# Scottish Government LogoRNIB Scotland Logo

# Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland Response to the Scottish Government: Let's Talk Scottish Education - feedback from group discussions

## About you

**Before you share your group's thoughts, please take some time to describe your group.**

**Please focus on the things your group has in common, rather than any information about a specific person (we would not want this form to collect personal data).**

**Please also decide if you want your group's feedback to be published.**

**To find out how we handle your personal data, please see our**[**privacy policy**](https://www.gov.scot/privacy/)**. By clicking submit you agree to our privacy policy.**

**Roughly how many people took part in this group discussion?**

**please estimate how many people took part in your group discussion.**

In total, seven young people provided feedback during an online meeting and a further young person provided email feedback.

**Were members of your group mostly speaking as: a) children and young people, b) parents, c) teachers, d) practitioners, e) other**

A) Children and young people.

**Does this group consider itself to share common characteristics? If so, please describe.**

Yes, all the young people are blind or partially sighted.

**The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your group's feedback. Please indicate your publishing preference:**

**(Required)**

 Publish response with name of group

 Publish response only (without name of group)

 Do not publish response

**If we can refer to your group, what should we call it? (i.e. name of school, youth group etc)**

Haggeye/ RNIB Scotland.

**We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?**

Yes.

**What is your email address?**

**Entering your email address allows you to return to edit your consultation at any time until you submit it. You will also receive an acknowledgement email when you complete the consultation.**

Haggeye.Mailbox@rnib.org.uk

**I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.**

[**Privacy Policy**](https://consult.gov.scot/learning-directorate/national-discussion-feedback/#question-2019-12-13-1755473921-factbanksubquestion)

**(Required**) I consent

**Do you want to share anything to help summarise your group's discussion (e.g. videos, photos, post casts, news reports, mind maps, drawings etc.)**

Yes



# About RNIB Scotland and Haggeye

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland is the country’s leading charity working with blind and partially sighted people. We support children, young people and adults with sight loss and help them to live independent lives.

According to RNIB’s most recent estimates, in Scotland around 183,000 people live with a significant degree of sight loss. The Scottish Government’s Pupil Census 2021 revealed that there were 4,930 school-pupils with a visual impairment in Scotland. [https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/.]

Through our work with blind and partially sighted children and young people we are aware of the need to identify solutions to the problems that children and young people with disabilities can face within education.

Haggeye is RNIB Scotland's campaign group for blind and partially sighted young people, aged 16-27 years, living in Scotland. As a national group, our members come together online from across Scotland every fortnight.

We dedicated one of the sessions to discussing the National Discussion on Scottish Education. The young people focused this conversation on the following questions: 1, 2 and 3.

## Survey routing

**To make sure we ask your group the right questions in the right order, please answer one quick question.**

**Which discussion guide did your group use to take part in the national discussion?**

Please pick from dropdown list

                                                                                                    

## Feedback questions - groups of young adults

Please know you are free to respond in a way that saves you time and works best for you and your group. This might include:

* writing in bullet points or shorthand
* not repeating key points you've raised in earlier answers
* sharing photos of group notes and drawings rather than writing them out again

**If your group undertake an activity where they wrote their own vision for Scottish education, please write it here:**

## 1. What kind of education will be needed by children and young people in Scotland in the future?

Haggeye members felt strongly that Scotland needs an education system that can adapt to each student, their abilities and preferred style of learning.

The participants in the focus group supported a universal plan for all children and young people in education which encompasses the three most crucial transition points in a young person’s life. This should not be limited to school age and instead should extend up to the age of 26. Young people over the age of 18 should be able to opt out of the plan if they no longer feel they require or want the support. Crucially, all young people should have ownership over their plan, they should be aware of what is in it, when it is to be reviewed and the purpose of the plan. It should be reviewed annually but the child or young person should be able to have access to it on request at any time.

Such a plan should include specific accessibility needs for blind and partially sighted young people including receiving all information and education resources in their preferred format: digital, large print or in braille. It should also include guidance on how best to share information within the classroom, such as providing a verbal description of any visual information and providing digital resources ahead of time. In addition, the holistic needs of each student should be included such as the impact of different lighting levels, the potential impact of variable eye conditions and eye strain.

Haggeye members recognised that despite the challenges faced by education settings during the covid pandemic, there had been real progress on accessibility. For example, when all resources are provided electronically for all students, it meant that students with sight loss did not have to ask for different formats repeatedly. It is hoped that this kind of learning will continue as new and emergent technology becomes more mainstream. Members noted that not all students benefit from the same type of support or digital access so individualised support should still be provided.

## 2. How do we make that a reality?

Haggeye members were keen that any information included within a pupils' Additional Support Plan be communicated with all staff, at the start of each term and at any transition point. It should also be recirculated as required to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and any additional information is included.

As well as information sharing, participants highlighted the school environment to be a critical aspect of making their vision of education a reality. Members called for classrooms to be decluttered. They also highlighted corridors during busy periods as being particularly challenging to navigate.

The young people discussed their desire for mandatory disability awareness training, including visual awareness training, to be provided to all school staff including teachers, support staff, catering, janitors, and administrators. Haggeye members felt that this would ensure a consistent baseline knowledge about how to best support blind and partially sighted young people.

While sharing their experiences, members of Haggeye cited examples of the practical information that should be included in such a training:

* Teachers should avoid using generic terms such as “young lady” or “young man” when speaking to pupils and instead use each pupil's name to allow blind or partially sighted students to identify who is being addresses.
* Avoid the use of green or red text on smart or white boards as these colours can be harder to see.
* Crowded and busy corridors can be challenging to navigate with a cane. This can lead to young people feeling isolated and vulnerable.
* There should be opportunities to learn about the different types of canes.
* There should be increased use of colour contrast to ensure that the physical education environment is more accessible e.g., contrasting basketball.
* Avoid using busy worksheets and small font sizes as these can make course work inaccessible. RNIB’s default font size is 14 point in a clear text such as Arial or Calibri.
* Teachers should be aware that students may need additional time to access resources if they are not in their preferred format.
* It should be recognised that pupils may need to rely on family members to act as scribes if tasks cannot be completed digitally.
* There should be greater guidance on how to recognise the signs of undiagnosed sight conditions including a pupil moving closer to the broad.
* Staff should receive guidance on how to refer onto Low Vision Services and the types of support that can be provided.

Furthermore, Haggeye would like to see similar baseline education provided to all students. Members in mainstream education, and those in schools with dedicated visual impairment teams, described limited understanding about the different types of sight loss within the wider student population. Some reported that this can lead to negative experiences and increased risk of social isolation.

Crucially, Haggeye stressed the need for Qualified Teachers of Visual Impairment (QTVIs). They highlighted geographic variations in the level and type of support provided by QTVIs, particularly in secondary school where the range and number of courses increases significantly. For those who use braille, support should be provided to access and understand the specialist braille required for subjects such as Physics and Chemistry.

Furthermore, members expressed concern about the number of QTVIs reaching retirement age and concerns about ongoing reported issues recruitment. Haggeye would be keen to see greater promotion of QTVI as a career option and increased opportunities to achieve the relevant qualification. Also, some members cited receiving support from staff who were undertaking the qualification but had not yet completed it. In these instances, the members hoped that a requirement could be introduced to ensure at all staff providing direct, specialist support to blind and partially students hold the Mandatory Qualification for Teachers of Visually Impaired Learners (QTVI) or be working towards it within a dedicated timescale.

Many Haggeye members described the benefits of using technology such as iPad and laptops with screen reading technology as vital to their success in school. They discussed how this equipment should be introduced early and should move with the student as they navigate through education. When this is not the case, it can result in delays accessing new technology when entering secondary school or further education. There should also be opportunities for ongoing professional development to ensure school staff are aware of the latest developments in technology.

## 3. How can every child and young person’s individual needs be supported and addressed in the future?

Haggeye members felt that it is important to ensure that each young person's needs are assessed and frequently reviewed to ensure that the guidance shared with staff remains up to date. They described the difficulties that young people can face asking for support and would advocate for teaching staff to encourage frequent opportunities to discuss progress and any concerns.

To help overcome this, all young people should be supported to develop self-advocacy skills. Haggeye believe opportunities to do so should be embedded within education. Furthermore, students would benefit from greater opportunities to link with older or former pupils through a mentorship scheme. Similarly, the members advised that closer links to sensory services and local third sector partners would also be included in their vision for education.

Within this context, RNIB Scotland would like to highlight the new Curriculum Framework for Children and Young people with a Vision Impairment (CFVI).

The Framework was produced in collaboration with parents, children, and young people along with professionals from a range of disciplines and experiences working for major sight sector organisations and networks across the UK. These included cross-border charities such as RNIB; Guide Dogs UK; and the Thomas Pocklington Trust. The Scottish Association for Visual Impairment Education (SAVIE); the Scottish Sensory Centre (SSC); and the University of Edinburgh have also been involved.

The Framework aims to support children and young people with vision impairment access an appropriate and equitable education. RNIB Scotland will be working with colleagues to promote the Framework approach over the next three years in the hope that it might be incorporated into Scottish government guidance.

**Almost done…**

**You are about to submit your response.**

**By clicking 'Submit Response' you give us permission to analyse and include your response in our results. After you click Submit, you will no longer be able to go back and change any of your answers.**

**To find out how we handle your personal data, please see our**[**privacy policy**](https://www.gov.scot/privacy/)**. By clicking submit you agree to our privacy policy.**Bottom of Form

I agree the privacy policy.

## For further information please contact:

Dr Catriona Burness

Parliamentary and Policy Manager, RNIB Scotland

catriona.burness@rnib.org.uk

07713 302 015

Rachael McMurchy

Policy Officer, RNIB Scotland

rachael.mcmurchy@rnib.org.uk

07821 637 317