Submission from Disability Team at the University of St. Andrews

The Education and Culture Committee – views on the Attainment of School Pupils with Sensory Impairment.

Please accept the views of the Disability Team at the University of St. Andrews. Although this focuses on an age group separate to our own expertise, these views are offered from the perspective of the gaps in preparation which we see in the new students arriving at our institution.

After some joint discussion, the development needs focus on a necessary investment by the Scottish Parliament in terms of equipment, technology, time and training in the Secondary sector. The following points are offered for consideration:

- Regular teacher/staff awareness training to enable staff to understand the needs of individuals who have a sensory impairment. It is not a case of making everyone an expert but better knowledge and understanding will lead to good practice across the board.
- Employment/training of more specialist staff is needed in addition so that there is someone specialised in every school. In the primary and secondary sector there are usually peripatetic staff but it would seem, in insufficient supplies.
- Training on accessibility through alternative formats and the ever changing assistive technology is essential so that staff are familiar with the strategies and supports that their students will be using.
- Training also needs to emphasise the following points:
  - that supporting disabled people has to be done within an anticipatory and inclusive framework
  - there needs to be whole institution support, led top down, that accepts individual adjustments are necessary, such as mentor support,
  - regular, anticipatory review of curriculum delivery (by design) has to offer choice and flexibility whilst ensuring equivalence.
- Schools need to be fitted out with appropriate and relevant equipment. This area requires significant investment – whether in audio or magnified materials.
- Broad diversity training for children will help remove stigma around disability, and from a young age.
- More liaison between HE and Secondary with proactive communication on both sides will equip the schools with the knowledge of how the pupil needs to be better prepared for the transition, and the HE ready for them arriving.

Thank you

Chris Lusk

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