SEND have often lacked coherence. Transition support has been complicated due to the interests, legislative requirements and policy directives of different government departments. This has been exacerbated by differences in the funding models for phases and types of post-16 and post-18 learning. To address this there has been a gradual 'coming together' of different planning processes in attempt to simplify them for parents and young people and to introduce coherence across statutory and non-statutory services.

The statutory requirement to provide tailored support for young people with SEND has its roots in the Education Act 1981 which clarified the support that they should receive in the education system for the first time. The 1981 legislation built on work undertaken by the Warnock Committee in the 1970s. The Warnock Report (Warnock Committee, 1978) laid out the foundations for educational support for young people with SEND. The report set out the process of creating a statement of special education need for those with SEND and represented a significant change in both legislation and thinking about the support for the transition from education to adult life. A statement of special educational needs was reviewed annually to ensure that it was relevant to the young persons' current circumstances and was accompanied by individual education plan. The statement ended at the point that a young person left school or school-based sixth form and did not include planning for the health or care needs for young people transitioning to adult services.

Following the publication of the Warnock report, SEND policy in England has been repeatedly reformed and developed. Table 1 sets out the key changes.

Table 1: Key developments in special educational needs and disability (SEND) policy in England

As Table 1 shows, there have been several policy themes which have developed over the last forty years in relation to career and transition planning for young people with SEND. These include a concern for a more personalised or person-centred service; a concern to ensure a more joined up approach to provision planning; and a concern to enable positive outcomes in terms of meaningful education, training and employment. Arguably, progression in SEND policy and legislation, alongside wider policy and legislation to eliminate discrimination against disabled people (the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995; the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001; the Equality Act, 2010), signalled a move toward a system of assessment and provision that was about enabling young people to have control over their own lives in ways that maximised their participation in society.

Despite the good intentions of over 40 years of SEND reforms there have been widespread concerns about how effectively the system has been working for young people with SEND and their families (Lamb, 2009). In the field of education specifically, there was some evidence that the system was leading to low aspirations for young people with SEND (Ofsted 2010). Critics argued that there was

too much focus on planning the provision that was to be put in place rather than evaluating its actual impact. There were also concerns about the overly complex, fractured context for assessment and provision (MacBeath, Galton, Steward, Macbeath & Page, 2004) and difficulties created by ambiguous and variable local policies. The Lamb Enquiry (Lamb, 2009) revealed inconsistencies in the quality and scope of provision across various local authorities. Furthermore, parents and young people were tasked with navigating disparate services in ways that were stressful and time-consuming (Gough, Dryden, Wolff, & Williams, 2014) and the separation of post- and pre-16 services created complexities that were disruptive to continuity at the most crucial stage in life.

Understanding the EHC Planning process

The 2014 Children and Families Act sought to redress many of the problems in the system by placing emphasis on personalisation, impact and outcomes. It purposed local authorities with securing the best possible outcomes in education, health, employment and independent living. The replacement of the SEND statutory assessment and statementing process with education, health and care (EHC) Plans is arguably the most significant practical reform within the Act and one which has relevance to career educators.

The EHC Plan is intended to bring together education, health and social care needs into one legal document. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that the process engages children, young people and parents in a participative way where they are fully and genuinely involved in the decisions that affect them. Though there is no universal template for an EHC Plan, the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & Department of Health [DoH], 2015, para. 9.62) presents the following requirements:

- the views, interests and aspirations of the child and their parents, or the young person (including where practical, their future employment plans);
- the child or young person's SEND which must be specified;
- the child or young person's health needs which relate to their SEND;
- the child or young person's social care needs;
- the outcomes being sought (including outcomes that prepare young people well for the transition to adulthood);
- the special educational provision required, recorded in specific, detailed and quantitative form, and clearly linked to outcomes;
- health and social care provision;
- placement (name and type of school or post-16 or other institution);
- detailed information on personal budgets that are being used to secure the provision (an amount of money identified by the local authority to deliver the provision set out in the EHC Plan which parents and young people can choose to hold and manage themselves);
- advice, information and assessments gathered during the EHC planning process as appendices.

Chapter 8 of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015, paras. 7.37 - 8.42) describes how local authorities must support transition and career planning through 'preparing for adulthood from the earliest years' (DfE & DoH, 2015, p. 120) though particular emphasis is placed on working with children and young people aged 14 and over. It is noted that service providers must have high aspirations about employment, independent living and community participation. Local authorities

are mandated to ensure that EHC Plans are reviewed at Year 9 with explicit attention to preparation for higher education and/or employment. In relation to employment, service providers should explore training options (supported internships, apprenticeships, traineeships, self-employment) and learning how to find and do a job. Reference is also made to planning for life and independent living so that as far as possible, young people can take control of their own lives and live independently. In England, local authority maintained schools and Pupil Referral Units (for pupils who are unable to attend a mainstream school) still have a statutory duty to ensure that pupils from Year 8 to Year 11 have independent career guidance (meaning external to the school and impartial). However, this independent guidance is explained in vague terms as 'external sources of support and inspiration' which might include 'employer visits, mentoring, website, telephone and helpline access' which provide information about the range of training and education options including apprenticeships (DfE & DoH, 2015, paras. 17 and 18). There is little clear indication of who might provide this career guidance and whether specialist career advisors are needed to broker young people's entry into employment and training. Though the SEND Code of Practice is clear about points of principle, it is vague about who should deliver this advice and what kinds of skills might be required by practitioners. The extent to which this presents risks to impact is explored later in this paper.

The SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015, paras. 9.44, 9.61 and 9.69) stipulates that the EHC Plan must be completed within 20 weeks (from the EHC Plan being requested to its final version), unless there are exceptional circumstances. Local authorities are required to ensure that EHC Plans include the clear articulation of outcomes (that are specific, relevant and measurable); a clear plan for how provision from education, health and social care will come together to secure those outcomes; a focus on the child/young person's capabilities; a focus on planning for the future (e.g. in thinking earlier about transition into adulthood), accessibility and a clear review date. Further, it is important to note that the definition of Special Educational Needs (and the scope of the EHC Plan) has evolved to include children and young people aged 0-25. The aim has been to construct a more continuous and connected legislature so that transition into adulthood is embedded in planning through the life course.

Hence, all stakeholders are encouraged to articulate aspirations for employment and independent living at a much earlier point in the child or young person's life. This is to habituate high expectations in readiness for transition planning at age 14-15. This requirement is assertively described in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015, para. 8.10) where it is noted that an EHC Plan review must take place with reference to *preparing for adulthood*. Preparing for adulthood must be centralised in every review thereafter.

The SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015, para. 8.47) notes that the provision of independent career guidance remains a statutory duty for all maintained schools and colleges. The new version of the statutory guidance on *Career Guidance and Inspiration for Young People in Schools* (DfE, 2015) explicitly links to EHC planning, highlighting that schools must ensure that EHC Plans include a focus on preparing for adulthood (including employment) (para. 64) and that schools must cooperate with local authorities in SEND provision (para. 65).

The process of EHC planning operationalises this transition planning through the development of individualised goals and support packages which are designed to maximise opportunities for young people to work towards their own aspirations for education, employment and training in early

adulthood. The EHC Plan from age 14-15 must record meaningful, outcome-oriented provisions that will support the young person in achieving these goals. Central to this is a holistic conceptualisation of *career* where independent living (e.g. having control over accommodation and support arrangements), participating in the community (e.g. friendship and agency), employment and health are considered coherently. However, where reference is made to employment, this is understood as traditional paid employment rather than a broader conception of useful and meaningful work (whether paid or unpaid).

The SEND Code of Practice requires local authorities to develop, maintain or transition EHC Plans in ways that are collaborative. They should position services users as co-constructors and equal partners (DfE and DoH, 2015, para. 9.22). The allocation of a personal budget (which families and young people are expected to have power in managing) intensifies the co-constructive and empowering character of EHC Plans. However, though the 2014 Children and Families Act seeks to drive provision towards a person-centred, inter-agency, user-led model, some argue that it represents, not radical reform, but a tightening up of existing policy and practice (Norwich and Eaton, 2015). In addition, considerable challenges remain in translating the 'intent' of the Children and Families Act into practice. For instance, Corrigan (2014) has noted the difference between espousing a person-centred assessment approach and actually achieving it. A significant adaptation of existing structures for co-production may be needed to create a genuinely person-centred process and this requires well-developed professional skills and sustained attention to staff development.

The 2014 Children and Families Act (Part 3, Section 19) requires local authorities to enable the full participation of young people in the construction of EHC Plans – placing their views, wishes and feelings at the centre of the process. Within the parameters of the Mental Capacity Act (2005), the Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) notes that young people can invite parents and carers to be involved in the planning process, but identifies the young person as the main agent in the process. Local authorities are also required to provide the information and support that young people may need to participate in such processes (for example, by publishing the range of local education options, which should be reviewed and redeveloped in the light of feedback, Lamb, 2013). For this reason, career practitioners have an important role to play in enabling young people to make informed decisions and in providing impartial information, advice and guidance. Local authorities are required to commission and cooperate with career services to enable the provision of services that might best develop and support 'the career aspirations of their SEND students and broaden their employment horizons' (DfE & DoH, 2015, para. 8.28). However, in practice local authorities' provision of careers services is in steep decline and even with respect to their provision of targeted services. Langley, Hooley and Bertuchi (2014) found evidence to suggest that fewer services are now available for vulnerable young people than in the past and that the definition of "vulnerability" has narrowed, resulting in a reduction of access to such services.

A reflection on the new policies

EHC planning has much to recommend it. It is certainly possible to view it as the culmination of 40 years of campaigning and professional development in relation to the education and transitions of young people with SEND. Those who view the new policy optimistically underscore its focus on co-creation, personalisation and inter-agency collaboration. They also highlight the strong focus on outcomes and the holistic and integrative nature of the new policy. However, there are also a

number of concerns and critiques that are very important to attend to as the EHC planning process is implemented.

Excessive focus on paid work as an outcome, unrealistic for some young people. The Department of Work and Pensions and the Office for Disability Issues (2014) reported that disabled people in England are significantly less likely to be in paid employment than those who are without disability. In 2012, 46.3% of disabled people were in employment compared to 76.4% of non-disabled people. Though there has been a close in the gap between disabled and non-disabled people over the past 14 years, this represents a 30.1% percentage point gap. Further, the Department of Health (2014) drew attention to a fall in the number of people with substantial learning disabilities or mental health needs gaining paid employment. Among those who were receiving social care, 6.8% were in paid employment, a fall from the 7% rate reported in 2012-13. People with learning disability report a strong desire to gain paid work as part of an ordinary life and the responsibility of employers to secure workforces more inclusive of people with learning disabilities had been noted and planned for by former governments (DoH, 2009). However, current policy makes little reference to how employment aspirations are to be supported through a wider programme of action focussed on addressing social inequalities and social justice. In this context, the aspirations set for individuals through EHC Planning focus on individualised concepts of employability, effectually making these unachievable for many in a competition-based employment context (Yates and Roulstone, 2013). Reforms in England can be interpreted as 'work on the individual' rather than work on societal and employment contexts that operate barriers to participation. Consequently, it may be viewed as being closer to a 'medical model' approach than a more transformative 'social model' approach (Barnes and Mercer, 2005). Further, given that individuals with EHC Plans represent a heterogeneous group comprising a wide range of abilities, paid employment for some may not be a fair or realistic option and a wider view of *career and work* may support more routes to an enriched, ordinary life. Where paid employment is assumed to be the only desirable option, the wider range of meaningful work is devalued with exclusive effect. Other meaningful work and activities associated with enhancing individual quality of life in ways that echo personal aspirations include non-paid activities such as sports, voluntary work, cultural activity and the arts.

Too limited resourcing in local authorities to successfully operationalise the policy. While many of the aspirations of the Children and Families Act are laudable, operationalising them is likely to be difficult in a context where local authorities are seeing their funding squeezed (Neville and Vina, 2015). Furthermore, in this austere context local authorities are likely to set their priorities differently both in response to local priorities and as a way of managing the limited funding available. One consequence of this is that there is likely to be patchy provision across different local authorities. This will inevitably mean that young people in different local authorities experience the EHC planning process very differently.

A lack of clarity about the professional base delivering EHC planning (especially in relation to the career-related elements). The EHC planning process imagines effective multi-agency services with a strong career component. This is exactly the sort of work that Connexions was designed to do, but since the collapse of Connexions as a national entitlement (Hooley and Watts, 2011) it is less clear who is likely to be doing this work. Furthermore, careers work with young people with SEND is a role which requires a high level of professionalism. The careers field has always been weakly

professionalised (Careers Profession Task Force, 2010) and the loss of funding and regulation following the closure of Connexions may have weakened the profession further. Given this there are clear questions as to whether there are sufficient and appropriately skilled people employed to provide high quality career support to the 2.8% of young people who are likely to have EHC Plans.

Too narrowly targeted. Previous legislation conceived SEND as a spectrum supported through a stratified resource system inclusive of School Action and School Action Plus. This has been replaced by a single category of 'SEND Support' which is funded through systems dependent on local authorities' policy. For example, in some local authorities there will be more delegation of funds to schools with the expectation that those schools will use the funds in ways that deliver outcomes. In others, funding for more exceptional needs will be delivered through grant application processes. The group of young people who fall just short of the eligibility criteria for an EHC Plan are particularly vulnerable in this context. Consequently, while those with EHC Plans will be better off in terms of the longevity and security of the support provided for them, those who do not have EHC Plans, but who are identified as in need of SEND Support, will have less security and less consistent support. That this group has been overlooked is evident in recent evaluations of the impact of SEND reforms in England (Spivack, Craston, Thorn & Carr, 2014; Skipp & Hopwood, 2016; Black & Norwich, 2013) which focus only on the impact of reform on those with EHC Plans.

Conclusions

This paper sets out the changes in policy during the last forty years of education, health and care planning for young people with SEND. It notes that early efforts to plan for young people with SEND often lacked coherence, were difficult to monitor and manage, and often led to young people being marginalised in the process and having their aspirations at best unrecognised and at worst restricted. However, a number of themes have emerged during the evolution of the planning processes during this period which are worthy of note. These include the move towards a more personalised or person-centred service; a concern to ensure a more joined-up approach to provision planning; and a concern to enable positive outcomes in terms of meaningful education, training and employment. These changes have signalled a move toward a system of assessment and provision that can potentially enable young people to have control over their own lives in ways that maximise their participation in society. Most recently, through the Children and Families Act, the government has renewed its commitment to supporting the transition of young people with SEND. The legislation has extended support for young people up to the age of 25 thus extending the support to focus more widely on the outcomes of individuals post school and college. The Act has also led to a new planning process (Education, Health and Care Planning) and a new Code of Practice and regulations. These new systems aim to make transitions less fragmented, and provide young people with more choice with forward-planning for future education and employment options. The new processes place the individual at the heart of transition planning and there is a full expectation that young people will be fully involved in the process and be encouraged to explore all of the possible options open to them. This is reinforced by ensuring that transition to adulthood is centralised in the minds of all stakeholders involved in the EHC planning process and that all stakeholders are to be viewed as equal partners in the process.

The new processes are not without challenge and are being enacted during a period of national and local austerity. The extent to which local authorities prioritise support for young people with SEND

will depend on local priorities and budgetary constraints. This has led to patchy provision for this group of young people across England. Further to this, whilst maintained schools and Pupil Referral Units have maintained a statutory duty to provide access to independent guidance, the types of career guidance and support required by young people with SEND is of a very specific and specialist nature. Where it was previously the role of Connexions to provide this support, it is currently unclear the extent to which specialist information, advice and guidance is now available to meet the needs of young people with SEND. What's more, the definition of special educational needs has evolved to include those who are 0-25 years of age. Whilst this has the advantage of creating a more continuous and seamless transition to adulthood and adult services, this once again stretches the resources of local authorities now tasked with providing support to a larger group of individuals across a wider range of provision.

The concept of *career* which underpins these reforms could be regarded as sophisticated and holistic in that it networks aspiration and achievement across the life-course of an individual and includes employment, education, training, income, social participation, friendship and health. This focus on independence and inclusion is laudable but should be the outcome sought for all young people in the interests of social mobility and justice and not just the 2.8% of the current school population who are eligible for EHC Plans. Given that transition to adulthood and employment is both critical and challenging, high quality universal services for all combined with specialist services for young people with SENDs are a necessary resource for socially-just outcomes.

We contend that over the last 40 years there has been a gradual 'coming together' of different planning processes in an attempt to simplify them for parents and young people and to introduce coherence across statutory and non-statutory services. The new EHC planning processes are the latest attempt to do this and are certainly a move forward in that they introduce coherence across service providers, are centred on the needs of the young person and are outcomes focussed. However, the vision for these new processes will only be realised fully for all young people with SEND if:

- the government develops nationally-recognised processes of quality assurance and accountability which lead to equitable provision across England for those with SEND and EHC Plans;
- there is a clear articulation of structure and processes at local authority and education provider levels for support for those with a wide range of SEND and those specifically with EHC Plans;
- local authorities identify, train and develop specialist staff who can facilitate and manage the process fully; and
- there is an integration of the EHC planning processes into school, college and pupil referral unit's career programmes.

The development of EHC planning aims to introduce more coherence in transition support for young people with SEND and it largely does this on a local level. However, until there is more guidance at a national level which helps local authorities to meet their duties effectively, the vision of inclusion and social justice for all young people across England is unlikely to be realised.

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