

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Regional Activity Report

This report looks at regional activity local areas engaged in during the final year of the Transition Support Programme. It also highlights key learning points which can be used to support the design and delivery of coordinated networking opportunities in the future.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Aim of report

The aim of this report is to reflect on the regional activity seen in nine English Government Office regions through the final year of the Transition Support Programme (TSP). The nine regions were; North West, North East, Yorkshire and Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, East, South East, South West and London.

This report considers the characteristics of and challenges to using networks to work successfully across geographic boundaries and highlights key learning points.

The TSP ended on 31st March 2011. During the life of the Programme resources were made available to support the development or enhancement of opportunities for local areas across regions to come together to facilitate a coherent approach to their work around transition.

Regional activity took on a variety of forms, in some cases the activity built on existing networks, and in others new activity was developed as a means of supporting the work of the Programme.

Whilst regional Government Offices (GO) have now closed, the comment on findings contained in the report will be useful in any new system to inform the design and development of local support networks. Local areas across the country commented on how valuable they found regional networking.

1.2 Background to report

Transition Support Programme

The Transition Support Programme was a government programme, owned jointly by the Department for Education and the Department of Health. It was designed to improve support to disabled young people in their transition to adulthood through local area services. It was part of the wider government programme, Aiming High for Disabled Children, which supported the transformation of local services in England for all disabled children, young people and their families¹.

The TSP ran over three years with £19 million of funding committed from government between 2008 and March 2011. The programme was supported by the National Transition Support Team (NTST), National Strategies (NS) including regional SEN Hubs and the Child Health and Maternity Partnership (CHaMP). These three agencies worked directly with every local area in England to support them in improving processes to ensure disabled young people and their families achieve their aspirations through their transition to adulthood.

The National Transition Support Team was based at the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) and coordinated the delivery of the Transition Support Programme including the preparation of this report.

¹ For ease of reading we use the terms 'disabled children' and 'disabled young people' throughout this report to include children and young people with special educational needs and complex health needs.

CHaMP, NS (including the SEN hubs) and NTST all had specific roles which were laid out in the TSP Charter and acknowledged in a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). There were also clear expectations for local areas attached to the allocation of resources, provided through the programme, which were agreed with them and set out in local Transition Development Plans (TDP).

TSP aims

The Transition Support Programme was set up to bring all local areas² up to a point where they could offer a set of services which operate minimum standards to support families and disabled young people at transition. These minimum standards are based on activity set out in '*a transition guide for all services*' by the Department for Children Schools and Families 2007 and in '*Transition Moving on Well*' by the Department for Health 2008. This includes meeting basic statutory duties, regulations and guidance, and establishing good practice to ensure support consistently meets need and goals.

Local areas were offered support through a combination of a direct grant, direct support from TSP Named Advisors to LA transition leads, training days, and resources on specialist areas of work.

Throughout the Programme funding was made available to the regional SEN Hubs specifically to provide opportunities for local areas to come together at regional events, workshops and network meetings to share learning and good practice.

1.3 Role of TSP in supporting regional activity

Regional networking can offer the opportunity for local areas to work together to produce a consistent standard of good transition practice across a region as a whole, with stronger areas supporting those areas whose practice is less well developed. This has the potential to eliminate the regional equivalent of a 'postcode lottery' in terms of outcomes for disabled young people. Regional activity therefore played an important part in supporting local areas to achieve the expected outcomes of the TSP.

In particular the continuation of effective and sustainable regional working during Year 3 was a key element of the TSP.

The final year of the Programme needed to build on the improvement work achieved in Year 2. It also needed to have a strong focus on excellent practice, sustainable planning and aspirational work, ensuring the final phase of TSP resulted in lasting change in local areas across the country. In order to achieve this, regional activity needed to focus on:

- Continued support to help local areas improve and produce **excellent practice**
- Promoting **investment and engagement** in regional networks
- Engaging local areas in providing **strategic leadership** in transition support planning
- Emphasising the need for **formalised partnership** arrangements
- Encouraging **evaluation** of local change to measure effectiveness.

² We use the term 'local areas' to describe local authorities, schools, Primary Care Trusts and their partner agencies who worked together during the programme.

The term regional activity will appear throughout the report and may refer to a variety of arrangements, for example:

- Regional TSP Planning Group Meetings for regional advisors
- Regional Networks for local area Transition Leads
- Regional Events for all professionals involved in work around transition
- Regional networks with a specific focus, such as person centred approaches to working which included transition planning
- Sub regional planning groups to support a coordinated approach to commissioning services for young people with learning disabilities in transition
- AHDC Regional Group enabling collaboration between relevant regional partners
- Sub regional networks to share practice across the wider AHDC programme and supporting transformation of services for children and young people with disabilities.

2. The Mapping Exercise

To develop a picture of regional activity a mapping exercise was carried out. A variety of methods were used to gather information regarding regional activity in the final year of the Programme, including:

- Visiting regions to attend, observe and contribute to regional meetings
- Attending regional events to participate/ observe the interface with local authorities
- Circulating a mapping table template to core members of regional groups
- Recording what's working well, opportunities for, and threats to the various regions
- Identifying other regional groups and initiatives operating in the region and the interface between them.

Whilst the value of local areas having a facility to maintain links with one another across their region was recognised, it was generally felt that the form regional support takes should reflect the characteristics of the region and the views of the local areas about what would work best for them. As expected the mapping exercise identified a variety of regional support models.

3. Findings

There was considerable investment in regional working in the final year of the programme. This recognised the effectiveness of bringing groups together and the popularity of this way of working with local areas. Regional networks had the potential to provide an opportunity for progressing and embedding good practice, and supporting sustainability post programme. The opportunity for the continuation of peer support and to share learning and challenges around transition practice may become even more valuable as the current fiscal restraints impact on local areas.

3.1 Feedback from local areas³

Q. What TSP support have you found useful?

A. Quotes received from local areas include:

"The TSP regional events which have been arranged with the SEN HUB have been excellent and a valuable way of sharing knowledge and expertise across the region. The programme has been varied with a variety of people attending. A special thank-you needs to go to SEN Hub Lead for her input and organisation of these events and her passion to see services improve across the region."

"The hubs and transition networks have been invaluable as it has promoted shared learning addressing common issues and solutions."

"Regional meetings have motivated all areas to improve transition and the wider issues around young people and their families on a range of issues such as health transition and transition planning to get a life. This is the only forum for professionals to share good practice and get peer support across the region especially in times of cutbacks. Many transition workers are lone workers and this is an invaluable local accessible forum to improve services."

"Regional events have helped to share good practice and Transition planning. [We] took part in regional events to evidence the work in progress and achievements realised. This has enabled [us] to continue to hold events that reflect local need. Regional partners will be invited to maintain sustainability."

"Meeting with other transition reps and recognising issues in common and possible ways forward has been very positive. Learning what is working well elsewhere gives new ideas of what is possible."

27 out of 50 responses to this question highlighted the benefits of regional networking.

In those regions where regional activity is successful, and likely to be sustainable, local areas made a commitment to engaging in regional work because they considered it extremely worthwhile.

Local areas identified key points of value to regional networking:

- Networking reduces the level of isolation - local areas often report they feel alone in tackling a significantly complex area of work and are keen to know how other areas are dealing with the same challenges they are facing
- Local areas feel they can safely say 'this is something we are struggling to take forward' or 'this is something we are proud of and willing to share' in a supportive environment
- Stronger local areas can support those whose practice is less effective
- They develop a regional identity
- Sharing the work they are doing and hearing about the work others are doing allows local areas to evaluate their work – when working in isolation local areas

³ Taken from Self Assessment Questionnaire 3 submitted by Local Areas on 1st December 2010.

- find it extremely difficult to judge how well their practice is progressing
- There is a shared commitment to developing a consistent standard of transition practice across the region
- Less duplication of work and therefore more effective use of resources
- Planning for future joint working is a shared decision.

There are challenges to committing to membership of a network:

- Time constraints
- Some local areas are reluctant to share their work as they may not feel confident about the standard of their work
- The sign up to regional networking can be dependent on the commitment of the transition lead in a local area – transition leads have a variety of roles within the local area, and a variety of skill bases, and the title is in some cases an 'add on' to their usual roles – their effectiveness will depend on whether they are transition lead in 'name only'
- Sign up from local areas needs to be from the very top down so that there are clear obligations regarding attendance, input and feedback.

The regions across England represent a hugely variable landscape; both in a geographical sense and in terms of demographic profiles. It was found that regional activity was most successful when it was context specific; when the activity was fit for the regional purpose and met the needs of the local areas, where the people leading the work had a strong link with the region, and a good knowledge of regional issues.

The mapping exercise and SAQ returns give an overview of regional activity in Year 3 of the TSP. From the information gathered it has been possible to identify key characteristics of successful or active region 1 networks.

3.2 Key Characteristics

- Clear Terms of Reference with sign up from members
- Clear Regional Action Plan agreed by members
- Leadership role in place with committed individual
- Full sign up from local area transition leads
- Local area leads being active and influential
- Access to administrative support (minutes, agendas, room bookings, circulating information) and either access to venues free of charge, or funding to cover room booking fees and refreshments
- A culture of sharing - collaborative working to strengthen practice
- A shared vision
- Small group with capacity to organise and run the network
- Broad skill base within core membership of planning group
- Engagement and involvement of other key people such as leads from programmes such as Getting a Life (GAL) and Valuing People (VP)
- Links with other relevant local and regional bodies such as Strategic Health Authorities (SHA)

- Consultation with local areas informs regional programme of work
- Good communication and regular contact between core members and external stakeholders
- Regional resources developed to support regional work, regional newsletters/updates
- Sustainability plan in development
- Strong drivers or motivators locally, including prominent/well known national figures.

3.3 Regional Activity Post Programme

Some regions considered developing sub regional groups made up of neighbouring local areas who would come together to share their practice successes and challenges. This would enable local areas to work together providing peer support once the option of support from individual advisors is no longer available post programme. This may also be a preferred option for local areas in regions which cover a large geographical area, where coming together as a whole region may involve significant time travelling for many local areas.

There were discussions in some regions about 'virtual' networks where communication is in the main through emails. This may prove to be a preferred way of working for many local areas in view of the rapidly changing landscape and significant demands on increasingly scarce resources. This model would enable regular and possibly frequent contact without actually having to free up time to travel across the region to attend a network meeting.

Many regions considered how regional resources and examples of good practice could be shared. Whilst the Transition Information Network Resource Library website (<http://resources.transitioninfonet.org.uk/resource-library.aspx>) is now available as a national resource and has many case studies and examples of local documents, many regions stated they would also like to have their own shared space for examples of local good practice, case studies, updates and other products. This presents another set of challenges and has resource implications in terms of managing, moderating and updating such a site.

The administration of networks will present a significant hurdle for many regions. Within the Programme there was capacity for:

- the cost of venues and refreshments to be covered
- named advisors from partner agencies to book a room within a SHA or GO building at no cost
- general admin to be covered by partners for example, minute taking, room bookings, agenda setting and circulating relevant information and documentation.

In general, there was concern that regional networking will not be sustained without funding for basic administration, as detailed above, and a co-ordinator role.

3.4 Sustainability

To support development of sustainable regional networking consideration was given to the function and form of activity post Programme and desired outcomes.

Characteristics identified to support sustainability were:

- Strong regional identity
- Historical regional networking prior to TSP
- Strong, committed and influential individuals who have worked hard over a significant period of time to build relationships across the region and have good skills in terms of coordinating work.

As each region began to make plans for post programme activity consideration was given to the following:

- What (in terms of other initiatives, structures) will still exist post March 2011
- Who (in terms of key individuals, roles) will still exist post March 2011
- How local areas who achieved demonstratable improvements shown in the final TSP SAQ could lead future activity
- Where a regional network will 'sit'. What will it's function be, who will it link in with, what will the benefits of membership be
- What form will it take. What has worked well with current activity, what hasn't worked well, considering the current climate, what needs to be developed now to provide appropriate activity for local areas
- Who will coordinate/ facilitate/ administer the network
- How will the network be funded
- How existing links can be used effectively to support sustainability.

4. Examples of Sustainability Planning

4.1 North East Region

Regional advisors in the North East region worked with local areas to design and develop a sustainable model for post programme regional activity which best met the needs of local areas. A survey was circulated to all local areas. Sessions were facilitated at regional events to work through issues such as form and function of post programme regional activity.

Function

- Sharing best practice and learning
- Sharing challenges and problem solving
- Regional analysis – identifying trends, enabling effective planning and service development
- Identifying gaps – regional, sub regional, local
- Saving resources – avoiding duplication, working towards common goal
- Working towards a consistent approach and standard across local areas.

Form

- Regional vs. sub regional
- Strategic vs. operational
- Piggybacking – what already exists, what will continue
- Fit for purpose
- Must represent proportional return in terms of cost/ benefits
- Capacity and management – elected chair (voluntary), paid coordinator, job carving
- Resourcing – core funding, membership fees, trading activity, charitable trusts, sweat equity (contribution to a project in the form of effort, as opposed to financial equity – a contribution in the form of capital)
- Frequency
- Membership - Will depend on function.

The North East Transitions Forum:

A Proposal

- Hosted by Inclusion North
- Secretariat
- Facilitated Network Meetings
- Website space/hosting
- Skills Bank/Resource Bank.

Final Steps – A Transition For The Transitions Forum

- Interim Seed-Corn Finance Has Been Identified
- A Facilitated Forum 'Terms of Reference' Session
- Design of 12 month programme of activity to 'embed the TSP' Legacy.

4.2 East of England

Developing an action plan for sustainability: maintaining the Network beyond 2011.

The Regional Network was developed about ten years ago through the SEN Regional Partnership and was funded through the SEN Regional Hub as part of the Transition Support Programme (TSP). Delegates were invited to explore the value in sustaining the Network beyond the TSP and to suggest mechanisms for doing so. Responses were as follows:

The **value and benefits** of the Network include:

- Information sharing and formal and informal **networking** leading to **developments** in practice and resources
- The opportunity to **challenge**, and for parents, professionals and establishments (including FE providers) to work together to **influence**
- Opportunities for effective **lobbying**

- Opportunities for **benchmarking and improving practice**
- **Bringing together** small local authorities.

How do we sustain the Network? We need to:

- Think creatively
- Ensure strategic links are in place with the Health and Wellbeing Boards
- Engage with shadow boards
- Be peripatetic and identify free venues, e.g. using college premises when not in use
- Focus on working groups
- Charge a membership fee per local authority or organisation and outsource the co-ordination to a social enterprise
- Consider a web-based forum - explore what already exists, e.g. the IT architecture
- Seek contributions from local businesses, especially those who benefit from the skills training on young people with LDD.

Sustainability Update

The Department for Health has allocated Joint Improvement Partnership funding (JIP) to support the Network for one further year. A group of members have agreed to act as a planning group. They have arranged a planning meeting on 6th May and a Network meeting in July 2011. The planning group will continue to explore ways of keeping the Network going beyond the coming year.

5. Conclusion

Local areas benefited from having access to peer support across their region as it enabled them to work through the ongoing challenges of developing good transition practice and to share their successes. This in turn supported the overall aim of the Programme to support disabled young people to achieve better outcomes in adulthood.

Local areas across the country commented on how valuable they found regional networking. It gave them the opportunity to:

- Support the development of a consistent standard of practice across local areas by sharing practice and learning from others
- Avoid duplication of development work
- Benefit from peer support when working through the many challenges around developing effective transition practice
- Pull together strands of relevant work
- Coordinate TSP work with initiatives such as Getting a Life and Valuing People.

The regions across England all have different histories of networking activities. Some groups were founded many years ago, long before the TSP. Some were formed specifically to support the work of the TSP.

Regional activity across the country took on a variety of forms through the life of the programme. However, with the exception of the South West, **all** regions have expressed a commitment to sustaining regional activity post programme. The majority of regions have a clear plan in place to support the continuation of activity.

Every region has taken a different approach to drawing up their post programme plans, and the result is a range of designs; some with linkage to surviving structures such as JIP, and some with newly formed structures such as Regional Transition Leadership Groups led by ADASS⁴. We can see a range of different funding streams, hosting arrangements and a mix of strategic and operational level activity.

Diversity of regional activity has been a strong thread, visible through the life of the Programme itself, and running through this report, the findings of the mapping work provide a coherent message from local areas with regard to the benefits of regional activity. Transition is a broad and challenging area of work, and there are many barriers to developing effective practice. Regional activity has provided an opportunity for local areas to come together to share their learning; thus saving valuable resources, share problem solving and benchmark their local practice against that of other areas.

Across the range of regional activity, regional planning groups ensured the focus for network meetings, seminars and workshops was up to date and relevant to local areas. This was particularly valuable over the last year of significant change, and saw local areas inform the agendas.

Local areas have made a very clear statement that they value and benefited from regional activity, but many have also voiced concerns regarding sustainability. Any activity will require administrative support and coordination, and networks will require appropriate membership and an appropriate host organisation which will allow the right links to develop or be maintained.

Key Learning Points

Our extensive work over 3 years of the TSP and evidence collected from the regions highlights some particular learning points as follows:

- There isn't a single model for a successful regional networking structure
- Successful regional activity is commonly linked to strong and committed individuals and their effective leadership skills
- The model of regional activity should meet the needs of, and be driven by local areas
- Organisation is based around a culture of sharing for increased collaboration, flexibility and innovation
- Networks require basic support for administrative support and access to venues
- Celebrating progress is equally as important as acknowledging challenges
- Branding can support regional working – a sense of belonging and identity is key
- Looking at the bigger picture and working towards a common goal enables professionals from a range of specialist backgrounds and a variety of localities to come together in a co-productive environment

⁴ The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services.

- Feedback suggests there are concerns that despite good intentions and strong commitment from local areas any plans regarding sustainability will fail unless there is funding to support the continuation of the work, and a clear and designated coordination role in place to facilitate networking.

Current application of learning

With the current focus on localism, it is worth considering the merits of regional activity. In essence localism is based on the principle that all services that can reasonably be provided locally should be. The idea behind regional networking is one which supports this principle, and serves to enhance local activity by enabling local areas to share their practice and possibly resources. It is a cost effective route to problem solving by learning from others and avoiding duplication of work, linking well to one of the core purposes of the programme which was to change organisational culture to improve local service delivery.

With the focus on providing services locally and avoiding high costs of out of borough placements, local areas may find working together either regionally, sub regional or as clusters of neighbouring boroughs, makes good business sense, especially when considering provision for children and young people with high support needs/ low incidence disabilities.

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National Transition Support Team (NTST)

NTST is working alongside the National Strategies and the Child Health and Maternity Partnership to coordinate the delivery of the Transition Support Programme.

NTST is based at the Council for Disabled Children (CDC), the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England. CDC is hosted by NCB. www.ncb.org.uk/cdc

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