Specialist teachers play an important part in the inclusion and educational success of pupils with sensory impairment. This leaflet aims to explain their role, how to train to become one, and where to find more information.
What do specialist teachers do?

Specialist teachers work in different settings and across age ranges. They work in mainstream nurseries and schools, special schools and units, teaching one-to-one or in small groups, and dealing with associated assessment.

They can also provide expert teaching support and advice to mainstream and special school teachers who have children with sensory impairment in their classes.

Working closely with Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), they provide in-service training support about the needs of pupils in school. They often advise on how a wide range of cutting edge technology can be used to help support learners’ access to achievement.

Specialist teachers will also visit parents and pre-school children at home to offer advice and support on a whole range of issues, including communication and educational development.

Some work with LEA support services, and they often work with medical and other professionals.

Mandatory Qualifications

Teachers who wish to specialise in teaching children and young people with visual, hearing, or both visual and hearing impairments are required by Regulations¹ to obtain a specialist qualification known as a Mandatory Qualification, or MQ for short.

¹ The Education (School Teachers’Qualifications)(England) Regulations 2003
Who can apply for an MQ?

Anyone who holds Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), but some teaching experience is normally a general requirement.

It may be possible for a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) to train as a specialist teacher immediately after their initial teacher training. But they would still need to complete their induction successfully to continue working as a qualified teacher in a maintained school or a non-maintained special school.

Where can I apply for an MQ?

MQs are offered by a variety of higher education institutions, some in partnership with specialist schools and voluntary bodies, and by different modes of delivery.

Details of approved MQ providers can be found at: www.teachernet.gov.uk/mq together with details of the major voluntary organisations representing the interests of people with sensory impairments.

Teachers may also wish to approach their school’s SENCO or their own local authority specialist support services, to discover more about the support and advice that is available.

What does an MQ offer?

MQs offer a range of opportunities for teachers to build on their experience, and to further develop the specialist skills and knowledge needed to support and meet the needs of pupils with sensory impairments.

MQs usually take one year full-time or two years part-time to complete and may involve distance learning. Courses typically involve a combination of lectures, specialist reading, practical assignments, seminars, visits, workshops, and teaching placements, where teachers can demonstrate the specialist skills they have acquired whilst working with pupils.
Why specialise?

Teaching children with sensory impairment can be immensely rewarding. It offers a real sense of worth and value in helping to enrich the life opportunities of students.

It offers teachers an opportunity to expand their horizons, to learn and use new skills, and to gain new knowledge and insight.

It offers an exciting, varied and challenging career path with many opportunities for progress. Teachers with specialist qualifications have become head teachers, managers of regional or local support services, senior officers in voluntary organisations, advanced skills teachers, education officers and teacher trainers.

Choosing to specialise, and to undertake the necessary specialist training, can be a springboard for a whole range of new experiences which can alter the direction of a career. We hope that this leaflet will have given a flavour of what it means to specialise, what would be involved, and what can be gained by making that choice.

Where to go for further information

Websites:
www.teachernet.gov.uk/mq
www.batod.org.uk
www.ndcs.org.uk
www.rnib.org.uk
www.rnid.org.uk
www.sense.org.uk

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