

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg |
Priorities for the Children, Young People and Education Committee

CYPE 76

Ymateb gan : Sefydliad Cenedlaethol Brenhinol y Deillion (RNIB Cymru)
Response from : Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB Cymru)

About us

RNIB Cymru is Wales' largest sight loss charity. We provide support, advice and information to people living with sight loss across Wales, as well as campaigning for improvements to services and raising awareness of the issues facing blind and partially sighted people. RNIB Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to Committee's consultation on its priorities.

Question 1 – Within the remit set out above: what do you consider to be the priorities or issues that the Children, Young People and Education Committee should consider during the Fifth Assembly?

1. There are 106,000 people living with sight loss in Wales. This is predicted to double by 2050 (1). It is estimated that there are 1,935 children and young people aged 0–25 with a visual impairment in Wales. At least 20 per cent of these will have additional disabilities and/or special educational needs; a further 30 per cent have very complex needs (2).

Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill

2. RNIB Cymru welcomed the First Minister's announcement that the ALN Bill has been confirmed for introduction in the first year of this Government's Legislative Programme and believes that Committee will have a vital role in the scrutiny and development of this legislation which has been under development for a number of years.

3. We support the former Children, Young People and Education Committee's conclusion that the ethos of the Bill is positive, but that much work is still required to secure legislation that is effective in practice.

4. It is likely that the ALNET Bill will be a major focus of Committees work over the next few months and we are keen to work closely with them to address the issues identified.

Qualified Teachers of Visual impairment.

5. Around seven in 10 children and young people in Wales who have a Vision Impairment (VI) are educated in mainstream schools, some of which are additionally resourced for learners with VI.

6. Just over a quarter attend special schools for learners with learning or physical disabilities. Less than one per cent attends specialist schools designated for blind and partially sighted learners and the same proportion are in other types of setting such as hospital schools or home educated [3].

7. One of the difficulties faced by pupils who are blind or partially sighted is that they have a low incidence disability which mainstream teachers often struggle to address. Problems identified by research include a lack of understanding by mainstream class teachers of the impact of a visual impairment, poor planning by teachers and an inability of schools to fully meet children's specialist visual impairment needs.

8. Although some of these problems can be addressed through empowering classroom teachers, there is a need to retain and support a specialised teaching workforce (Qualified Teachers of Visual Impairment) to provide specialist teaching (e.g. Braille and accessing the curriculum through tactile, low vision techniques and technological means).

9. Qualified teachers of children and young people with vision impairment (QTVI) play a crucial role in the development and education of blind and partially sighted learners and we are concerned about the declining numbers of QTVI's in Wales.

10. RNIB Cymru believes that Committee should undertake a review into workforce planning in the Special Educational Needs/Additional Learning Needs sector to tackle the decline of teachers and also to make the QTVI qualification compulsory.

11. The qualification for teaching children with vision impairment has already been made mandatory in England. The only university currently providing the two year course in the UK is in Birmingham and it is oversubscribed.

Disabled Student Allowance

12. Sight loss impacts on every aspect of a person's life, including their ability to access education. Since 80% of learning comes through our sight, it is essential that the needs of students with sight loss who are in further or higher education are recognised and that there is support in place.

13. The potential impact of even a relatively moderate visual impairment is significant, and higher education institutions may need to consider a range of adjustments to ensure that visually impaired students have equal access to learning

14. In addition, young people with sight loss can experience significant difficulties during the transition period after leaving school, and need support to manage the changes in their life. In particular, having confidence that support will be available for them if they choose to go to university, is likely to be a crucial factor in making choices about their future.

15. While the Equality Act requires reasonable adjustments, there are still significant barriers to full participation for people with sight loss that makes the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) a vital resource for students.

16. We have been increasingly concerned at progressive changes to the DSA in Wales which could make it harder for students to participate in higher education and believe that Committee could undertake a review of the impacts of these changes on disabled students and the opportunities for higher education to be included in the Additional Learning Needs Bill.

References

(1) Access Economics 2009. Future Sight Loss UK: Economic Impact of Partial Sight and Blindness in the UK adult population. RNIB and Mid-2015 Population Estimates, Office for National Statistics (released 25/06/2015)

(2) ONS (2013), National Population Projections for 2015, 2012-based projections release. Office for National Statistics

(3) RNIB survey of VI services in England and Wales 2012: Report for Wales. RNIB.

Question 2 – From the list of priorities or issues you have identified, what do you consider to be the key areas that should be considered during the next 12 months (please identify up to three areas or issues)? Please outline why these should be considered as key priorities.

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