# Critical role of Qualified Teacher of Children and young people

# with Vision Impairment (QTVI)

**January 2023**

This statement should be read alongside RNIB’s other policy position statements on children and young people with vision impairment.

This statement should be read in the context of the Equality Act 2010, the Children and Families Act 2014, and the 2015 statutory guidance, ‘[SEND Code of Practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25): 0 to 25 years’.

This statement is supported by VIEW, the professional association of the vision impairment workforce.

## What we think

Children and young people with vision impairment face unique challenges to learning which can only be addressed by specialist knowledge and understanding.

All children and young people with vision impairment will require specialist input to address crucial needs in their cognitive development, communication, social and independence skills. The level of this input will vary according to the severity of their vision impairment, the needs and skills of each individual child, the nature of their setting and other factors. In all situations we maintain that the input must always include specialist assessment and support by a QTVI. Evidence shows that the QTVI is usually the key worker for a blind child, assessing their needs and co-ordinating the provision to address these.

QTVIs hold the mandatory qualification (MQ) in vision impairment, in addition to qualified teacher status. QTVIs as well as other specialists carry out a central role in the education of children and young people with vision impairment from birth, working in homes, early years settings, schools through to post 16 settings as laid out in the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment. They provide vital advice, information and specialist interventions such as supporting the learning and development in the early years, teaching braille, teaching children and young people the skills they need to access information independently and advising and training mainstream teaching staff.

## What’s the current issue

We recognise the importance and central role of QTVIs in the education of children with vision impairment and are concerned that some local authorities and schools are under budgetary pressures.

Our annual Freedom of Information (FOI) research found that more than three quarters of local authorities in England have cut or frozen their VI service budgets at least once over the last four years, despite a gradual increase in children and young people requiring VI services [1]. In 2021, almost two thirds of local authorities in England also reported a decrease or freeze in QTVIs, affecting almost two thirds of children and young people accessing VI support [2].

Not increasing the numbers of QTVIs, when the demand for services is increasing, has led to unmanageably high caseloads. Some authorities have increased the threshold for active involvement meaning that children and young people with mild to moderate vision impairment no longer have regular access to a QTVI. Some authorities are also moving towards a model where the QTVI is in a more advisory role and direct intervention is from non-specialist teaching assistants in schools.

This reduced level of intervention from specialist staff could impact not only a child or young person’s education and childhood, but also potentially their later life, including their ability to find employment.

Such a focus on short term savings is at odds with the SEND Code of Practice (Para 6.61, SEND Code of Practice, 2015), which emphasises the importance of specialist services.

## Recommendations

It is vital that the support from QTVIs and other key specialist professionals for children and young people with VI is maintained and protected. To ensure children and young people with VI have equality of opportunity in education, we are calling on the Department for Education to:

* Provide adequate and protected funding for local authorities to deliver specialist education services which meet the needs of children and young people with VI from 0-25.
* Take immediate action to boost the numbers of Qualified Teachers of children and young people with Vision Impairment (QTVIs). This should include a clear and fully-funded plan of action to improve recruitment and opportunities to qualify into the profession, and retention of the current workforce.

In order to protect the rights of children and young people with vision impairment have equitable access to education, we also maintain that schools and local authorities should apply the following principles and practices:

* All children and young people with vision impairment are assessed and supported accordingly by teachers employed as QTVIs, who hold (or are working towards) the mandatory qualification in vision impairment.
* The caseloads of these teachers are managed in order that they are able to support these children and young people in line with their assessed needs.
* QTVIs work directly with children and young people in a teaching capacity in specialist areas such as the acquisition of visual concepts and the development of literacy through braille, large print and/or technology.
* QTVIs support parents/carers in the home to support their child’s early development.
* QTVIs work closely with staff in nurseries, schools, or colleges to ensure that children and young people's needs are met through training and joint planning to secure inclusive teaching and learning approaches.
* QTVIs advise on and oversee the implementation of strategies to promote children and young people’s social inclusion.
* QTVIs are involved in a planned approach over time to reduce adult support through the implementation of strategies which promote independent learning. This should not be confused with a withdrawal of support and will need regular monitoring.
* QTVIs maintain close contact with families as a source of ongoing advice and to make sure that expectations and approaches are consistent between home and school.
* QTVIs work closely with SENCOs and Exams Officers to ensure that appropriate exam formats and access arrangements are in place for all examinations.
* QTVIs help to prepare students so that their normal way of working matches those that are available to them in examinations.

## What RNIB is doing

RNIB continues to work with partner organisations to campaign for better support for children and young people with vision impairment, so they can reach their full potential in adult life. Many of our policy priorities are reflected in the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI), which seeks to define, unify and embed best practice support for children and young people with VI.

## Contact

RNIB Policy and Campaigns on 0207 391 2123 or campaigns@rnib.org.uk

## References

[1] Bhangoo, 2022. Still left out of learning: Education provision for children and young people with vision impairment in England, 2021. Available from <https://www.rnib.org.uk/left-out-learning>

[2] Ibid.