**Good practice guidelines for Eye Clinic Liaison Officers (ECLOs)**

**Children, young people and families**

**Background**

Most children with a vision impairment are born with their eye condition so they and their families have a different set of needs to older people whose sight loss tends to occur later in life.

**Children and young people with vision impairment**

**How many blind and partially sighted children and young people are there?**

An estimated 0.2 per cent (2 in every 1,000) of children and young people up to the age of 18 in the UK have vision impairment (VI). An estimated 0.05 per cent (5 in every 10,000) are blind. This is based on the WHO international classification of childhood vision impairment. There are around 26,000 children and young people in the UK aged 16 and younger that have vision impairment. As many as 50 per cent may have additional disabilities and/or special educational needs (SEN) including those with very complex needs. Most are born with their vision impairment.

**Where are they educated?**

Most (over two thirds) are educated in mainstream schools, or mainstream schools additionally resourced for blind and partially sighted pupils. Around a third are in special schools for pupils with learning or physical difficulties and around 2 per cent are in special schools designated for blind and partially sighted pupils.

**How do they learn?**

Depending upon the degree and nature of their vision impairment, a learner may use non-sighted or sighted methods - or a combination of both - for accessing the curriculum. Many will use some form of technology or low vision aid. Only around 4 per cent of children and young people use Braille. Blind and partially sighted children with complex needs may use alternative communication systems such as objects of reference.

**How are they supported?**

Specialist support for blind and partially sighted learners is usually provided by the local authority’s Vision Impairment (VI) services via peripatetic advisory teachers of learners with vision impairment. The specialist teacher is often referred to as a **QTVI (qualified teacher of learners with vision impairment)** as they are required to hold a specialist qualification in addition to qualified teacher status. This qualification is known as the mandatory qualification (MQ). **Teaching assistants** (TAs) provide in-class and curriculum support and a mobility teacher/habilitation officer should also be involved. Support should also be available to babies and children with VI in the home and early years settings and young people in post-16 settings, but provision varies.

**What does the law say?**

There is a legal basis to meeting the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) of children. Legislation and terminology vary across the UK but the principles of assessment and providing for a child’s needs are the same. For specific guidance visit [www.rnib.org.uk/children](http://www.rnib.org.uk/children).

ECLOs are well placed to offer information and advice to children, young people and their families and refer to local authority vision impairment services.

**Good practice guidance for ECLOs**

* Children, young people with vision impairment, and families that are in contact with an ECLO should be asked routinely whether they are in touch with the local **vision impairment teaching service**. This is a key referral and is not dependent upon certification. Depending on local procedure, your Ophthalmologist or another professional may already have made the referral but it is important to check anyway.

If families are not in touch with the local VI service, give them the contact details or offer to contact the service on their behalf. Every local authority in England, by law, has to publish their **local offer** of services to families of a child with SEND. RNIB has a database of Local Offer websites for England which have details of every Local Authority’s Visual Impairment Service. You can find the details at [www.rnib.org.uk/sensupport](http://www.rnib.org.uk/sensupport)

Sightline also lists services across the whole UK:

www.sightlinedirectory.org.uk

* Read and become familiar with some key resources and share these with families:
	+ Starting Point – which signposts to sector-wide information, advice and support services. A downloadable leaflet is available at [Starting Point](http://www.vision2020uk.org.uk/startingpoint/) (From Autumn 2019 this has been updated to point towards the new sight advice portal.)
	+ [www.rnib.org.uk/children](http://www.rnib.org.uk/children) for an overview of all RNIB services for children, young people and families.
	+ The RNIB Parents’ Guide is available from [rnib.org.uk/parentsguide](http://www.rnib.org.uk/parentsguide)
	+ The RNIB Play Guide downloadable from [rnib.org.uk/play](http://www.rnib.org.uk/play)
	+ A leaflet giving details of all RNIB’s services for Children, Young People and Families is available to order either via our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 or by email to publicationorders@rnib.org.uk. Ask for the CYPF Services leaflet, code PR20430.
* Referrals to other services could also be considered if appropriate. For example, emotional support is available for both the parent and for the child from the age of 11 <http://www.rnib.org.uk/emotionalsupport>.
* Check whether the parent would like to meet up with others e.g. through a local parent support group. RNIB moderate a Facebook group for parents and carers of children with vision impairment: [www.facebook.com/groups/RNIBConnectparentsandcarers/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/RNIBConnectparentsandcarers/)
* Check whether the child or young person would like to meet others e.g. take part in events, clubs and residentials They should be put in contact with their local RNIB Children, Young People and Families Support Officer in order to find out about local opportunities [www.rnib.org.uk/contacts](http://www.rnib.org.uk/contacts)

**Making a referral**

If a family needs specialist support, RNIB’s team of Family Support Officers can offer information, advice and guidance.

For RNIB ECLOs:

Please use the auto-referral checkbox **RNIB CYPF** in the ECLO Referrals Made output list on OV2. Remember to put the date of entry into the date field or the auto-referral won’t be recorded.

For non-RNIB ECLOs

You can contact the RNIB CYPF team directly by emailing cypf@rnib.org.uk. The mailbox is covered Mon-Fri 9am-5pm. Please provide the following information: name of child, age/date of birth, address, contact information (including name of parent/carer), brief description of the enquiry and any advice already given**.** Ensure all referrals containing personal identifiable data are sent securely, in accordance with GDPR and your organisational policy.

You should get an acknowledgement that a referral has been received by us. If you want to be updated on progress with a case, just ask us in the initial message.

**In Scotland, there is a sector-wide** [**VINCYP pathway**](https://www.vincyp.scot.nhs.uk/professional-resources/pathway/) **to enable smooth and co-ordinated referral for children with VI from health services into wider supportive services in health, education and the voluntary sector. ECLOs in Scotland, please ensure that you are following the VINCYP arrangements for your own hospital/local area.**

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