



## **The Specialist Vision Impairment Workforce and their vital role in unlocking inclusive education and life opportunities for children and young people with vision impairment**

### **Executive summary**

Limited access to specialist support for children and young people with vision impairment can negatively impact on attainment and educational and social inclusion. This has implications on the outcomes of this population as they transition into adulthood.

### **Policy recommendations**

1. The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) to be embedded within National Standards to address inconsistencies in specialist support.
2. Centralised and protected funding for Local Authorities to support their local populations.
3. Research into how best to mobilise specialist sensory professionals in FE/HE.

### **About the research**

The ongoing input of specialist vision impairment professionals such as Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVIs) and Habilitation specialists is essential for children and young people (CYP) with vision impairment (VI) to have an inclusive education and to receive the specialist support they require to be best prepared for independent adulthood. In this briefing we provide evidence of:

The difference that specialist support makes to CYP with VI.

The importance of adopting the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) in National Standards to facilitate partnerships between specialist and non-specialist professionals and families.

Service gaps in specialist support in Further and Higher Education.

A key challenge for low incidence disability groups is that educational needs and appropriate educational approaches are commonly not recognised by non-specialists working with CYP. The advisory and collaborative role of the specialist workforce is crucial in setting high expectations and designing inclusive educational interventions which lead to successful outcomes. Therefore, the arguments made for vision impairment are of general value for other low incidence disability groups (e.g. Deaf education and multisensory impairment).

Similarly, emerging research from our wider sensory team reveals how much parents rely on Teachers of the Deaf as a key source of support for their child's academic and social outcomes.

Moving forward, it is vital that specialist professionals in Local Authorities can access centralised funding to meet the needs of all CYP with sensory impairment.

### ***Embedding the Curriculum Framework***

The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment (CFVI) presents an approach for addressing many of these issues. The CFVI is designed to support the partnership between specialist and non-specialist professionals, families and the CYP – the Framework sets out a shared language which can be used in EHC plans, IEPs and transition planning. The framework is developed for CYP aged 0-25 and presents important learning outcomes within 11 areas. The CFVI has been extremely well received within the VI sector and is the result of a national consultation drawing upon expertise from specialist professionals, parents and CYP with VI. The CFVI has been extremely well received within the VI education sector and 95% were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the final framework.

Our research evidence shows that all too often the specialist professionals are not utilised, which can mean that the needs of the CYP with VI are overlooked. Implementation of the CFVI will lead to a more inclusive education for CYP with VI. It will ensure CYP with VI will more easily be able to navigate complex education systems and secure equitable access to the services to which they are entitled, addressing national inconsistencies.

### ***Gaps in support in Further and Higher Education***

Our longitudinal research and research from Thomas Pocklington Trust has identified gaps in specialist support in HE and FE, e.g. VI HE students are often not able to access their DSA allocated support, in particular the services of Specialist Support Professionals and Mobility trainers. QTVIs and Habilitation specialists are best qualified to provide this support, but shortages in the workforce and funding limitations mean very few Local Authorities have registered as providers for FE and HE. This can lead to students with VI dropping out of their courses, repeating years

or not achieving their potential. Further research is needed to understand the barriers faced in FE and HE, and how the specialist workforce might best be mobilised for post-16 learners.

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