Department for Education

DSA-NMH Mandatory Qualifications or Professional Body Membership Criteria and Role Descriptors Review 2017/18

Closing date for submitting responses 12:00 midday on Tuesday 9th January**.**

You should provide any evidence in writing via email to Disabled.STUDENTALLOWANCES@education.gov.uk clearly marking the subject box **“NMH Review evidence – [your organisation/name]**

**(The original template has been adapted within this document to meet accessibility standards)**

# Contact information

| Type of contact information | Details |
| --- | --- |
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# Questions posed

**As indicated this review will only consider the issues detailed below.**

## Question 1.

Do you think that the qualification and professional membership requirements for specific Non-Medical Help roles remain accurate, appropriate, and relevant to the specific role? If YES, please go straight to question 2. If NO, please give full details below.

## Response to Question 1

No.

**Band 1 roles (reader/scribe/workshop and laboratory assistant):**

We have concerns about the minimum qualification standards for Band 1 roles for support staff working with a student with a vision impairment. Our longitudinal transitions study1 for example identified barriers to student participation in STEM exams when the provided scribe/reader did not have advanced STEM qualifications. The minimum qualifications required should reflect the knowledge required by the assistant to appropriately support the student – for example to be able to follow direction to write down mathematical equations. The banding for these roles should reflect the advanced qualifications required (we would suggest degree level).

**Band 3 specialist notetaker for VI students and Band 4 specialist support professional for students with VI:**

Providing support for students with vision impairment can be extremely complex, both in terms of ensuring course content is accessible to the student, and also pedagogical considerations on how best to support the student. At present the qualifications for a specialist notetaker focus purely on specialist knowledge of vision impairment. This does not reflect certain scenarios where it is necessary for note-takers to have specialist subject knowledge in order to facilitate the VI student in their understanding of their subject area. For example, our research in the longitudinal transitions study highlights the importance of note-takers and specialist support workers having specialist subject knowledge when supporting students with severe VI studying STEM courses1. This is because the role becomes broader than simply ensuring information is accessible to the student and extends into facilitating the student with their interpretation of concepts (this is particularly the case with visual material, such as diagrams). The challenge to find appropriate support staff is compounded by a lack of formal qualification for specialist support staff in HE. It is important for organisations such as VIEW (https://viewweb.org.uk/) or NatSIP (https://www.natsip.org.uk/) to seek to develop an appropriate qualification to fill this gap, and ideally DfE would financially facilitate this. In the interim we would recommend that there should be flexibility with regards to the type of specialist support that a student with vision impairment could receive and that this should be determined as part of the DSA assessment of needs process. This is especially important as anecdotal evidence shows that some students with vision impairment are not receiving their allocated specialist support due to challenges in identifying appropriate staff – it is vital that this group of students is not penalised because of a lack of flexibility in role descriptors.

[1 Hewett, et al (2015) Experiences of blind and partially sighted young people as they make the transition into Higher Education](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/education/victar/transitions-into-higher-education-2015.doc)

## Question 2:

Do you think there are any additional qualifications or memberships you think should be included in the NMH list? If NO, please go straight to question 3. If YES, please give details below including a full description of these as well as full reasons for your proposal.

Response to Question 2

**Band 1 Sighted guide:**

At present no qualifications are required for a person to act as a sighted guide. As a sighted guide has responsibility for helping a person with vision impairment safely navigate an environment we view it more appropriate for a sighted guide to have some form of formal training in how best to provide this support. Voluntary sector organisations such as RNIB and Guide Dogs as well as organisations such as Visualise Training and Consultancy offer introductory visual impairment awareness courses which include how to act as a sighted guide.

**Band 3 Mobility Trainer**

The current qualification requirements should be extended to include all rehabilitation officers whose qualifications are recognised by the professional organisations for rehabilitation workers: Rehabilitation Workers professional network and HabVIUK.

**Band 4 Specialist Support Professional for Students with Sensory Impairment**

Specific reference should be made to the mandatory qualification for teachers of learners with vision impairment: MQ (VI)

## Question 3:

Do you think that the specific role descriptors correctly describe the support function? If YES, please go straight to question 4. If NO, please give full details below of the suggested change and a full explanation of why you think this is needed.

Response to Question 3

No.

**Band 3 Specialist Notetaker for VI students**

The descriptor given for specialist note-takers for VI students is limited. In our research we have observed notetakers for students with VI being used in multiple ways1. For example, some students require notetakers simply to record the content of a lecture. In other cases, however, the student requires support during the lecture, for example with interpreting diagrams or mathematical content. In these situations it is essential for the note-taker to have a specialist understanding of the subject, in order to help the student interpret concepts (either during the lecture or through descriptors in the notes produced).

We would also suggest that it would be worthwhile listing the descriptors for specialist notetakers for hearing impaired and visually impaired students separately as the roles are not directly comparable.

**Band 4 Specialist Support Professional for Students with Sensory Impairment – Vision Impairment**

A detailed descriptor is still required for this role. We would recommend that this descriptor is developed in conjunction with key sector organisations such as VIEW, and that it should take into account our response given to question 1. In line with other role descriptors, specialist support professionals for students with VI should also be able to offer one-to-one study support and mentoring support. Our research2 has highlighted how complex the transition into HE can be for students with VI as they develop strategies to become independent learners in a new educational setting, and learn to take responsibility for self-advocating for their needs. It is important that this group of students have support to navigate these challenges to ensure outcomes in line with their academic ability.

[1 Hewett, R et al (2015) Experiences of blind and partially sighted young people as they make the transition into Higher Education](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/education/victar/transitions-into-higher-education-2015.doc)

[2 Hewett, R et al (2017) Developing an inclusive learning environment for students with visual impairment in higher education: progressive mutual accommodation and learner experiences in the United Kingdom. European Journal of Special Needs Education. 32:1, 89-109.](http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1080/08856257.2016.1254971)

## Question 4:

Do you think that there are any new role descriptors required? If NO, please go straight to question 5. If YES, please offer a suggested title and include information below to let us know why you think it’s needed, what will the impact of the proposed new role be, what qualifications would be relevant, and what is the current cost of provision.

As noted in response to question 3, students with vision impairment should have the option of specialist one-to-one study support and/or a mentor. This could be as part of a new role descriptor, or incorporated into the role of specialist support professional.

## Question 5:

Are the hourly cost bandings for specific roles correct? If YES, please go straight to the completion box below. If NO, please give full details below of the cost banding/bandings needing to be changed, why you think it/they need changing, and any evidence you have to support this

No response to Question 5