



Sight Scotland 2021 Scottish Parliament Elections Manifesto

Time to Focus on Sight Loss



Every hour someone in Scotland starts to lose their sight. There will be over 200,000 visually impaired people in Scotland by 2030. It's time to focus on sight loss and ensure they have the support they need.



We are Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans, sister charities that exist to level the playing field, because we believe that everyone with sight loss deserves the opportunity to lead a great life.

Sight Scotland's services range from providing specialist education to blind pupils, to care, community based support and document transcription to enable visually impaired people to access vital documents such as bank statements.

Sight Scotland Veterans offers support to veterans with sight loss across Scotland so that they can live independently.

We know that there are significantly more people in Scotland who could benefit from our life-changing help and we are determined to develop new services to be able to reach them. In 2020, we have set ourselves an ambitious long term goal: to expand our reach across Scotland to support and empower even more people affected by sight loss.



With an increasing number of people in Scotland affected by visual impairment, we believe it's time to focus on sight loss.

We want the next parliament to:

- **Make sight loss a public health priority** by establishing a new national low vision service and investing in research.
- **Create better chances for blind and partially sighted young people** by increasing the number of specialist teachers in mainstream schools, and other specialist resources available to schools.
- **Ensure fair work opportunities and support for visually impaired people** through establishing specialist employability programmes and apprenticeships across Scotland and creating a fair benefits system.
- **Create an inclusive Scotland for blind and partially sighted people** by incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into Scots Law.



Time to make sight loss a public health priority



Every hour someone in Scotland starts to lose their sight and needs early support to deal with the physical, practical and emotional effects of visual impairment. A diagnosis of a visual impairment is a life-changing event. Waiting times for treatment and access to support are variable across the country. Too often people don't get the help they need to cope with a sight loss condition. Our research shows there is also low public awareness of risk factors for visual impairment, such as smoking, poor diet and lack of exercise.

A national low vision service should be established, providing community-based services for early diagnosis, treatment and access to low vision aids. It should also link eye patients to local sight loss organisations, including mental health services and family support. Public Health Scotland awareness campaigns should include information on reducing the risk of sight loss.

It is time to focus on research into visual impairment. Public funding for research into sight loss is far less than for other conditions. Leading academic expertise in eye health is based in Scottish institutions so we are calling for increased government investment in research to make Scotland a world leader in developing new treatments for sight loss.

The number of people who are blind or partially sighted in Scotland is set to increase by 30,000 in the next decade to over 200,000 people.



Time for better chances for visually impaired young people



Blind and partially sighted pupils face an attainment gap in education. Over the last ten years the number of visually impaired young people in Scotland's schools has more than doubled to 4,735 pupils but there has been a reduction in specialist teachers providing vital support such as braille tuition. Scottish Government figures show there has been a decrease in the number of blind and partially sighted pupils who progress to further education or employment.

We are calling for an increase in the number of Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with Visual Impairment over this parliament. We also call for a national learning resource for all those school staff working with blind and partially sighted pupils.

We believe every young disabled person, including young blind and partially sighted people, should have a transition plan. The plan should meet their needs for education, employment or care.

Blind and partially sighted students in Further Education are only half as likely to progress to employment after college compared with students who are fully sighted.



Time for fair work opportunities and support for blind and partially sighted people



Working age people with visual impairment are more than twice as likely not to be in paid employment as people who are fully sighted. 39% of blind and partially sighted people of working age say they have some or great difficulty in making ends meet. Under the current benefits system around 40% of blind and partially sighted people in Scotland had their applications for Personal Independence Payments rejected over a three-year period, but 16% of those decisions were overturned on appeal.

Specialist employability support should be put in place across the country to enable more people with visual impairment to find work. Employment programmes such as Fair Start Scotland and the Youth Guarantee must be inclusive for young blind and partially sighted people, and specialist visual impairment apprenticeship programmes should also be established.

The application process for the new Disability Assistance for Working Age People must be accessible. Decisions should be informed by specialist expertise on the impacts of visual impairment. Long term awards should be made to visually impaired people where there is no prospect of their sight condition improving.

90,000 children in poverty in Scotland live in a family where a family member, usually an adult, has a disability or limiting health condition – around 40% of all children in poverty.



Time for an inclusive Scotland for people living with sight loss



Too often people who are blind or partially sighted are excluded because of a lack of accessibility, whether that be in health and social care services, education, employment, public spaces or access to public transport. Access to information which fully sighted people take for granted is still frequently not provided in accessible formats including braille, audio or large print. We are concerned that the impact of the coronavirus pandemic has increased isolation and deepened existing inequalities faced by visually impaired people. It is vital that addressing these issues is a key aspect of building back better after coronavirus.

We believe the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities should be incorporated into Scots Law. This follows the approach which has been taken successfully with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. We believe this will help protect the rights of blind and partially sighted people.

Legal rights to accessible and inclusive information should be strengthened in the next parliament. New legislation needs to be accompanied by a national programme of visual impairment awareness so that all our services and communities are made accessible for blind and partially sighted people.

A Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans survey of over 400 blind and partially sighted people found that over 90% believed there was not enough awareness among the general public about visual impairment.





**Sight
Scotland**

The new name for Royal Blind



**Sight Scotland
Veterans**

The new name for Scottish War Blinded

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Sight Scotland is the operating name
of The Royal Blind Asylum and School,
Scottish Charity Number SC017167.

Sight Scotland Veterans is the
operating name of Scottish War
Blinded, charity number SC047192.