

The Law

The Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002ⁱ describes the planning duties that need to be carried out by local authorities, independent and grant-aided schools in Scotland to meet legal requirements introduced by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Each local authority and other education provider - the so-called responsible body - has to set out how it plans to improve accessibility in an 'Accessibility Strategy'. These are prepared on a 3-yearly cycle and local authorities in Scotland had to submit their first 3-yearly plan in 1 April 2003.

The Scottish Executive Education Department produced valuable guidanceⁱⁱ for local authorities to help them prepare their accessibility strategies. There are three areas of improvement needed in relation to disabled pupils:

- Improving access to the physical environment
- Improving access to the curriculum
- Improving access to communication and delivery of school information.

Improving access to the Curriculum through ICT

Paragraphs 47 and 48 from the SEED Guidance are given here:

47. Through the National Grid for Learning, new computers and networks are being installed in schools across Scotland to allow pupils to benefit from the use of ICT in learning. At the moment, various service providers are being contracted to install the network, but some pupils with disabilities are unable to use these computers for a variety of reasons.
48. Therefore, as part of their accessibility strategies, responsible bodies should make certain that contracts for any future supply of computers or upgrade of existing stock ensure that the computers (and associated furniture) are accessible or can easily be modified to be accessible to pupils with disabilities. They should also ensure that teaching staff are aware and can receive specialist advice on the use of accessible software and websites which are available (accessibility approval systems can provide information about these). For example, DAISY (Digital Audio Information System) has been trialled successfully in Scottish schools.



48 cont.

In reviewing existing contracts and, if necessary, negotiating new ones, a commissioning body should ensure that:

- specialised items of hardware and software, such as an alternative keyboard, mouse or switches can be added easily;
- software needed by pupils with disabilities, such as speech output or screen magnification, can be installed;
- the full range of accessibility options within the operating system can be utilised, for example, to slow down mouse speed or keyboard repeat rate, or to enlarge screen fonts or reduce screen clutter;
- equipment can be placed in accessible locations, for example, so that wheelchair users can reach the keyboard and see the screen;
- access privileges are flexible enough to enable staff to make necessary changes to afford access (for example, to adjust control panels or save individual settings for specific programs).

In order to meet these requirements, local authorities might like to consider some key questions:

- How are students with additional support needs who require specialised hardware and software or other adaptations identified?
- How are their particular support needs in terms of access to ICT identified and assessed?
- Can specialised items of hardware and software be installed on managed/networked computers?
- Who is responsible for installing specialised hardware and software?
- What is the procedure for ensuring that these resources can be provided?
- How do staff make these necessary changes to control panels and user profiles to afford access?
- Are staff aware of the procedures for identifying and assessing ICT access needs and for providing resources?
- Are there systems and procedures for ensuring that students with additional support needs can access ICT systems effectively and efficiently?

Resources

ⁱ The **Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002** can be downloaded from: <http://www.hmso.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2002/20020012.htm>

ⁱⁱ The Scottish Executive: **Guidance on Planning to Improve Access to Education for Pupils with Disabilities: Guidance on Preparing Accessibility Strategies** 2002
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/gpas-00.asp>