



SEND reform: putting children and young people first

The voice of young people with SEND

ABSTRACT

The following report collates information received from young people with SEND, gathered through a variety of methods, in line with the questions set out in the SEND reform consultation

The Collective

Contents / related question ¹	Page number
Introduction	2
Thanks	2
Involving CYP and families in decision making Q1	3
Ensuring CYP with SEND get the support they need Q2	4
Supporting CYP mental health across nursery, school and college Q3	4-9
Support for CYP before starting school Q4	9
Important things to know to support CYP well Q5	10-11
Making Individual Support Plans (ISPs) work Q6	12-13
Successful transitions to continuing education or employment Q7	14-20
Inclusion bases in mainstream schools Q8	21-22
The right support for those with complex needs Q9	23
Choosing the right school Q10	23-29
Information and help about SEND support Q11	29
Anything else Q12	30-39

¹ Related question numbers are taken from the easy read document for the SEND consultation which opened on 23rd February 2026, and closed on 18th May 2026

Kids heard from 434 young people, representing 8 of the 9 regions of England, across the consultation period. Throughout, it was made clear that the evidence gathered would be shared with Department for Education, the Government and other strategic networks.

A variety of methods were used, to enable young people with varying support needs and disabilities to engage.

- Survey – a short 6 question survey enabled us to get statistical data that could be inputted (149 responses)
- School visits – These were visits done in person, with Kids staff facilitating small group sessions.
- Participation group visits – These were done both virtually and in person and ran activities
- Power Hour – The Collective’s virtual sessions that are usually hosted monthly. During the consultation period, additional sessions were put in with each having activity to focus on specific topics relating to the questions within the consultation.

285 young people took part in the sessions and activities across the consultation period.

We would like to thank all young people and support staff who took part in the survey and activities. We would like to give a special mention to the following groups for their support and recognise the commitment made to ensuring young people’s voices were heard within the consultation:

- The Collective
- Kids Advisory Panel
- Rutland Disabled Youth Forum
- Leicestershire Young Voices
- Chatterboxes
- Somers town youth centre
- Time 2 talk
- Dynamite
- Angmering Schools
- Redwood Park Academy
- University of Portsmouth
- Break Charity
- Hampshire Youth Offending Team
- City of Portsmouth College
- Washwood heath primary
- Washwood Heath Secondary
- Saltely Secondary
- Firs Primary school
- Brownmead Primary
- Gossey Lane Junior school
- Tile Cross Academy
- Topcliffe primary academy

Question 1: How can we involve children and families in making decisions about SEND support?

During the process of co-producing activities to engage young people with the consultation, members of Kids Advisory Panel were clear in their answer



ASK US.

This was echoed by young people that we worked with across the consultation, sharing that they should be included in decision making around SEND support; from individual decision making through the running of services and commissioning, to being included in decisions around legislation and best practice guidance.

Young people have told us that they would like to engage via individual meetings or as small groups with those they know, often preferring discussions facilitated by peers.

When asked how we can ensure all young people get the support they need, out of 149 respondents, almost 90% agreed that talking to young people was either very helpful or a bit helpful. 84% agreed that talking with families would help to ensure all young people get the support they need.

“Fund participation groups! You want to hear from us, but you don’t fund it. Like the parents’ forums – why are they the priority – young people are the next generation”

“Asking young people what affects them and why, and the ideas we have for this”

“Ask us what we want in education”

“Work with us and talk to us on our level. Don’t use big words or jargon and give us time to think about and answer questions in the ways we need to have the say we want to have”

“You and MP’s talk to participation groups, we are there to be heard”

Question 2: How can we make sure that all children with SEND get the support they need?

As part of our survey respondents rated different ways of making sure that they get the support they need.

Talking to the young person – almost 90% agreed with this

Talking to families/carers – 84% said this was helpful or very helpful.

Specialists being available – 83% said this was helpful or very helpful.

Staff training about SEND – 82% said this was helpful or very helpful

Having a profile or plan – 76% said this was helpful or very helpful.

All suggested approaches were supported, but the strongest message is that **young people want to be spoken to directly**, alongside families/carers and trained staff.

Question 3: How can we support children with their mental health at nursery, school and college?

99% of young people told us that learning about emotions and wellbeing should be part of education and included as part of the curriculum.

Young people shared how the information and activity would look different across different stages of education, but that it was important throughout.

Mental health and wellbeing support in Nurseries and Early Years Settings

Parent/ carer partnerships

- Regular communication
- Support for families (especially vulnerable or NEET linked households)

Environment

- Calm, predictable environments
- Quiet corners
- Sensory areas
- Soft spaces
- Space to move (run) about / outside space



Staff (training and key worker systems)

- Trained to support early identification
- Key workers get to know child, builds a relationship and communicates with family
- Learning a child's normal so can identify changes in behaviour – this also helps identification of any development impairment and if they'd need additional support moving forward
- Key workers build attachment and emotional safety
- Key person system gives each child a trusted adult
- Trained in trauma-informed practice
- Trained to understand behaviour as communication
- Trained in basic mental health awareness
- One to one support

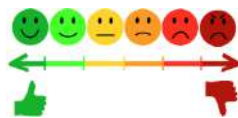
Teaching

- That their bodies are their own
- What things feel like
- Basics of feelings and emotions
- Social skills e.g. turn taking, role play and friendship building
- "When your emotions change, its okay to need more support - there are always people who want to support you"
- Stories and puppets to help children understand emotions



Practical

- Visual routines
- Each morning ask how they are (picture board can help with this)
- Positive activities before need arises
- Breathing bubbles
- Toys and teddies to hold



Mental health and wellbeing support in School

Primary Education

- Focus: early identification + emotional development
- Key areas:
 - Emotional literacy (understanding feelings)
 - Behaviour as communication
 - Early SEND identification
- Strong link to:



- SEND Code of Practice
- Support approach:
 - Nurture-based support
 - Relationship building
 - Early intervention for SEMH needs

Secondary Education

- Focus: increased complexity of mental health needs
- Key issues:
 - Anxiety and depression
 - Peer pressure and identity
 - Academic stress and exams
- Safeguarding framework:
 - Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Support approach:
 - Whole-school wellbeing strategies
 - Pastoral systems (heads of year, mentors)
 - Mental health leads and targeted interventions



Further Education (FE)

- Focus: transition + independence
- Key issues:
 - Adjustment from school to college environment
 - Future uncertainty and career pressure
 - Higher risk of NEET outcomes
- Key policy link:
 - SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan
- Support approach:
 - Flexible learning environments
 - On-site wellbeing and pastoral support
 - Strong focus on SEND inclusion and adult preparation

Cross stage Issues

Biggest challenge: transition points between stages

(Primary → Secondary, Secondary → FE)

Common problems:

- Loss of support information
- Inconsistent provision between settings
- Gaps in SEND continuity

Communication and Support are often intertwined.

- Clubs and safe social spaces e.g. social skills groups, lunch drop in, wellbeing clubs & fun/social activities
- Peer Mentoring (from older students or student support team provide a safe relatable space to talk)
- having mental health support in all schools like 1-1 chat about mental health and counselling
- Create steps to remove stigma as young people don't speak up as they don't want to feel othered
- Teach young people sign language!! It's so vital in teaching about inclusion. The sign language itself is so useful, but it also teaches a lesson that we should strive to involve everyone
- Have a card to show that you need a time out to speak to someone about your mental health. You could give this to all students
- Communication cards, alternatives to verbal communication that can be difficult for some individuals (especially in situations where emotions are high, potentially approaching crisis point)

Learning through Assemblies, PHSE etc. – all students should learn about feelings and emotions!

- Emotional understanding
- Coping skills / resilience
- Relationships
- Stress management

Setting and staffing

- All schools having a mental health lead
- make sure all staff are trained in mental health
- Understanding that Mental health, physical health and social needs are intertwined. I hear time and time again “not our area”, or “we need to focus on your mental health” without identifying that every factor has an impact
- Settings having fidget and sensory toys within classrooms



Emotions / meltdowns don't just happen (well maybe on the outside), there is a build-up – you feel things in your body.

Being able to recognise the tightness in your chest, sick feeling in your tummy, hands getting itchy & knowing this feeling needs acting on – calm it before things 'peak' beyond the chance to come back safely.

Mental health and wellbeing support for transitioning into adulthood

Post-16 Education (FE, Sixth Form, Apprenticeships)

- Mental Health Focus
 - Major life transition stage (school → semi-independence)
 - Increased responsibility for learning and life management
 - Identity development and future planning
- Key Challenges
 - Anxiety about exams, careers, and progression
 - Risk of disengagement or becoming NEET
 - Increased awareness of SEND needs (often Undiagnosed or unsupported)
 - Social isolation or loss of school-based support systems
- Support Needs in Post-16 Settings
 - Strong pastoral and wellbeing support systems
 - Flexible and accessible learning pathways
 - Early intervention for SEMH needs
 - Access to counselling and mental health services
 - Strong SEND support aligned with adulthood preparation
- Policy Context
 - SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan
 - Focus on improving transitions and preparing for adulthood
 - Emphasis on inclusion in FE and training routes



Transition to Adulthood (16–25+)

- Mental Health Focus
 - Move towards full independence
 - Managing adult responsibilities (work, finances, housing)
 - Long-term identity, wellbeing, and life direction
- Areas of support
 - Clear transition planning from age 14+ (preparation for adulthood)
 - Joined-up services across education, health, and social care
 - Employment support and apprenticeships
 - Independent living skills development
 - Continued mental health support beyond education settings
 - Opportunity to take part in creative activities

Cross stage issues

- Re-engagement support for those NEET, not punishment
- Social space and activities including quiet times for those who need it
- Wellbeing hubs – safe spaces, calm areas to decompress/ chill out and trusted adults (people) available to talk to
- Social workers able to support, no matter the point of referral
- Support/ service accessible to everyone, not just identified students, so nobody goes “under the radar”
- Staff trained in trauma informed practice
- Staff able to signpost appropriately
- Access to social spaces



Question 4: What help do you think children and families need before they start school?

Children and families need supportive spaces at inclusive nursery provision. This should include training on SEND and any medical needs. At this stage, teams of relevant practitioners should begin working with the child and family, and begin planning for transition to school. This includes good, accessible information and support from someone to help coordinate different things.

Question 5: What are the most important things they need to know to support children and young people well?

Those supporting young people need the right information such as communication, strengths and challenges, likes and dislikes, needs, triggers and de-escalation strategies and things that help them to learn.

Young people want support that is built around them as individuals. They find it frustrating when they have to repeat information to a variety of practitioners who all support in different ways.

Young people repeated their previous suggestion of having an app that they can complete their information in and share with the relevant people, but also grows with them and has sections open up when they become relevant (e.g. transitions into adulthood at 14 years old)

Within the survey, young people selected the topics that they wanted others to know about them. Times each answer was chosen can be seen below

What helps me learn – 114

Things I find challenging – 106

What calms me – 105

My interests – 103

How I communicate – 102

What triggers me – 96

My sensory needs – 87

My medical or physical needs – 85

When thinking specifically about receiving support in education, young people took part in an activity involving designing an app, sharing important headers and the information that the app would contain.

Things that help me learn

- Music
- Fidgets
- 1:1 support
- Teaching help e.g. on the board
- Friends helping me
- Smaller classrooms
- Information explained twice for me
- Work explained at a slower pace, little bit at a time
- Movement breaks
- Not overloading me
- Listening to me
- Visuals
- Sitting near the front
- Ear defenders

Things I don't like or find hard

- Lots of talking
- Time out
- Writing
- Sitting too much
- Colouring
- Reading
- Too much work
- Maths, English and Science
- I have a class of all boys and it's not fair
- People bossing me around (talk to me nicely and let me work at my own pace)

Things that help me feel safe

- Family
- Friends
- Pets
- Youth clubs
- Bedroom
- Familiar adults

What helps me when I'm upset

- Talking to someone
- Listening to music
- Screaming into a pillow
- Have a break
- Cuddle something
- Fidgets
- Drawing
- Comic books
- Quiet room
- Fun stuff

Things that make me feel calm

- Music
- Schedule
- Pictures
- Fidgets
- Familiar adults
- Pets
- Friends
- Family
- Food
- Talking to me
- Distraction e.g. TV, iPad
- Drawing and colouring
- Writing

Favourite activities

- Going out with friends
- Seeing my family
- Going to my friend's house
- Going to the funfair
- Holiday (caravan)

Question 6: How can we make sure that Individual Support Plans work well, and families are happy with them?

Young people and parent carers have expressed frustration around the variability of documents used when recording the support that children and young people receive. Some also shared worries having seen headlines from media outlets about limitations of their rights and the reduction in the powers of tribunal.

Without legislative duties, including people who are held accountable when support or a service isn't supplied, young people felt there was potential for breaches to the following UNCRC articles:

Article 23 – Child with a disability's rights to live a full & decent life with dignity

Article 28 – Right to an education

Article 29 – Goals of Education

It is vital that all relevant parties are involved including these important people

- YP
- Parents
- Key workers
- Teachers
- School nurse or health worker who understands your health needs
- TA
- SENCO
- Safeguarding
- Consultant
- Lead professional

Plan Contents

- Goals – both YPs and those set by others e.g. staff / parents
- Strengths – What YP are good at, things they might need to work at
- Things I find difficult/challenging
- Support – tried and tested measures are a good idea. If it works, leave it and focus on what doesn't.
- Stressors
- Communication
- Academic attainment

Other things to consider during the planning phase

Change – what needs to change. If there is likely to be a change in condition i.e. degenerative or variable/ fluctuating conditions

Information – YP are happy with the info recorded and consent to sharing.

Additionally, the YP spoke about the importance in having enough staff appropriately trained to be able to provide support, as well as it being the right staff.

Assess – Is there relevant testing? Who will complete testing? Do YP want it?

The group discussed both dyslexia and generalised neurodiversity testing.

YP spoke about the need for more staff able to do testing, and would prefer if it those around them anyway (or to at least include reports from staff / key workers). The group discussed if there could be staff within schools who did pre-assessments to see if further / full testing needed. Part of this was driven by long waits to see specialists, seeing them for too short lengths of time, not being able to be their true selves with or having to travel considerable distances to attend appointments. YP wondered if assessments might at times be done via Zoom or similar.

Do – Actioning the plan

The plan should be read and understood by all, including the young people. It should be written in language that they are familiar with (the only time this may not be the case is if there are names for medical conditions, but they should be explained within, so everyone understands what it is).

Action should happen, with everyone working to ensure all parts of the plan are being met. There should be accountability, with someone having the responsibility of ensuring that they are fully met.

Review – Ensuring the plans remain current

Goals – Have they been met? Do they need to be changed? There should be regular check ins to ensure YP goals are appropriate, and teachers should be able to request reviews on behalf of YP if they feel there should be a change.

Next steps should be considered but flexibility should be inbuilt because sometimes things change.

YP should have opportunity to refuse support if it's not something that they want. Those around the YP should work to find out why and if there is a more appropriate alternative or clearly explaining why it has to be that way.

Information – YP felt information that they're asked as part of current reviews isn't always relevant and can seem tokenistic, while others reported not feeding in. YP also shared that they felt unable to say no and challenge things, and felt practitioners talk young people down from their goals to enable goals to be met more easily.

Transitions should be considered continually, and YP want to be supported to develop skills. This includes practical skill development being given to all young people, including those who may achieve well academically. YP want to understand what will happen next. YP felt starting at a default of them not understanding was a good idea, as they weren't always comfortable speaking up and saying when they don't understand.

Question 7: How can we help young people with SEND to leave school and start college, work or university?

Evidence points to young people needing practical, real-world opportunities to develop skills done over a prolonged period of time.

As part of our survey, young people chose areas of support they felt could be helpful in leaving school and starting college, university or work. Below shows the numbers of times each answer was selected

Work experience – 102

College visits – 93

Confidence support – 91

Support at interviews – 84

Help with forms – 83

Careers advice – 81

Independent living skills – 80

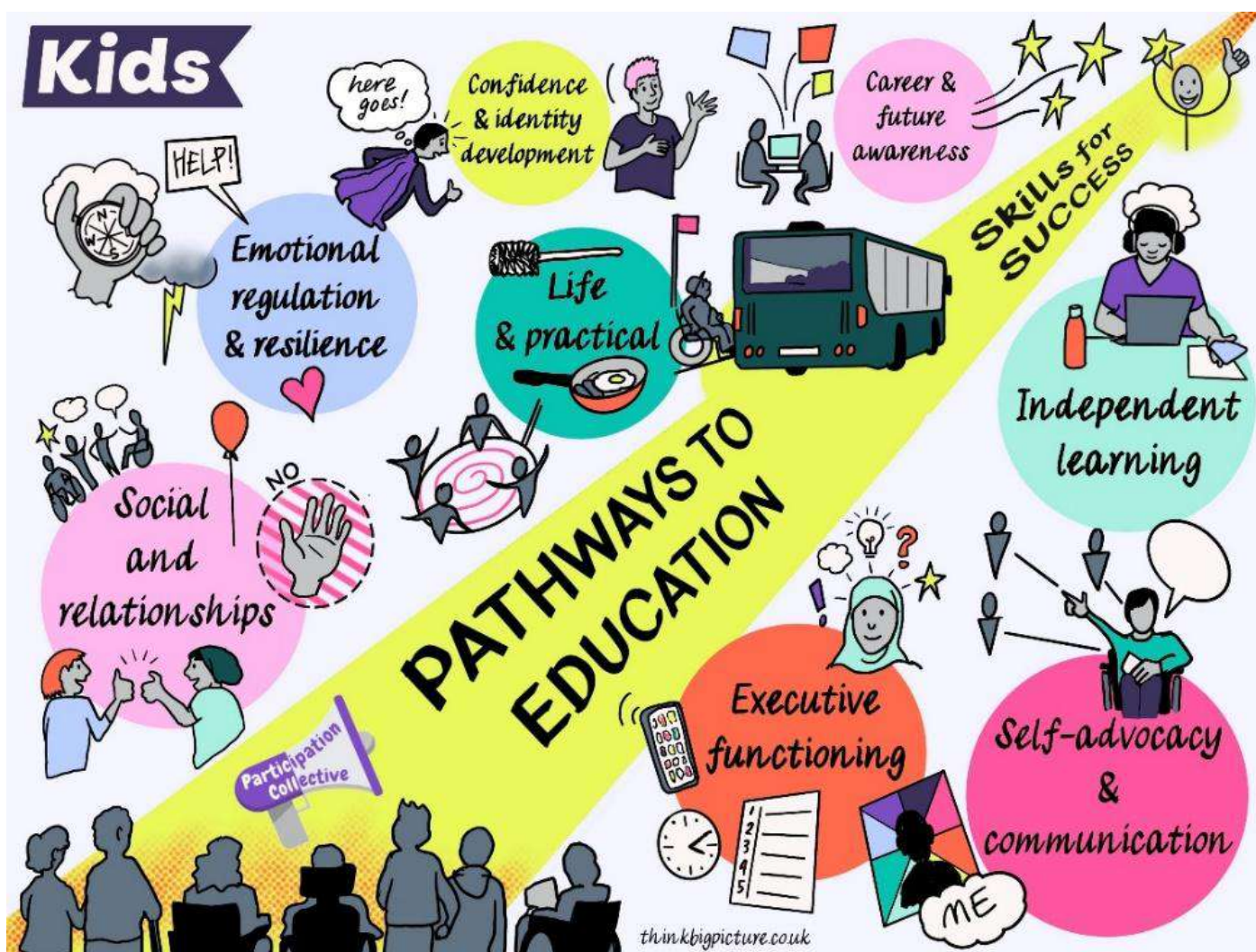
Transition support – 78

All About Me profiles – 74

Travel training – 64

Health support – 59

Skills for success – pathway to education



Graphic based on young people's ideas. Credit: thinkbigpicture.co.uk

Kids Advisory Panel and wider working party identified key themes for the skills needed to successfully follow a pathway to further education after school. Young people ranked how important areas are, with 1 being most important.

Ranking	Topic
1	Self-Advocacy & Communication
=2	Executive Functioning Skills
=2	Social & Relationship Skills
3	Independent Learning Skills
4	Emotional Regulation & Resilience
5	Life & Practical Skills
=6	Career & Future Awareness
=6	Confidence & Identity Development

What skills do young people need under these headings, and how can they be developed?

Independent Learning Skills

- Note taking
- Using support services available
- Making support services easy to access
- Knowing how you learn best
- Doing homework
- Managing your time table

Executive Functioning Skills

- Organisational skills
- Bringing what you need
- Time management
- Knowing how to prioritise
- Understanding your disability
- Find apps that can help you
- Study support talking priorities through to help identify priorities until you're able to do it independently

Self-Advocacy & Communication

- Knowing what you are good at and what you might need help with
- Understanding who's in your network
- Communicating assertively (and knowing how to do it without being seen as ((passive)) aggressive)
- Confidence
- Knowing what your needs are and how to communicate them
- Knowing your rights or entitlements

Emotional Regulation & Resilience

- Brave and resilient
- Knowing what your triggers are
- Know when you need a break from social situations
- Knowing when to remove yourself from a situation if it is getting too much
- Being able to ask for help

Social & Relationship Skills

- Understanding boundaries
- How to form friendships
- Maintaining friendships
- Going to different clubs you may be interested in so you can meet other young people
- Put on fun/ social opportunities to meet others who will be moving to the college over the summer
- Transitions period/ visits to familiarise yourself with the new setting

Life & Practical Skills

- Building relationships and networking
- Engaging in huge social spaces
- Cooking
- Cleaning
- Using technology
- Using public transport
- Different services that may be relevant to your disability such as guide dogs, for travel training they can also help with independent living skills such as cooking and money and identifying the money

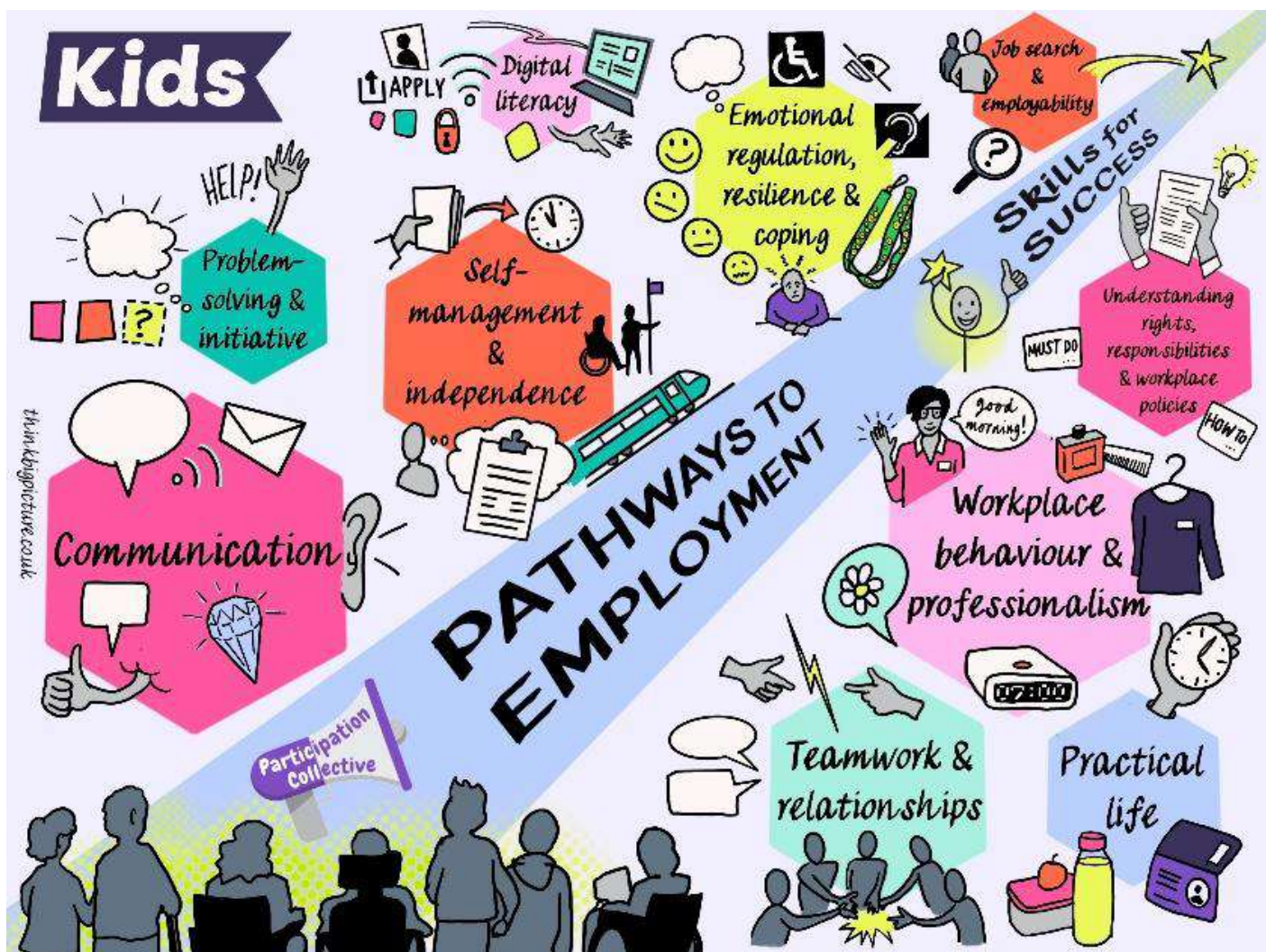
Career & Future Awareness

- School / college link and discussions about what courses are available and if they would be suitable for you.
- Knowing what opportunities are out there for people
- Different qualification options

Confidence & Identity Development

- Understanding yourself and different parts of your identity
- Understanding your disability
- Knowing what you like / don't like
- What you're good at / find hard
- Doing what makes you happy to build confidence
- Know your interests
- Engaging in local community
- Join groups relevant to your identity
- Time and space to think about your identity

Skills for success: pathway to employment



Graphic based on young people's ideas. Credit: thinkbigpicture.co.uk

Young people ranked how important areas are, with 1 being most important

Ranking	Topic
1	Communication skills
2	Workplace behaviour & professionalism
3	Self-management & independence
4	Teamwork & relationship skills
5	Emotional regulation, resilience & coping skills
6	Practical life skills
7	Understanding rights, responsibilities & workplace policies
8	Problem-solving & initiative
9	Job search & employability skills
10	Digital literacy

What skills do young people need under these headings, and how can they be developed?

Workplace behaviour & professionalism

- Being reliable
- Turning up on time
- Being clean and presentable if you don't have a uniform
- Behaving appropriately
- Being respectful
- Wearing uniform

Ways suggested to develop these skills were work experience and workplace role modelling.

Communication skills

- Understand how to be professional in emails and conversation
- Communicate clearly so people understand you
- Listen to what everyone has to say
- How to talk to others

Teamwork & relationship skills

- Working in a team
- Understand and respect differences
- Boundaries in the workplace
- Appropriate relationships
- Take on board other points of view

"Sometimes you might need to work as part of a team to help you get the job done. And it's important to remember to have good relationships with work colleagues."

Self-management & independence

- Know what your job role and responsibilities are
- Understand what you need to do
- Be on time / good time management
- Working to a deadline
- Travel to and from work (public transport)
- Being clean and presentable (including uniform if you have one)

Problem-solving & initiative

- Knowing when to ask for help (and being able to do it)
- Thinking on your feet
- Thinking of ways around a problem

"It's important to learn how to solve problems on your own and appropriately"

Emotional regulation, resilience & coping skills

- Control your emotions
- Speak to someone you trust at work if you feel upset
- Manage time and stress levels
- Reduce burnout
- Work life balance
- Tell your colleagues the best way to help you if needed
- Understand your disability
- Make a box with things that could help

Job search & employability skills

- Understand what you'd like to do in the future
- Understanding what's out there for you
- Knowing who you can go to, to help you look for work
- Understanding how you could use social media to help you search for jobs

Ways suggested to help develop these skills included practice interviews, support to fill out applications, developing a CV and template for a covering letter, mentoring and job coaches.

Digital literacy

- Knowing how to stay safe online
- Specific software and applications used for the role
- upskilling people to be able to use digital systems, any software or hardware.
- Practical, real-life training
- Move beyond theory:
 - Teach how to book appointments online
 - Use banking apps
 - Apply for jobs digitally
 - Show how to Troubleshoot everyday tech issues

Many students leave education without functional digital skills

Understanding rights, responsibilities & workplace policies

- Know what time you need to be there
- Know what is required of you
- Being taught about policies
- Educating employers about SEND and reasonable adjustments

"It's important for you to know your rights and responsibilities at work and the workplace policies to ensure that you are safe."

Practical life skills

- Managing your time
- Travel training
- Being able to come up with a way around if transport doesn't show up

“It’s Important that you know practical life skills as it helps you to develop independence.”

Overall ideas for skill development (besides practice, practice, practice):

- Practice conversations around expectations
- Practicing with support until comfortable enough to do it on your own
- Problem solving challenges using real world/realistic scenarios
- Work experience
- Training sessions
- Practice interviews
- Communication skills practice
- Practice how to ask questions (and what questions to ask)
- Understanding why it’s important to learn

Question 8: How can we make sure that Inclusion Bases help children in mainstream schools?

One concern that we heard repeatedly from young people (and their parent carers) was around the potential for inclusion bases to create more of a sense of exclusion than inclusion, with those with SEND being shut away from the rest of the school.

Work done with young people looked at a variety of areas, aiming to ensure that inclusion bases are able to help those in mainstream schools.

Young people made the following suggestions for inclusion bases but made it clear they should be designed with young people:

Spaces

- Quiet space
- Sensory room
- Soft play
- Colouring / art space
- Playground / outside space
- Kitchen

Décor and atmosphere

- Calm/ light colours
- A black, no light environment
- Soft/ dimmable lighting
- Light music in the background

Furniture

- Desks - Moveable & adjustable, leaning table
- Different seating options – spinney chair, chairs with cushions on
- Comfy chair so not always in wheelchair
- Soft seats/ bean bags

Movement

- Treadmill
- Small gym kit
- Just dance
- Movement breaks

Other contents

- Fidget boxes on tables
- Busy boxes
- Train set/ items of interest
- Calming objects
- Art supplies
- Laptop

Individual items

- Headphones/ ear defenders
- Able to wear sunglasses if needed
- YP have chews/ things to bite
- Boards around to create own space
- Movement break/ Allowed to move around

Who should be in there

- Not crowded/ less people/ small class sizes
- Teaching assistants/ learning support assistants
- Friends
- Staff who are well trained
- Access to experts from other fields

Other general comments

- Away from the main school
- Able to take part in Community activities
- Easy access
- Symbols
- Breaks/ free time
- Good communication between YP, parents and staff
- Well planned transitions

Learning

Young people wanted to learn science, art, reading, how things work along with skills such as turn taking, making friends and life skills.

Question 9: How can we make sure that children with complex needs get the right support?

Young people with complex needs (and their peers) shared that they should be supported to have a sense of control over the support they receive. This could be through working with those who know them best, observations and empowering them to make decisions appropriate to their age and ability levels.

Young people have shared the importance of special school places for those who need them, skilled teachers who have had training on SEND (that has been co-designed and co-delivered with young people with SEND), alongside access to specialists when needed.

Question 10: How can we help children and families to choose which school is best for their child?

Young people prioritised everyday support, safety and the school environment over formal measures like Ofsted.

Class size, quiet spaces, available support and exam support were the top priorities; suggesting that young people are thinking about whether they will cope, feel safe, get help and be understood in the setting.

Most selected answers were:

Class size – 98

Quiet spaces – 97

Support available – 96

Exam support – 91

Travel distance – 85

School visit – 80

Knowing which friends are going –
80

Clubs and interests – 76

Accessibility – 73

Bullying support – 70

Video / virtual tour – 58

Familiar school – 49

Ofsted result – 48

Previous work that looked at tailored lists revealed that young people felt that they could be a good idea, as they allow families to see all of the relevant information about a school and whether it could meet the needs of the child.

"I think it's important to know HOW the schools will help you such as access and how they teach those with SEND"

-Young person with SEND

Young people have looked at the information that would help them choose the right school.

Support – How the school can support you and meet your needs

Young people agreed that this was very important.

Progression – What other people who went to the school did afterwards (e.g. what job did they get, did they go to university?)

"I think progression varies – My secondary school went through changes over the past – so what happened 10 years ago isn't reflective of how the school is now"

Grades – What grades other children at the school got

This wasn't important to all young people. "Maybe but this may not be reflective of the standards of teaching currently, and depends on the students too!"

Environment – How the school looks and feels, and what facilities it has that support your needs (e.g. sensory room or ramps)

Young people agreed that this was important information to help choose the right school for you.

Transport – How far is the school is from your home and how you would travel there (walking/car/bus)

Knowing the distance to travel and how was important. Young people also raised the importance of continuity within this. "I think that's the important part – continuity through the years, just because it's there in year 7 doesn't mean it will still be there 3-5 years on"

"Knowing the routes on where you travel it also develops preparation for adulthood knowing how to travel to places and the skills."

Curriculum – What the school would teach you and what type of qualification this could lead to

“Would've helped me a lot!! Because there were certain subjects I wanted to learn but the school did NOT teach”. Young people also spoke about receiving limited choice as subjects were chosen from blocks.

The pace of curriculum was also important to young people, and they wanted to know how long they would have to complete the course.

Staff – What types of teachers, therapists, and support staff you would work with

Most young people felt that this was important to help them choose the right setting for them, although there was information within the topic that they raised as being essential. This included:

- Types of staff available including things like educational psychologists and physiotherapists
- Whether there would be criteria you have to meet to see the person?
- How often they will be available to you?
- Is there choice on any therapists etc that you see?
- Do you have enough time to build a rapport with them (or are they too busy)?
- Are staff supportive?
- Are they trained to work with those with SEND?
- Are you able to get to know staff, and them know you? (Some secondary schools have sent staff to primary schools to get to know how the young person works)

Values – How the school describes itself and what it values most

Young people didn't think that this was particularly important when choosing schools, as they felt that schools etc may not act on or live up to them.

Knowing what the schools' principles and cultures (are like) in pupils and staff and the education in SEND. They need to act from their words (and) use integrity. See negatives and work on it, not hide it. Look at the positives, evaluate and see what is going well and what needs to be improved on. I think we should have young inspectors and school parent forums

- *A young person with SEND*

Friends and Family – If you have friends or siblings already at the school

Young people felt that this would help them as they'd get more honest reviews (not just shown the 5* reviews). One young person proposed a "trip advisor for schools". Young people highlighted the need to do what's best for them rather than copying others and that experiences etc will be different for different people. It was noted that having a person you already know can help you settle in.

Religion – If it is a religious school or not

Young people didn't think that was essential, but would want to know how much the religion is 'enforced' and whether religious activities offered were optional or compulsory.

Website – Links to school websites

Young people shared that these were often difficult to navigate, not accessible, not up to date and felt that they could say anything. Young people understood that it could be useful but felt that it was much more useful

Local Offer – Links to Local Offer (a list of all schools & settings in your area)

Young people immediately identified that this depended on the quality of the local offer. On previous occasion, young people have told us that they would like more information around schools on the local offer. Examples of the information included:

- More pictures of the school
- A video tour
- How big the school is (physically, and in terms of numbers of students)
- Quotes from students and parents
- Information about/ pictures of the uniform
- Information on the subjects offered by the schools
- Information about staff working at the school
- Types of support that they can give
- Any additional professionals that they work with to support young people

School approach to SEND – What the school says about supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

While young people did consider this important, they reflected the need for this not just to be about what the school says but also what they do and how. Some young people raised that they felt schools didn't support those with SEND well, including some special schools

Ofsted – If the school was rated good or bad when inspected by Ofsted

Many of the young people didn't feel that this was important. Reasons included that Ofsted ratings aren't reflective of all aspects of a school and can be outdated. One young person commented that it was important to know that the school or educational provision was running smoothly. Additional comments included that this information should be on the website.

Size – Size of school (e.g. number of pupils per year, number of year groups)

Young people felt it was important to know how crowded it is, as well as the physical size as large and crowded spaces can be overwhelming.

Extra-curricular – Extra activities you can take part in such as sport, music, or art

This was important to many young people. They shared that it's nice to know you can do hobbies. The quote below from a young person articulates the importance of extra-curricular activities.

"It be helpful knowing how the school can bring you full potential it can be added on you CV to really boost your skills for future."

Specialism – If the school is particularly good at teaching a certain subject area, e.g. performing arts

Young people felt it wasn't important if a school had a specialism, but rather what was offered within that if there was one. One young person said that even if a school has in their name that they are a specialist, it could have been from some time ago and that now they're not really specialist. It was also raised that specialism is self-declared.

When young people were asked to pick their **5 most important** from within the list above, it was **schools approach to SEND** that received the highest percentage of votes, followed by **staff, curriculum, support** and **progression**.

Young people were more likely to have had a say and been involved in choosing their college, however some had some say in where they went to school. There was similarities in the information that young people valued when involved in decision making for which school and college to attend.

- Student centred not grade centred.
- Feeling when I was there.
- Visits.
- Learning environment.
- Relationships between staff and students (and students and students)
- The values, principles, and the support.
- The SEND services knowing how to support me / what support is offered.
- Progression post education, opportunities to develop.
- Information of classes and teachers.
- Attendance at school careers fair.
- Meeting the staff.
- Liking the offered course(s) / curriculum.
- Opportunity to engage with interests outside of lessons.
- Transport options.
- Friends going there.

Young people also considered how families and the local authority can work together better to find the right placement. Ideas included:

- Multiple visits and tasters, including when it is empty to learn / become accustomed to a space, as well as when it is full to feel how crowded it becomes.
- Honesty.
- Including young people.
- Listening.
- Charters on working together.

Additional comments from young people

We need to know amount of teachers/TA's per pupil – if I get 1:1 on my EHCP I should get this even if a special school

Even if PMLD, see potential and give proper education not just sensory with the right equipment/support all can learn to read and write.

What they say they will do and what they actually do are different

Question 11: What information and help do children and families need about SEND support?

The SEND support needed by young people is individual and at times variable, therefore the information and help that they and their families require is wide ranging.

Throughout this document it evidences the need for different types of support depending on the individual, their needs and the stage of life they are at.

Our survey identified that only 41% said they get information about support easily.

Most respondents either only get information sometimes, find it hard to find, find it hard to understand, or are unsure.

SEND support information needs to be easier to find, easier to understand, and more accessible for young people and families.

Question 12: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about SEND support?

The written comments reinforced the survey results: young people want to be listened to, feel safe, have practical support, and be understood by people around them.

Themes included:

- **Being listened to and involved**

Some young people said they want to be part of decisions about their support, rather than having decisions made for them.

- **Feeling safe and supported emotionally**

- Anxiety
- Trust
- Friendships
- emotional regulation
- feeling safe
- needing people to understand them

- **More specialist or suitable support**

- specialist schools
- specialist equipment
- specialist laptops
- placements that can properly meet needs
- Better trained staff

Some comments specifically mentioned staff needing better understanding of PDA, dyslexia, autism, ADHD and other needs.

- **Practical help with learning and exams**

Including support with reading exam questions, maths, spelling, understanding work, teaching assistant support.

- **Smaller, calmer environments**

- smaller classes
- quiet classrooms
- quiet spaces
- calmer learning environments

- **Support with transitions**

Some comments showed that moving from school to college, university or work can be difficult when support is unclear or disappears too quickly.

Additional work was undertaken on transitions into adulthood, as a topic that young people frequently raise as an area of concern.

When asked if they think they will be a healthy, happy, successful adult, young people said:

Yes: 68%

No: 5%

Unsure: 207%

Young people felt that the most important thing as an adult would be:

Health: 36%

Relationships and community: 22%

Employment: 23%

Independence: 19%

Young people are worried about:

Employment: 39%

Relationships and community: 23%

Independence: 24%

Health: 14%

Health

Important topics included:

- Healthy relationships
- Mental health
- How to take care of themselves
- Less shameful sex education (especially relating to LGBTQ)
- More support
- Support to find new things I might like i.e. foods
- Exercise / leisure centre
- Dentist
- Sleep
- Going outside / parks
- Healthy eating / cooking

Health was widely seen as an important foundation for a happy, successful adulthood.

Some young people had chronic health conditions and highlighted the uncertainty and fear that comes with these conditions.

Multiple young people mentioned that they have had to 'fight' with multiple healthcare professionals to be believed or listened to and given care. Some of these young people have since found trusted professionals, with easier access to regular checkups and care.

The university provides support with mental health, including access to therapy. The Disabled Student's Allowance also helps with the cost of devices etc.

Healthcare can also be a social opportunity. Multiple young people are members of physio groups for people with similar conditions, which offers an opportunity to socialise while addressing health needs.

Employment

Important topics included:

- More opportunities for young adults to access good careers even when they do not have best experience
- Options past just education
- Disability support
- Getting a job
- Help finding a job
- Help with CV and interviews
- Someone to sit with me in an interview
- Applying for jobs
- Meet people who do these jobs
- Having clubs to help with future jobs
- Volunteering
- Taster days
- Advice
- Buying tickets to travel for work
- Work experience

Young people had mixed feelings about employment prospects. Those in university were generally more positive but still felt some uncertainty.

Local social services and university services provide support with finding employment.

One young person highlighted that they face lots of discrimination in the workplace.

Relationships and accessing the community

Important topics included:

- Having fun! Clubs, friends and community exist everywhere ❤️
- Building community support through activities
- Be kind
- Relationships
- Travelling
- Parks
- Activities
- Kids and similar organizations
- Bowling
- No more politics
- More activities available
- Knowing about places to go
- Bowling
- Parents
- A buddy to go out with
- Community
- Free travel
- Help with work experience
- WhatsApp groups
- Add more to the Local Offer
- Support to attend clubs
- Swimming

Young people who are worried about lack of relationships and community highlighted societal judgement of disability and stigma attached to 'labels' or visible reasonable adjustments.

One young person noted that 'you can't be successful alone'.

They called on wider society to be kind, and to judge people based on capabilities rather than disabilities.

Many young people said that they were bullied in secondary school, or struggled to find friendship groups. Most of them noted that their social networks have improved in recent years – through disability-specific groups as well as university offering more opportunities to connect with like-minded individuals. Young people identified struggles with mental health and loneliness before returning to university, which offered more social opportunities. It was noted that small class sizes in university helped with making friends.

One young person who worried about relationships highlighted the challenges of navigating the online world, where content is difficult to verify, and relationships can be toxic. They highlighted the importance of

printed/hard copy content, personal recommendations and trusted online sources.

Others highlighted positives of social media and online communities. One young person is a member of Facebook groups for people who share a medical condition, where members share lived experience and coping strategies. Another young person is a keen video gamer and YouTuber and has found a community online.

Independent living

Important topics included:

- Getting a job
- Keeping yourself clean
- Cooking (being able to get proper, healthy nutrition and not wasting money on foods you don't like or aren't good for you)
- Money management
- Washing
- Safety
- Helping me when I'm upset
- More time away from home
- More money
- Going out
- Learning to drive
- Hairdressers
- Having support
- Getting used to the layout
- More access courses for performing arts
- Shopping independently – substitutions
- Different from living with mum/ family
- How to get a home
- Worried about being alone if I live alone

Independent living was previously a major concern for many young people, though those who were university students identified their experiences of independence, making it less of a concern.

Some young people noted that school didn't prepare them with practical skills for independent living, including navigating finances, finding housing, cooking etc.

Support through local social care services provided help toward independent living, while others received alternative support with tasks like meal planning and prepping.

One young person highlighted concerns about the cost of living

Who can help you plan/prepare for adulthood?

- Local offer
- Charities e.g. no limits
- Family (Parents, Siblings)
- Teachers
- University staff / team
- Friends
- Community groups (like Dynamite or Abilities for life)
- Job coach
- Internet (Social media, YouTube)
- Chat GPT
- Friends
- Apps

Where can you go for information to help you plan/prepare for adulthood?

- Council website for support services
- Gov.uk website for job hunting
- School staff
- Nurse / doctor
- Family
- Phone / apps
- Careers officer
- Visual timetable
- Volunteers
- Trusted adults
- Social media
- Youth worker
- Employer
- Charities
- Police
- Job centre
- Symbols
- NHS
- Primary care service
- Therapy
- Support worker / key worker / community worker
- Volunteering

What can help you become an adult more successfully? What could help you feel more positive about becoming an adult?

- Independence
- More support/ supportive environments
- Getting the right support early
- Understanding that different doesn't mean less, that you don't have to change to fit in
- Lessons on adulthood like taxes, bills, housing etc
- Family

- Create a list of things that you need to do and learn/ be taught them
- Speaking about becoming an adult past just education, like what are the other options
- More tailored lessons in secondary school to real world experiences / adulthood
- Parents talking openly and honestly about money and jobs etc.
- Speaking to older friends who are already through that transition about their experiences
- More practical lessons at secondary school – how to write a CV, how to spot AI
- Effective PSHE sessions in secondary school
- How to have fun and understanding that it's ok!!
- 1 / 2 lessons on how to be an adult in school e.g. how to pay bills
- Open and adult conversations about money from a young age.

Support services

- Family (many relied on family for day-to-day support and advocacy)
- GP
- Physio groups
- Facebook groups
- Teachers/lecturers/tutors
- Peer mentor
- Student Success Advisor (pastoral support)
- Employability Service
- Disabled Student's Allowance – helps with cost of digital devices, physical aids etc

Some young people noted not knowing where to go for help. Others felt that the Local Offer could be helpful if you know what you're looking for, but that it could benefit from clearer categories and navigation options.

Portsmouth University was identified as offering really strong pastoral support, including a named pastoral lead for each department who supports across a range of issues, and an Employability Service, which can support students for up to 5 years after graduation with CVs, finding placements etc.

Mum always talked openly about money as she's an accountant.
More young people need a savings account and
to understand about saving, spending etc

Cooking at school didn't teach you anything useful –
things like preheat the oven!

Anticipation of what's next = fear
School you were told what to do
College you choose to do it but still dictated
Uni and adulthood it's all on us, no gradual take on and it's hard

I don't know I feel like an adult really – I have jobs at
Uni, being a student rep, but until I live alone and have
a full time job – am I really a proper adult?

Becoming an adult is a big question. Will I ever be fully prepared?
I think we all keep learning – we should all help each other out

I went into a shared living house at 16 and had to do more things
for myself. It was scary but I think I was determined to make it work.

It's more difficult now with the added extras;
no-one teaches you to check your payslip, but I can give you 7 digits of pi

Cooking at school didn't teach you anything useful – things like
preheat the oven!

PHSE isn't real life

Lots on mental health, which is important.
More on other stuff like drinking, drugs and first-aid
Pay bills – sort banking, savings

School kids don't care about taxes or bills or anything but I wish we knew now.

Maybe in college hearing from people who are still young but have become adults – what did they wish they knew or could do before?

When I was a child I wanted to be an adult, and now I'm an adult I want to be a child.

Adults are like my parents' age.

I didn't realise it hit you like a train; pay bills, rent a house, get a job

Additional discussion with one student with SEND was around missed identification within cohorts of people, and support not being given. This is especially true within schools where there are declining birth rates, as schools are struggling to afford staffing and costs where students do not have an EHCP. Furthermore, attitudes of some teachers can negatively impact students experience and preparedness for learning.

While on placement within a school, the young person observed that some students were being punished for bad behavior with the removal of breaktimes, despite noticing that those experiencing this often displayed better readiness for learning and ability to concentrate for the hour or so after breaktime. In those cases, movement breaks and practical activities were often more successful teaching methods.