## Scottish Parliament Call for Views - Additional Support for Learning (ASL) - RNIB Scotland Response

RNIB Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Parliament call for views - Additional Support for Learning. Please note that we have responded only to Questions 1 and 8.

### Question 1 - What do you think of the approach that children and young people with additional support needs should normally be educated in mainstream schools instead of special schools or units?

RNIB Scotland believes that meaningful choice should be available for parents/carers of children and young people with vision impairment. Children and young people with vision impairment require input from specialists such as Qualified Teachers of children and young people with Vision Impairments (QTVIs) and Habilitation Specialists to fully access the Curriculum for Excellence.

For children and young people with vision impairment to thrive in education, RNIB Scotland recommends that the Scottish Government adopts the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment into Additional Support for Learning and all other relevant policies. See - [Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment | RNIB | RNIB](https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/health-social-care-education-professionals/education-professionals/curriculum-framework-for-children-and-young-people-with-vision-impairment/).

The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) has been developed to support children and young people with vision impairment access an appropriate and equitable education.

The framework presents outcomes within eleven areas:

1. Facilitating an Inclusive World;
2. Sensory Development;
3. Communication;
4. Literacy;
5. Habilitation: Orientation and Mobility;
6. Habilitation: Independent Living Skills;
7. Accessing information;
8. Technology;
9. Health: Social, Emotional, Mental and Physical Wellbeing;
10. Social, Sports and Leisure; and
11. Preparing for Adulthood.

At the heart of the Framework is a set of three fundamental aims:

* To help clarify and define the elements of specialist skill development, interventions and best practice support that are considered to be essential for children and young people with vision impairment;
* To assist qualified specialist practitioners in raising the awareness amongst other professionals and parents of the need for children and young people with vision impairment to be taught skills that enable them to access the curriculum and the wider world with as much independence as possible;
* To aid discussions and understanding amongst all involved in a child/young person’s education of how and when these skills should be taught by suitably qualified specialists and reinforced by non-specialists.

"Unlocking Education for all" - the joint report by RNIB Scotland, Sight Scotland, the University of Birmingham, the Thomas Pocklington Trust and VIEW - calls for the CFVI to be:

* Recognised and referenced in Scotland Additional Support for Learning policies;
* Embedded in local authority service delivery frameworks;
* Followed by all educational settings supporting children and young people with vision impairment and their families, in partnership with VI specialists;
* Embedded within competence frameworks for teachers of children and young people with vision impairment and habilitation specialists across the UK.

See - [Unlocking education for all – Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment in Scotland (rnib.org.uk)](https://media.rnib.org.uk/documents/APDF-SV230105_CFVI_Project_Phase-SC-REPORT-v01.pdf).

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### Question 8 - Do you have any other comments to make about ASL?

Vision impairment is a high need, low incidence disability and support needed will differ greatly between individuals. For many CYP with VI, navigating the complexities of education is hugely burdensome.

This is reflected in a quote from a parent of a vision impaired pupil:

"They [the Scottish Government] did a huge consultation before Covid and then didn’t like the results and buried it. There have been other consultations since that just go nowhere - using families as a huge box ticking exercise.

They’d do well to actually look at the last review outcomes as I don’t think much will have changed except the budgets got smaller and the support less." (Parent 1)

Another parent wrote:

"My child wants to be at mainstream with their peers but also wants to be supported to access the curriculum and also to learn the specialist 'curriculum' that a VI child needs. They feel very frustrated when they have not been taught to use equipment that they know can help them or when they are not taught the Braille they need for a lesson in advance of it cropping up. They feel frustrated when the 'QTVI' who is supposed to teach them does not know any Braille let alone contracted Braille and advanced maths Braille, nor do they know how any assistive tech works and cannot teach them or even support them. They feel frustrated when the only VI skills they are learning are being taught by their mum using tutorials off the internet." (Parent 2)

RNIB Scotland’s 2022 and 2023 Freedom of Information (FOI) reports on VI Education services across Scotland highlight variation in practice and widespread geographical inequalities. See [Freedom of Information Reports | RNIB](https://www.rnib.org.uk/living-with-sight-loss/supporting-others/left-out-of-learning/freedom-of-information-reports/).

We found that:

* There is a variation in service structures and practices;
* A variety of eligibility criteria for allocating support are used;
* Provision of habilitation support varies widely with 10 per cent of services not delivering this element of specialist skills training at all.

This patchwork of inconsistent support has the potential to leave some CYP without the support they need to access education. The combination of caseload numbers and multiple individual needs means that the specialists required to teach and support the development of specialist skills are under significant pressure in terms of time and resource.

Parent 2 summed up barriers they and their vision impaired child faced:

"The main barrier (and it has been huge!) has been in provision of specialist VI support provided by the Council and the precarious, inconsistent and at times, completely hopeless nature of that provision.

"The complete lack of experience of staff in the VI department in the council dealing with a child who has capacity but cannot see, and the complete lack of understanding of the service they are supposed to be managing by the managers in the council. Poor management appears to have been at the route of the issues with the wrong people in the wrong job and no leadership or oversight of what was needed to manage caseloads and provide the right skills at the right time to the right people." (Parent 2)

To ensure that children and young people with vision impairment now, and in the future, can access the support they need to thrive we are calling on Scottish Government to:

* Recognise and reference the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment in ASN policies, guidance and documentation including any new ASN legislation.
* Provide adequate and protected high needs funding for local authorities to develop effective VI team structures and deliver a consistent level of specialist education services, that meet criteria set out in the VINCYP standards, across Scotland to meet the needs of children and young people with VI no matter where they live.
* Take immediate action to boost the numbers of Qualified Teachers for Vision Impairment (QTVIs) and Registered Qualified Habilitation Specialists (RQHSs). This should include a clear and fully funded plan of action to improve recruitment and opportunities to qualify into the profession.
* Implement a clear, fully funded strategy to ensure appropriate access to habilitation services for children and young people with VI across Scotland.
* Support the skills development, and retention of the current workforce through investment in specialist training and career development opportunities.

RNIB Scotland and our campaigning youth forum Haggeye along with RNIB's Children, Young People, Families & Education team would be happy to work with the Scottish Government and other stakeholders to ensure the best outcomes for children and young people with additional needs in Scotland.