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**RNIB Scotland response to the Additional Support for Learning review**

**Introduction**

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 and adults with sight loss and help them to live independent lives.

Blind and partially sighted pupils require additional support over the course of their education in order to access the curriculum, learn practical mobility and habilitation skills and achieve to the same level as their sighted peers. Support for pupils with a visual impairment can be provided on a day to day basis by their regular class teacher. However specialised support provided by Qualified Teachers of children and young people with Vision Impairment (QTVIs) is necessary in order to learn the additional skills required to access the full breadth of education. Between 2010 and 2017 the number of pupils with sight loss doubled to 4331[[1]](#footnote-1) but the provision for pupils with sight loss has not increased to reflect this. We welcome the Scottish Government’s £15million funding commitment for additional support for learning as set out in the 2019 programme for government and urge this to be built on in 2020.

**Presumption of mainstreaming**

RNIB Scotland fully support the presumption of mainstreaming in Scottish education. For the presumption of mainstreaming to work effectively the specialist support that is required must be in place to allow that child or young person to fully access all aspects of school life. For the child or young person with vision impairment, in addition to support to access the curriculum support is required to learn skills sighted children acquire intuitively such as mobility, independent living and social skills. Specialist support from a Qualified Teacher of children and young people with a Vision Impairment (QTVI), a Qualified Habilitation Officer and a Pupil Support Assistant with training in VI education may be required to support access to practical subjects, attend school trips, access break and lunch time activities, in order that the pupil with sight loss feels fully included. Many children and young people report they feel excluded from these aspects which can lead to feelings of isolation and poor mental health.

With early intervention and access to the right support children and young people with vision impairment can go on to achieve their full potential, contribute to society and lead fully independent lives.

**Provision of Qualified Teachers of children and young people with Vision Impairment (QTVIs) in Scotland**

A survey conducted in June 2016 found that there were 94 teachers of pupils with a visual impairment[[2]](#footnote-2) in Scotland. This figure includes both qualified teachers and teachers in training for the qualification. In order to become a Qualified Teacher of children and young people with Vision Impairment (QTVI) teachers must either complete local authority based training as well as achieving a post-graduate certificate, have a relevant Masters degree which meets the competencies of a QTVI or obtain a post-graduate diploma. Just under 31 per cent of the 94 teachers of pupils with a vision impairment were in training at the time of the survey.

The same study reported that the median age of teachers of pupils with a vision impairment was 50 and that the median number of years of experience was 10. This means that QTVIs are a profession which are rapidly approaching retirement. In order for pupils with a vision impairment to have adequate support we believe that they need input from a fully qualified QTVI. However, there is little incentive to obtain the qualification which takes time and money to gain. The Scottish Government should anticipate this potential shortfall in QTVIs and incentivise teachers to obtain the qualification to provide specialised support to pupils with a visual impairment. Incentives could include financial support and time out of class in order to study for the qualification.

As well as QTVIs it is essential that initial teacher training gives teachers a grounding in how to generally support pupils with additional support needs. RNIB Scotland asks that all teachers and pupil support assistants are given training in how to generally support pupils with a vision impairment and how to ensure their lessons are inclusive.

**Attainment**

The attainment gap between pupils with a visual impairment and pupils with no additional support needs begins at the most basic level of qualification that can be obtained in high school and widens as the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) levels progress. Scottish Government figures from 2017/18[[3]](#footnote-3) highlight an attainment gap at all qualification levels.

* Just under 1 in 50 pupils (1.8 per cent) with no additional support need did not obtain at least one National 4. Just under 1 in 5 pupils (19.3 per cent) with a visual impairment did not achieve the same level.
* 92.2 per cent of pupils with no additional support needs achieved at least one National 5 in 2017/18. 64 per cent of pupils with a visual impairment achieved at least one National 5 qualification. This is an attainment gap of 28.2.
* 71.3 per cent of pupils with no additional support needs achieved at least one Higher qualification. 40.2 per cent of pupils with a visual impairment achieved at least one Higher qualification. This is an attainment gap of 31.1.
* 24 per cent of pupils with no additional support needs left school with at least one Advanced Higher. Just under double the percentage of pupils with a visual impairment who left school with at least one Advanced Higher (12.9 per cent).

With the right support visual impairment does not have an impact on the potential of a pupil to achieve. Therefore there is no reason why this attainment gap could not be significantly narrowed if the correct provision was put in place. This gap can adversely affect pupils with a visual impairment’s ability to achieve what they want out of life compared to their sighted peers. A lower attainment rate means a lower acceptance rate into college and university and can adversely affect their chances of obtaining employment. The current employment rate generally for blind and partially sighted people is 26 per cent[[4]](#footnote-4), significantly lower than the employment rate of the general population.

We urge the Scottish Government to produce an additional support for learning attainment gap strategy to close this unnecessary and shocking gap in attainment between pupils with a visual impairment and their sighted peers.

**Asks**

We ask that this review of Additional Support for Learning consider the following actions:

1. Improve the training for all teachers in how to support children and young people with vision impairment and other additional support needs at initial teacher training level.
2. Increase the number of QTVIs and create an incentive and opportunities for teachers to train to become QTVIs.
3. Create more comprehensive training for pupil support assistance to best support children and young people with a vision impairment
4. Acknowledge and make better use of specialist provision and expertise available in grant aided special schools/independent special schools, including making placement where it is the best option for the child or young person.
5. Urge the Scottish Government to commit to further fund additional support for learning on top of the £15 million commitment made in the programme for government 2019.
6. Monitor the attainment gap between pupils with a visual impairment and pupils with no additional support needs and produce a strategy to close the gap by 2030.

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1. https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/dspupcensus/dspupcensus17 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/research/sg\_teachers\_sensory\_impairment.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-attainment-initial-leaver-destinations-1-2019-edition/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.rnib.org.uk/sites/default/files/Employment%20status%20and%20sight%20loss%202017.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)