

# Unlocking education for all

Curriculum Framework for Children and Young  
People with Vision Impairment in England



Developed with

**R N I B**

See differently



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



# Unlocking education for all

We too often hear stories from children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), their parents and carers and from those that support them about things going wrong. Getting the right support in place is too often a fraught experience for all. The impact of this on those individuals with SEND can be significant. More needs to be done.

It is vital that for low incidence disabilities, such as vision impairment (VI), there is a shared understanding of the needs of the child or young person (CYP) being supported. The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) provides much needed definition and shared language of the specialist skill development required for CYP with VI.

The CFVI will help children and young people with VI and specialist educators along with education professionals in all sectors, parents and carers, to navigate the complexities of specialist support for VI education within the context of the broader life skills required. It will enable better partnership working and importantly puts the CYP at the centre of their pathway to adulthood. For VI specialists it provides a more consistent approach and for non-specialists it helps to demystify specialist skill development to enable more effective inclusive learning practices.



nasen works to ensure the workforce is fully equipped to meet the needs of learners with SEND. The CFVI will support professionals to deliver the best for the CYP they support. Used in the right way, the CFVI can transform lives; this is why we are calling for the CFVI to be formally recognised as a vital resource in supporting policy across the UK.

**Annamarie Hassall MBE,**  
Chief Executive Officer, National  
Association for Special Educational  
Needs (nasen)

# Contents

2	Unlocking education for all	10	Case study: A young person's experience
4	Introducing the CFVI: A framework for unlocking education	11	Locked out of post-16 education
5	Succeeding by working together	11	Locked out of the workplace
7	The value of specialist education	12	When it goes wrong
8	Case study: Amanda Bayley-Sunter QTVI – How the CFVI helps prioritise children's needs	13	Getting the funding right
9	A fragmented education	13	What needs to happen next
		14	Conclusion
		15	References



# Introducing the CFVI: A framework for unlocking education

Accessing education and support for children and young people (CYP) with a vision impairment (VI) can be complex. Evidence shows the current system is failing; a lack of support can prevent CYP from developing the skills needed to achieve their potential in adulthood.

The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment (CFVI) for the first time offers a UK wide framework for specialist and non-specialist practitioners, CYP with VI and their families and carers to unlock and navigate necessary support and education.

The CFVI helps by addressing the many issues experienced by CYP with VI, including:

- The attainment gap between CYP with VI and the general population
- Poor employment outcomes, including high vulnerability of becoming long term NEET (not in education, employment or training)
- Poor social inclusion, mental health and wellbeing
- Inconsistent provision of specialist support
- Lack of joined up working between specialist and non-specialist professionals.

The framework has been developed in consultation with professionals, CYP, parents and carers. The Delphi method was used, which involved repeatedly returning to this panel

of experts until consensus was achieved. It has been extremely well received within the vision impairment education sector, with 95 per cent either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the final framework [1].

The CFVI offers a transformative contribution to UK policies and practices in ensuring CYP with VI can navigate complex education systems and secure equitable access to the services to which they are entitled. Its implementation can lead to a more inclusive education.

To succeed, we are calling for the CFVI to be:

- Recognised and referenced in England SEND policies, including the new SEND national standards
- Embedded in local authority service commissioning and delivery frameworks
- Adopted to underpin practice in all education settings supporting children and young people with vision impairment and their families, in partnership with VI specialists
- Embedded within quality standards for teachers of children and young people with vision impairment and habilitation specialists across the UK.

How the CFVI is implemented in each of the UK nations will vary, there are separate reports setting the evidence and asks for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

# Succeeding by working together

Vision impairment is a high need, low incidence disability and the support needed will differ greatly between individuals. For many CYP with VI, navigating the complexities of education is hugely burdensome. This does not need to be the case. Mainstream teachers and other professionals involved in education are likely to have little or no experience of supporting CYP with VI. Use of the CFVI can improve understanding to ensure that there is fair and equitable access to education, as well as the right support to maximise independence and prepare CYP with VI for adulthood.

## Access to learning and learning to access

In order to get the most of education, CYP with VI need specific support, guidance and specialist teaching to access the curriculum.

The CFVI sets out 11 areas of learning and example outcomes. These take a holistic approach and consider the developmental, educational, social and wellbeing needs of CYP between the ages of 0-25.

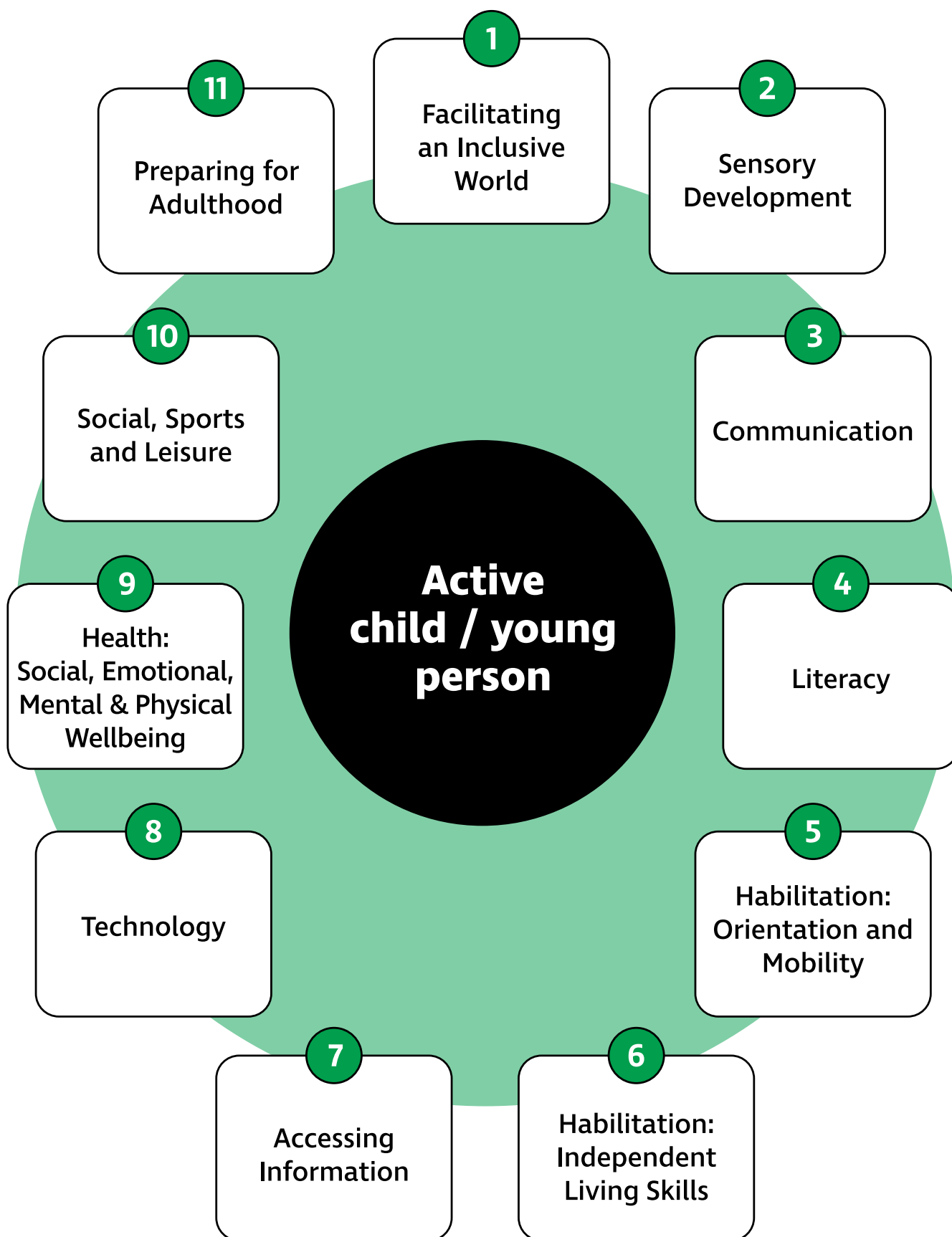
This includes the use of technology, for example the ability to touch type and read back using a screen reader for revision; accessing learning materials; habilitation, such as the ability to use mobility and orientation skills to move between lessons; literacy, for instance the development of braille literacy to access all core curriculum areas; and preparation for adulthood, such as career planning or transitions

into assisted living placements. An overview of the CFVI is provided in Figure 1. The framework helps CYP to develop a broad range of specialist skills, acquire the information and experiences needed in preparation for leaving education and supports social and emotional development.

Central to this approach is the dual access model, known as **'access to learning'** and **'learning to access'**. This is the acknowledgement that inclusive education is promoted by balancing universal inclusive practice with specialist skills-based interventions. This ensures CYP with VI have fair access to a shared curriculum and education system while developing the specialist skills to develop personal agency and increase independence. This philosophy is true for all CYP with VI – young or old, with or without additional and complex needs – and the CFVI promotes this by setting high expectations of education at all levels in all settings.



**Figure 1:** Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI)

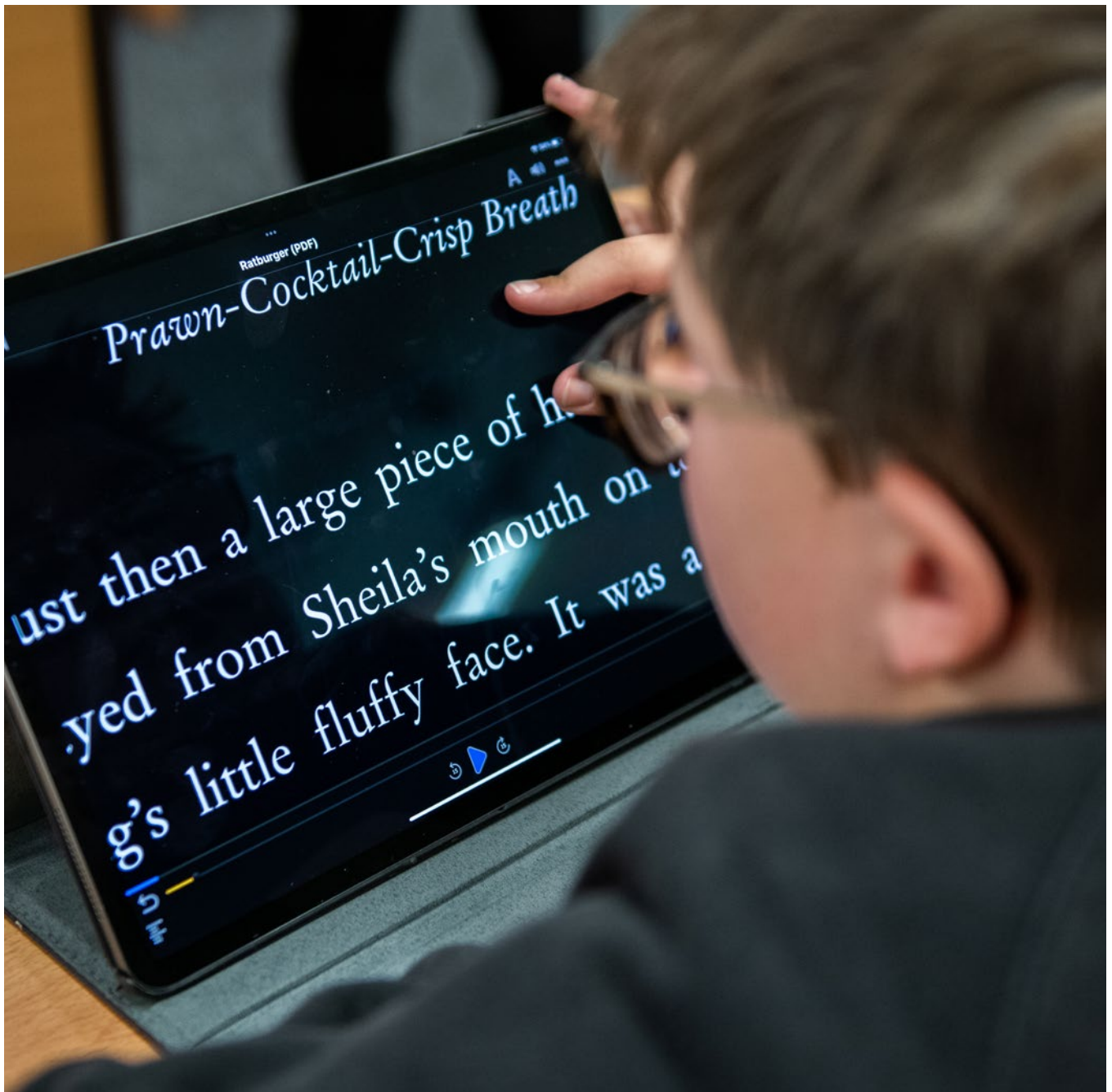


## The value of specialist education

CYP with VI need to be taught a range of specialist skills, by specialist educators that promote independent learning, mobility, everyday living and social communication. Teaching and support is provided by Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVIs), Registered Qualified

Habilitation Specialists (RQHSs) and specialist trained Teaching Assistants (TAs). Their role is to support the development of skills needed to live independently as adults, succeed in education, enter employment and advise non-specialists and families on how best to facilitate this.

The CFVI provides a shared language and agreed approach for both specialist and non-specialist education professionals to collaborate and support CYP with VI.



## **Case study:** Amanda Bayley-Sunter QTVI – How the CFVI helps prioritise children’s needs

**Amanda Bayley-Sunter is a qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVI) and is Service Manager of Doncaster’s Service for Children with Vision Impairment.**

The CFVI provides us with a tool to help explain and prioritise the needs of the whole child. The need to teach skills for independence is central to the framework enabling our work to focus on what life is going to be like for that child through to adulthood and what needs to be put in place to prepare them for that.

---

**“I think if it [CFVI] is nationally recognised it would absolutely be a godsend. Continuity and consistency of specialist VI education is a big challenge”.**

---

We often need to deliver the same training course over again as knowledge is often lost. Whilst the CFVI doesn’t replace the need for training, by setting out a shared language and approach that both schools and parents can access, it helps to shape and set out what support and interventions can be made available.

The CFVI will help parents as well. They can see the journey that they’re going to go on.



A parent might be confused about why for their child, at four years old, you are teaching left, right, forwards and backwards, which is in order for them to develop skills and confidence in orientating themselves around a new environment.

---

**“The CFVI lays out the path that’s in front of them and gives reasons for the work that we’re doing and again introduces them to that whole concept of whole child and lifelong impact.”**

---



# A fragmented education

CYP with VI are not being given access to the specialist support they need to participate and thrive in education. Research consistently highlights the importance of specialist support to ensure that CYP with VI have the best opportunity to progress academically and to continue to live as independently as possible [2]. However, without access to the specialist support they need, we know many CYP are being let down and left behind.

The RNIB Freedom of Information (FOI) report 2022 highlights variation in practice and widespread geographical inequalities: [3]

- There is a variation in service structures, practices and budgets across local authorities in England
- In 2022, 61 per cent of local authorities reported a decrease or freeze in the number of QTVIs despite rising caseloads

This patchwork of inconsistent support has the potential to leave some CYP without the support they need to access education.

With growing caseloads, the specialists needed to teach and support the development of specialist skills are under increasing pressure in terms of time and resources. Due to budgetary constraints, it can be difficult for CYP with VI to receive the support they need unless they have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) however, these are often only offered to those with additional complex support needs [4]. RNIB's latest FOI report showed just under half of the total number of CYP aged 0-25 on vision impairment service caseloads had an EHCP. [3]



## Case study: A young person's experience

---

"I am 15 years old and currently studying my GCSEs. I have rod-cone dystrophy which was diagnosed aged eight. I could say a lot about each area of the curriculum framework as they are all relevant, but the one that speaks to me most is 'facilitating an inclusive world.'"

---

Starting secondary school, lots of my teachers were reliant on me telling them my support needs when I didn't know as I wasn't aware of what was available. Some teachers said that I needed to tell them if I couldn't see something so that they knew how to work around what I can't see, but I can't tell them what I can't see because I can't see it. I know self-advocacy is part of life and I'm happy to do it, but often it's small things that aren't put into practice. Doing this work can get exhausting.

My vision has deteriorated to the point where it's not very useful and I need to develop skills like using braille and speech software alongside exam preparation. I wish that this could have been started earlier.

It's not a fair playing field, many of the things available to my peers for exam revision are not available to me. I can't access the same past papers and model examples as they aren't accessible. It's not just that I need more time in exams, it also takes me more time to do the learning alongside learning additional skills. I could find material online but it would have to be adapted or I would need to use a voice reader, however I haven't been taught how to use that fully yet.

If the framework was used to set out my learning this would definitely benefit me, my school, family and friends.



## Locked out of post-16 education

The inconsistency in support is further exacerbated in post-16 education. Despite a legal requirement for all young people to remain in education up to the age of 18, for many the support ends when they leave school.

The 'Give me Access to College' report (2022) by Thomas Pocklington Trust (TPT) found that parents and young people do not have a clear understanding of how to access specialist provision or whether they are eligible for support. The report finds that: [5]

- There is a fragmented and unreliable system of support for students with VI as they leave secondary education
- Nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of local authorities provide different post-16 provision depending on whether someone studies in a mainstream or a sixth form college
- There is a wide array of different criteria for assessing the needs of students with VI.

## Locked out of the workplace

TPT's 'Careers education information and guidance support in England' report found that specialist professionals are often not included in conversations relating to transition planning and career preparation [4]. This means that guidance received by CYP with VI does not often adequately consider their disability.

The CFVI can assist qualified specialist VI educators to raise awareness of the need for CYP with VI to be taught skills that enable access to the curriculum and their community as independently as possible. It also helps to ensure that CYP with VI receive tailored information and guidance to make decisions about their future. The formal adoption of the CFVI can establish equitable access to services across England and the UK to support a collaborative way of working.

# When it goes wrong

While there is evidence demonstrating how specialist education can improve outcomes for CYP with VI, there is also extensive evidence highlighting what can go wrong when they are denied access to the support they need.

## Attainment gap

For those CYP with VI accessing National Curriculum assessments and end of Key Stage 4 examinations there is a consistent and significant attainment gap between CYP with VI and their peers without a special educational need or disability. At Key Stage 1, the gap is 33 per cent [6]. This gap falls to 21 per cent by Key Stage 4, demonstrating the impact which can be made by receiving educational support, but there is still a significant difference which needs to be addressed. [7]

## Vulnerability to becoming long-term NEET

Government statistics show that CYP with VI are almost twice as likely to be not in employment, education or training (NEET) as their sighted peers. [8]

Several factors can risk a CYP with VI becoming NEET such as attaining lower levels of qualification, not being able to access education, limited opportunities for work experience and a lack of tailored careers guidance. [9]

## Limited independence

A high proportion of CYP with VI are unable to access habilitation support to enable them to develop the orientation, mobility and independent living skills that they need for both education and in young adulthood. [3]

The impact of VI on social inclusion can be significant. For example, young adults with VI often do not apply for jobs in unfamiliar locations because they lack the confidence to travel independently. [2]

## Wellbeing gap

CYP with VI report lower wellbeing and poorer mental health than their fully sighted peers. At age 17, CYP with VI were five times more likely to 'feel depressed all or most of the time'. [12]

There are added pressures on CYP with VI, such as inaccessible systems, needing to repeatedly advocate for necessary adjustments and feeling socially excluded. [12]



## Getting the funding right

To succeed, the CFVI needs a system that can respond to the needs of CYP with VI. As already highlighted, the specialist workforce has reduced and for many local authorities there is simply not the capacity to support the entire cohort of students aged 0-25 with a VI and in particular those in post-16 education. Over the last five years more than a third of local authorities' VI education teams have had their budget cut at least once [3].

How local authorities access and allocate funding varies and, worryingly, statutory services are often only available if an EHCP is in place, locking a number of CYP with VI out of accessing support.

As VI is a low incidence disability, economies of scale do not allow for all schools and FE settings to recruit their own specialist workforce. There needs to be centralised services that can support CYP with VI in their chosen education setting.

That is why, as part of the government's review of funding for SEND support, there must be a protected centralised budget that local authorities can access to meet the needs of low incidence disability populations such as VI.

## What needs to happen next

The changes to the SEND system in England provide an opportunity for these issues to be addressed. We are calling on Government to ensure that:

**The CFVI is recognised and referenced in English SEND policies, including the new SEND national standards.**

The inequities in education provision and support available for CYP with VI cannot continue. The CFVI shares the ambition of the proposed national standards and as it is grounded in both research and practice, it provides the evidence base on how to support CYP with VI.

**The CFVI is embedded in local authority service commissioning and delivery frameworks.**

It is not enough for professionals to opt into the use of the framework on a voluntary basis. To end continuation of geographical inequities, it must be adopted across all local authorities.

**The CFVI is followed by all educational settings supporting CYP with vision impairment and their families, in partnership with VI specialists.**

It is a legal requirement for all young people up to the age of 18 years to remain in education and therefore the support must be available across all education settings, from nursery to further education.

## The CFVI is embedded within quality standards and professional training for teachers of CYP with VI and habilitation specialists across the UK.

The clarity provided by the CFVI will resolve confusion over what support CYP with VI need and who is responsible or qualified to deliver this.

## There is adequate centralised funding for local authorities to access to support from their local VI populations.

We need to ensure that there is an equity of provision across the country so that children, young people, their families and carers and educational professionals can be supported by a specialist workforce.

## Conclusion

CYP with VI should have equitable access to opportunities in life, however, all the evidence tells us that their education is currently failing to deliver this. The CFVI provides an opportunity for a consistent approach for those CYP with VI aged 0-25. Formal adoption of the CFVI will enable the framework to have the greatest impact, allowing the potential of CYP with VI to be fully realised.

### For further information

You can read more about the CFVI at: [rnib.in/CFVI](https://rnib.in/CFVI) or email us at: [CYPF@rnib.org.uk](mailto:CYPF@rnib.org.uk)



# References

1. Hewett et al. (in press). Development of a new curriculum framework for children and young people with vision impairment: a United Kingdom consultation using Delphi approach. *British Journal of Vision Impairment*.
2. Reflections of Transition Experiences by Young People with Visual Impairments aged 19-22, University of Birmingham, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/education/victar/reflections-of-transition-experiences-accessible.pdf>
3. RNIB Freedom of Information Reports, RNIB, Freedom of Information Reports <https://www.rnib.org.uk/living-with-sight-loss/supporting-others/left-out-of-learning/freedom-of-information-reports/>
4. Careers Education Information and Guidance Support in England, University of Birmingham and Thomas Pocklington Trust, <https://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/student-support/professionals/careers-advice-research/>
5. Give me Access to College, Thomas Pocklington Trust, Give Me Access To College – Thomas Pocklington Trust ([pocklington-trust.org.uk](http://pocklington-trust.org.uk)) November 2022
6. Key stage one statistics, Department for Education <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-key-stage-1>
7. Key stage four statistics, Department for Education <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-gcses-key-stage-4>
8. NEET aged 16-21, Department for Education, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/neet-age-16-to-24-2021>
9. Lost in Transition? The post-school experiences of young people with vision impairment, University of Birmingham, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/education/victar/lost-in-transition.pdf>
10. Making childhood equal. The need to increase habilitation support for children and young people with vision impairment, Thomas Pocklington Trust and Guide Dogs, <https://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Making-Childhood-Equal-Habilitation-Research-2020-compressed.pdf>
11. Hewett, R., Douglas, G., McLinden, M., James, L., Brydon, G., Chattaway, T., Cobb, R., Keil, S., Raisanen, S., Sutherland, C., Taylor, J., (2022) Curriculum Framework for Children and young People with Vision Impairment [CFVI]: Defining specialist skills development and best practice support to promote equity, inclusion and personal agency. RNIB
12. Secondary analysis of the Millennium Cohort Survey: Sight impairment at ages seven and eleven, RNIB, 2022, <https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/health-social-care-education-professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/reports-and-insight/secondary-analysis-of-the-millennium-cohort-survey/>

---

## Contact details



**cypf@rnib.org.uk**



**[www.rnib.org.uk/cfvi](http://www.rnib.org.uk/cfvi)**