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Web

**Education and Culture Committee**

# **Attainment of pupils with a sensory impairment**



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# Education and Culture Committee

The remit of the Committee is to consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning; matters relating to youth employment, skills and employment training, implementation of the recommendations of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, Skills Development Scotland and other matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training, and matters relating to culture and the arts falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs.



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**Note: The membership of the Committee changed during the period covered by this report, as follows:**

John Pentland joined the Committee on 2 September 2015, replacing Siobhan McMahon (Scottish Labour, Central Scotland)



# Introduction

## The current picture of attainment

### Setting the scene

1. We believe all children and young people with sensory impairments should receive the support they need to reach their full potential. While we were told about some examples where, with the right support, these pupils can achieve the same level as their peers, this is not the case across Scotland.
2. We therefore consider more work is needed to improve the prospects of pupils with sensory impairments and expect ongoing efforts and existing initiatives will be given greater impetus as a result of our inquiry.
3. We welcome the recent narrowing of the attainment gap<sup>1</sup> for pupils with sensory impairments in Scotland and the actions undertaken by the Scottish Government in this area. In particular we note the Scottish Government's See Hear strategy<sup>2</sup>.
4. We recognise that local authorities have the key role to play. Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, local authorities are required to identify, meet and keep under review the additional support needs of all pupils for whose education they are responsible and to tailor provision according to their individual circumstances.
5. In addition, the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill when it is enacted shortly should lead to improvements for deaf children and young people. Having recently led the Parliament's scrutiny of that legislation, we have drawn on the evidence received in the course of this inquiry.<sup>3</sup>

### Current indications

6. Scottish Government data<sup>4</sup> show that, on average, school leavers with a visual or hearing impairment achieve fewer qualifications at school than those who do not have any additional support needs. This may have an effect on the destinations of school leavers and their employment prospects, a key area of concern discussed later in this report (see paragraphs 96 to 110).
7. However, we are encouraged by some examples indicating sensory-impaired children are performing well in some schools. East Renfrewshire Council told us that where the sensory impairment was the child's sole barrier to their learning, in its experience such children "perform as well as and, in some cases, better than their peers without a sensory impairment"<sup>5</sup>. The Council acknowledged, however, that these figures could be due, in part, to the small number of pupils with a sensory impairment.

8. In relation to pupils at its hearing impairment unit, Dalziel High School, in Motherwell, said it believed its pupils achieve on a par with their hearing peers at the level they are working at.<sup>6</sup> Also, the Scottish Sensory Centre said young people with a visual impairment and with no other additional support needs were “achieving only slightly less than their sighted peers”<sup>7</sup>.
9. The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages, Dr Alasdair Allan, recognised there is much good work going on in local authorities to meet the needs of pupils with sensory impairments. However, he said, “there is still significant room for improvement”<sup>8</sup>.
10. Similarly, Education Scotland recognised some local authorities were doing better than others and stated it “should be looking to challenge authorities further”<sup>9</sup> to ensure there is consistency of good practice across each school and each authority. Education Scotland also recognised there were things it needed to do, which included establishing “an approach that looks to boost inclusiveness and which takes account of additional support needs but in which our schools are places where social background, disability and gender are not barriers to learning”<sup>10</sup>.

## **Our inquiry**

11. This inquiry and report forms part of our wider work on educational attainment. We agreed to hold a short and focussed inquiry to consider specific ways in which the attainment levels of pupils with a visual or hearing impairment could be improved. We appreciate that the number of pupils in question is relatively small; however, it is important that their support needs are fully met.
12. We received 63 written submissions to our inquiry and took oral evidence from a range of organisations and individuals.<sup>11</sup> We also visited two schools: Craigie High school in Dundee<sup>12</sup> and Windsor Park School and Sensory Service in Falkirk<sup>13</sup>. We thank everyone who provided their views to us.
13. We recognise that children with a sensory impairment may have other additional support needs that require complex and specialist support. This is particularly true in relation to children with a visual impairment, a large proportion of whom also have an additional disability. In the time available, however, we decided our inquiry should focus on children with a sensory impairment but no additional disability.



## Executive Summary

We believe all children and young people with sensory impairments should receive the support they need to reach their full potential. While we were told about some examples where, with the right support, these pupils can achieve the same level as their peers, this is not the case across Scotland.

We therefore consider more work is needed to improve the prospects of pupils with sensory impairments and expect ongoing efforts and existing initiatives will be given greater impetus as a result of our inquiry.

Based on the evidence we received, we make the following recommendations.

### 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 the See Hear strategy.

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.

### 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 that 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 us by the end of 2015 on how it shares such good practice and how it is ensuring similarly effective services are available across Scotland.

### **Number of qualified teachers**

We believe work should be carried out to ascertain whether there are sufficient numbers of qualified teachers of the deaf and visually impaired. We welcome the indication from the Minister that work is underway in this area. As part of this work, we recommend that the Minister consider the options available to incentivise teachers to become teachers of the deaf (ToD) and qualified teachers of the visually impaired (QTVI), building on the actions already implemented by Moray House School of Education. Given the strength of the evidence we have received, we request details about the work the Scottish Government is doing and the information it is gathering on this issue.

We note that some local authorities already provide a first-class service in support of pupils with sensory impairments, and have established good models of succession planning to ensure teacher numbers are maintained. However, we are not clear about the extent to which Education Scotland disseminates such good practice across other local authorities. We therefore recommend that Education Scotland, the Scottish Government and local authorities work together to ensure that existing good practice on workforce planning is more widely adopted.

### **Qualifications of 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.

### **Technology and access to 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.

### **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.

## **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.

## Suggestions and improvements

14. In the remainder of this report, we consider the main suggestions made about how the attainment of pupils with a visual or hearing impairment could be improved.
15. We appreciate there are differences in the needs and concerns of those with a sensory impairment and we highlight these throughout.

### Limitations of attainment data

16. We were told that the data on children and young people with sensory impairments could be improved in a number of ways. Specific issues were highlighted in relation to the accuracy of data on the prevalence of sensory impairments; the limited nature of some attainment information published by the Scottish Government; and a lack of consistency in the approaches taken by local authorities to collect attainment information.
17. We explore each of these issues below but note that they make it difficult to establish a full picture of attainment. This has implications for service providers when they are trying to identify what types of support are required.
18. Concerns were raised with us about a lack of precise figures for the number of children affected by a sensory impairment in Scotland. We were told there was a growing body of evidence pointing to under-registration of blind and partially sighted children. It was suggested part of the problem was that registering a child is voluntary. The Scottish Sensory Centre said that because local authorities use registration data as a guide to anticipating demand for services, this left them with the “difficult task of delivering services based on information that may not describe the full scale or spectrum of children needing support”<sup>14</sup>. The RNIB said more rigorous collection of statistics on pupils with a visual impairment, along with an agreed definition of what is considered to constitute a visual impairment, “was essential”<sup>15</sup>.
19. Similarly, the National Deaf Children’s Society called for “more robust and complete”<sup>16</sup> data sets on numbers of deaf children and young people in Scotland. It said that while the pupil census has improved over the years there is insufficient information on children with mild hearing loss and with no formal education plan in place.
20. We are aware of a number of issues relating to the data published by the Scottish Government. A SPICe briefing<sup>17</sup> outlined that attainment data for pupils with additional support needs (ASN) – which include those with a visual or hearing impairment – are only reported for school leavers, whereas data on non-ASN pupils are also collected at the end of S4. As there are no data on when pupils with ASN leave school, it is not possible to compare directly the attainment of ASN and non-ASN pupils at a single specified age.

21. Also, these data show the attainment of children who have a visual or hearing impairment, some of whom may also have additional support needs. It is not possible to identify the attainment of children who have a visual or hearing impairment only. Given that an estimated 60-70% of children with a visual impairment have additional disabilities, the data does not accurately reflect the attainment of those with a visual impairment only. Noting that attainment data for children with a visual impairment only are available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Dr John Ravenscroft, from the Scottish Sensory Centre, said that there was no reason why this information could not also be made available in Scotland.
22. Education Scotland highlighted differences in the ways local authorities measure attainment and said improvements could be made by standardising how local authorities identify additional support needs. It pointed out that some local authorities have identified 10% of the pupil population as having additional support needs, while others are identifying percentages in the low 30s.<sup>18</sup> Education Scotland suggested that “if we can standardise and achieve greater consistency, we can ensure that there is no misallocation of resources”<sup>19</sup>.
23. Data collection is an area of improvement already identified by the Scottish Government in See Hear, its strategic framework for meeting the needs of people with sensory impairments—
- ” ... reliable information is basic to understanding the prevalence of sensory impairment and then being able to monitor the reach of services, engage with service users and carers, identify and learn from best practice, and identify gaps and opportunities for service improvement. Currently there are no standard expectations in this regard.
- ” There should be robust systems for maintaining information locally, and sharing this between agencies, in relation to people who have received a diagnosis of a sensory impairment at any time from birth onwards.<sup>20</sup>
24. We recognise there are various different factors, including socio-economic impacts and the presence of other forms of additional support need, which contribute to the attainment of children with a sensory impairment. It is difficult to draw a complete picture on current levels of attainment, given the limitations in data that we have highlighted.
25. 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 the See Hear strategy.

26. 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.

## Models of educational provision

27. While there is a need for better data on sensory-impaired pupils' attainment, it is nonetheless clear that their overall educational experience could and should be improved. In this section, we consider the presumption that sensory-impaired pupils be educated in mainstream schools.
28. Overall, there were mixed views on whether this presumption is a good thing. While some recognised mainstreaming was important as it allowed children to go to their local school, there was concern that some pupils were isolated in the classroom and did not receive the specialist support they needed.
29. Eileen Burns, Head teacher at Hamilton School for the Deaf, told us that some deaf people felt being the sole deaf pupil in a mainstream school is not the ideal way to be educated.<sup>21</sup> Difficulties in communicating with their hearing peers were, she said, limiting and isolating and could result in mental health issues.
30. Dr Audrey Cameron, who worked as a deaf teacher in a mainstream school, said deaf children often became detached from the rest of the class because their teacher of the deaf (ToD) or communication support worker (CSW) was essentially running a micro-class within the larger class.<sup>22</sup> This situation, she said, could lead to the deaf child becoming distracted or disruptive in class. She suggested it would be better to have children in smaller group environments, interacting directly with a teacher who is qualified and skilled in the necessary language and cultural aspects. In smaller groups, she said, deaf children would be involved in class discussions and debates, would know what was going on in the whole classroom, and would not feel isolated.
31. Dr Cameron called for a comprehensive review of deaf education. The National Deaf Children's Society agreed and suggested such a review would "enable us to identify where practice is really good, to learn from it and to share that best practice"<sup>23</sup>.
32. However, not everyone agreed that a review was necessary. Rachel O'Neill of the University of Edinburgh proposed a list of solutions that she felt would help make sure deaf children across Scotland received a good level of support. These solutions were based on her view that "we don't need more mapping or reviewing, we just need action"<sup>24</sup>.



33. Social inclusion was also said to be a major problem for blind and partially sighted pupils. In his role at the RNIB, Dominic Everett provides support to young people during what he described as the “hugely emotional transition”<sup>25</sup> from primary to secondary school. When these young people move up to secondary school, he said, the friends they had in primary school often disappear, leaving them socially isolated.
34. Some parents told us they had concerns about the level of resources and specialist support available for their children in mainstream schools. One parent stated that “the system does not expect deaf children to attain comparably with hearing children, and is not organised or resourced to allow them to do so”<sup>26</sup>. Another said the focus in mainstream schools was on assimilating children with a sensory impairment into the schools rather than putting adequate resources into meeting their specific needs.<sup>27</sup>
35. The issue of resources and specialist support was raised by other experts. Dr Cameron told us that a ToD might only be able to visit some pupils for an hour a day, once a week or in some cases, once a month.<sup>28</sup> She questioned what support the deaf pupils received for the rest of their time in school. The availability of qualified teaching staff is discussed in the section on workforce planning, at paragraphs 54 to 80.
36. In response to these issues, people suggested some improvements that could be made to the mainstream teaching environment, which are discussed next.

#### Resource base provision and collaborative working

37. Various people told us that one way of improving the support available to pupils with sensory impairments in mainstream education was to have ‘resource base provision’ within schools. This was felt to be of particular benefit to pupils with a hearing impairment.
38. For example, Eileen Burns, Head teacher of Hamilton School for the Deaf, told us a resource base allowed deaf pupils to access education in a mainstream environment while benefiting from having a deaf peer group to improve their social experience at school.<sup>29</sup> Pupils also enjoyed more regular on-site specialist support compared with what they might receive if they were supported by a peripatetic teacher. She called for all local authorities to offer resource base provision as part of their education service.
39. Rachel O’Neill also supported resource base provision. She spoke about her experience of working with deaf pupils and said she saw much more confidence in the children who attended schools with a resource base.<sup>30</sup> While such provision, she said, was easier to make work in the central belt, she suggested local authorities could co-operate in the setting up of resource base schools, as Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City councils had done previously.



40. We visited two mainstream schools – Craigie High school in Dundee and Windsor Park School and Sensory Service in Falkirk – both of which have resource base provision. We met pupils, their parents and teaching staff, and saw the impressive efforts being made to integrate the pupils in the mainstream settings while ensuring they also received the specialist support they required.
41. At Windsor Park School, we discussed how the involvement of a deaf British Sign Language (BSL) tutor who works in the local authority area had been significant in developing pupils' confidence. The school also told us how it invites deaf former pupils back to the school to meet the other pupils, which has had a hugely positive effect in establishing role-models for the younger pupils. The school also runs deaf awareness lessons, leading to a greater understanding of what it means to be deaf, which increases the self-confidence and assertiveness of its deaf pupils.
42. At Craigie High School, we discussed how the multi-agency approach to service delivery, promoted as part of Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), enabled sharing of information and best practice across the Tayside region. We met with professionals from NHS Tayside and heard how they worked closely with sensory support staff in Dundee City Council. They said such close working relationships between education and healthcare staff were vital in ensuring a co-ordinated support structure for children from the time they are diagnosed with a sensory impairment.

#### Habilitation lessons as part of the curriculum

43. A greater emphasis on teaching day to day life skills, known as habilitation skills, in mainstream schools could be a key means of helping to improve attainment. The term habilitation tends to be used in a visual impairment context. (Confidence building in hearing impaired children is discussed in the previous section on resource base provision.)
44. Habilitation lessons can include teaching basic mobility and orientation skills as well as social communication skills, and are critical in enabling pupils with a visual impairment to learn about their environment.
45. These skills are critical to building a child's confidence and could therefore help to reduce feelings of social isolation. It was also suggested that habilitation skills were critical for pupils' future job prospects. The RNIB said that a lack of mobility and independent living and travel skills was a key factor in school leavers being "unemployable"<sup>31</sup> despite having reasonable qualifications. This is discussed further in the section on leaver destinations, at paragraphs 96 to 110.
46. Sally Paterson, from Royal Blind, said she was sometimes less worried about the academic performance of a child and would rather see them develop communication skills with their peers, visit the shops and be able to tie their shoelaces.<sup>32</sup> She recognised, though, that it was sometimes a difficult balance and that removing a child from class would mean they could fall behind the rest of the class.

47. Nevertheless, witnesses considered habilitation skills fundamental in giving pupils with a visual impairment the tools they need in order to assimilate other learning, and called for these lessons to be incorporated in the curriculum for those pupils. They felt that the aspirations and flexibility of the Curriculum for Excellence framework afforded an excellent opportunity to develop habilitation skills across the curriculum.

#### Response from the Scottish Government

48. We discussed the concerns about mainstreaming with the Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages, Dr Alasdair Allan, and Education Scotland. The Minister pointed out that "although mainstreaming may be described as the default option, it is certainly not the only option, and if mainstreaming is not in the child's best interests, it should not be the chosen option"<sup>33</sup>.
49. Where the mainstreaming option is selected, the Minister said he would not expect a child who faces barriers to learning to have the same day-to-day educational experiences as other children. In such cases, he said, "the school must tailor things to the needs of the young person"<sup>34</sup>. He emphasised that "the child should get the specialist attention that they need to give them the same opportunities for learning that other children have"<sup>35</sup>.

50. 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.

51. 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.

52. We consider that 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.

53. 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 us by the end of 2015 on how it shares such good practice and how it is ensuring similarly effective services are available across Scotland.

## Workforce planning

54. Another key issue that may affect the attainment of sensory-impaired pupils is their limited access to qualified teachers of the deaf (ToD) and qualified teachers of the visually impaired (QTVI).
55. These teachers provide support to families when a diagnosis of a sensory impairment has been made and work with mainstream teachers to ensure pupils are properly supported in school. The message we heard was that, with a few exceptions, this resource is spread too thinly to deliver effective support and learning.

## Number of qualified teachers

56. The Scottish Government told us that there are around 80 ToD and 58 QTVI currently registered in Scotland.<sup>36</sup> Over the past few years the number of ToD has dropped slightly, it said, while the number of QTVI has remained constant.
57. As noted earlier, some mainstream schools have been described as poorly equipped, with specialist teachers working peripatetically and only available for short periods of time. In addition, we were told that some local authorities had no educational audiologists available – there are only five in Scotland and all but one have additional managerial responsibilities aside from their core specialism.<sup>37</sup>
58. Catherine Finestone, from the British Association for Teachers of the Deaf, said there was a “national shortage”<sup>38</sup> of ToD. She told us that when advertising for ToD, “you rarely get any applicants - if you are lucky, you get one”<sup>39</sup>. She put the shortage down to the fact some ToD have to pay for the training themselves, and that the time required to do the training alongside a teacher’s day job required a significant commitment. She suggested that a contributing factor could also be that qualification as a ToD no longer brought an additional responsibility allowance.
59. Furthermore, the number of ToD is expected to halve over the next 10 to 15 years due to the ageing of the workforce (the majority of ToD are in their mid to late 50s).<sup>40</sup> In order to counter this trend, Rachel O’Neill told us that succession planning was crucial. Her work involves liaison with ToD across Scotland and she said some local authorities were proactive in their succession planning. For instance, we were told that Falkirk and Fife councils have made provision in

advance by looking out for good, younger teachers in mainstream education, attracting them to the service and sending them on the diploma course.<sup>41</sup>

60. There was significant concern raised in evidence about the decisions taken by local authorities in how to structure support services for children with sensory impairments. The RNIB suggested that local authorities were trying to save money by establishing joint sensory impairment services, which were sometimes managed by a person with no experience of visual or hearing impairment.<sup>42</sup> Also, Royal Blind raised concern about a “worrying trend”<sup>43</sup> for QTVI to be re-assigned from their role in supporting a visually impaired pupil to provide absence cover for general teaching staff.
61. Some local authorities told us that they recognised there were problems. For example, Aberdeen City Council said the costs to train a ToD or QTVI were “considerable”<sup>44</sup>. It suggested a “shortage of staff generally has had a knock on effect on the ability of services to attract staff, reducing opportunities for secondments etc.”<sup>45</sup> It also said changes and reviews in staffing levels had meant staffing had been kept temporary, which had prevented people from starting on the relevant mandatory qualification.
62. Following our consideration of these issues, we understand from Moray House School of Education that it has taken steps to incentivise teachers to train as QTVI in order to attract greater numbers to the specialism.<sup>46</sup> The course has been re-designed and now equates to 80 credits (up from 60). Also, the course makes improved use of technology and is now running as a live streaming interactive course in the evenings, which allows teachers from across the country to access the classes without it getting in the way of their day-to-day teaching role. We welcome this development.
63. Given the views set out above, we were surprised that the Minister felt there was “no evidence that local authorities are struggling to find teachers or that qualified teachers are not available”<sup>47</sup>. However, he also said “there is a debate to be had about whether the right number of teachers is in the system” and indicated the Government was “working on” gathering information on the issue.<sup>48</sup>

64. We believe work should be carried out to ascertain whether there are sufficient numbers of qualified teachers of the deaf and visually impaired. We welcome the indication from the Minister that work is underway in this area. As part of this work, we recommend that the Minister consider the options available to incentivise teachers to become teachers of the deaf (ToD) and qualified teachers of the visually impaired (QTVI), building on the actions already implemented by Moray House School of Education. Given the strength of the evidence we have received, we request details about the work the Scottish Government is doing and the information it is gathering on this issue.

65. We note that some local authorities already provide a first-class service in support of pupils with sensory impairments, and have established good models of succession planning to ensure teacher numbers are maintained. However, we are not clear about the extent to which Education Scotland disseminates such good practice across other local authorities. We therefore recommend that Education Scotland, the Scottish Government and local authorities work together to ensure that existing good practice on workforce planning is more widely adopted.

### Qualifications of teachers

66. People also told us they were concerned that some teachers who provide support to pupils with sensory impairments were not formally qualified as ToD or QTVI.
67. The Visual Impairment Network for Children and Young People referred to data from 2012 and stated that 40% of teachers providing support to children with a visual impairment did not have a postgraduate qualification in teaching the visually impaired.<sup>49</sup> Recent research from 2014 indicates that 33% of teachers who support pupils with a hearing impairment are not qualified ToD.<sup>50</sup>
68. In relation to QTVI, the RNIB felt that “local authorities are trying to do things on the cheap and are not putting people through the appropriate qualification - the postgraduate diploma”<sup>51</sup>.
69. Similarly, Sally Paterson, QTVI and Resource Centre Manager at Royal Blind, suggested training standards and expectations were being diluted, which was having a “very significant impact”<sup>52</sup> on the education and attainment of visually impaired young people. She said there were variations across local authorities in the number of Masters modules in visual impairment teacher training that are required in order to support visually impaired pupils. She also said that some staff have no formal training or qualification in teaching the visually impaired and others on temporary contracts are refused funding to allow for this training and so can be re-employed year on year with no possibility of qualification.
70. A huge concern for the deaf/BSL community is that ToD are only required to have a level 1 BSL qualification. As we learned during our scrutiny of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill, this basic level of qualification is not considered sufficiently advanced to allow ToD to interpret complex theories and concepts, which Dr Audrey Cameron said has a “serious detrimental impact on deaf pupils’ learning”<sup>53</sup>. We have been told on numerous occasions that the minimum level should be raised to at least level 3 (roughly equivalent to Higher grade), while some considered level 6 to be a more appropriate level.
71. The National Deaf Children’s Society put these BSL standards into context by saying that 71 per cent of peripatetic hearing impairment services have no

teachers who are qualified at level 3, and that six services have teachers with no qualifications in BSL.<sup>54</sup>

72. Suggestions of how to improve teaching standards included requiring ToD and QTVI to register with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, and for such teachers to be assessed and inspected by Education Scotland.<sup>55</sup>
73. Others suggested that additional training should be provided for all teaching staff in mainstream education. For example, Action on Hearing Loss called for mandatory sensory loss awareness training to be introduced as part of the undergraduate teaching qualification.<sup>56</sup> See Hear recommended action in this area and for scoping work to be carried out at national and local levels to assess the skills base and available training opportunities in relation to sensory impairment awareness.<sup>57</sup> It also called for work to explore opportunities to increase awareness and expertise in the area of sensory impairment awareness and include appropriate content into core training regimes.
74. We raised these issues relating to teacher qualifications with the Minister. In relation to the suggestion that ToD and QTVI were inadequately trained, he said that “there is an increased cultural understanding that all teachers must have an awareness of the issues around deaf and visually impaired children”<sup>58</sup>. His strong view was that “local authorities would be wise to allow people to take up the training opportunities”<sup>59</sup>.
75. The Minister did not appear to support increasing the minimum level of BSL qualification for ToD. Instead, he wanted to expand the pool of available teachers first.<sup>60</sup> He did, however, hope that the cultural changes brought about by the BSL Bill and through schools offering BSL as a language (under the 1+2 language policy), would help to raise qualifications in BSL.
76. In line with the recommendations in See Hear, the Minister said there needed to be much broader deaf awareness and training among secondary teachers and confirmed that there is “much more that we need to do on that”<sup>61</sup>.

77. 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.

78. 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.



79. 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.
80. 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.

## Adaptations

### Technology and access to the curriculum

81. We are concerned to learn that various barriers can frequently impede sensory-impaired pupils' access to learning materials and their use of assistive technologies in school.
82. For example, we were told some older teaching videos were not subtitle-friendly, which made them unsuitable for some pupils with a hearing impairment.<sup>62</sup> Other issues included teachers who were not properly trained in the use of assistive technologies, such as Soundfield systems.<sup>63</sup>
83. Also, pupils with a visual impairment sometimes experienced difficulties using their assistive technologies (e.g. Braille note-taking devices or iPads) because their equipment was not supported by the school's intranet or online facilities.<sup>64</sup> Education Scotland acknowledged this as a problem and told us that it faced a challenge in striking a balance between having a secure intranet in schools and ensuring that young people can use the technology that they use outside school.<sup>65</sup>
84. There is good practice on the use of technology in schools to support pupils with sensory impairments. For example, the guidance document Eye Right sets out the challenges identified by teachers when supporting the technology needs of learners with visual impairments.<sup>66</sup> The RNIB described the document as including very positive examples of where IT was working, making it an important resource for local authority staff who were having difficulties with their IT setup.<sup>67</sup>
85. We were also told about work carried out by St Margaret's primary school to translate many of their books into BSL and make this resource available to different schools and nurseries across Fife.<sup>68</sup>
86. We also explored with witnesses whether an innovative approach could be adopted, where a teacher who is highly-qualified in BSL teaches a subject lesson that is transmitted to classrooms across the country. Such a 'distance learning'

type approach could help to compensate for a lack of teachers with advanced qualifications in BSL. While witnesses were not aware of anywhere that is doing this routinely, there was interest in the idea. Professor Graham Turner of Heriot-Watt University noted that spoken or written tele-schooling was already applied successfully in remote parts of Canada and Australia.<sup>69</sup> He suggested introducing the BSL element could be a challenge, particularly in terms of allowing interaction between the teacher and the class, but it was worth piloting with the right resources in place.

87. The Minister said that there had been some discussion about adopting a centralised teaching approach in rural and island schools, where it is difficult to attract specialist secondary teachers. He described this as a “live debate”<sup>70</sup>. Education Scotland added that it was interested in best practice examples and would be open to considering ways in which the issue could be taken forward.

88. 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.

89. 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.

### **Classroom environment**

90. Classroom layout and the design of school buildings are other potential barriers for pupils with sensory impairments.
91. We were told that poor classroom acoustics could severely limit hearing-impaired pupils’ ability to participate in lessons and discussions. Fife Council<sup>71</sup> suggested that the Scottish Government should look at establishing consistent standards, and Clydeview Academy<sup>72</sup> wanted educational audiologists to be consulted during the design stage of new school buildings. Others highlighted the need for teachers to be aware of any acoustic issues and to make use of technology, such as roaming microphones, where necessary.



92. A number of witnesses referred to Building Bulletin 93, which is a UK Government guide for the acoustic design of schools.<sup>73</sup> There were calls for these design standards to be placed on a statutory basis in Scotland as they are in England and Wales.
93. The Minister said he was aware of the issue of acoustics in schools, which are of obvious importance for deaf people. He referred to Building Bulletin 93 and confirmed it had “informed much of the design of our new schools”<sup>74</sup>. However, he did not seem inclined to adopt the guidelines on a statutory basis:

” If we were to start to legislate, we would probably have to work out where acoustics fitted in with other priorities such as ventilation, which – believe it or not – is a competing priority when it comes to a school building.<sup>75</sup>

94. 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.
95. 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.

## Leaver destinations

96. The Scottish Government has stated that leaver destinations are a key measure of attainment, and there is clear concern about the education and employment prospects of school leavers with sensory impairments.

### Further and higher education

97. The available data show that a large proportion of school leavers with sensory impairments go on to attend higher or further education.<sup>76</sup>
98. However, Rachel O’Neill raised some concerns about what lay behind the figures. She highlighted that a larger proportion of deaf children go on to further education (around 40%) than to higher education (around 22%), the reason for which “is largely the level of English qualification”<sup>77</sup>. She suggested that this “must be because of their early language experience and their experience all the way through school of support and access to language in the curriculum”<sup>78</sup>.

99. Dominic Everett, from the RNIB, said his experience was that, while a lot of young visually impaired people go on to further education, “they are planted in courses that are inaccessible” and, in the long term, “tread water for three or four years, going from one short course to the next”.<sup>79</sup>

### Employability

100. Dr John Ravenscroft, from the Scottish Sensory Centre, welcomed the latest Scottish Government figures showing a large proportion of visually impaired school leavers going on to a positive destination. However, he suggested that the focus should be on those who were not finding employment. In his submission, Dr Ravenscroft cited UK data showing that the employment rate for visually impaired people was significantly lower than that for the general population.<sup>80</sup>

101. The RNIB was also concerned with this issue. It suggested that the reason for the disparity in employment rates was that visually impaired people simply did not have the appropriate skills. It stated that, although a lot of visually impaired young people leave school with reasonable qualifications, “they are still unemployable, because they do not have the interpersonal and softer skills, the mobility and the independent living and travel skills that would enable them to engage more effectively in the workplace”<sup>81</sup>.

102. Research from 2014 found that the Scottish employment rate for young people aged 16-24 with a hearing impairment (31%) was lower than that for Scottish young people of the same age (53%).<sup>82</sup>

### Responses from the Scottish Government and Education Scotland

103. We raised the concerns about leaver destinations with the Minister. He said that sensory-impaired school leavers have done well in the further education sector, but have been under-represented in going into work and higher education. However, while the figures had been improving, he accepted that “there is still a great deal to be done”<sup>83</sup>. He also accepted that “we need more data on where people with a visual impairment or people who are deaf go after college and university”<sup>84</sup>.

104. He went on to say that young people with sensory impairments must not be pushed from one college course to another, and their right to take the courses they feel will lead them into employment must be respected.<sup>85</sup>

105. We were also told about a number of initiatives aimed at supporting young people with sensory impairments as they make the transition from school to employment. Enable Scotland delivers a project specifically focused on this area and Education Scotland is carrying out scoping work to identify how best to support the needs of young people as well as those of practitioners, teachers and employers.<sup>86</sup>

106. The Minister also told us that the Extended Learning Support fund – which colleges can access in order to help provide specialised support for individual students with educational support needs including sensory impairments – was being reviewed.<sup>87</sup> The review is expected to conclude in May 2016.

107. 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.

108. 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.

109. 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.

110. 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.

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence from the Scottish Government, 11 June 2015 (see Annex B). Available at: [http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_EducationandCultureCommittee/Attainment%20-%20sensory%20impairments/AllanSensImp20150611IN.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EducationandCultureCommittee/Attainment%20-%20sensory%20impairments/AllanSensImp20150611IN.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government, See Hear (2014). Available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/04/7863>

<sup>3</sup> Link to Committee webpage on its scrutiny of the BSL Bill:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/83760.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> SPICe briefing (see Table 1 on Page 5). Available at:

[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_EducationandCultureCommittee/Attainment%20-%20sensory%20impairments/SPICeBriefing.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EducationandCultureCommittee/Attainment%20-%20sensory%20impairments/SPICeBriefing.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> East Renfrewshire Council. Written submission.

<sup>6</sup> Email correspondence from Sadie Donnelly, 31 August 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Sensory Centre. Written submission.

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 3.

<sup>9</sup> Education Scotland. Written submission.

<sup>10</sup> Education Scotland. Written submission.

<sup>11</sup> Scottish Parliament website:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/87932.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> Craigie High School, 18 May 2015. Note of visit:

[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_EducationandCultureCommittee/Attainment%20-%20sensory%20impairments/DundeeMSSNote.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EducationandCultureCommittee/Attainment%20-%20sensory%20impairments/DundeeMSSNote.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Windsor Park School and Sensory Services, 9 December 2014 (visit conducted as part of scrutiny of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill. Available at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/83760.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> Scottish Sensory Centre. Written submission.

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- <sup>15</sup> The Royal National Institute for the Blind. Written submission.
- <sup>16</sup> National Deaf Children's Society. Written submission.
- <sup>17</sup> SPICe briefing (see endnote 4).
- <sup>18</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 19 May 2015, Col 13.
- <sup>19</sup> Education Scotland. Written submission.
- <sup>20</sup> Scottish Government, See Hear (see endnote 2).
- <sup>21</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 19 May 2015, Cols 18-19.
- <sup>22</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 41.
- <sup>23</sup> Education Scotland. Written submission.
- <sup>24</sup> Rachel O'Neil. Written submission.
- <sup>25</sup> Royal National Institute of Blind People. Written submission.
- <sup>26</sup> Iain Cameron. Written submission.
- <sup>27</sup> Breda Maguire. Written submission.
- <sup>28</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Cols 44-45.
- <sup>29</sup> Hamilton School for the Deaf. Written submission.
- <sup>30</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 43.
- <sup>31</sup> Royal National Institute of Blind People. Written submission.
- <sup>32</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Cols 16-17.
- <sup>33</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 19.
- <sup>34</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 20.
- <sup>35</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 20.
- <sup>36</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 14.
- <sup>37</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 33.
- <sup>38</sup> British Association for Teachers of the Deaf. Written submission.
- <sup>39</sup> British Association for Teachers of the Deaf. Written submission.
- <sup>40</sup> Consortium for Research in Deaf Education (CRIDE), Report on 2014 survey on educational provision for deaf children in Scotland. Available at:  
[http://www.ndcs.org.uk/professional\\_support/national\\_data/uk\\_education\\_.html](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/professional_support/national_data/uk_education_.html)
- <sup>41</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Cols 27-28.
- <sup>42</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 24.
- <sup>43</sup> Royal National Institute of Blind People. Written submission.
- <sup>44</sup> Aberdeen City Council. Written submission.
- <sup>45</sup> Aberdeen City Council. Written submission.
- <sup>46</sup> Email correspondence from Dr John Ravenscroft, 28 August 2015.
- <sup>47</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 14.
- <sup>48</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 16.
- <sup>49</sup> Visual Impairment Network for Children and Young People. Written submission. The data referred to was based on feedback from 26 local authorities.
- <sup>50</sup> CRIDE Report (see endnote 40). Data is based on feedback from 30 local authorities.
- <sup>51</sup> Royal National Institute of Blind People. Written submission.
- <sup>52</sup> Royal National Institute of Blind People. Written submission.
- <sup>53</sup> Dr Audrey Cameron. Written submission.
- <sup>54</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 31.
- <sup>55</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 15.
- <sup>56</sup> Action on Hearing Loss. Written submission.
- <sup>57</sup> See Hear, recommendations 2 and 3, page 20.
- <sup>58</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Cols 14-15.
- <sup>59</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 14.
- <sup>60</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 17.
- <sup>61</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 17.
- <sup>62</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 19 May 2015, Col 28.
- <sup>63</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 33.
- <sup>64</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 24.
- <sup>65</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 19 May 2015, Cols 26-27.
- <sup>66</sup> Scottish Association for Visual Impairment Education (SAVIE), Getting IT Right for Pupils with Visual Impairments (2014). Available at: <http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/resources/vi&multi/eyeright.html>
- <sup>67</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 26.
- <sup>68</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 19 May 2015, Col 27.
- <sup>69</sup> Email correspondence from Professor Graham Turner, 25 August 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 23.

<sup>71</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 19 May 2015, Cols 10-11.

<sup>72</sup> Clydeview Academy. Written submission.

<sup>73</sup> UK Government guidance, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bb93-acoustic-design-of-schools-performance-standards>

<sup>74</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 22.

<sup>75</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 23.

<sup>76</sup> SPICe briefing (see Table 2 on page 6) (see endnote 4).

<sup>77</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 40.

<sup>78</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 40.

<sup>79</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 10.

<sup>80</sup> Scottish Sensory Centre. Written submission.

<sup>81</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 12 May 2015, Col 11.

<sup>82</sup> Report from the Achievement and Opportunities for Deaf Students in the United Kingdom: from Research to Practice project (2014). Available at: <http://www.blendedlearning.me/DASS/site/report.php>

<sup>83</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 12.

<sup>84</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 12.

<sup>85</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Cols 6-7.

<sup>86</sup> Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee. Official Report, 26 May 2015, Col 5.

<sup>87</sup> Correspondence from the Scottish Government, 11 June 2015 (see endnote 1).

