

## **Cross Party Group on Visual Impairment in the Scottish Parliament #CPGVI**

### **Minutes of the Cross Party Group on Visual Impairment meeting held on Tuesday 28 May, 18.00 - 19.00, Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament**

#### **Present:**

James Adams, RNIB Scotland; Richard Baker, Royal Blind & Scottish War Blinded; Paul Bartley, Optelec; Neil Bibby MSP; Ian Brown, RNIB Scotland; Catriona Burness, RNIB Scotland; Pamela Chater; Ian Clement; Helen Court, NHS Education for Scotland; Jamie Cuthbertson, Macular Society; Anne Marie Fleming, RNIB Scotland; Niall Foley, Guide Dogs Scotland; Claire Forde MSYP/ Haggeye; Mairi Graham; Laura Gray, Macular Society; Carl Hodson, seescape; Louise Hunter, Visibility; Carol Kearns, Visibility; Elizabeth McCann, University of Edinburgh; Gwenn McCreath, Vision PK; Debbie McGill, ABDO; David McKerral; Stuart McMillan MSP; Callum Macdonald, Royal Blind & Scottish War Blinded; Sheila Mackenzie, Scottish Sensory Centre; Maureen Macmillan, Sight Action; Terence Moody, RNIB Scotland Committee; Sally Paterson, Royal Blind School; Alun Peate, RNIB Scotland Committee; Rosine Pybus, RNIB Scotland; Professor John Ravenscroft, University of Edinburgh; Ken Reid, Scottish Vision Strategy Ambassador/RNIB; Brenda Rennie, Optometry Scotland; Terry Robinson, RNIB Scotland Committee; Kirin Saeed, RNIB Scotland Committee; J Angus Scott, NHS Forth Valley; Davina Sheill, Royal Blind & Scottish War Blinded; Grant Sutherland; Steven Sutherland MSYP/ Haggeye; Boab Thompson, Universities Scotland; Julie Thomson; Sandra Wilson, RNIB Scotland Committee; Jacquie Winning, Forth Valley Sensory Centre; Cate Vallis, RNIB Scotland.

#### **1. Welcome and introductions.**

Convener of CPGVI Stuart McMillan MSP welcomed members to the meeting.

#### **2. Apologies.**

Tom Arthur MSP; Salena Begley, Family Fund; Miles Briggs MSP; Matt Broom, Vision UK; Amanda Burt, RNIB Scotland; Marion Butchart, Novartis; Campbell Chalmers, RNIB Scotland; Jane Donnelly, Connect Radio; Dominic Everett, Royal Blind School; John Furze, Macular Society; Rhoda Grant MSP; Laura Jones, RNIB Scotland; Joan Kerr; Philippa Mason, International Glaucoma Association; Linda Middlemist, Guide Dogs Scotland; Rod Murchison; Jacqueline McGuire, Angus

Council; David McKerral; Moira McMurchie; Mark O'Donnell, Royal Blind & Scottish War Blinded; Hussein Patwa, RNIB Scotland Committee; Mary Rasmussen; Susan Robinson; Hal Rollason, Optometry Scotland; Stephanie Rose, Police Scotland; Angela Russell, Royal Blind School; Allan Russell, Connect Radio; Fiona Sandford, Thomas Pocklington Trust; Janelle Scotland, ASTN; Colin Smyth MSP; Ken Swa; Mhairi Thurston; Cirta Tooth; Colette Walker; Kat Wilson, Audio Description Association (Scotland).

### **3. Minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2019.**

The minutes were proposed by Sandra Wilson, seconded by Niall Foley and approved by the meeting.

### **4. Matters arising.**

Councillor McVey's reply to CPGVI's letter welcoming the on-street advertising ban in Edinburgh was noted.

### **5. Panel discussion on the educational attainment gap for visually impaired pupils and students with:**

- **Professor John Ravenscroft, Scottish Sensory Centre, University of Edinburgh - "The Qualifications and Competences of Teachers of Pupils with Visual Impairment";**
- **Sally Paterson, Learning Hub Manager, Royal Blind School - "Making 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) a reality for every pupil with vision impairment";**
- **Anne Marie Fleming, Education and CYPF Lead, RNIB Scotland - "Extended Core Curriculum and Transitions".**

Professor Ravenscroft reflected on his Scottish Government commissioned report "The Qualification of Teachers of pupils with visual impairment, or pupils with hearing impairment or pupils with multi-sensory impairment (vision and hearing impairment)".

The purpose of the report was to establish a picture of the number and type of qualifications of those teachers working with children and young people affected by sensory impairment in Scotland in 2016/2017. The report does not cover Grant Aided and Independent Schools that employ teachers who work with pupils with a sensory impairment. Nor does it include data regarding support staff, class room assistants or any other person that is not classified as a Teacher of Pupils with Sensory Impairment. The report findings included:

- 31% of teachers working with pupils with a sensory impairment in Scotland are QTVIs
- there are 48 pupils per QTVI in Scotland
- the median age of QTVIs is relatively old with a lack of newly qualified teachers training to become QTVIs.
- the median years of experience for a QTVI is 3.9 years.
- there is confusion over the definitions of 'mainly competent' and 'wholly competent' in relation to the training of QTVIs.

Professor Ravenscroft is working with the Scottish Government on solutions to the issues raised in his report.

Sally Paterson of the Royal Blind School quoted a head teacher who said that "mainstreaming with resources is fine, it is mainstreaming without resources that is the problem" and highlighted that the ratio of visually impaired pupils to teachers is insufficient meaning that pupils aren't getting the support they need to get the most out of their education and mainstream schools don't have the resources to properly support VI pupils.

Sally commended the idea of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), but is disappointed that it currently just isn't working for VI children, citing the case of Amy, a young person with a visual impairment who visited Royal Blind who was delighted to find people her own age who also have visual impairments and to be included in class.

Sally highlighted the three exceptions to the presumption of mainstreaming as set out in the 2000 Act. The exemptions are if mainstream education:

- a. Would not be suited to the ability or aptitude of the child
- b. Would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for the children with whom the child would be educated; or
- c. Would result in unreasonable public expenditure being incurred which would not ordinarily be incurred.

However, pupils are not assessed against these criteria before they enter mainstream education and even then, they are not being applied consistently.

Anne Marie Fleming (RNIB Scotland) spoke on the importance of the Extended Core Curriculum (ECC) which includes compensatory access (such as braille), sensory efficiency, orientation and mobility,

independent living, assistive technology, social interaction, recreation and literature, career education and self-determination. ECC is a right, essential to accessing the learning set out in Curriculum for Excellence and should be made available through reasonable adjustments.

Current practice in schools often has children and young people taken out of non-academic subjects or missing break time in order to do Mobility or Braille. This can be counterproductive as the skills - such as social interaction, independence skills and recreation - that they can learn in these non-academic subjects are those covered in the ECC. This can impact on post school transitions with an academically qualified young person unable to continue into further or higher education due to a lack of experience in the kind of social skills covered by ECC. Anne Marie would like the CPGVI to consider that the ECC or Specialist VI Curriculum is seen as a right and as a reasonable adjustment required for children and young people with a visual impairment.

The discussion was opened to questions that covered:

- The limited encouragement and opportunities teachers are given to specialise as a QTVI and the difficulty recruiting new QTVIs.
- Cuts to support staff.
- The disability attainment gap.
- The standard teachers are trained at to deal with VI pupils' needs before they enter a classroom.
- The problems other areas supported by Additional Support Needs provision face.
- The importance of getting it right and funding every child.

#### **6. Any other competent business (AOB).**

No other business was raised.

**7. Date of next meeting – Tuesday 17 September 2019, 13.00-14.15, Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament. This meeting is also the AGM.**