# Effective deployment and training of teaching assistants working with learners who have vision impairment

**January 2023**

This statement represents RNIB's outline position at the date given below. It is supported by [VIEW](http://www.viewweb.org.uk/), the professional association of the vision impairment workforce.

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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25)’.

## What we think

Vision impairment creates unique challenges to learning which can only be addressed by specialist knowledge and understanding. Teaching assistants play an essential role in the education of many children and young people with vision impairment, supporting their learning while promoting their independence and social inclusion.

RNIB maintains that the deployment of teaching assistants should be determined on an individual basis according to the following factors:

* The learner’s communication needs, their normal way of working and their consequent need for modified material.
* The learner’s general ability and any additional needs they may have.
* The learning objectives and content of individual lessons/activities.
* The environment in which they are learning.

We believe that the work of teaching assistants should be overseen by a qualified teacher of children and young people with vision impairment (QTVI), and they should receive training through the [CPD]/appraisal process to develop the specialist skills needed for their role.

## What’s the issue

While some teaching assistants (TAs) are employed by local authority VI services, most are employed by individual schools. Although they often work with QTVIs most TAs are often managed by professionals who do not have a background in vision impairment.

Many TAs do not receive adequate time to plan ahead with teachers. Too often they have to make decisions about curriculum access for lessons at short notice, limiting their opportunity to produce accessible resources which enable learners to work independently. [how impacts the learner, time when unable to work and fall behind]. This can make it much harder for children with VI keep up with their sighted peers.

Many TAs receive basic awareness training, but there is no requirement for them to have specialist training or qualifications to work with children with vision impairment. The main area of specialist training is in braille proficiency, which many TAs undertake when they are already supporting a learner who uses braille. Very few TAs are able to access specialist training on how to support VI learners effectively, and most of those who are able to undertake such training do not gain any recognition in terms of salary or status.

## Recommendations

All teaching assistants appointed to support learners with vision impairment should be allocated regular amounts of time in order to:

* meet with school/setting teachers to discuss lesson plans, identify materials that needs modifying, and agree when direct support is needed;
* meet with a QTVI to discuss the learner’s progress and seek specific advice on modifications and support strategies;
* prepare appropriately adapted learning materials and gather specialist resources;
* provide direct support where there is an agreed need arising from the planning of a particular lesson/activity;
* carry out other activities, e.g. observing the learner in different contexts, keeping records and feeding back to staff.

Teaching assistants should be provided with training in the following:

* Understanding vision impairment and its implications for the educational and social development of children and young people
* Learning and applying a range of specialist skills which can be used regularly in support situations
* Demonstrating a commitment to effective team work and to encouraging positive attitudes among staff and pupils
* Developing positive working relationships with children and young people that promote their independence and engage them in planning and decision making.
* The changing role of a teaching assistant as a learner progresses and becomes more independent. **Access to learning** moving towards **learning to access**.

Courses and qualifications which reflect these requirements should be recognised by educational settings and local authorities as integral to the appointment and career development of teaching assistants working with children and young people with vision impairment.

## What RNIB is doing

RNIB continues to work with partner organisations to campaign for better support for children and young people 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 [VI curriculum project](https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/education-professionals/development-new-uk-specialist-vi-curriculum-framework) which seeks to define, unify and embed best practice support for children and young people with VI.

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