

Evidence to the Education and Culture Committee

The Attainment Gap of School Pupils with a Sensory Impairment

Introduction

Colleges Scotland and College Development Network are jointly responding to the inquiry on the attainment gap of school pupils with a sensory impairment on behalf of members.

Scotland's colleges have a wealth of experience in making individual and reasonable anticipatory adjustments to their services and arrangements to meet the needs of learners who have a sensory impairment. These form part of the colleges' duties in respect of the Equality Act 2010.

These adjustments include the use of assistive technology and the provision of communication support workers where appropriate. Colleges take account of the specific needs of individual learners in planning and delivering this professional level of support. College staff are also provided with awareness training so that they understand the adjustments to delivery and teaching required for learners with a sensory impairment, and college staff also engage with local schools to ensure a smooth transition for pupils with a sensory impairment entering college from school or engaging in school-college partnerships. These arrangements have served learners well and are highly praised in learner evaluations of these services.

College Development Network offers the Professional Development Award (PDA) in Inclusiveness to develop the skills and strengthen the confidence of staff in colleges. The PDA, which is SQA accredited, aims to:

- improve the college capacity to offer accessible teaching and learning environments
- provide appropriate support for learners through the effective use of assistive and enabling technologies
- ensure there are sufficient staff trained to conduct assessments of needs so that appropriate resources and support can be put in place to enable learners with sensory impairments to succeed.

To date, 23 candidates have successfully completed the PDA, and 24 new candidates have recently begun the PDA.

We welcome the opportunity to make suggestions about what can be done to improve the attainment of learners with a sensory impairment, these are as follows:

- Taking a needs-led approach and working with individual learners on this basis to provide the support that they require.
- Ensuring that there are no barriers to education and providing appropriate levels of support. This support may include a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter, one-to-one mentor support, note taking, technology etc., depending on the needs of the learner.

- Adapting course materials to suit individual's needs.
- Ensuring that all staff are aware of adjustments and adaptations made and that these are followed.
- Using assistive technology where appropriate.
- Currently, a Scottish Gaelic computer voice is being developed and there is no formal code for Scottish Gaelic Braille, therefore learners with a visual impairment cannot access files written in Scottish Gaelic unless they do so through another language. The learner must use technology coded for one language to 'read' Scottish Gaelic letter by letter or word by word, which could be confusing.
- Providing awareness raising training for all staff.
- Providing support staff with specific experience of learners with a sensory impairment.
- Ensuring that schools and colleges work together so that learners can smoothly transition from school to college.
- Raising expectations so that learners with a sensory impairment are given the opportunity to reach their potential.

Colleges Scotland/College Development Network
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