

TRANSITIONS PATHWAY

Supporting Young People with Additional Needs Through Their Transition to Adulthood

Abstract

This guide outlines the transition process for young people with additional support needs as they move from school into adulthood, including further education, employment, or specialist services. It aims to simplify and improve the experience for families and professionals by providing clear, locally informed guidance aligned with national best practices.

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What are Transitions?

Transitions are life events that happen at any time and for any one, however in the context of this guidance when we refer to Transitions we specifically mean the transition of young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) into adulthood. ASN could include a learning disability (LD), neurodevelopmental e.g. autism, mental health (MH) support needs or physical disability (PD). Transitions of young people at this time are primarily from a school setting to a further destination post-school, such as further education, training or employment. For some young people with ASN they may require more specialist supports from Adult Social Work (ASW), social care and health services.

Families and young people tell us that nationally there is a lot more to be done to improve the transitions experience for young people; this is backed up by what we have heard locally through various engagement opportunities. Many families find the transitions process complicated and hard to navigate. Our aim is to improve this transitions experience by providing clarity on the processes undertaken in Aberdeen City, and to continue to make improvements to our processes where possible.

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Who is this guide for?

This guide is designed for staff within Children's and Adult Services, including education, social work, social care and health, and the purpose of this guide is to provide clear processes and information to improve the transitions experience for young people. The detail within the guidance has been developed alongside staff and teams working within transitions and aligns to nationally recognised good practice.

There will be a separate parents and young person's guidance produced.

ASN can be a number of ongoing support needs which may continue into adulthood.

Young people with LD are often the main group of people who require support with their transition, but they are not the only group. This guide can be used for different care groups as they transition, however in writing this guide the main priority has been on focusing on how the experience can be improved for young people with LD.

National Approach to Improving Transitions

There is an existing legal framework which establishes legal duties and responsibilities for transitions:

- [The Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#) incorporating the [Additional Support for Learning \(Changes in School Education\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2005](#).
- [Social Care \(Self-Directed Support\) \(Scotland\) Act 2013](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Adults with Incapacity \(Scotland\) Act 2000](#)
- [Mental Health \(Care and Treatment\) \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#)
- Other key legislation can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

The Scottish Government is committed to delivering a [National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy](#) which aims to “*support disabled young people as they make the transition to adult life*”. An external strategic working group which includes representatives of parents/carers, education, social work, health, local authorities and third sector partners has been established. The strategy has been in development since 2021 and was reaffirmed in 2023. The strategy will likely align closely to the Principles of Good Transitions 3.

[The Principles of Good Transitions 3](#) is a set of good practice principles for transitions planning within Scotland. There are 7 principles which create a framework by which

services such as Education, Social Work and Health will work within to improve the transitions experience for young people with ASN.

1. Planning and decision making should be carried out in a person-centred way
2. Support should be co-ordinated across all services
3. Planning should start early and continue up to age 25
4. All young people should get the support they need
5. Young people, parents and carers must have access to the information they need
6. Families and carers need support
7. A continued focus on transitions across Scotland

The principles are accompanied by a toolkit known as '[Compass](#)' which can be used by young people, parents and professionals to explore how the principles apply in practice to transitions. Compass provides a framework of transitions stages, from pre-transitions to young adult life, helping to understand what can be expected at each stage and who holds responsibility for actions.

The Compass stages are:

- Pre-Transition
- Gathering Information (2 years before)
- Your Transitions Year (1 year before)
- Getting ready to Move on (6 months before)
- Leaving School and Moving on (Leaving)
- Young Adult Life (6 months after)

Transition Stage	Brief Explanation
Pre Transitions	Staff should clarify their roles in the transition process, inform parents / carers on when the formal process starts, and advise parents on local support groups.
Gathering Information (2 years before)	Staff should engage with the young person to understand their needs, provide information on available options, facilitate, where appropriate, visits to services, and ensure the young person's needs are assessed.
Your Transitions Year (1 year before)	Staff should provide information on financial support and legal matters like guardianship, ensure the young person is included in the process, and support parents in attending meetings.
Getting ready to Move on (6 months before)	Staff should help parents prepare for changes, identify support networks, and develop a backup plan in case of delays or changes.
Leaving School and Moving on (Leaving)	Staff should support the young person in building their skills, plan for the next steps, and assist with applications to transition funds.
Young Adult Life (6 months after)	Staff should ensure that services / teams that the young person is moving on to, have all necessary information about the young person, and understand the legal duties of guardians.

Within Aberdeen City we have adopted the Principles of Good Transition 3 as our local policy and Compass as the framework by which our local practices are based.

Aberdeen City Approach

There are a number of services and teams who might be involved in a young person's transition, the specific teams and professionals will be determined based on the needs of the young person:

- **Education Services:** Education services support young people through various school settings based on their needs, including mainstream or specialist, residential. Education are responsible for coordinated support planning, arranging transition meetings, and providing skills development and enablement activities to prepare young people for adult life. This work is supported through the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. This act ensures that children and young people with ASN receive the necessary support to benefit from education.
- **Children's Social Work (CSW):** CSW offers support to children and families, including those with disabilities. They assist with child protection, foster care, and support for looked-after children. While some families with a child who has ASN may require support from CSW and Social Care (respite care, coordinating practical help, crisis support), not all families do. Support provided can include advocacy, assessments, and referrals. The responsibilities of CSW are defined in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, which outlines the duties of local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need.

- **Adult Social Work:** ASW support adults with LD, MH and PD needs. ASW and Social Care provide information to parents/carers, carry out care assessments, and where eligibility has been met, develop support plans, and coordinate with other services to ensure a smooth transition to adult care. The responsibilities of ASW are defined in the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. This act provides the framework for social work services in Scotland, including the provision of care and support for adults.

- **Wider services such as Skills Development, Training and Employment:** There are several services providing key skills development, training and support to young people with ASN who are preparing to move into adult life and / or post-education opportunities. There is also support for their carers too. Currently these are:
 - Skills Development Scotland
 - ABZ Works
 - North East Scotland College (NESCOL)
 - Aberdeen Carers Support Services

The support offered from these services is supported by the Skills Development (Scotland) Act 2008; this act establishes the framework for skills development and training services in Scotland and the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 which provided new rights and support for unpaid carers.

Transitions Pathway

The Transitions pathway is designed to support young people with ASN move from school to adult life, and where eligible, have access to services which support this journey.

Every young persons' transition journey will be person centred and outcomes focused. However, maintaining a consistent approach to transitions pathways is key to improving experiences of transitions for young people and their families.

Below is the general transitions pathway adopted within Aberdeen City for young people who have ASN. The criteria to access ASW services is clear and will differ depending on the service e.g., LD, MH, PD, Youth Team (YT).

Appropriate assessments of a child must be undertaken at the earliest opportunity, as this will impact eligibility assessments, which may provide access to necessary adult social work and social care services e.g., part of the eligible criteria for the LD service is a diagnosed learning disability. This pathway will assume that any necessary assessments will have been undertaken.

Key Steps

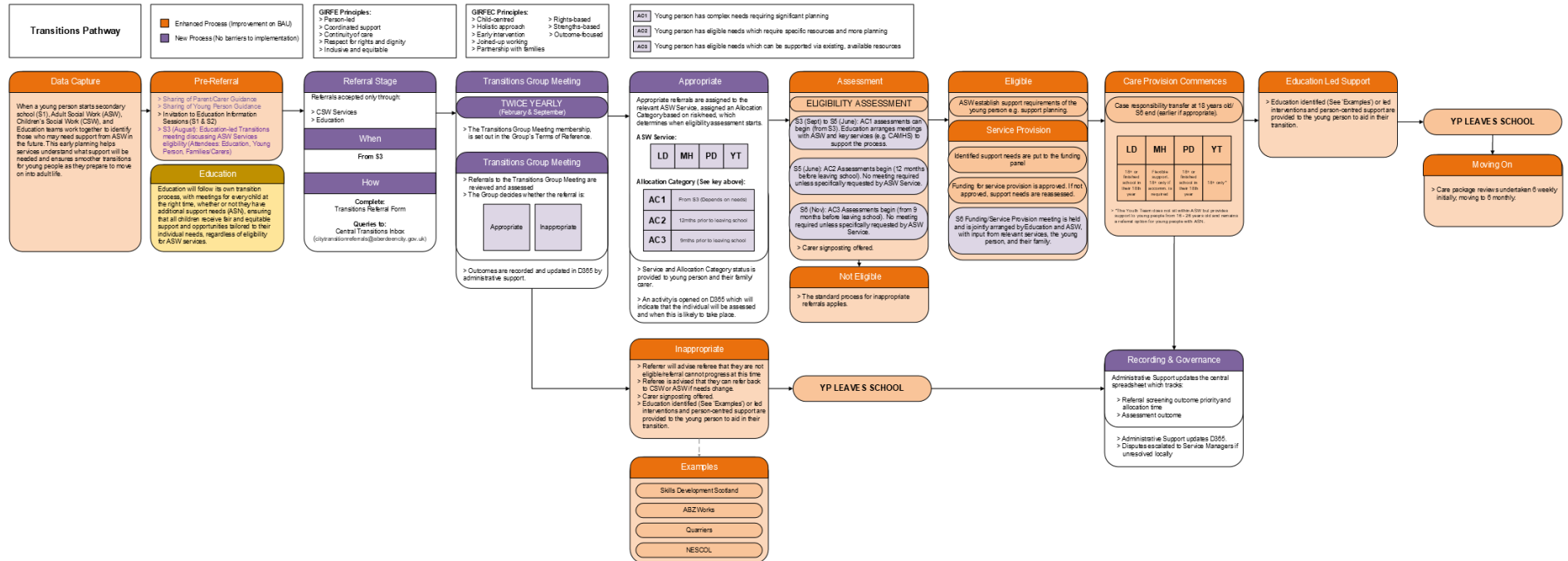
Below you will read about the comprehensive process that begins at S3 (Year 3 of Secondary School / Academy) guiding young people through their transition to adult life. This journey involves various stages, including engagement sessions, assessments,

available support. Each step is designed to ensure that young people receive the necessary support and resources as they move towards adulthood.

- Data Capture
- Education
- Pre Referral Stage
- Referral Stage
- Transitions Group Meeting
- Appropriate & Inappropriate Referrals
- External Support Services
- Assessment of Appropriate Referrals
- Eligible / Ineligible
- Service Provision
- Care Provision Commences
- Education-Led Support
- Recording & Governance

You can view the pathway flowchart below followed by a detailed overview of each stage of the pathway.

Transitions Flowchart



Data Capture

The transitions journey starts as early as S1, when a young person begins secondary school. At this stage, staff in Education, CSW, and ASW begin working together to identify any young people who may need support from adult services in the future.

This doesn't mean a referral is made straight away; it's about starting to build a picture. Staff look at what is already known about the young person, including any support they've received in primary school or from other services. The aim is to identify at an early stage who might need extra help as they grow older, so that planning can begin well in advance.

By capturing this information early, we can avoid delays later on and make sure the right people are involved at the right time. It helps families feel more prepared and supported as their child moves through school and towards adulthood; and it allows likes of ASW and Social Care Services to forecast the types of services that will be needed and to begin commissioning those services at the most appropriate time.

The data capture is undertaken twice annually and is aligned to the Transitions Referral process. The data being captured during this time includes:

- Young Person's Name
 - Young Person's Date of Birth
 - Diagnoses
 - Children's Worker
 - Educational Placement
-

- Address / Postcode
- Guardianship
- Support in School
- Support other than Education
- Other Information
- Signposting Provided
- Post School Destination

Additional Planning Tools: The Dynamic Support Register (DSR)

Aberdeen City Council also uses the Dynamic Support Register (DSR) to help plan support for adults with learning disabilities who have complex needs. It's especially useful for identifying young people approaching adulthood who may need more intensive support.

The DSR helps prevent hospital admissions or out-of-area placements by identifying individuals whose support may be at risk. It's reviewed monthly by Adult Learning Disability Services and supports local decision making, while also contributing to a national picture through consistent data sharing.

Education

From the moment a young person starts secondary school, education staff play a key role in supporting their journey into adulthood. Schools begin to gather information, observe the young person's needs, and work closely with families and other services to understand what support might be needed in the future.

Education doesn't just focus on learning, it also helps young people build life skills, confidence, and independence. Staff may arrange meetings, share information about future options, and help families understand what to expect. Even if a young person doesn't need ASW support, education will still ensure that learners are supported through their transition to further destinations. This can be delivered at a universal or targeted level, dependent on the particular needs of the learner.

Pre Referral Stage

This stage is all about getting schools, children's services, and families or carers together to think ahead and consider what support or services a young person might need in the future. It's crucial that these discussions start early, as it allows the team around the young person to gather the right information and ensure understanding of their needs and strengths. These following activities begin well in advance of the statutory timelines set out in the Additional Support for Learning (Changes in School Education) (Scotland) Regulations 2005.

Families are invited to information sessions, usually in S1 and S2, to learn about the transitions process. These information sessions will be attended twice annually by ASW & CSW alongside any partners invited by education.

By S3, schools will hold a meeting with the young person, their family / carers, and key professionals to talk about what support might be needed. This may involve making a

transitions referral to ASW if education or CSW believe the young person would meet the eligible criteria for support.

This is also a good time to start thinking about things like guardianship and it's good practice for schools to highlight guardianship to parents and carers. Financial planning is also important and guidance can be given to parents and carers by Aberdeen City Council's Financial Inclusion Team.

Referral Stage

If it looks like a young person may need support from ASW, a formal referral can be made from S3 onwards. This is done using a Transitions Referral Form. This is a digital form that allows supporting documents to be uploaded, however, some larger supporting documents can be sent to the Central Transitions Inbox (email). Only referrals from CSW or Education are accepted.

The referral includes key information about the young person's needs and current support. Once submitted, it's logged and tracked so that staff know when the young person will be assessed and what happens next.

Transitions Group Meeting

This is a multi-agency meeting that takes place twice a year in February and September. A group of professionals (Social Work Transitions Group) from different services come together to review each referral and decide what should happen next.

They look at whether the young person meets the criteria for adult services and whether more information is needed. The outcomes of the meeting are recorded and shared, so everyone involved knows what the next steps are. The next steps will be different for those whose referral is considered appropriate and for those whose referral is considered inappropriate and/or does not meet the eligibility criteria.

Appropriate & Inappropriate Referrals

Once a referral is reviewed by the Social Work Transitions Group, it will be considered either appropriate or inappropriate for ASW services.

- An appropriate referral means the young person can be assessed against the eligible criteria for ASW services. These referrals are passed to the relevant ASW service (LD, MH, PD, YT) and assigned an Allocation Category based on the young person's needs. This helps determine when their assessment will begin.

The Allocation Categories are:

- Allocation Category 1 (AC1): Young person has complex needs which require significant planning.
- Allocation Category 2 (AC2): Young person has eligible needs which require specific resources and more planning.
- Allocation Category 1 (AC3): Young person has eligible needs which can be supported within existing, available resources.

- An inappropriate referral means the young person is unlikely to meet the eligible criteria for ASW services at this time. This doesn't mean they won't get support. The Social Work Transitions Group may signpost to other services like Skills Development Scotland, ABZ Works, or Aberdeen Carers Support Services. Families / carers are given guidance and can refer again in the future if the young person's needs change.

External Support Services

Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

SDS supports young people to explore their future options whether that's further education, training, or employment. For young people with ASN, SDS can offer tailored advice, help with career planning, and support with applications or work placements. They work closely with schools and families to make sure young people feel confident and prepared for life after school.

ABZ Works

ABZ Works is a local employability service that helps young people build skills and find opportunities in the world of work. For those with ASN, ABZ Works can offer one-to-one support, training programmes, and help connecting with employers. They focus on building confidence, independence, and real-world experience, even if a young person isn't ready for work right away.

North East Scotland College (NESCOL)

NESCOL offers a wide range of courses and learning opportunities for school leavers, including those with ASN. The college provides supported learning programmes, tailored support, and inclusive environments to help young people succeed. Staff at NESCOL work closely with schools and families to make sure transitions into college are well-planned and positive.

Aberdeen Carers Support Service

Aberdeen Carers Support Service supports unpaid carers including parents and family members of young people with ASN. They offer advice, emotional support, and help accessing practical resources. During transitions, they can be a vital source of guidance for families navigating changes in services, eligibility, and responsibilities.

Assessment of Appropriate Referrals

Once a referral has been accepted as appropriate, the young person is assigned to the relevant ASW team (LD, MH, PD or YT). They are also given an Allocation Category based on the level of need and complexity. This helps determine when their assessment will begin:

- AC1: Complex needs requiring significant planning (can begin from S3)
- AC2: Eligible needs requiring specific resources (starts 12 months before leaving school)

- AC3: Eligible needs that can be supported through existing services (starts 9 months before leaving school)

The eligibility assessment is a structured process where ASW works with the young person and their family to understand what support is needed. This includes looking at their daily living needs, health, independence, and any risks or challenges. The outcome of the assessment is used to decide whether the young person qualifies for adult services.

Adult Social Work: Eligibility Criteria
<p>Emergency or Urgent (Requires an immediate or rapid service response):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate threat to person's safety or survival • Immediate threat of harm to others • Serious abuse or neglect has occurred • Terminal care needs • Inability to meet essential personal care needs • Homelessness of a vulnerable person • Existing care arrangements break down placing person at high risk or immediate loss of independence • Main carer admitted to hospital or ceases caring without notice
<p>High (Service to meet priority needs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abuse or neglect has occurred or will occur • Significant health problems or disability with risk to safety or independence • Palliative care needs

- Inability to carry out most personal care tasks
- Risk of loss of independence, including admission to hospital / care home
- Risk of loss of liberty or compulsory measures of care (other than by criminal proceedings)
- Risk of homelessness of a vulnerable person
- Involvement in work, training or education cannot be maintained
- Critical risk in carer's ability to sustain any essential aspects of the caring role, including ill health of carer
- Existing care arrangements breakdown or are at risk of breaking down placing person at risk
- High risk of family breakdown

Eligible / Not Eligible

If eligible criteria is met following completion of an assessment of need, the young person's support needs are identified and a support plan is completed. If funding is required, a request is submitted to a funding panel for approval. If funding is not approved, the plan will be reviewed and adjusted. If the young person is not eligible, they are signposted to other services, and support continues through education and community-based options.

Where a young person is considered ineligible for services, ASW will signpost to other services like Skills Development Scotland, ABZ Works, or Aberdeen Carers Support

Services as well as any services that families / carers could self-fund. Families / carers are given guidance and can refer again in the future if the young person's needs change.

Service Provision

Once a young person is confirmed as eligible for ASW services, the next step is to plan what support they will require and what service options are available. This involves identifying the type of support the young person needs e.g.; help with daily living, personal care, or accessing the community, and deciding how that support will be delivered.

A support plan is created with involvement input from the young person, their family, and professionals. This plan outlines what services are needed, how often, and who will provide them. The plan is then submitted to a funding panel for approval. If funding is agreed, the services can be arranged. If not, the plan will be reviewed and adjusted.

Care Provision Commences

Once funding is approved and the support plan is in place, care provision begins. This means the young person starts receiving the services outlined in their plan. This could happen while they are still in school or once they leave, depending on their needs and the timing of the transition.

At this stage, regular reviews are scheduled to make sure the support is working well and continues to meet the young person's needs. The transition into adult services is now fully underway, with a focus on stability, independence, and continuity of care.

Education-Led Support

Education plays a central role in supporting young people throughout the entire transitions process, not just at the beginning, and not only for those referred to ASW.

Every young person, whether or not they are eligible for adult services, will receive education-led transitions support. There may be more targeted support for those who need it. Schools continue to hold planning meetings, provide guidance, and help young people build the skills they need for adult life.

Education staff will also work closely with families, helping them understand what options are available after school such as further education, training, employment, or community-based support; helping to prepare the young person for their next steps and connect them with the right opportunities.

This ongoing support reflects the principle that every young person deserves a positive and well-planned transition, no matter their level of need or the services they access.

Recording & Governance

Throughout the transitions process, all actions and decisions are recorded on D365 to ensure transparency and accountability. This includes referral outcomes, assessment results and care plans.

Appendix 1

1. Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 incorporating the Additional Support for Learning (Changes in School Education) (Scotland) Regulations 2005: This Act outlines the responsibilities of education authorities to identify, assess, and provide necessary support to children and young people who face barriers to learning.
2. Social Care (Self-Directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013: This Act provides the framework for individuals to have greater choice and control over how their social care support is provided, including options like direct payments and managed services.
3. Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968: This Act outlines the duties of local authorities to assess and provide social care services and promote social welfare.
4. Children (Scotland) Act 1995: This Act outlines the responsibilities of local authorities and other agencies in relation to the welfare of children, including those with disabilities.
5. Equality Act 2010: This Act requires public bodies, including schools and social services, to prevent discrimination and promote equality for individuals with disabilities.
6. Carers (Scotland) Act 2016: This Act provides for the rights of carers, including young carers, to support and services, which can be crucial for families of young people with LD.

7. Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002: This Act addresses the provision of community care services and the rights of individuals to receive assessments and services.
8. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): While not a domestic law, the principles of the UNCRC are embedded in Scottish legislation and policy, ensuring that the rights of children, including those with disabilities, are upheld.
9. The Promise Scotland: A commitment made by Scotland following the Independent Care Review in 2020 to ensure that care-experienced children and young people grow up loved, safe, and respected; and that they receive the support they need as they move into adulthood.
10. Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC): This is Scotland's national approach to improving outcomes and supporting the wellbeing of children and young people by ensuring they get the right help at the right time from the right people.
11. Getting it Right for Everyone: Building on GIRFEC principles, this proposed approach aims to provide personalised, person-centred health and social care from young adulthood to end-of-life.
12. The Scottish Transitions Forum: This forum works to improve the experiences of young people with ASN as they make the transition to young adult life. It provides guidance and resources to professionals and families to support effective transitions.
13. Towards Transformation Plan: This plan aims to improve the lives of autistic people and those with LD by promoting independence and social inclusion.

14. The National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education: This framework aims to deliver excellence and equity in education, ensuring that all children and young people, including those with ASN, achieve their full potential.
15. LD, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill: This proposed bill aims to protect, respect, and champion the rights of people with LD and neurodivergent individuals. It seeks to ensure inclusive communication, advocacy support, and accountability for services
16. Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000: This Act provides a framework for protecting and empowering adults who lack capacity to make their own decisions. It is relevant to transitions where parents of young people require guardianships.
17. Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003: This Act outlines the rights and protections for individuals with MH issues, including provisions for compulsory treatment, advocacy, and the roles of MH officers and tribunals, emphasising the importance of patient participation and respect for their wishes.
18. Care Reform (Scotland) Bill (formerly National care service): The bill, through collective legislation, aims to improve the support and rights of individuals with LD, MH issues, and those requiring social care.