



Accessing Physical Education Courses

Case Study 4: Royal Blind School

What are the challenges?

The Royal Blind School is a grant-aided special school offering residential and day provision for children and young people from Scotland and the North of England. All pupils have a visual impairment and many have additional disabilities. Physical Education Courses can be made accessible to young people with a visual impairment — indeed pupils attending the Royal Blind School have successfully achieved good results in both Intermediate 2 and Higher Physical Education.

The approaches and adaptations used at the Royal Blind School for pupils with a significant visual impairment may also be useful for delivering PE Courses to young people with other impairments.

Visual Impairment

The level of visual impairment is determined by measuring visual acuity (distance vision) and visual field (area of vision), the most significant being total blindness with no light-perception. Some young people may suffer cognitive visual impairment — they may have good visual acuity and field, but are unable to interpret what they are seeing. For competition purposes, athletes are classified according to the severity of their visual impairment. A B1 classification is for those with no sight or only light-perception, with B2 and B3 having more functional vision. All B1 competitors have to wear eye shades or blacked-out goggles for competition. These are the classifications used in international competition, but there is also a partially sighted (PS) category in some competitions for those with greater functional vision than the B3 class.

Having a visual impairment can provide difficulties in accessing activities at the appropriate level, especially in a school setting. This is a major consideration, as SQA's Arrangement

Documents clearly state that ‘activities undertaken in extra-curricular time **only** cannot contribute to the unit assessment in performance’.

Whatever the level of visual impairment, it is not, in itself, a barrier to accessing the Physical Education Course. Provided the young person can achieve the required standard, the Analysis and Development unit can be adapted to allow them to successfully complete the course.

How do candidates access the Course in class?

The teaching of the PE course to young people with a severe visual impairment requires adaptations to activities, support materials and teaching approaches.

Young people who are blind or visually impaired can access many physical activities that are regularly part of a physical education programme in most secondary schools. Games such as football and goalball can be played by the blind or visually impaired (and are played at Paralympics level). However, in the school setting it would be difficult to provide the opportunity to participate at the required level.

Basketball and badminton, activities for which course material is available, are not easily accessed. A shuttlecock is small and difficult to see, and does not provide audio cues; basketball at higher levels is a very fast-paced game, making it difficult for a person with visual impairment to participate. Many of the individual skills such as dribbling and shooting can, however, be taught successfully.

The required standard ‘to demonstrate effective performance in challenging contexts’ is most likely to be achieved in individual activities, such as swimming, gymnastics, dance and athletics with some adaptation. There are support materials for these activities, linked to some of the areas in the Analysis and Development unit. At the Royal Blind School, the Course at Intermediate 2 and Higher is based around swimming, gymnastics and athletics.

Swimming

In swimming, the use of lane ropes and verbal cues can help with direction, and a ‘bopper’ can be used to indicate the end of the pool. The ‘bopper’ is used to tap the swimmer to initiate their

turn or the end of the race; this is an additional skill and requires practice from the swimmer and the person 'bopping' to get the timing right.

Teaching stroke technique is done with detailed verbal input or through guided movement, as observing and copying is not always possible.

Teaching of diving starts and turns requires a build-up of trust between coach/teacher and the swimmer, and is taught as for sighted pupils although it can take longer for the pupil to gain the confidence to perform successfully and consistently.

Athletics

The adaptations in athletics may be minimal in track events, if the pupil has sufficient sight to see and follow the lines on the track. If this is not possible, it would be necessary to run with a sighted guide. The guide runs alongside the athlete attached by a tether, and runs in unison matching pace and stride. (However, the athlete must cross the finish line in front of the guide.) This technique takes a great deal of practice to get right, particularly when using sprint starts and running a bend.

Field events are adapted to suit the needs of the pupils and will vary according to the event and the level of disability.

Throwing events may require little adaptation except in teaching approach — as with swimming, detailed verbal description and guided movement are necessary. An audio cue may be required for direction, for example a call or clap in shot-putt. Health and safety has to be the main concern — some additional considerations include shortening the approach run in javelin to prevent loss of direction, and for safety reasons those with a severe visual impairment may opt to do a standing throw. In discus, orientation can be a problem, as with sighted pupils, and unless working on a one-to-one basis it is best taught in a netted area.

In long jump and triple jump, strides are counted for the approach run, and for B1 athletes a caller can stand in the pit and call for the jumper. The B1 jumper is permitted to take off from within a chalked box 1m in front of the take off board. The distance is measured from the actual take-off point.

Analysis and development of performance

This unit requires the adaptation of course notes and support materials into the appropriate format — large print, Braille or audio. Current IT software can be very useful in helping young people access this Unit because information held in electronic form can be accessed using screen readers or enlargement programmes. At the Royal Blind School we use Supernova and Jaws.

The outcomes for this unit require candidates to analyse their performance in an activity that involves collecting data to identify strengths, weaknesses and development needs. For those with a visual impairment, this can be done using detailed timings and measurements and comparing them with model performances.

The use of observation schedules designed by the candidate and completed by staff, with results discussed verbally, can provide useful information. The use and understanding of internal feedback by the candidate is an extremely valuable tool in helping young people with visual impairment analyse their own performance. Encouraging candidates to describe how their performance feels, both good and bad, is an important part of skill acquisition and analysis. Keeping training diaries and notes on their performance allow candidates to monitor their programme of work. This is best done electronically, and may require adaptations such as in the layout of tables, allowing each candidate to use the most appropriate format to suit their individual needs.

In the Royal Blind School the course is based on the areas of Performance Appreciation, Preparation of the Body, and Skills and Techniques because for young people with visual impairment the most difficult area to access is Structures, Strategies and Composition. This tends to be a very visual area and is usually taught around games such as basketball. However this area has been covered successfully at Higher with a pupil who completed the Standard Grade course as a sighted candidate and had a working knowledge of structures, strategies and composition of games before losing their sight. For a young person with a severe or congenital visual impairment, this prior knowledge would not be available.

Accessing the principles of the Analysis and Development unit was mainly covered verbally either in classroom discussion or during practical lessons. The knowledge and understanding of key concepts required in performance appreciation, preparation of the body, and skills and

techniques are mainly taught verbally — through question and answer and discussion as part of the practical activities. Summarised notes (provided in the appropriate format) are useful for revision purposes, and electronically recording information such as training diaries and assessment results can cut down on the volume of material the candidate has to work with.

How are the candidates assessed?

The challenges in assessing the candidates' practical performance in individual activities are mainly concerned with provision of challenging contexts. At the Royal Blind School assessment of performance in swimming and athletics occurs towards the end of the session and also makes use of results obtained at competition. Candidates undertaking the PE course at Intermediate 2 and Higher levels compete at the Scottish Disability Sports competition for visually impaired and physically disabled athletes and swimmers. They also compete in National Competitions organised by British Blinds Sports in swimming and athletics. These events provide the challenging contexts in which effective performance can be demonstrated.

In swimming, assessment is carried out using the same criteria used for sighted candidates for stroke technique, starts and turns with the use of a 'bopper' where required. Candidates are assessed over a variety of distances to demonstrate control and fluency and in competition with others of similar ability and disability.

In athletics candidates are assessed as far as possible using the same criteria as for sighted candidates with suitable adaptation where required as in the use of a guide runner or box jump as described above.

The NAB for the Analysis and Development of Performance unit is provided in large print or Braille and answers are entered on computer. Candidates are also given up to 50% extra time to complete the assessment with similar arrangements for the external examination.

How successful is the delivery of the course?

Royal Blind School pupils have achieved good results at Intermediate 2 and Higher level and one has gone on to study Sports Science. One pupil has achieved the Advanced Higher Unit in Physical Education: Performance. This has led to an increased number of pupils interested in taking the course in the future.

The course has been successful because it is based around the most suitable activities for pupils with visual impairment and these activities were linked to the most appropriate areas of study. These areas could be adapted to allow the development of knowledge and understanding of the key concepts.

What advice would you give other teachers?

For the Analysis and Development of Performance unit, consideration must be given to the volume of material required. For example, for a candidate using large print at N48 or Braille, it may not be possible to provide all the information available from the recommended textbooks. Summarised notes and selective texts are of benefit, as is the use of appropriate software to access the internet. Simplification of tables and diagrams can help with the collection of data.

Incorporating the knowledge and understanding aspects of the course into practical session is both more interesting and of greater significance for the candidates than discussion in a classroom. For young people with a significant visual impairment, experiential learning of concepts is much more relevant and memorable.