



Our Asks of Government

Young wheelchair users in the UK are being held back. The existing system needs to be fixed so they can reach their potential and enjoy all the opportunities and experiences that so many others take for granted - at home, school, work and beyond. Currently, many young people cannot access equipment that fully meets their needs through local services and are not receiving the support to help them live as independently as possible. For young wheelchair users across the UK to be mobile, enabled and included, we are campaigning to:

1. Reshape NHS wheelchair services for future generations.
2. Foster success for wheelchair users in education and beyond.
3. Close the disability employment gap.
4. Upgrade accessibility across public transport networks.
5. Include young wheelchair users in all aspects of central and devolved Government policy.

Enacting these changes will empower young wheelchair users to reach their full potential, reduce costs to the NHS and welfare state, facilitate social mobility for young wheelchair users, and promote an inclusive and accessible society.

As the UK's leading charity for young wheelchair users, Whizz Kidz has supported thousands of children and young people. The campaigns we are pursuing are built on over 30 years of experience and expertise, drawing upon young people's insight and sharing their vision for an inclusive and accessible society. We have developed evidence-based ideas, solutions, and models to approach the issues at hand, many of which are tried and tested ways of working within Whizz Kidz.

1. Reshape NHS wheelchair services for future generations

There is no substitute for receiving the right wheelchair, expertly tailored to meet the user's needs. It is difficult to overstate the right equipment's impact on a young wheelchair user – it offers young people freedom and independence, builds their confidence and helps them become more engaged with their peers and broader society. The needs and requirements of each child, whether medical, physical, or social, are unique and that should be reflected by the equipment provided. NHS wheelchair services are falling short in providing equipment that meets the holistic needs of young people. That is why Whizz Kidz is calling for:

- The creation of a dedicated Children and Young People's Wheelchair Service, which supports young people from 0-25 years, run by trained paediatric colleagues, in line with other health, education and social care services. Specialist paediatric professionals will be better positioned to prescribe the right wheelchair to young people, considering their home, school, and social life.
- The allocation of a ringfenced budget exclusively for the provision of equipment to children and young people, protecting budgets from being disproportionately spent on adult services.
- All equipment for children and young people aged 0-25 should be received within 12 weeks, minimising unnecessary disruption to young people's lives as much as possible.
- Greater flexibility, both within the types of equipment that can be offered and the criteria to provide them, to ensure young people are receiving the right equipment for their holistic needs. As well as better supporting wheelchair users, this will lead to long-term and significant savings across the whole system.
- The provision of equipment to children aged five years and under to promote independence, helping young children enjoy greater stimulation and interactivity within their environments in their most formative years of physical, psychological, and social growth.
- Assurance from the government that successful best practices will be recognised and adopted by Integrated Care Boards in England, NHS Local Health Boards in Wales, and NHS Health Boards in Scotland. This will create a consistent and uniform wheelchair service nationwide, removing inequalities between young people living in different areas.

2. Foster success for wheelchair users in education and beyond

Too often, incorrect and ableist assumptions are made about young wheelchair users and their abilities. Young people we have worked with tell us that they have had their academic plans and dream careers dismissed, purely on the reasoning that they will not be able to achieve their aspirations because they are wheelchair users. Before even completing their GCSE examinations, disabled young people are 15% more likely to hold lower expectations than their non-disabled peers from similar backgrounds¹. If supported and encouraged by adults with a positive attitude, further and higher education are well within reach for young wheelchair users. Whizz Kidz is asking for the following:

- Teachers, support staff and other education professionals across all learning institutions to receive valuable training on supporting wheelchair users in education.
- Closer collaboration between schools and local authorities to ensure students receive relevant support in a streamlined and timely manner. Early and effective personal support, informed by individual Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs), will give young wheelchair users the tools they need to thrive at school.

¹ Chatzitheochari and Platt (2018) Childhood Disability & Educational Attainment: The Impact of Parental Expectations and Bullying. Available at: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/impact/policybriefings/childhood_disability_and_education_chatzitheochari_policy_briefing_april_2018.pdf

- Flexibility in universities, sixth forms, colleges, and schools to promote learning which best suits the learner. This should include opportunities for online, home and hybrid education.
- Firm commitments to assessing, improving, and continuously reviewing the accessibility of physical learning environments to make campuses, classrooms, bathrooms, sports and recreation facilities as universally accessible as possible.
- Long wait times associated with Disability Support Allowance (DSA) to be reduced, ensuring young wheelchair users attending university have the relevant support from the outset.
- All schools to commit to providing wheelchair skills training as a part of the physical education curriculum, endorsing physical health and well-being for young wheelchair users.

3. Close the disability employment gap

Young wheelchair users are an untapped asset to the UK economy – they are motivated, skilled, capable, and enthusiastic. While the number of disabled people in employment has increased in the last decade, and progress has been made with the introduction of the Disability Confident scheme in 2016 and the Equality Act 2010, there is still some way to go. Disabled people remain more likely to hold lower-paying roles and work part-time compared to non-disabled adults, and the disability employment gap in the UK still stands at 29.8%². Whizz Kidz knows young wheelchair users have so much to offer, and that is why we are asking for the following:

- Improved resources for wheelchair users who are looking for employment opportunities, starting with a national job search database to link disabled job seekers to employers who are recognised as supporting their specific disability. This will support wheelchair users in finding a role and employer they can be confident will suit them and further incentivise employers to operate inclusively.
- Renewed and improved support for employers to enable them, in turn, to provide the best possible support and opportunities to wheelchair users. Support to employers should include best practice guidance across aspects including recruitment, culture, physical accessibility, sickness and absences, reasonable adjustments, and flexible working.
- The creation of a standardised disability awareness training programme which comprehensively covers workplace inclusion of wheelchair users. Any programme should be a publicly accessible resource for all UK employers and promoted widely by central government.

4. Upgrade accessibility across public transport networks

Accessing public transport when and where you need it, without a moment's notice or prior thought, is something many people will take for granted. For young wheelchair users, careful planning of the route and the timings are needed before taking any journey on public transport – and even that will not ensure the trip runs smoothly. Public transport should provide wheelchair users with independent travel for all aspects of life, be it

² Department for Work & Pensions (2023) Employment of disabled people 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2022/employment-of-disabled-people-2022>

education, work, health, leisure or social, facilitating an active life and full participation within their community. Yet the transport industry is behind: 1 in 4 disabled people report difficulties with any trip on public transport³. Whizz Kidz is therefore calling for:

- Thorough mandatory training for those working within the transport sector, which encompasses key legislation, disabled passenger rights, and company obligations, to ensure the best support is provided to disabled travellers. This will build much-needed trust between the disabled community and the transport industry.
- The introduction of mandatory free bus travel at all times of day for those in England with a disabled bus pass affording disabled people freedom, independence, and equal opportunities. This will bring England in line with both Scotland and Wales.
- Real-time updates on the accessibility of train stations through a variety of means (apps, emails, texts), in tandem with regular maintenance of ramps and lifts, to enable wheelchair users to plan and travel with confidence.
- The establishment of a clearer complaints process across all transport services to enable wheelchair users to report poor service or treatment, with the knowledge that complaints will be appropriately acted upon.
- Better advertisement of the travel benefits available to wheelchair users when facing service disruptions, providing options for personal choice.

5. Include young wheelchair users in all aspects of central and devolved government policy

Young wheelchair users should be considered in all policy decisions – even those that may not directly impact them at first glance. By questioning how decisions may affect young wheelchair users and involving them in the process, equality and inclusivity will begin to underpin all policies and change. At Whizz Kidz, we are supported by our Kidz Board, a group of young wheelchair users who help to guide the charity and its decisions. Bearing in mind the phrase that Kidz Board often repeat to us, ‘Nothing for us without us’, Whizz Kidz is asking for:

- The concepts of equality, inclusivity, and accessibility to act as guiding principles at all levels of policy work.
- Wheelchair users and disabled people to be considered at every step of policy change and implementation, guaranteeing disability is built into decisions from the start.
- Young wheelchair users to be active participants in decision-making processes, consulting, listening to and acting on their input wherever possible.
- All official communications to be available in multiple accessible formats and disseminated through an array of communication channels.

³ Clery et al. (2017) Disabled people’s travel behaviour and attitudes to travel. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647703/disabled-peoples-travel-behaviour-and-attitudes-to-travel.pdf