



Mr Andy Pike
FÓRSA
Nerney's Court
Dublin
D01 R2C5

18 June 2021

Dear Andy,

I am writing to you in response to your correspondence of 19 April last following the engagement at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) on the issue of minimum qualifications for the role of Special Needs Assistant (SNA).

The Department notes your view that there is a need to review the minimum essential qualification for SNAs with a QQI Level 6 award as the foundation.

While noting the material put forward in support of the concept of such an award being the minimum essential requirement a number of issues arise around that, not least that your own data indicates that as high a proportion as 25% of existing SNAs may not have that level of qualification. You also refer to a NCSE recommendation that proposed lower level of minimum qualification than what is being proposed by Fórsa.

As set out at the WRC the actual requirements for an SNA post will vary depending on the specific needs of the children and the school to which the SNA is to be appointed. When recruiting an SNA school authorities must list in the advertisement any specific competencies and/ or requirements to meet the special educational needs of the pupil(s). The appointment of SNAs is a matter for the individual school authority, subject to agreed procedures which are published on the Department's website.

While certain qualifications may be listed as desirable by employers and indeed may give candidates an advantage in competitions it does not necessarily follow that a QQI level 6 qualification is essential for the role.

As you will be aware, SNAs can also independently seek further training or this can be provided by the school if required as part of the role. In addition the new national training programme for SNAs employed in schools is tailored to their needs. It gives a general understanding, knowledge, skills and expertise for the role of an SNA whose work is central to the inclusion of students with additional care and complex needs in school life, and may be a stepping stone to further education. The issue of accreditation will be considered in any review of the course.

It is important to state that the Department is not aware of there being any issues in the competence of the SNA cohort recruited to date under the existing minimum requirements. However, having considered the claim and the evidence put forward by Fórsa and, in particular, the period of time since they were set, the Department is open to reviewing the position.

However, given the current level of activity and change around the special education sector, including in the response to COVID-19 the Department is not in a position to indicate when that review might take place. The Department is of the view that, at the very least, the forthcoming review of the SNA contract should be carried out and implemented before any review of the minimum qualifications could take place given that relevant matters may be decided upon.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Bohan
Principal Officer
External Staff Relations