

Unlocking education for all

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



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Unlocking education for all

We too often hear stories from children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN), 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 ASN 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 ASN. 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.

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Introducing the CFVI: A framework for unlocking education

Accessing education and support for children and young people (CYP) with vision impairment (VI) can be complex. Evidence shows that 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 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 a 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 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.

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

Succeeding by working together

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 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

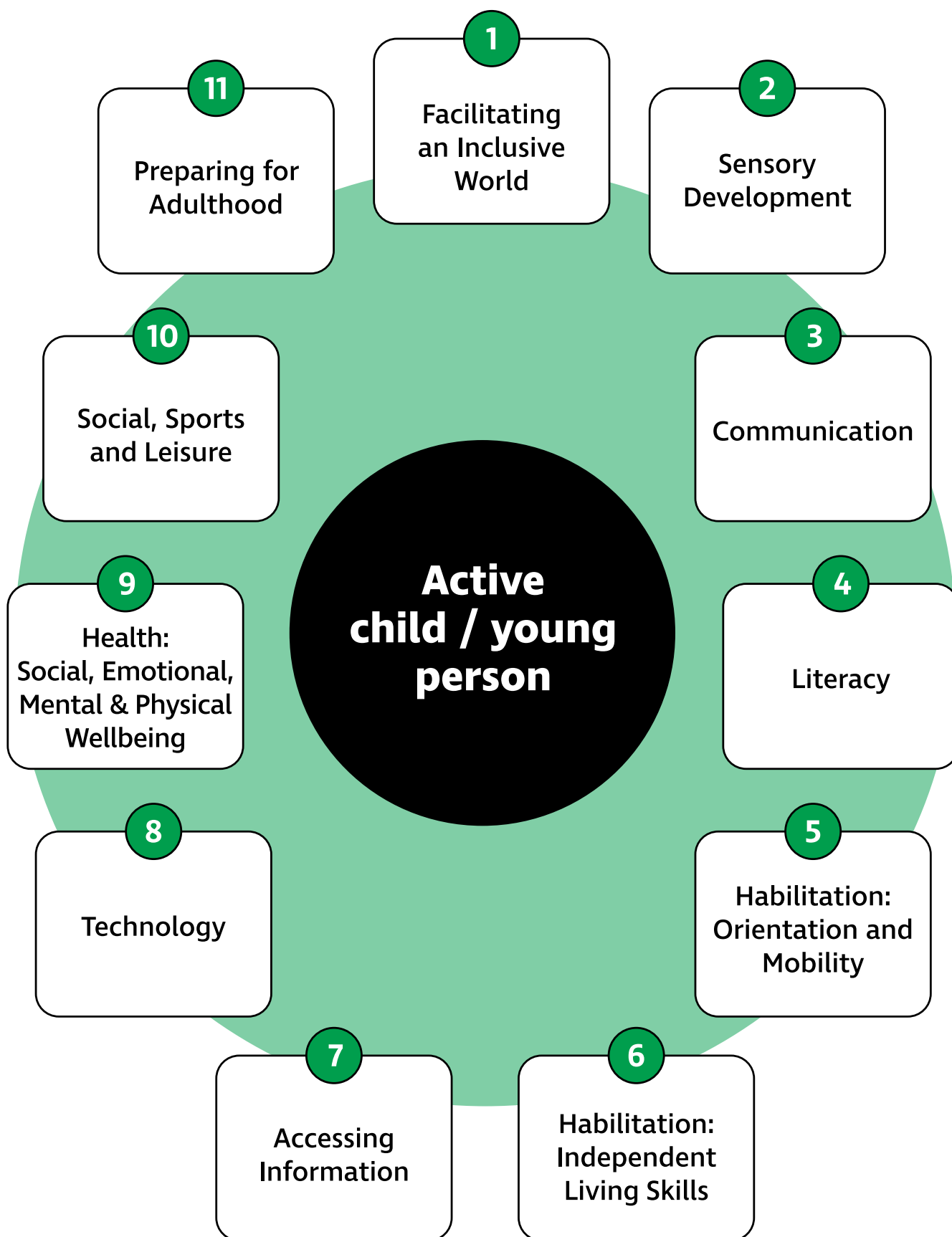
In order to get the most out of education, CYP with VI need specific support, guidance and specialist teaching to access the curriculum. The CFVI sets out 11 areas of learning and example outcomes. These take a holistic approach and consider the developmental, educational, social and wellbeing needs of CYP with VI. 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)

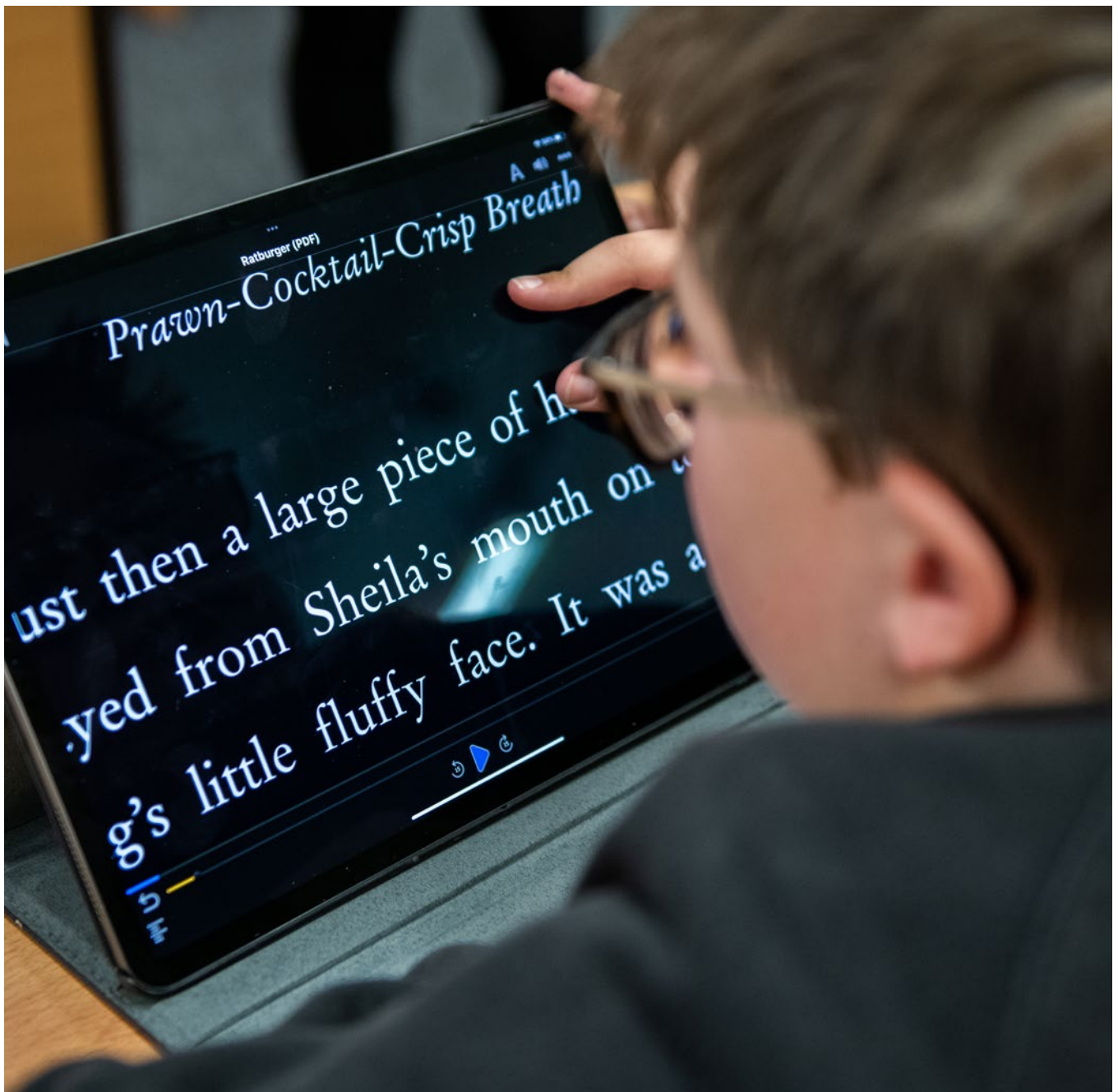


The value of specialist education

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 and participate 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: Lisa Kelly, QTVI

Lisa Kelly is a qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVI) for North Lanarkshire's Visual Impairment Service. She is also Chair of SAVIE (Scottish Association for Visual Impairment Education)

Working as a QTVI means that you develop very strong relationships with your students. You use your intuition to decide exactly what it is they need to develop their wider skills. But however good your intuition is, as teachers we still engage in that report writing

process to complete the learning and teaching cycle.

"I have found that the CFVI has been a great resource to reference when I am creating my individual educational plans."

It also gives me a shared language to use with my students, so they're involved in setting the targets as well. I really look forward to using it more in my role.



A fragmented education

CYP with VI are not being given access to the specialist support they need to participate and thrive in education. Specialist support ensures that CYP with VI have the best opportunity to progress academically and to continue to live as independent a life as possible.

The RNIB Scotland Freedom of Information (FOI) report 2022 highlights variation in practice and widespread geographical inequalities [2]. Across local authorities in Scotland:

- 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% 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.



Case study: A young person's experience

Ellie is 20 and is volunteering with VI and mental health organisations. She's registered Severely Sight Impaired and has light perception only.

"I went to mainstream school. I had a Classroom Assistant all the time. She gave me more direct support at primary school and moved into the background when I got older. She was still supporting me, but she wanted me to be as independent as I could. My first VI teacher taught me Braille."

I went to a secondary school with a resource base, where the VI teacher supported me with maths and music theory.

"Braille skills helped me a lot. Although I don't use it as much now, it's great for checking the labels on medication. This is important to me, because my health information is personal."

I learned cane skills from when I was 7 or 8. I knew how to use the cane properly and went over routes through my primary school. From P6 onwards, my Mobility Officer took me to the secondary school once a week to learn the

routes I'd need. She was keen that I be independent when I got there so I could be included.

I also learned assistive technology skills from a young age. I learned how to touch type in primary school and I got a laptop with a screen reader in S1. I've been using screen reading technology ever since. Technology helps me integrate into the world.

I think being allowed to navigate busy environments on my own would have helped me. Even though I knew the routes, one of my teachers wouldn't let me leave class without someone with me. I think she was worried about safety. I was uncomfortable with this because I was 16 at the time. My Classroom Assistant was great, but other people tend to stay away from you when there is an adult there. I think it's important for students to learn to be more assertive and advocate for ourselves.

The Curriculum Framework would have been good for me. It would have helped to have those definite areas to work on. My school focused on results and doing well in exams, but you need independence skills to move on successfully.

Locked out of post-16 education

The inconsistency in support is further exacerbated in post-16 education. For many young people, the support drops off when they leave school.

In Scotland, QTVIs support students in mainstream schools who remain in formal education post-16. If a pupil moves to a local further education college, it is the college's disability service that holds the budget to provide the support. As vision impairment is a low incidence disability, it is possible that FE college disability services will lack knowledge of specific needs of this group of students.

ARC Scotland's 'Principles of Good Transitions' (Principle 3), carried out on behalf of the Scottish Transitions Forum, recommends that transitions for students with Additional Support Needs should be planned from an early stage.

- Planning should be available from age 14 and be proportionate to need
- Children's plans and assessments should be adopted by adult services
- Transitions planning and support should continue to age 25. [3]

As part of the Scottish Government's consultation on their proposed Transitions Bill, they met with the Haggeye Youth Forum, a forum for VI young people aged 16 plus with vision impairment, supported by RNIB Scotland.

They raised several points which underline the importance of having a planned and monitored process for transition to adulthood. The following statements have been anonymised: One member received 11 years of support while at primary and secondary school but "when it came to leaving school, the support vanished". Another said that she felt fortunate to have an extra year at school after losing her sight in her sixth year and to have the support of a QTVI and use of a Vision Book and magnifier. However, at college she found "one lecturer was very hostile to disability, providing information in font size 8." [4]

Locked out of the workplace

Where specialist professionals are not included in conversations relating to transition planning and career preparation, guidance received by CYP with VI is often not adequately considering their disability.

RNIB recently interviewed some young people in Scotland about careers advice and vision impairment. Summer is now at university. She reflected that the school careers service didn't have a good understanding of her vision impairment.

"I didn't have much careers advice in school and what I had with my class was very visual and interactive. It wasn't accessible to me. I remember a one-to-one session with a careers

officer who didn't know how little vision I had. She was trying to show me job access websites on her computer screen. I don't have a CV yet and that makes it difficult now that I'm thinking about work."

The Haggeye Youth Forum's recent response to Scotland's 'Let's Talk Scottish Education' consultation recommended that children and young people with Additional Support Needs have a universal plan which addresses all key transitions points and extends beyond school. This plan should contain information about the access needs of pupils/students with vision impairment and be shared with all staff supporting them. [5]

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 Scotland and the UK to support a collaborative way of working.



When it goes wrong

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

Attainment gap

There is a significant attainment gap between CYP with VI and their peers without additional support needs. Statistics show a 25% gap between school leavers with VI who had one or more qualifications at SCQF Level 5 (National 5) or better and school leavers with no additional support need, a significant difference which needs to be addressed. [6]

Vulnerability to becoming long-term NEET

Government statistics show that CYP with a disability are twice as likely to be not in employment, education or training (NEET) than their non-disabled peers. [7]

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.

In their response to the 'Let's Talk Scottish Education' consultation, 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 the curriculum 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. [5]

Inclusion Scotland's policy statement on employment points out that:

"Lots of disabled people want to work and can work. We experience barriers to getting work and advancing in our careers such as inaccessible workplaces, inflexible working practices, a lack of support for disabled people and employers, and employers not knowing about the support that exists." [8]

Limited independence

CYP with VI in some areas of Scotland 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 [2].

The impact on social inclusion can be significant. For example, young people with VI are unlikely to apply for jobs in unfamiliar locations if they lack the confidence to travel independently.

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". [9]

There is added pressure on CYP with VI, with them having to deal with inaccessible systems, needing to repeatedly advocate for necessary adjustments and feeling socially excluded. [9]

Getting the funding right

To succeed the CFVI needs a system that is able to respond to the needs of CYP with VI. RNIB's 2023 FOI found that over the last three years more than one third of Local Authorities in Scotland have had the budget which funds the VI service decreased or frozen at least once. [2]

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 there must be a protected centralised pot of money that local authorities can access to meet the needs of low incidence disability populations.

What needs to happen next

The reform of Scotland's education system provides an opportunity for these issues to be addressed. We are calling on Government to ensure that:

The CFVI is recognised and referenced in Scotland Additional Support for Learning policies.

The inequities in education provision and support available for CYP with VI cannot continue. The CFVI shares the ambition of the Curriculum for Excellence and provides the evidence base on how to support CYP with VI.

The CFVI is embedded in local authority service 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 children and young people with vision impairment and their families, in partnership with VI specialists.

Specialist support must be available across all education settings. The CFVI is embedded within competence frameworks for teachers of children with vision impairment 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 and protected high needs funding to deliver specialist education services which meet the needs of children and young people with VI from 0-19.

We need to ensure that there is consistent, sustainable provision so that 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 to implement a consistent approach to the provision of specialist support throughout education. 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 or email us at: CYPF@rnib.org.uk

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