SQA: Inquiry into attainment of school pupils with a sensory impairment – Call for views

Thank you for your email of 19 March 2015 seeking concise and specific suggestions about what could be done to improve the attainment levels of school pupils with a hearing and/or a visual impairment.

SQA is Scotland’s national body for qualifications (other than degrees). We have a responsibility to ensure that assessment leading to certification is rigorous and fair for all candidates, including those who have sensory impairments, and that it allows all candidates to demonstrate the skills and knowledge necessary for the award.

SQA is aware of the very wide spread of attainment amongst learners with sensory impairments and acknowledge that there are many factors which contribute to differences in attainment such as social class, gender, ethnicity, the nature and severity of the particular disability/difficulty, the presence of other disabilities or learning difficulties and the regional variation relating to provision and support for children and young people with sensory impairments. However SQA does not have the appropriate expertise to provide specific suggestions on improving the attainment levels of school pupils with a hearing and/or visual impairment beyond ensuring that our qualifications and assessments are as accessible as possible to this group of school pupils.

To this end, SQA provides assessment arrangements or makes reasonable adjustments for candidates with sensory impairments (based on their individual needs) where we are satisfied that the integrity of the qualification is maintained. We work in partnership with centres to identify and deliver such assessment arrangements. These assessment arrangements are clearly established and set out in our guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs. SQA is very aware of the duty of care that we hold in respect of candidates with sensory impairment who require assessment arrangements and take that duty of care very seriously.

We also continue to develop and improve access to qualifications and assessments for learners with sensory impairments ensuring that, as far as possible, any potential barriers are removed or, where appropriate, we make reasonable adjustments to mitigate the adverse impact of these barriers in a way that is consistent with maintaining the integrity of the qualifications and assessments.