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Convener
Education and Culture Committee
T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
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Convener,

Report on Attainment of Pupils with a Sensory Impairment

I am writing in response to the recommendations contained in the Report. I would like to thank the Committee for the time given to this important topic. Your considerations have been wide ranging and thought provoking and I have set out my response below using the same broad headings as in the report structure.

I agree with the Committee's view that all children and young people with sensory impairments should receive the support they need to reach their full potential. I am pleased that the committee has noted, and welcomed, the narrowing of the attainment gap for pupils with sensory impairments in Scotland and our actions in this area. I also agree that we should continue to seek improvements. This is particularly relevant for this group of children as technology and models of provision continue to evolve rapidly.

Turning to the specific recommendations in the Report my response is as follows

Limitations of Attainment Data

We recommend that the Scottish Government work with Education Scotland and local authorities to improve data collection, in order to provide as accurate a view as possible of the level of need across Scotland. We recommend that the Scottish Government and Education Scotland ensure the various concerns around data collection are acted upon as part of the ongoing implementation of See Hear strategy.

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We note the First Minister's recent announcement on educational attainment, including on standardised assessments, which was made after we completed our evidence-taking. The Scottish Government should confirm that any work on standardised assessments will take account of the needs of sensory-impaired pupils.

I recognise the importance that the Committee has placed on the data for children and young people with sensory impairments and appreciate their recognition of some of the difficulties in relation to the collection of data. At paragraph 20 of the report it is stated that there are concerns in relation to the data for pupils with Additional Support Needs, which are contained within the SPICe briefing on this issue. However, it is clearly stated within the SPICe briefing that the data referred to is a 2009 analysis of 2007 information. Therefore the picture set out at paragraph 20 does not accurately reflect the current picture of data collection as part of the pupil census about pupils with additional support needs, including sensory impairment.

It may be helpful to the Committee if I set out the current picture here. As part of our national pupil census statistical collection a range of information is collected about pupils including those with additional support needs. Whilst only summary information is contained within the [Summary Statistics](#) publication, a great deal of information is also included within the [Supplementary Data](#) which is also published alongside the Summary publication. Further, and specifically in relation to attainment, Table 6 of the [Attainment and Leaver Destinations Supplementary Data](#) outlines attainment by pupil characteristic including a comparison of pupils with ASN and without. Further table L3.1 sets out the leaver destinations and Tables A3.1 and A3.2 provide information on qualification levels.

I note also the concerns highlighted at paragraph 21 of the report which indicates that children and young people may have a visual impairment which is not recorded as an additional support need. This is unlikely to be the case, as an additional support need may arise from any reason, including a health or disability, learning environment, social and emotional factors or family circumstance. The report then goes on to comment on the fact that information about those pupils who receive additional support for a visual or hearing impairment alone are not collected within the statistical data provided by the Scottish Government. Whilst it is true that this data is not published by the Scottish Government, the data could certainly be provided on request. However, due to the very small numbers of pupils it is unlikely that this information would be robust in terms of further analysis.

In light of the information I have provided, I do not believe it is necessary to undertake extensive work to improve the data collection. However, it may be helpful to the Committee to be aware of the work being undertaken by the Advisory Group for Additional Support for Learning, which advises Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Government on implementation of the Act.

The Advisory Group's role includes the information collected on additional support needs through the pupil census. It is in this context, and the plans of this group to move towards a more outcomes focus for our data collection, that the consideration of the future direction of this data should be considered.

This will ensure a consistent approach to the collection of data to support implementation of additional support for learning as a whole, rather than in relation to specific groups. I would suggest that it is in this context rather than in the context of the See Hear Strategy that this should be placed.

Information on progress will be supported by the introduction of new national standardised assessments for pupils in primaries 1, 4 and 7, and in the third year of secondary school. The new assessments will inform, not replace, teacher judgment, focusing on aspects of literacy and numeracy. By replacing the range of assessments already used by authorities, with a new streamlined, consistent approach, the new assessments will aim to reduce the burden on teachers and children. The assessments are being developed in partnership with local authorities, teachers and parents, building on the range of good practice which allows all learners to demonstrate progress.

Under the Additional Support for Learning Act education authorities are required to identify, make provision for, and review the additional support needs of their pupils. This includes their arrangements for support to access learning opportunities, including the assessment of their learning. In addition, for pupils who have disabilities, education authorities must make reasonable adjustments to support pupils with their learning, including auxiliary aids and supports. The issue of accessibility and equity is central to the development of the assessments and one that is being considered as part of the draft specification. As part of the development of the assessments, we are also considering the collection and use of attainment data for all pupils, including those with Additional Support Needs, to ensure the pupils who require support receive it.

Models of Educational Provision

We recognise that there is a range of education provision available to children and young people with sensory impairments and welcome the Minister's confirmation that decision-making should focus on what is in the child's best interests. However, we recognise from the evidence we have received that this is not always the case and we invite the Scottish Government to elaborate and report on the improvements required in mainstream schools.

While we support the presumption of mainstreaming, we are concerned by the views expressed to us that some pupils with sensory impairments are not receiving the support they need in mainstream schools. There is clear evidence to suggest that resource base provision is successful and we recommend this approach be used where possible, while recognising that rural and island communities experience particular difficulties in this regard.

We consider Education Scotland and local authorities should place a greater emphasis on pupils with a visual impairment in mainstream schools being able to access habilitation training.

Education Scotland has provided little in the way of detail on how it shares best practice and how it works with local authorities to improve support for pupils with sensory impairment in mainstream schools. We have highlighted some good practice and call for Education Scotland to provide evidence to use by the end of 2015 on how it shares such good practice and how it is ensuring similarly effective services are available across Scotland.

In Scotland there is a range of provision available to meet the needs of pupils with a range of additional support needs, including mainstream schools, specialist units within mainstream schools, specialist services and special schools. The placement of pupils is a matter for the education authority and the pupil and their family, in order to best meet the needs of the child or young person. The legislation on mainstreaming is clear in that pupils with additional support needs should learn in a mainstream school unless certain exceptions apply. These are set out within subsection 3 of Section 15 of the 2000 Act and are:

- (a) where education in a school other than a special school would not be suited to the ability or aptitude of the child;
- (b) would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for the children with whom the child would be educated;
- (c) would result in unreasonable public expenditure being incurred which would not ordinarily be incurred.

It is presumed that those circumstances arise only exceptionally.

Subsection 4 makes it clear that should one of the circumstances above arise, then the authority may provide education for the child in a mainstream school, but they are required to take into account the views of the child and the child's parents in that regard.

These provisions, coupled with the provisions of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 which require education authorities to: identify the additional support needs of their pupils, make adequate and efficient provision for those needs; and to review the additional support needs and the provision made to meet them. These duties are owed to each child and young person for whose education the authority is responsible.

This means that the packages of support provided to children and young people, and decisions about placements, are highly tailored to meet individual needs. Consequently there are not 'off the shelf' patterns of improvements across services which should be made to improve services in mainstream schools, special units or special schools. The assessment is whether or not the provision which is proposed and the support which will be provided is suitable for the individual children and young people who are intending to attend the chosen school.

Education Scotland works together with schools and authorities to improve Scotland's successful comprehensive education system further. In inspections, HM Inspectors have reported on schools and services across Scotland that meet the needs children and young people very well and also on the excellent practice for Scotland's children and young people, including those with sensory impairments. In recent years Education Scotland has provide extensive support to Donaldson's School, a grant-aided special school to improve the quality of provision for learners who are deaf. Education Scotland has identified the need for schools and authorities to identify and address the barriers to learning identifying and tackling barriers to learning before they become entrenched, finding new ways to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse population of learners and personalising learning and support to take account of individual needs, choices and circumstances while relentlessly reinforcing high expectations.

Curriculum for Excellence has the express aim of ensuring children and young people have the skills for learning, life and work.

Education Scotland views young people's entitlements in Curriculum for Excellence as providing ways for habilitation skills to be part of personalising learning through:

- skills for life for those with visual impairment to enable them progress in their environment and locality
- appropriate attention to an environment for learning that support young people to achieve
- personalising support to meet the needs and raise achievement of those with visual impairment.

Through such a personalised approach to learning in their Broad General Education as part of progress in health and wellbeing, young people can benefit from accreditation of such learning at the Senior Phase. Education Scotland can promote accreditation of habilitation skills through Personal Development Units and Personal Achievement awards within Scottish Qualification Authority.

Education Scotland will shortly publish a best practice document for those making provision for sensory impairments for education authorities and schools across early years, primary, secondary and special schools and units as well as grant-aided schools in Scotland. They can seek to extend the ways to disseminate such good practice through our webspace, events and communities of Professional Learning with in GLOW and Education Scotland's Inclusion Hub.

Number of Qualified Teachers

As part of its work in sharing good practice on workforce planning, Education Scotland should ensure that local authorities are aware of the Minister's view that teachers who want to train as ToD and QTVI should be allowed to do so.

We believe that the minimum level of British Sign Language (BSL) qualification for ToD is set too low, at level 1, as this basic level qualification is not sufficient for teaching complex concepts and subjects. It can also mean pupils are sometimes qualified to a higher level than their teachers. We recommend that, subject to enactment of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill, the BSL Advisory Group consider the issue of raising the minimum level of BSL qualification to level 3. We believe it is important that teachers have at least a basic level of awareness in relation to sensory impairment and we welcome the Minister's comments and the recommendations in See Hear calling for further work in this area. We look forward to receiving details of this work.

It is essential that teaching standards for ToD and QTVI are routinely assessed. We therefore call on the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to explain how this will be achieved. Separately, in our Stage 1 report on the Education (Scotland) Bill we have asked the Scottish Government to clarify issues around teachers' registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, including ToD and QTVI.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015, which was granted Royal Assent on 22 October 2015, requires the Scottish Government to publish a BSL National Plan within two years. We are in the process of setting up a National Advisory Group (NAG) which will inform the development of the first BSL National Plan. The NAG will be made up of Deaf BSL users and public bodies, and will include young people and parents of Deaf children.

It is too early to speculate about what issues will feature in the BSL National Plan. However, we know from the evidence submitted during the passage of the Bill, that many BSL users have strong views about the level of qualification of Teachers of the Deaf (ToD), which concur with the views of the committee. If a Deaf child is taught by a teacher with insufficient levels of BSL, then clearly this will impede their access to the curriculum and to wider learning opportunities. Therefore, we acknowledge that any measures to increase the minimum level of BSL qualifications for ToD will be welcomed by the BSL community.

We have started collaborative work with NDCS, the Scottish Sensory Centre and ADES to establish a robust and effective way to collect data on the numbers of qualified teachers and the level of their qualification. A group met on the issue in November and a further meeting is planned for January 2016. The group is looking at options including collecting additional information through the teacher census and/or using an expanded version of the CRIDE survey issued by NDCS which covers hearing impairment to cover sensory impairment more widely. This work will give us an accurate picture of the current position and will allow us to further develop our response to this issue.

Education Scotland, the Scottish Government and local authorities can work together to ensure that existing good practice on workforce planning is more widely adopted through engagement within Advisory Group on Additional Support for Learning.

Education Scotland, Scottish Government and GTCS can work together to consider approaches to promote Professional Recognition and career-long professional learning that leads teachers to improve their practice in these areas identified in report.

In relation to the Committee's comment that 'it is important that teachers have at least a basic level of awareness in relation to sensory impairment' this is consistent with the approach taken to initial teacher education in Scotland. Which is that the teaching standards set by the General Teaching Council for Scotland require teachers to be able to identify and respond appropriately to pupils with difficulties in or barriers to learning. During initial teacher education, student teachers will gain sufficient knowledge of the most common additional support needs for them to be able to support the child in question themselves or to seek specialised information and specialised support if necessary.

Teachers career-long contractual requirement to undertake continuing professional development provides further opportunities for them to augment what they have learnt during initial teacher education. It is therefore not necessary, nor appropriate, for mandatory training in additional support needs to be put in place in Scotland.

Teaching for effective learning features in every inspection and as a matter of routine HM inspectors evaluate the quality of teaching and its impact on provision.

As requested, our response to the Committee's stage 1 report on the Education Bill makes clear the position on the registration of teachers, including Teachers of the Deaf and Qualified Teachers of the Visual Impaired.

Technology and Access across the Curriculum

We consider it unacceptable that basic technological failures mean some pupils are not able to access learning materials or make use of their assistive technologies in school. It is also disappointing that the available good practice, particularly that included in the Eye Right guidance, does not always seem to have been adopted by local authorities. The Scottish Government, local authorities and Education Scotland should take urgent steps to rectify this.

We are very interested in the possible benefits a 'distance learning' type approach (as described at paragraph 86) could have for pupils who use BSL. We call on the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to explore options for taking this innovative idea forward, perhaps as a pilot or on a trial basis.

There are specific provisions in place through the Equality Act 2010 and the Disabilities Strategies and Pupils Educational Records Act 2002 which provide protection in this regard. Under the Equality Act 2010 schools are required to make reasonable adjustments for pupils who are affected by a disability, and are required to provide auxiliary aids and services, which may include technological support. This issue is specifically addressed within the guidance on Accessibility Strategies.

These responsibilities are further enforced through the requirements on responsible bodies, including education authorities to develop and publish accessibility strategies to increase pupils' access to the curriculum, access to the physical environment of schools and improving communication with pupils with disabilities.

Further, as I outlined earlier, the provisions of the Additional Support for Learning Act also apply. Of particular relevance is the duty to identify, make provision for and to review the additional support needs and the support provided for pupils with additional support needs. These duties apply to individual children and young people.

Education Scotland works closely with CALL Scotland and the Scottish Sensory Centre to promote good practice in assistive technology. Over the past year we have held several events where CALL showcase best practice. Education Scotland values highly the work of CALL Scotland both within Scotland and in influencing best practice internationally. Education Scotland agrees that it is unacceptable that breakdowns in technology cause children and young people barriers to their learning.

Young people at the Deaf Learners Conference in March 2015 valued the support they received in school but were unhappy that the technology on occasion was used inappropriately or did not work as planned. Young people indicated that they wanted more technology that worked through their own devices.

The Eye Right guidance referred to is published by the Scottish Sensory Centre. Whilst the guidance is undoubtedly useful in enabling local authorities to develop policy and practice this is not Scottish Government guidance and we were not involved in its development. The guidance is however linked to from the Education Scotland website as a useful resource.

Scottish Government is consulting on the development of a Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy for Scotland. The consultation will run until 17th December 2015 and is open to all. Education Scotland is seeking to ensure that digital learning is a supportive aspect for all learners.

Classroom Environment

Appropriate acoustic standards are vital for pupils with a hearing impairment. We do not understand why the relevant standards are not statutory in Scotland when this is the case in England and Wales. We therefore call on the Scottish Government to work with local authorities and deaf people to examine how appropriate standards can be provided in all schools.

Some schools clearly have more expertise in meeting the needs of sensory-impaired pupils and we consider such knowledge should be shared. Education Scotland should therefore identify good examples of inclusive classrooms and disseminate this advice to all schools.

The School Premises Regulations give statutory requirements for school environmental conditions. Moreover, the Scottish Government's guidance on School Design (Optimising the Internal Environment, Building Our Future, Scotland's School Estate) is intended to assist local authorities in the development of design brief documents for a range of environmental conditions in schools, including acoustics, however, the statutory responsibility for the design, build and maintenance of Scotland's school estate rests with the local authorities.

Building Bulletin 93 (Acoustic Design of Schools), published in 2004, is considered the most comprehensive single source of guidance on school acoustics. It is extensively referenced in our design guidance which was produced in 2007. Our guidance does, however, point out that it should not be the only reference point when considering the design of new school buildings as to do so would mean that the building could not achieve other standards such as those in BB101 on ventilation.

As I have indicated earlier there are specific provisions in Scotland in relation to the planning of services for pupils with disabilities contained within the Disability Strategies and Pupils Educational Records Act 2002. These include the requirements on responsible bodies, including education authorities to develop and publish accessibility strategies to increase pupil's access to the curriculum, access to the physical environment of schools and improving communication with pupils with disabilities.

Education Scotland will publish good practice in inclusive classroom environments to include successful approaches to meet the needs of children and young people with sensory impairments as well as other aspects of addressing barriers to learning.

Leaver Destinations

We have already recommended that habilitation lessons be included in the curriculum for sensory-impaired pupils. We expect this change will help to better equip young people with the skills they need for employment.

We agree with the Minister that there is a need for more data on where people with sensory impairments go after further or higher education, and invite him to provide details of how this information will be collected. These data should help service providers to understand more fully and plan for the support these people require.

We welcome the work that is being carried out to support young people with sensory impairments as they make the transition into employment. We invite the Minister to ensure that this work is co-ordinated to deliver on agreed outcomes and take account of the findings of Education Scotland's scoping work on how best to support the needs of sensory-impaired young people.

We look forward to receiving updates from Education Scotland about the findings of its scoping work and from the Scottish Funding Council on the conclusions of its review into Extended Learning Support as it relates to the needs of students with sensory impairments.

As previously indicated under 'Models of education provision' Curriculum for Excellence has the express aim of ensuring children and young people have the skills for learning, life and work.

In my letter to the Committee, dated 11 June 2015, I provided leaver destination data for pupils leaving school. Data on University leaver destinations is published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and in **Appendix A** we have a breakdown of leavers who are 'Blind or a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses' and 'Deaf or a serious hearing impairment', which provides a relatively positive picture for students with a sensory impairment leaving higher education.

The first College Leaver Destinations report that is to be published on Tuesday, 15 December are classed as 'Experimental Statistics – data being developed' which are defined in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics as: 'new official statistics undergoing evaluation that are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development as a means to build in quality at an early stage'. However, following the Committee's report and recommendations I can confirm that as part of the CLD collection developments we will for the following and future years collect the student disclosed disability data, which will include data on college student leaver destinations by disability/additional support need. This will include a breakdown for students who are deaf or have a serious hearing impairment and who are blind or have a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses.

Education Scotland has published new career education advice and standards as a result of Developing the Young Workforce programme and aims to improve outcomes for those with additional support needs. Developing the Young Workforce is seeking to encourage the business community and employers to engage in aspects of equalities to improve positive destinations of those with disabilities including young people with sensory impairments.

In 2013-14, 385 students with a sensory impairment accessed bursary funds totalling just over £1m. Of that £1m, £384k was awarded to students with sensory impairments through the '*additional support for learning allowances*' (funded through SFC bursary funds) to support them in getting to college and fully taking part in their college course. These funds are designed to cover the additional travel and study costs faced by students with additional education needs. Additional support for learning funds are not means tested.

Colleges, via the SFC, have access to an 'Extended Learning Support' (ELS) ring-fenced fund, this year at a record total of £50m, to provide specialised support for individual students with specific educational support needs. The fund allows colleges to provide support measures for students that require extra resources such as additional staff or expenditure. The ELS fund was previously part of the total college budget and is, for the first time, in 2015-16, a visible sum to the sector.

When colleges claim Extended Learning Support for a student they must complete a Personal Learning Support Plan (PLSP) for that student. This plan crucially **ensures that students are central to the support being provided and that there must be clear goals attached to the education.**

If a college is not claiming ELS the college must still comply with the legal requirements set upon them and the SFC consider the PLSP guidance to be good guidance for all students regardless of whether the college claims ELS or not.

SFC are currently undertaking a sector led review of ELS across the sector in partnership with colleges and other stakeholder groups. The review will conclude in May 2016 and will inform future outcome expectations and we will provide the committee with an update on the conclusions of the review.

Conclusion

As a Government we remain committed to ensuring that all learners can access the support they need to reach their full potential. The Committee's work on this issue has been helpful in providing a focus on the specific needs of children and young people with sensory impairment.

I have outlined above our current and planned measures to address gaps that exist both in provision and data and I hope this provides the Committee with reassurance of our commitment in this area.

As I indicated earlier however, the position is constantly evolving and we will continue to anticipate and respond to that changing landscape.

ALASDAIR ALLAN

Appendix A

Table 1: Destinations of leavers from Scottish HEIs by disability & activity(UK):2013-14

Disability Type	1 Study/ Training	2 Employed in UK	3 Employed Overseas	4 Believed Unemployed	5 Other	Total
1b Blind or a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses	19%	67%	2%	11%	2%	100%
2a Deaf or a serious hearing impairment	22%	59%	6%	4%	9%	100%
No known disability	17%	68%	5%	5%	5%	100%

Table 2: Destinations of leavers from Scottish HEIs by disability and activity(Scotland) : 2013-14

Disability Type	1 Study/ Training	2 Employed in Scotland	3 Employed Elsewhere	4 Believed unemployed	5 Other	Total
1b Blind or a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses	19%	57%	11%	11%	2%	100%
2a Deaf or a serious hearing impairment	22%	51%	14%	4%	9%	100%
No known disability	17%	57%	16%	5%	5%	100%

From HESA:

[Rounding and suppression strategy Back to top](#)

HESA implements a strategy in published and released tabulations designed to prevent the disclosure of personal information about any individual.

Counts of student instances (and apportioned subject-level data) are rounded to the nearest multiple of 5.

For example 0, 1, 2 are rounded to 0, 3 is represented as 5, 22 is represented as 20, 3286 is represented as 3285 while 0, 20, 55, 3510 remain unchanged. This rounding strategy is also applied to total figures, so the sum of numbers in each row or column may not match the total shown.

Average values and **percentages** are calculated on un-rounded raw numbers. Averages based on populations (denominator) of 7 or fewer individuals are suppressed. Percentages based on populations of fewer than 22.5 individuals are also suppressed. Suppressed values are normally represented as '..' in published tables.