

Submission: Department of Education School Transport Scheme Review

# Introduction

The National Disability Authority (NDA), as the independent statutory body provides information and advice to the Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of persons with disabilities. We have a role to assist the Minister for Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth in the co-ordination of disability policy. We work through our [Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](http://universaldesign.ie/) (CEUD) to promote the universal design of the built environment, products, services and information and communication technologies, so that they can be easily accessed, understood and used by everyone, including persons with disabilities.

# School Transport Scheme Review

Access to Education is recognised as a right under Article 24 of the UN Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Ireland ratified the UN Convention in 2018. The UNCRPD states that State Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability[[1]](#footnote-1). Transportation to and from education is central to providing access to the education system.

As part of the review of this scheme the NDA would like to emphasise the observations made by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in the Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes Progress report from 2019 on which NDA and CEUD were consulted, to the effect that the NCSE do not think that students should have to travel, sometimes considerable distances, outside their local area in order to attend school and in doing so lose the connection to their local communities.[[2]](#footnote-2) The NDA is aware that the NCSE is currently conducting consultations for updated policy advice on Special Schools and Classes and would like to note that this updated advice may have implications to ancillary elements of education provision, which would include transport.

The NDA notes at as part of this review the Department of Education will be examining the potential for integration and coordination with other Government Departments which also use transport services. The NDA welcomes this cross-agency approach and would encourage engagement between relevant Government Departments, the NTA, public transport service providers, NCSE, local authorities and related agencies as part of the review process of this scheme and other transports schemes available. The NDA would also stress that the development of integrated, inclusive and universally designed public services and mobility solutions also requires input, involvement, and planning from the general public, public sector, private sector, academia, and advocacy groups. [[3]](#footnote-3)

As you may be aware The Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Disability, Anne Rabbitte T.D., recently chaired a meeting of an inter-departmental group to examine the issues of accessible transport for persons with disabilities. This inter-departmental working group is specifically focussed on the delivery of Action 104 of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy which commits to leading a review of transport supports encompassing all Government funded transport and mobility schemes for people with disabilities, to enhance the options for transport to work or employment supports for people with disabilities and developing proposals for development of a coordinated plan for such provision with regard to making the most efficient use of available transport resources.[[4]](#footnote-4) The Terms of Reference for this working group are still to be finalised, however, it is understood that for the purposes of this working group transport to education and training is encompassed in ‘employment supports’ as stated in Action 104. This working group may provide the Department with a valuable resource with regards to linking this scheme with other grants and supports.

The NDA notes that one of the possible aims of the review of this scheme would be to encourage more active travel of students. The NDA would like to encourage the Department to consider, if it hasn’t already, a wider range of user types and cycle types from the [Inclusive Cycling Guide](https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/FINAL.pdf)[[5]](#footnote-5). Providing access to other forms of cycles and accompanying infrastructure will require a cross-departmental/agency approach, however, it will provide the Department with the opportunity to link in with and promote other policy decisions around climate action and rural development.

# Universal Design Approach

The NDA is pleased to see that the Department of Education is planning stakeholder engagement process as part of this review. The NDA would encourage the Department of Education to take the universal design approach to these consultations and is happy to provide information and advice to the Department concerning engagement with people with disabilities. To support this the NDA recommends that the Department implements the European standard **I.S. EN 17161:2019 ‘Design for All - Accessibility following a Design for All approach in products, goods and services - Extending the range of users’** when designing and procuring products, goods and services. This standard enables an organisation to apply a universal design approach for accessibility and meet its statutory and regulatory requirements in terms of accessibility of its products, goods and services

In taking a universal design approach to consultation it is recommended that all material pertaining to the consultation be available in a variety of accessible formats. Consultation activity should be delivered in a variety of formats (for example not just through a survey but by using fora such as workshops, and focus groups as well) with multiple avenues for providing spoken and written input. Further information concerning accessible information can be found in the NDAs [**Code of Practice on the Accessibility of Public Services and Information provided by Public Bodies**](https://nda.ie/good-practice/codes-of-practice/code-of-practice-on-accessibility-of-public-services-and-information-provided-by-public-bodies-/)**.** This Codeoutlines the statutory obligations public bodies have in providing accessible services and information under section 26, 27 and 28 of the **Disability Act 2005**. These sections of the Disability Act 2005, incorporate the core elements of an integrated universally designed public transport service as mentioned previously. The NDA, has a statutory role to **monitor the implementation of this Code of Practice** and report our findings to the Minister.

The NDA would like to stress that universal design involves a very inclusive and wide ranging approach. We would encourage the Department to include not only staff, parents and guardians in this stakeholder engagement, but also children and younger people with disabilities. The NDA are supporting the DCEDIY participation unit to consult with children on this issue using their participation framework.

Involving children and young people at all stages of consultation and planning will be vital to the review of this scheme as they are the ones with first-hand experience of what does and doesn’t work well for them. Using the insights and lived experience of children of all abilities in the area of transport is a key area of improvement for Ireland. In a recent study done of 16 countries, Ireland scored among the lowest for children’s independent mobility and active travel. [[6]](#footnote-6) Universally designed tools, such as the [walkability audit tool](https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Universal-Design-Walkability-Audit-Tool-V1.pdf)[[7]](#footnote-7) provides an example of how universal design can get as wide a range of people as possible, including children, involved in providing views and feedback. This audit tool may be a useful resource to the Department in looking at how to involve children in review and planning activities.

**Accessible information** is one of the key criteria for universally designed services that should be incorporated into the stakeholder engagement process. All information (written, spoken, signed and digital) delivered by the Department (which includes consultation information), should be universally designed. The NDA suggests thattheDepartment should usethe **Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service - A Universal Design Approach[[8]](#footnote-8)** which will help to produce universally designed written, verbal and digital communications that can be easily accessed, understood and used by everyone.

It is also important to note that websites and mobile apps must comply with the accessibility criteria laid out in the [European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2020/si/358/made/en/print) which came into force on 23 September 2020. Accessible information also includes audio visual announcements on public transport, information received from self-service terminals, processes for requesting information and making complaints.

# Conclusion

In addition to the advice above, we would also suggest that Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) should be consulted with as part of this review. The NDA also recommends that children and families who have a need for transport but do not have access to this at present are also included in the consultation on this review.

The NDA is happy to meet with the Department to discuss this submission. The NDA is looking forward to continuing to work with the Department of Education to develop and implement integrated universally designed services to children with disabilities.

1. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-24-education.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Progress-Report-Policy-Advice-on-Special-Schools-Classes-website-upload.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1757-899X/960/3/032089/pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8072c0-national-disability-inclusion-strategy-2017-2021/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/FC_WfW-Inclusive-Guide_FINAL_V03.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/download/03175f2b7388716c0b78acce44b7af6cd907564d6b437038519cb3dc525ad27e/3906556/PSI_Finalreport_2015.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [Universal Design Walkability Audit (nationaltransport.ie)](https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Universal-Design-Walkability-Audit-Tool-V1.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://universaldesign.ie/products-services/customer-communications-toolkit-for-the-public-service-a-universal-design-approach/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)