# Education provision for children and young people with vision impairment in Scotland, 2022

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## Contents

[i. Glossary 2](#_Toc103952170)

[Foreword 3](#_Toc103952171)

[1. Introduction 3](#_Toc103952172)

[2. Summary of findings 3](#_Toc103952173)

[3. Method 4](#_Toc103952174)

[4. Findings 4](#_Toc103952175)

[4.1 Children and young people supported by local authority services 4](#_Toc103952176)

[4.2 Teachers and support staff 6](#_Toc103952177)

[4.3 Habilitation 7](#_Toc103952178)

[5. Conclusion 8](#_Toc103952179)

# i. Glossary

The following table is a glossary containing acronyms used in this report and their definitions. There are two columns. The first column contains the acronym, and the second column contains the definition.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **ASN**  **CFVI**  **CSP** | Additional Support Needs  Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment  Co-ordinated Support Plan |
| **CYP** | Children and Young People |
| **DHT** | Deputy Headteacher |
| **FOI** | Freedom of Information |
| **FTE** | Full-time Equivalent |
| **GIRFEC** | Getting It Right For Every Child |
| **HI** | Hearing Impairment |
| **LA** | Local Authority |
| **MQ** | Mandatory Qualification |
| **MSI** | Multi-sensory Impairment |
| **NatSIP**  **PLP** | National Sensory Impairment Partnership  Personal Learning Plan |
| **PSA** | Pupil Support Assistant |
| **QTMSI** | Qualified Teacher of children and young people with Multi-Sensory Impairment |
| **QTVI** | Qualified Teacher of children and young people with Vision Impairment |
| **RNIB** | Royal National Institute of Blind People |
| **SEN** | Special Educational Needs |
| **SEND** | Special Educational Needs and Disabilities |
| **TA** | Teaching Assistant |
| **ToD** | Teacher of the Deaf |
| **VI** | Vision Impairment |
| **VINCYP** | Visual Impairment Network for Children and Young People |

# Foreword

Every child has a right to an education that gives them the opportunity to maximise their potential, allowing them to develop as an individual.

Over recent years, concerns over the educational attainment of Scotland’s children and young people with a vision impairment, as compared to the general school population, continue to surface.  The Third Sector, including RNIB Scotland, seeks to work with partners to keep education firmly on the agenda of decision makers.

This report examines the provision of Qualified Teachers of children and young people with a Vision Impairment (QTVIs) in Scotland’s schools. QTVIs are a fundamental part of the educational pathway of pupils with vision impairment and must be effectively resourced.

We seek to set out in one document the information provided to us by 30 of the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland to contribute to the ongoing discussion about the provision of education for children and young people with vision impairment in our school system.

Although the true number is likely to be slightly higher, the report responses indicate an active service caseload of 2,686 children and young people with a vision impairment. It is the responsibility of society, and government, to ensure them the best possible educational experience.

We are very grateful to the following networks and organisations for their contributions to this report: The Visual Impairment Network for Children and Young People (VINCYP), the Scottish Sensory Centre, the Scottish Association for Vision Impairment Education (SAVIE) and the University of Edinburgh, where Scotland’s Mandatory Qualification course for QTVIs is delivered.

James Adams

Director, RNIB Scotland

# 1. Introduction

Provision for specialist educational support for children with a vision impairment (VI) is essential to ensure they are not disadvantaged in their education. In order to better understand and monitor the provision of specialist education services for children with a vision impairment, RNIB Scotland has decided to run an annual survey of local authorities across Scotland. This report summarises findings from the recent Freedom of Information (FOI) survey in Spring 2022.

To ensure children and young people with VI have equality in education, provision needs to be delivered more consistently, including through adequate and protected funding.

# 2. Summary of findings

* We received replies from 94% (30/32) of Scotland’s local authorities.
* From responses received, the total number of children and young people with a vision impairment on active service caseloads across Scotland is 2,686.
* A variety of eligibility criteria for allocating support are used across the 30 LAs including VINCYP, NatSIP, child’s individual needs or a combination of frameworks.
* Of the 30 LAs who responded, 87% employ Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment (QTVIs) directly, 10% said QTVIs were delivered by an external organisation and 3% of QTVIs are shared with another local authority.
* One third of responding LAs employ a pupil support assistant (PSA) to work specifically with CYP with VI.
* There are 554 pupils across 30 local authorities currently on active habilitation caseloads.
* 10% of local authorities do not deliver habilitation services; these local authorities support 399 children and young people with vision impairment.

# 3. Method

In February 2022, RNIB Scotland contacted the 32 local authorities in Scotland, asking a range of questions about current and future education provision for children and young people with vision impairment.

30 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland responded or had a response provided from a consortium, giving an overall response rate of 94%.

# 4. Findings

## 4.1 Children and young people supported by local authority services

### Caseload

The total number of children and young people with vision impairment on active service caseload is 2,686. However, the true number is likely to be slightly higher as three local authorities did not provide a response to this question. Of those on active caseload, 81% attend mainstream schools and 19% attend a special school.

The table below illustrates the breakdown of CYP on active caseload by age group. Just under a third of children and young people sit within P4 – P7, followed by S1 – S3.

**Table: Proportion of CYP on active caseload by group**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Age Group | Proportion on active caseload |
| 0 – 3 years | 6% |
| P1 – P3 | 16% |
| P4 – P7 | 23% |
| S1 – S3 | 21% |
| S4 – S6 | 17% |

The number of children and young people known to the service but not actively receiving support is an additional 243. The majority of these sit under the advice on request category (44%); the rest are educated at a specialist school (43%), home educated (7%), or out of local authority area placements (4%).

### Braille users

The total number of children and young people supported across the 30 local authorities that use braille as their sole or main literacy medium is 33. If we take into account children and young people who are dual medium users, using a combination of braille and large print, this number increases to 52.

Three local authorities specified having less than five CYP using braille, whilst another local authority stated they did not hold this information.

It is difficult to get a true picture of the number due to the low number of authorities providing figures; particularly where LAs have answered ‘less than 5’ or ‘less than 10’, these have not been included in the counts. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the true number of children with VI in Scotland using braille as sole or dual medium is likely to be higher than even the number quoted here, 52.

### Criteria for allocating support levels

When asked about the criteria used for allocating levels of support, local authorities were able to select multiple answers. Of 30 authorities, a third (33%) said they used the VINCYP framework, while a further 23% said they used the NatSIP Eligibility Framework. 27% said support was provided based on a child’s individual needs; this includes the degree and severity of vision impairment, age of the pupil, specialist equipment needed and the professional judgement from a QTVI or medical professional.

Local authorities were given an option to provide extra information regarding the criteria they used for allocating support. A further 27% of local authorities stated they used a combination of frameworks and assessments. For example, several authorities stated they used elements of the VINCYP as well as NatSIP Eligibility Framework, staff judgement and GIRFEC. The lack of consistent use of frameworks in allocating support across local authorities could lead to inconsistent specialist support for CYP with VI, resulting in a patchwork of provision and ultimately affecting outcomes for CYP with VI.

We asked local authorities what existing framework or curriculum they used to support CYP with VI. LAs were able to select more than one option.

* 33% used Expanded Core Curriculum (EEC) – USA
* 23% used NatSIP Learner Outcomes Framework
* 70% used Developmental Journal (DJVI)
* 13% used Steps to Independence – the mobility and independence
* 73% used The Oregon Project
* 33% used Quality Standards for Habilitation
* 30% used Guide Dogs Habilitation programme
* 37% used a Bespoke programme designed in house

For those who stated they used a bespoke programme designed in house, this consisted of two or more of the above options.

## 4.2 Teachers and support staff

### Service provision

When asked who provided Qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment (QTVI) to authorities, 87% said QTVIs were employed by the local authority. 10% said QTVIs were delivered by an external organisation and 3% of QTVIs are shared with another local authority.

Local authorities were given an option to provide more detail; 30% of respondents provided further details regarding the provision of QTVIs. The majority of authorities acknowledged their local council as the provider of QTVIs, whereas two authorities identified Sight Scotland as the main provider.

### QTVI posts

There are a total of 91.4 full time equivalent posts for QTVIs across 30 Scottish local authorities; this figure is inclusive of those currently studying for the mandatory qualification MQ and current vacancies.

* 59% of QTVIs hold the mandatory qualification in VI
* 24% of teachers are currently studying for MQ
* 14% are in post and not yet studying for MQ
* 3% of posts are open vacancies yet to be filled.
* Only one local authority said they did not employ any FTE QTVIs.

### Pupil Support Assistants

Only one third of responding LAs employ a pupil support assistant (PSA) to work specifically with CYP with VI. The total number of full-time equivalent PSA posts across these authorities is 34.08. One LA said they do not hold this information and a further two authorities said PSAs are not directly employed by the VI service, as most PSAs are employed directly by schools, as opposed to sensory services.

Authorities were given an option to provide details of any other staff employed by the VI service. Of those authorities that responded to this question, the majority employed transcription staff, followed by communicators and support workers.

## 4.3 Habilitation

There are a total of 554 pupils currently on active habilitation caseloads, with a further 115 waiting to be assessed.

Of the total children on active caseload (2,686), almost a quarter (21%) are receiving or waiting to be assessed for habilitation support. This is based on authorities who provided figures for CYP in receipt of habilitation support.

When asked how habilitation services are delivered, 47% of authorities said they employ a habilitation specialist, whereas 33% said an external organisation is commissioned to deliver the service and 17% stated services are spot purchased. A further 10% said no habilitation services are delivered; these local authorities support 399 children and young people with vision impairment.

There was also an option for LAs to provide more information regarding service delivery. The most popular answer was that habilitation services were provided by a Social Services Sensory Support Team.

Only three authorities said no habilitation services are delivered; two of the LAs stated habilitation services to children were under consultation, whereas another authority has a member of staff currently undergoing habilitation training.

Local authorities were asked to provide the number of hours per week a habilitation specialist provides support to children and young people. Of the 11 local authorities that responded to this question, the total amount of support provided was 286 hours per week.

# 5. Conclusion

This is the first FOI circulated by RNIB to Scottish local authorities on the delivery of specialist services for children with vision impairment. Our intention is to make this an annual request, so that we can identify broad trends over time. The findings from our first FOI suggest a varied pattern of specialist service delivery across Scotland. This is leaving some children and young people without the vital support they need to participate in education and all the opportunities childhood has to offer.

In order to make sure children and young people with vision impairment have equality of opportunity in education, we are calling on the Scottish Government to:

1. Ensure consistency of funding and eligibility criteria of specialist provision for children and young people with vision impairment across Scotland. RNIB (including Scotland) and partners have developed a Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment ([CFVI](https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/education-professionals/launch-new-uk-specialist-vi-curriculum-framework)). The CFVI has been developed to support children and young people with vision impairment access and appropriate and equitable education. We are eager to engage with Education Scotland on this to ensure the framework reaches every child with VI in Scotland, through measures such as being referred to in official guidance or receiving statutory status.
2. Provide adequate and protected high needs funding for local authorities to deliver specialist education services which meet the needs of children and young people with vision impairment.
3. Take immediate action to boost the numbers of QTVIs and Qualified Habilitation Specialists. This should include a clear and fully funded plan of action to improve recruitment and opportunities to qualify into the profession, and retention of the current workforce.