

Chapter 2: Policies and strategies

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Introduction

This chapter highlights the key legislation, policies and strategies that relate to people with sight loss. These include those that have been drafted by the sight loss sector as well as more general legislation that concerns the inclusion and equality of people with disabilities. The headings include, in parenthesis, the country to which they apply.

Equality Act (2010) (England, Wales, Scotland)

The Equality Act brings together a range of anti-discrimination laws that have been passed over the last 40 years. In England, Wales and Scotland it replaced the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

In Northern Ireland, the Disability Discrimination Act remains law.

Included in the Equality Act is the duty to make ‘reasonable adjustments’. This obliges employers and providers of public services to make any adjustment – as far as is reasonable – so that a worker or service user with a disability has the same access to everything as a non-disabled person.

The Equality Act is especially relevant to people with sight loss in the following areas:

- **Definition.** Someone is considered disabled under the Equality Act if they have a 'physical or mental impairment' that has a 'substantial and long-term [for 12 months or more] effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'.^[1] If someone with sight loss is registered as blind or partially sighted, they automatically meet this definition, and they may still do so if they are not registered. For further information on the certification and registration process, see Chapter One.
- **Accessible information.** Providers of services and education are required to plan ahead and anticipate the fact that some of their users will request information in accessible formats such as braille, large print or email.
- **Assistance dogs.** Service providers must make reasonable adjustments for assistance dogs and owners. It is illegal for a guide dog partnership to be refused access to a taxi or minicab with their guide dog.

For a briefing on the rights of guide dog owners under the Equality Act, see: Assistance Dogs UK, Equality Act 2010 www.assistancedogs.org.uk/equality-act-2010/ [last accessed July 2014].

Guide Dogs launched a campaign called 'Open your doors' to educate service providers about how they can best serve blind and partially-sighted customers. For further information, see: Guide Dogs, Open your doors www.guidedogs.org.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/access/accessopendoors#.U8b9Vf1OVso [last accessed July 2014].

Preventable sight loss: a public health priority (England)

Each year, the Department of Health publishes a Public Health Outcomes Framework for England that sets out the desired outcomes for public health and how to measure them. In January 2012, for the first time, preventable sight loss was made a top

¹ Gov.UK, Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010 [last accessed July 2014].

public health priority alongside issues like dementia and obesity. This was in recognition of the findings highlighted in RNIB's research: 50% of cases of blindness and serious sight loss could be prevented if detected and treated in time.[2]

This national commitment by the Department of Health to tackle preventable sight loss came in the shape of an eye health indicator. The indicator tracks changes in the number of people certified as blind or partially sighted as a result of glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. These are the three major causes of preventable sight loss. These numbers come from CVI data, i.e. how many people receive a Certificate of Visual Impairment. More information on certification can be found in Chapter One.

The eye health indicator is part of the broader aim of reducing health inequalities between communities. Although sight loss can affect anyone at any time, research suggests that several groups are at an increased risk of losing their sight unnecessarily. South Asian communities have an increased risk of diabetes and consequently diabetic eye conditions, including diabetic retinopathy. African and African-Caribbean groups have an increased risk of developing glaucoma. Additionally, people living in economically deprived communities are less likely to access primary eye care services and are therefore at greater risk of preventable sight loss.[3]

For more information on the Public Health Indicator, see:

Department of Health, Public Health Outcomes Framework www.gov.uk/government/publications/healthy-lives-healthy-people-improving-outcomes-and-supporting-transparency [last accessed July 2014].

RNIB (2014), Sight loss: a public health priority. RNIB, London. A Word document and PDF version of the report can be downloaded from: RNIB, Public health professionals www.rnib.org.uk/services-

2 Department of Health (2013), Improving outcomes and supporting transparency. Part 2: summary technical specifications of public health indicators. Department of Health, London, p.123.

3 Johnson, M., Cross, V., Scase, M. et al (2012), A review of evidence to evaluate effectiveness of intervention strategies to address inequalities in eye health care. RNIB and De Montfort University, London.

[we-offer-advice-professionals-health-professionals/public-health-professionals](#) [last accessed July 2014].

UK Vision Strategy, Briefing on Public Health Indicator
www.vision2020uk.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy/commhome.asp?section=221§ionTitle=Briefing+on+Public+Health+Indicator&preview=1 [last accessed July 2014].

Vision 2020 (global)

Vision 2020 is a global initiative, launched by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1999, which aims to eliminate avoidable sight loss by 2020.

More information on Vision 2020 is found at the following website: Vision 2020, www.iapb.org/vision-2020 [last accessed July 2014].

Vision 2020 (UK) Ltd

The UK is one of the countries that have a national programme within the global Vision 2020. UK organisations concerned with sight loss and eye health are brought together under this national programme, which is called Vision 2020 (UK) Ltd.

The aims of Vision 2020 (UK) Ltd are set out at:

Vision 2020 (UK) Ltd www.vision2020uk.org.uk/ [last accessed July 2014].

UK Vision Strategy (UK)

One of the Vision 2020 (UK) Ltd's initiatives is the UK Vision strategy: a cross-sector programme that unites all those in the UK who want to take action on issues relating to vision. The UK Vision Strategy was launched in 2008, following a consultation with 650 organisations and individuals. The strategy aims to improve the UK's eye health, eye care and sight loss services. It includes statutory, health and social care bodies, voluntary organisations, eye health professionals and individuals, and is led by RNIB.

When the UK Vision Strategy was launched, there were clear indications that services were failing to meet current needs and that there would be an increased demand in the future.

The refreshed strategy covering 2013 to 2018 was launched in June 2013. The outcomes are as follows:

1. Everyone in the UK looks after their eyes and their sight.
2. Everyone with an eye condition receives timely treatment and, if permanent sight loss occurs, early and appropriate services and support are available and accessible to all.
3. A society in which people with sight loss can fully participate.

More details on each of the outcomes can be found at:

UK Vision Strategy, Strategy 2013-2018
www.vision2020uk.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy/landing_page.asp?section=274§ionTitle=Strategy+2013%2D2018 [last accessed July 2014].

‘Seeing it my way’ (UK)

A component of the UK Vision Strategy is the ‘Seeing it my way’ outcomes. These were developed in 2011 through consultation with over 1000 blind and partially sighted people.

‘Seeing it my way’ is an initiative to ensure that every blind and partially sighted person, regardless of age, ethnicity, extent of sight loss, other disabilities or location across the UK, has access to the same range of information and support. .

The ‘Seeing It my way’ outcomes are as follows:

- That I understand my eye condition and the registration process.
- That I have someone to talk to.
- That I can look after myself, my health, my home and my family.
- That I receive statutory benefits and information and support that I need.
- That I can make the best use of the sight I have.
- That I can access information making the most of the advantages that technology brings.
- That I can get out and about.
- That I have the tools, skills and confidence to communicate.
- That I have equal access to education and life long learning.
- That I can work and volunteer.

Adult sight loss pathway (UK)

The Adult sight loss pathway sets out a process map for how the 'Seeing it my way' outcomes can be delivered and seeks to link professionals involved in order to achieve a thorough and coordinated response. Service delivery it enshrines is based around:

- Early interventions to address the presenting needs of people with sight loss, as a right.
- Visual impairment rehabilitation as an early intervention, delivered by specialist, qualified professionals.
- Interventions that help people with sight loss maximise their functional vision.
- Community Care Assessment of eligibility for adult social care, only if people with sight loss still have un-met needs after receiving early intervention services.

The Adult sight loss pathway can be downloaded as a PDF or a Word document at: UK Vision Strategy, Adult UK sight loss pathway

www.vision2020uk.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy/page.asp?section=299§ionTitle=Adult+UK+Sight+loss+pathway [last accessed July 2014].

Children and young people's guidelines (UK)

The UK Vision Strategy has also outlined guidelines for those responsible for commissioning and providing services for children and young people and their families.

The pathway can be downloaded as a Word document at the following webpage:

UK Vision Strategy, Children and young people's guidelines
www.vision2020uk.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy/page.asp?section=346§ionTitle=Children+%26+Young+Peoples'+guidelines [last accessed July 2014].

It is particularly difficult to estimate the number of children and young people with sight loss as the data sources are very variable.

Information about the nature of the available statistics can be found at the following:

Vision 2020 (UK) Ltd, Key statistics on the prevalence and population of children and young people with vision impairment: discussion paper

www.vision2020uk.org.uk/news.asp?newsID=4156§ion=000100050006 [last accessed July 2014].

The Wales Vision Strategy Implementation Plan (Wales)

The Wales Vision Strategy Implementation Plan sets out how the three priorities within the UK Vision Strategy will be delivered in Wales. This was devised in 2010 by the Wales Vision Strategy Implementation group, which is made up of representatives from the public, private and third sector with an interest in eye health and sight loss, including the Welsh government, Guide Dogs Cymru and Royal College of Nursing Wales. A full list of members can be found at the following:

UK Vision Strategy, The Wales Vision Strategy Implementation Group

www.vision2020uk.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy/page.asp?section=316§ionTitle=The+Wales+Vision+Strategy+Implementation+Group&preview=1 [last accessed July 2014].

Following the launch of the revised UK Vision Strategy, a revised Plan for Wales is currently in development. To read about the key achievements of the Vision Strategy in Wales so far, see the following:

UK Vision Strategy, Wales

www.vision2020uk.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy/page.asp?section=297§ionTitle=Wales [last accessed July 2014].

Scottish Vision Strategy (Scotland)

In response to the World Health Assembly Resolution in 2003, which urged the development of plans to tackle vision impairment, the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group on Visual Impairment agreed that Scotland should have its own implementation plan. This was launched in 2008. The Scottish Vision Strategy Advisory

Group is made up from a cross sector of statutory and voluntary organisations and professionals bodies. For the current membership, see the following:

UK Vision Strategy, Scottish Vision Strategy Advisory Group
www.vision2020uk.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy/page.asp?section=296§ionTitle=Scotland [last accessed July 2014].

The Scottish Vision Strategy is built around the following strategic objectives:

- To improve the eye health of the people of Scotland.
- To eliminate avoidable sight loss and deliver excellent support to those with a visual impairment.
- To enhance the inclusion, participation and independence of blind and partially sighted people.

To download the Scottish Vision Strategy 2013-2018 in PDF or Word document, go to the following page:

UK Vision Strategy, Scotland
www.vision2020uk.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy/page.asp?section=296§ionTitle=Scotland [last accessed July 2014].

See Hear (Scotland)

In April 2013, the Scottish government announced See Hear, a series of recommendations for improving services for people of all ages with a sensory impairment in Scotland. This includes varying degrees of hearing loss, sight loss and loss of both of these senses.

To read about the background to this initiative, see the following:

RNIB, Scotland unveils sensory impairment strategy
www.rnib.org.uk/services-we-offer-advice-professionals-nb-magazine-health-professionals-nb-features/scotland-unveils [last accessed July 2014].

See Hear can be downloaded from the following:

The Scottish Government, See Hear
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/04/7863/downloads [last
accessed July 2014].

Helpful resources

RNIB, Your rights www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living/your-rights [last accessed July 2014].

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