

Raising the achievement of pupils with a vision impairment

Effective working with teaching assistants
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Preface



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0. Versions of this document

This document is an updated revision of one NatSIP first published in 2012. This, the *March 2022 Edition* replaces all previous versions, which should no-longer be used.

1. Acknowledgements

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This edition was prepared with assistance from colleagues at VIEW² and RNIB³, both of whom are NatSIP Partner Organisations.



2. Glossary

The following abbreviations are used in the text of this document:

AT	Assistive Technology
CFVI	Curriculum Framework for children and young people with Vision Impairment
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DFE	Department for Education
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IEP	Individual Education Plan
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PSA	Pupil Support Assistant (term used in Scotland)
RQHS	Register of Qualified Habilitation Specialists
QTVI	Qualified Teacher of (children and young people with) Vision Impairment
SENDCO	Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
TA	Teaching Assistant
VI	Vision Impairment/Vision Impaired

¹ See: <https://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/>

² See: <https://viewweb.org.uk/>

³ See: <https://www.rnib.org.uk/>

3. Purpose of this guidance

The primary role of the teaching assistant should be to work with teachers to raise the learning and attainment of pupils while also promoting their independence, self-esteem and social inclusion. Teaching assistants provide support to pupils so that they can access the curriculum, participate in learning and experience a sense of achievement.

Professional standards for teaching assistants, NEU 2019

Senior staff across the schools interviewed reported there being a need for greater support funding, better pay for TAs, greater respect for TAs within the profession, consistent professional development and nationally recognised career paths for TAs, as well as more sharing of evidence and practice in effective deployment, and how this can be achieved with limited resources.

The deployment of teaching assistants in schools – research report, DfE 2019

The purpose of this guidance is to help schools ensure there is effective support for pupils with a vision impairment from teaching assistants.

Effective working with teaching assistants should:

- raise the achievement of blind and partially sighted pupils, narrowing any attainment gap with other children and young people
- enable the full inclusion of blind and partially sighted pupils in school activities
- encourage independent learning and personal agency

This guidance reflects findings from research commissioned by the Department of Education into the work of TAs, and from reviews by Ofsted.

4. Definition and terminology

4.1 Vision impairment

The terms *vision impairment* and *visual impairment* refer to a range of sight difficulties, from partial sight through to blindness. For brevity, *vision impairment (VI)* will be adopted throughout this document to represent these difficulties. Pupils with VI cover the whole ability range. Some children are born with their visual difficulty, while others may develop it later in life. Some conditions are progressive and a child's vision may deteriorate as a result.

In most circumstances, pupils with VI who receive additional support in school require adaptations to their environment and specific differentiation of learning materials. They may also use specialist equipment to enable them to access the curriculum through visual, tactile or auditory means.

4.2 Teaching Assistants and Learning Support Assistants

There is a range of titles used to describe adults who provide additional learning support to pupils with VI. The most commonly used term is *teaching assistant (TA)* although some schools use the title *learning support assistant (LSA)* to reflect the fact that the main focus of the job should be on learning.

In this document, the term *teaching assistant* will be used as an umbrella term for anyone carrying out this role.

4.3 Definition of Teaching Assistant

A teaching assistant is defined as an adult who is employed to support the educational, social and emotional development of visually impaired learners, their independent access to the curriculum and their sense of personal agency.

5. Implications of vision impairment for development and learning: The need for teaching assistants

There is general agreement in the literature that teaching assistants can best help visually impaired children if they have an understanding of visual impairment and how it affects the individual child.

University of Birmingham - International review of the literature of evidence of best practice models and outcomes in the education of blind and visually impaired children 2009.

A visually impaired person is the same as everybody else in the world. I guess somebody that's going to start working with someone with visual impairment for the first time should treat them like a normal person for goodness sake. Obviously, treat them like they are visually impaired but don't treat them like they're some strange thing from the planet Mars. Think about what somebody can do, not what somebody can't do because, chances are, they can probably do a lot more than you think they can.

Student (aged 15)

5.1 The need for support

Pupils with VI cover the whole range of ability. They have the same potential to attain and achieve as other pupils given the right levels of support and access to the curriculum.

Most teaching and learning takes place through the main senses of sight and hearing, presenting pupils who have visual difficulties with particular challenges which need to be addressed with support from specialist staff including teaching assistants.

All schools are expected:

- to narrow the gap between different groups of learners in their schools, including those with SEND and others who do not have SEND
- to be proactive in providing for any known barriers that might impede pupils' smooth personal and educational development and progress. Under the Equality Act (2010) there is a clear duty placed on schools (and others) to ensure that pupils have access to the support they need to overcome barriers to their learning and inclusion and to monitor carefully how effective they are in enabling access and inclusion for all.

5.2 Barriers to vision impaired pupils' development

The teaching assistant can make an important contribution in supporting pupils with VI to overcome barriers that can impede their development in many ways:

- Educational progress - VI learners may not have access to the incidental learning through vision that is available to sighted learners and which is fundamental to concept development.
- Speed of working and access to information - many VI learners will take longer to complete tasks for reasons to do with their visual difficulties rather than their inherent ability.
- Communication skills – many VI learners will need to learn specialist skills to enable them to read and write on equal terms with sighted learners. This may involve the use of magnifiers, assistive technology or braille, all of which require specialist support and training.
- Mobility and environmental awareness - a lack of incidental visual knowledge means that many VI learners, especially those with more severe vision loss, will need to be taught the skills to navigate their environment independently and safely.
- Independent living skills - many children and young people with VI will require specialist training and support to develop the day to day living skills they need to live as independently as possible.
- Social interaction - VI reduces the ability to recognise non-verbal clues such as body language and facial expression. The development of pragmatic (social) language can also be delayed in children with VI.
- Self-esteem - growing up with a VI can place considerable emotional pressure on children and influence their self-image and self-esteem, particularly if they experience negative attitudes and stereotyping.

Teaching assistants can play a vital role in minimising these barriers to learning, social development and inclusion in a range of ways which are described in detail below.

The support I get in school is really good because they do it in the right way that I need it to be. We are all different and we have different needs so they get to know all of us and so they can help all of us in our own ways.

Pupil with VI

The *Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment*⁴ has been developed to support children and young people with vision impairment access an appropriate and equitable education. The framework presents outcomes within 11 teaching areas. It provides a vocabulary to be used by children and young people, their families and professionals in the UK who work with them. A shared vocabulary supports both better communication and purpose.

The aims of the framework are:

- To help clarify and define the elements of specialist skill development, interventions and best practice support that are considered to be essential for children and young people with vision impairment
- To assist qualified specialist practitioners in raising the awareness amongst other professionals and parents, of the need for children and young people with vision impairment to be taught skills that enable them to access the curriculum and the wider world with as much independence as possible
- To aid discussions and understanding amongst all involved in a child/young person's education of how and when these skills should be taught by suitably qualified specialists and reinforced by non-specialists. The central specialist practitioners working in the field of vision impairment education are Qualified Teachers of children and young people with a Vision Impairment (QTVIs) and Registered Qualified Habilitation Specialists (RQHSs)

The framework is also intended for other professionals such as rehabilitation workers (vision impairment) who may have specialised in working with children and young people, and specialist teaching assistants who have undertaken additional training (such as a braille qualification) and are working under the direction of a QTVI.

The primary focus of the framework is children and young people who are 0-25 years of age. It is recognised that local authorities and countries differ in the precise way support is arranged and provided. E.g. as the young person moves into adulthood, often specialist support may be provided by adult services. Nevertheless, the 0-25 age band reflects wider concerns about educational provision for supporting children and young people with disabilities across the UK and how it links with adulthood. (This is usually also captured with statutory educational guidance).

Research evidence clearly highlights the significant role services have in helping young people with vision impairment to prepare for and transition into adulthood (Hewett et al, 2021). For school-aged children, it is intended that the framework should be closely integrated with the core or national curriculum to which all children and young people are entitled. Although the framework is currently non-statutory, it is hoped it will achieve statutory or guidance, status to ensure that the areas of the framework are recognised as essential and not optional. Children and young people with vision impairment must have the opportunity to develop the skills contained within the framework in order to thrive. The teaching of these essential skills should be led by specialist qualified practitioners, such as a QTVIs or habilitation specialists, specialist TAs, working in close partnership with families and other professionals.

⁴ See <https://www.rnib.org.uk/health-social-care-and-education-professionals/education-professionals/curriculum-framework-children-and-young-people-vision-impairment-cfvi>

7. Teaching Assistants: role, duties, skills and understandings

You're always thinking, 'Right, how can we assist G in accessing the curriculum?' It is important that she works independently. You get to know when she hasn't quite grasped something. You don't necessarily always need to intervene. I'm very conscious that the teacher is there to teach the class, including G, so I have to be in the background. But also, I'm there for G if she's not quite sure.

TA working with blind pupil in primary school)

7.1 Role

TAs play a vital role in enabling access to the curriculum and in supporting the inclusion and achievement of pupils with VI. Their involvement in supporting VI pupils' learning operates in three main ways:

- Promoting the communicative, experiential and visual/tactual development of the pupil so that any gap between the pupil's current level of development and that of their peers is reduced
- Ensuring the pupil is able to access the lesson and achieve the objectives set for him or her while exercising as much independence and personal agency as possible
- Enabling the pupil to be socially included, to enjoy similar opportunities to be involved and to contribute to lessons and the school community in the same way as other pupils

It is also important to understand the importance of the *Access to Learning-Learning to Access*⁵ model which underpins good practice in this area. This model is rooted in the belief that specialist support for children and young people with vision impairment should focus on two key outcomes as a route to their long-term development and inclusion:

1. *Access to learning*: Ensuring all children and young people have fair and optimised access to education
2. *Learning to access*: Ensuring all children and young people have opportunities to develop their own agency, voice and independence

This model translates into the classroom role of the teaching assistant:

- *Access to learning*: The emphasis here is on the TA providing the pupil with experiences and resources to provide the most direct route to learning.
- *Learning to access*: The emphasis here is on encouraging the pupil to develop the skills to access the curriculum independently. The TA's role is to provide opportunities so that the pupil develops the ability and confidence to become an independent learner.

The balance between these two strategies should be planned to shift over time from 'access to learning' to 'learning to access', so that pupils become increasingly less reliant on adult support as they grow older, becoming more independent and confident in exercising control over their learning. This shift should be reflected in the annual review process and the setting of individual outcomes.

Over the years, you obviously naturally get more independent as you become a teenager and grow up in the school. So in first year, I had a support assistant in every classroom and now I don't have one at all and I'm completely electronic working-wise. I do everything electronically and I'm now at the stage where we can kind of skip the phase of liaising with the unit every time.

Kerry Burke, Student

⁵ McLinden M, Douglas G, Cobb R, Hewett R and Ravenscroft J (2016) 'Access to learning' and 'learning to access': Analysing the distinctive role of specialist teachers of children and young people with vision impairments in facilitating curriculum access through an ecological systems theory *British Journal of Visual Impairment* 2016, Vol. 34(2) 179–197

TAs provide specialist interventions specifically aimed at helping the pupil to improve:

- their skills in making use of visual, tactual and auditory information
- their language and literacy levels
- their access to the visual content of lessons
- their social and communication skills
- their independent learning and personal agency
- their opportunities for social interaction and enjoyment

The TA's role is practical and hands-on with the pupil, focused on ensuring the outcomes identified in the pupil's EHCP or SEN Support plan are being implemented. This includes ensuring that everyday experiences and opportunities for incidental learning and extension of language and concepts are built upon so that learning is reinforced in a variety of contexts.

TA support is intended to enable pupils to experience achievement, independence and personal agency. It is not intended to develop an expectation of full-time support and an attitude of 'learned helplessness'. This means that TAs should not simply support the content and delivery of lessons but may also:

- work outside lessons modifying curriculum materials to enable the pupil to access information in an appropriate format
- spend time working on specialist programmes with a pupil to reinforce learning and skills so that their understanding, visual and communicative development are enhanced

TAs may also be asked to carry out specific observational and practical activities to help identify and accelerate an aspect of the pupil's development that is holding back their learning

The allocation of teaching assistant time to a pupil will generally be linked to a detailed assessment of need, the challenges they might face as a learner and their individual education or personal learning plan. Regular evaluation of the impact of the support should be in place and be centred on outcomes relating to the child's personal and academic targets. This process reflects the four part cycle (assess, plan, do, review) which forms a central part of the SEND framework.

A Qualified Teacher of children with Vision Impairment should advise and support school staff, parents and carers in implementing support strategies and interventions and in identifying next steps for the pupil.

7.2 Specific duties

The LSAs are not responsible for your education. They just help you to work as best you can with the materials provided. They're not going to say, 'Right - you do this now, this now...' that's your teacher's job, not the LSA's job.

VI learner (aged 15)

The model job description in Appendix 1 describes the specific duties a TA will undertake in helping to ensure that the outcomes of the pupil's EHCP or personal education plan are achieved. As part of their role in achieving these outcomes, TAs should be involved in the following ways:

- Advance planning. Supporting the teacher in the planning of lessons, advising on the suitability of curriculum resources for a VI pupil, and modifying resources and tasks to achieve the same learning outcome
- Adapting learning resources and teaching materials so that they are accessible to the pupil, involving not just conversion to a different format such as large print, braille or digital, but also the simplification of visual content. Providing accessible learning resources is an essential part of enabling pupils to be independent in their learning.

I don't need help in my Punjabi lesson 'cause my teacher's already enlarged everything for the whole year. If all the teachers did that then I don't think I would need as much help by the learning support. It would be better because that way I would be more part of the class and no-one would be like, 'Oh, that person needs lots of help. He's got a teacher sitting by him.' So I'd just be like normal.

Pupil with VI (aged 12)

- Direct support to VI pupils in class. This is a necessary aspect of the TA role where the content of lessons is highly visual (e.g. some aspects of geography) or where there are safety implications (e.g. preparation of food in design technology). When providing direct support, the TA should avoid taking control of the pupil's learning and look to maximise their personal agency. The intention should be to seek alternatives to direct support where possible, particularly as children grow older and need opportunities for greater independence.
- Implementing discrete learning programmes. Carrying out pre-planned programmes designed to promote a specific skill that will enhance the pupil's access to the curriculum, e.g. touch typing, the development of tactile discrimination skills.
- Pre-tutoring or post-tutoring the pupil in individual withdrawal sessions or small groups, to reinforce learning and to ensure that key concepts are understood, e.g. familiarisation with complex tactile diagrams for a blind pupil.
- Specialist equipment and assistive technology (AT). Ensuring that any specialist equipment used by the pupil is working properly and that the class teacher is aware of any implications for their teaching. This might involve managing the use of speech output or screen magnification software on laptops, overseeing the use of manual and electronic braille note takers, and encouraging a pupil with VI to learn how to manage their own equipment.

My handwriting isn't very good and using ICT makes things easier to read for me and makes it easier for other people to read something I may have written.

(Partially sighted pupil)

- Supporting social and emotional development. Promoting self confidence and self-esteem. This could involve delivering programmes put together by a QTVI or qualified habilitation officer aimed at developing social skills and emotional wellbeing. It also requires TAs to look for opportunities to promote and facilitate positive interactions with other learners.
- Promoting independence. Looking for opportunities for a pupil with VI to experience and become more confident in independent learning. TAs also play an important role in reinforcing skills taught by a habilitation specialist within the school context in order to further the pupil's skill level and confidence in independent mobility.

The mobility officer's taught me how to use the cane for myself, and it was really helpful her teaching me that, because I've been able to reinforce all her hard work. So when she's not there, it doesn't stop. I'm just there to reassure M. So, the ultimate aim is for us to get to the point where M can do this all by himself. We're all working as a team to make sure that he gets the best mobility we can offer.

(TA in Special School)

I didn't know all the way around the school when I first came here, but now I know all the way around. It's good to have [TA's name] there because I know that I can use my cane a lot better. If it does ever go wrong, I sort the problems out. I trust her because she lets me get on with it by myself.

(VI pupil in Special School)

- Supporting liaison with parents, including giving feedback and contributing to the home-school liaison book.
- Observing, monitoring and reporting on pupil engagement, participation and progress to support assessment, the evaluation of teaching strategies, planning and target setting.

- Supporting evaluation by reflecting on how well specific interventions are working, and alerting the SENDCO and/or QTVI if progress towards objectives is insufficient.

The balance of such activities will be determined by the EHCP annual review, where appropriate, regular target setting and next steps for the pupil. Consideration will also need to be given to time allocated for in-class support, small group and withdrawal support, preparation of material, and liaison and planning with teachers and other professionals supporting the pupil.

7.3 Skills and understandings required

The job is about knowing how to get along with individuals and using this to your best advantage. With some teachers, I might address ideas directly to them, whilst with others a more formal route (through the QTVI) might be more acceptable to them. I feel very accepted by the majority of the staff and students. I see myself as part of the school and really have enjoyed my time working here.

(TA, Staffordshire)

TAs who work with pupils with VI fall into the 'specialist' category of support staff and often have a very specific role with individual pupils. The role requires a skilled, trained professional who can anticipate aspects of a lesson that may create barriers for the pupil, help them access concepts and visual information used in lessons and facilitate their understanding, learning, and personal and social development.

Appendix 2 contains a person specification for a TA, identifying some of the attributes and skills, knowledge and understanding required if they are to provide effective support for a pupil with VI. These attributes will differ according to the school, age of the pupil and the specific needs identified.

For any appointment it is essential to determine:

- A starting point for the TA in terms of the skills, experience and other attributes which must be evidenced and demonstrated on the application form and at interview
- The TA's developmental needs in terms of training, coaching and support needed to develop sufficient knowledge, understanding and skills to be able to support a pupil with VI effectively

Specialist VI support services should be able to advise schools on the person specification and the questions to ask to test whether candidates meet the specification.

8. Ensuring the effectiveness of learning support

The challenge in the management of this valuable role is in relation to:⁶

- a) providing the right balance of this support, and if done incorrectly may prevent the development of independence skills and agency.
- b) preventing the development of relationships between the pupils with vision impairment and their peers.

The use of TAs (often) causes this sort of separation between the supported pupil, and the teacher, the classroom and their peers – so the more support they get from the TA, the less they will have from the teacher... Then the second main strut is the interaction – the TAs doing the work for the kids and not creating the space for independence. And then the third bit is if teachers and TAs are not given the opportunity to meet together to plan, then the TAs are in this reactive position. They don't quite know what they're doing, and the teachers are not planning with the TAs in mind.⁷

In the 12 years that I have been a teaching assistant, I have seen the role develop considerably and take on more and more responsibility. We are actively involved in planning, monitoring, liaising with professionals, administering medication, providing training, running clubs... but primarily and most importantly, supporting and effectively meeting the needs of the pupils we work with.

(Teaching Assistant)

8.1 Measures to support effective Teaching Assistant practice

There are a number of measures which the school leadership should have in place to ensure that the TAs provides effective support for pupils with VI. These include:

- a well-designed programme for continuing professional development of all staff
- the appropriate deployment of TAs, focussing support on individual pupils or groups
- joint monitoring by the leadership team of the use of TAs in the classroom and the outcomes of their work
- ensuring clarity and understanding of the roles of those involved in the pupil's education
- agreeing targets and intended outcomes for the pupil with VI and evaluating the impact of support and interventions
- good collaborative planning and communication between class teachers, TAs and QTVIs
- effective partnership working, ensuring the use of consistent approaches
- giving TAs clear professional status and holding them accountable for their work.

8.2 Guidance for class or subject teachers

When working with TAs, it is good practice for the class or subject teacher to:

- provide TAs with copies of schemes of work, lesson plans and teaching resources well in advance
- keep to planned lesson activities and resources wherever possible, and inform TAs at the earliest opportunity of any proposed changes
- set aside time to meet with the TA to plan and discuss lessons

⁶ Douglas, G. et al. *A Rapid Evidence Assessment of the effectiveness of educational interventions to support children and young people with vision impairment*. Welsh Government. 2019

⁷ Dr Rob Webster, Centre for Inclusive Education, UCL Institute of Education *The aim of the game is to support kids* The Psychologist, March 2021

- explain the role they want the TA to take during different parts of the lesson, promoting a 'least amount of help first' approach to encourage pupils to take ownership of their learning
- consult the TA about how best to meet the needs of the pupil with VI, and involve them in assessment and target setting. Remember that over time, the TA is likely to develop considerable knowledge of an individual pupil with VI.
- keep the TA informed of the pupil's progress
- develop a relationship with the VI pupil, remembering that they are the teacher, and not relying on the TA to be the person perceived as teaching the pupil with VI
- seek opportunities through their teaching to promote the VI pupil's independence, personal agency and social inclusion

The maths teacher sends the planning a week in advance. This means that the QTVI and I can adapt the resources for my student so that he can use his iPad and braille display to work independently. It's great that he's just like the other pupils in the class, asking for help when he needs it rather than having me sat next to him all the time.

TA in secondary school

8.3 Teaching assistant practice to be avoided

The Education Endowment Foundation guidance report *Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants*⁸ (2015) identified a number of possible negative features of TA support that needed to be avoided:

- Prioritising task completion
- Not allowing pupils enough thinking and response time
- 'Stereo-teaching' i.e. repeating verbatim what the teacher says
- High use of closed questions
- Over-prompting and spoon-feeding.

8.4 Clarity of roles

The TA is part of a wider team supporting the pupil's learning and well-being. It is important to be clear about the respective roles of different staff.

The TA's support is focused on improving the skills and access of the pupil, so that they become increasingly independent as a learner. The TA may be involved in some direct teaching under the guidance of the QTVI, class or subject teacher. The role of the TA for vision impaired pupils is described in greater detail in the preceding section and in the job description in Appendix 1.

The class or subject teacher is responsible for the overall teaching and learning of the pupil. This includes planning the TA's role in lessons and ensuring lesson plans are clear about outcomes.

The teachers, in liaison with the SENDCO, TA and QTVI will:

- agree when and if the pupil might be withdrawn from a lesson for one to one or small group support, including the objectives for such withdrawal;
- agree whether pre-lesson or post-lesson reinforcement is required;
- be involved in the evaluation of teaching and learning, and the effectiveness of the support provided to the pupil, monitoring progress towards targets and outcomes.

⁸ See: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/teaching-assistants>

The QTVI will be able to provide support and training to the TA and teaching staff and advise on all areas of the pupil's development. In terms of supporting the work of the TA, the QTVI can:

- undertake specialist assessments to inform the setting of learning objectives and provision of appropriate support strategies
- advise on how vision impaired pupils can access learning activities
- support the planning of lessons
- advise on the outcomes that may reasonably be expected for pupils with VI when support is sustained and developed effectively over time
- advise on the use and maintenance of specialist equipment
- offer training and coaching

8.5 Clarity of outcomes and evaluation

The effectiveness of additional support to pupils has to be considered with reference to the clearly defined purpose and intended outcomes of that support. What is the support meant to achieve and is it working? The effective deployment, and ultimate success, of any additional support provided will be directly linked to:

- how clearly the priority learning needs of the pupil and next steps have been identified and defined
- how well these have been shared with and understood by those responsible for the pupil's learning
- how the time available and the activities carried out in it are related to these priority needs

The quality of the targets set in the pupil's EHCP or personalised learning plan is crucial in securing the effective deployment of the available support to the pupil.

8.6 Communication and planning

Support from the TA should be discussed at the time of the pupil's entry to the school, taking into account the views of parents. Agreement should be reached on how:

- the support available to the pupil and the school will be used
- its impact will be reviewed
- the QTVI, support staff and others will plan together
- the support staff and school will be trained
- parents will be included

Measures the school can take to facilitate planning and communication include:

- enabling the teacher and TA to find time to discuss lessons and pupil's participation before/after the school day
- enabling the teacher and TA to work together to evaluate the pupil's progress and participation, and to plan and review short- and medium-term curricular plans and the pupil's objectives and planned outcomes
- ensuring the TA is invited to attend meetings where there are issues of relevance to them;
- supporting the TA to take responsibility for planning and reviewing some specific learning opportunities, ensuring they have the necessary training, knowledge and skills to do this.

8.7 Partnership working with parents and other agencies

The school can support effective working relationships with other people involved in the pupil's education by:

- being clear about the respective roles and responsibilities of the TA, teacher and SENDCO in liaising with parents and other professionals supporting the pupil (QTVI, habilitation specialist etc)
- ensuring that where the TA is asked to liaise with parents and other professionals from outside the school, that this is overseen by the teacher/year teacher and/or SENDCO, that the TA is given time to record that contact, and information is passed to relevant school staff
- ensuring the TA has the opportunity to meet with relevant people (e.g. QTVI, habilitation specialist, SENDCO) to discuss pupil issues and give feedback

8.8 Continuing professional development

I feel that a key benefit of the [specialist training] course is that it allows me to understand the theory behind the provision for children with VI. This helps me to ensure a consistent high level of support for children in mainstream, when a QTVI is not on site, because I more thoroughly understand the intended outcomes of the specialist input.

KR, TA

The TA's development needs will need to be identified, supported and continually reviewed. They will require support and guidance on appropriate strategies for supporting pupils with VI that are specific to the needs and objectives of the pupils concerned.

Measures the school can take to support CPD include:

- a planned induction for the TA, followed by regular review meetings that continue until the school and TA feel confident in their new role. The TA is offered a planned programme of mentoring/coaching, including support from specialists such as the QTVI, habilitation specialist, eye clinic staff
- an ongoing CPD programme for the TA based on competencies required to undertake the role, their objectives and the monitoring of teaching and learning
- providing opportunities to attend externally-provided courses leading to accreditation/qualifications (see Appendix 4)
- enabling the TA to network with TAs in other schools, particularly those supporting pupils with VI
- ensuring that the TA has clear objectives or performance management targets, and opportunities for regular discussion with team leaders about their work and professional development needs, enabling them to identify specific requirements with regard to supporting pupils with VI
- providing the TA with feedback on their performance including feedback from classroom observations
- providing training for the class or subject teacher on how to work effectively with TAs, and meeting the needs of pupils with VI

Where training needs are identified, there should be a clear timescale indicated by the school and service as to when the training will take place, how the impact of that training will be evaluated, and when certain skills (such as the ability to produce curriculum materials in alternative formats effectively) will be in place.

Appendix 1: Model Job Description

School-based teaching assistant or learning support assistant supporting pupils with a vision impairment.

A1.1 Introduction

This job description can be modified to reflect the needs of the pupil and the school. The duties of the TA and the emphasis put on each duty will depend on the needs of the pupil and the school context.

A qualified Teacher of VI (QTVI) should be able to advise on how to adapt the job description below to best meet the specific needs of the pupil.

This model job description sets out the tasks/role in more detail than normal to give those agreeing the final job description a little more information on why the task is needed, and how it is discharged.

Having considered each duty schools may want to edit down and reduce the quantity of text.

A1.2 Job Description

Job Title	Specialist teaching assistant for vision impairment (Some settings may prefer the term <i>Learning Support Assistant</i>)
Report to	[Details of line manager] e.g. SENDCO, another member of the leadership team, Lead QTVI,
Day to day management/supervision	Class/Subject teacher, QTVI
Guidance and support	QTVI

Job Purpose:

- To work as a specialist teaching assistant to provide specialist teaching of specific skills and support to pupils who are vision impaired, 0-25 years at home, in schools and colleges across X [or in X school].
- To enhance educational opportunities and achievement for pupils with VI through a focus on standards, good outcomes and inclusive practice so that they can access the curriculum, participate in learning, experience a sense of achievement and develop independence in learning and other aspects of life.
- To ensure that the special educational and communication needs of individual children with VI are met within an inclusive environment that allows them access to the learning in accordance with the provisions of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2014) and the Equality Act (2010).

Main responsibilities and duties

Supporting the teacher in the planning, delivery and evaluation of lessons

1. Work in partnership with the teacher in the planning of lessons including the adaptations, materials and direct support that pupils with VI will need to be included and make progress.
2. Support the delivery of learning by:
 - 2.1 Providing direct support as agreed with the teacher (and QTVI). This may include pre-tutoring support to ensure pupils have the necessary knowledge and familiarity with the resources, skills and concepts to be used in the lesson. It may also involve post-tutoring to check understanding, and reinforce key learning points.
 - 2.2 Adapting resources and teaching materials as necessary so that the pupil is able to access the key points of a lesson and achieve the objectives set for him/her, as far as possible independently.
 - 2.3 Developing skills in the use of specialist formats (e.g. Braille) as appropriate.

- 2.4 Developing skills in the use of technology and IT resources as required.
 - 2.5 Developing skills and knowledge of access arrangements and modifications available in exams and tests so as to provide opportunity to the pupil to develop the necessary skills.
 - 2.6 Supporting the pupil(s) in participating in class teaching activities, providing support to groups as appropriate to encourage independence and social interaction.
 - 2.7 Using praise, assistance and encouragement to motivate the pupil(s) and to help them stay on-task.
 - 2.8 Supporting the pupil(s) understanding of any follow up tasks set by the teacher.
 - 2.9 Taking lesson notes from the board, where required, to support the VI pupil's understanding and inclusion.
 - 2.10 Overseeing the VI pupil's work in practical activities where safety is a consideration.
 - 2.11 Undertaking CPD in the field of VI.
3. Support the teacher in evaluating the VI pupils' learning and access by:
- 3.1 Providing constructive feedback to the teacher on the how the VI pupil has responded to the lesson.
 - 3.2 Discussing with the teacher any difficulties experienced in providing the support the pupil(s) needed.
 - 3.3 Providing information on how well the child is engaging in the lesson, any difficulties they appear to be experiencing, work they find relatively easy and work they find more difficult.

Implementing individual learning programmes for pupils

4. Support the development and implementation of individual learning programmes focused on delivering priority learning targets for pupils. (These might include work in the areas of functional vision, concept formation, language and literacy skills including handwriting and touch-typing, personal, social and emotional development as required). This will be achieved by:
- 4.1 Working with the SENDCO, class teacher, QTVI and other specialists where appropriate to plan and agree the programme which contains clear, challenging but achievable objectives for the pupil.
 - 4.2 Reinforce mobility and independence skills under the guidance of a pupil's mobility specialist.
 - 4.3 Delivering the agreed programmes under the guidance of the teacher, SENDCO and the QTVI focussing on [] (to be specified depending on the age and needs of the pupil but the focus is likely to include the areas listed in 4 above).
 - 4.4 Providing feedback to relevant colleagues about the pupil's progress towards targets and the effectiveness of the programme in securing this and the pupil's engagement.

Observing and reporting on pupil progress

5. Observe and report on pupil progress, gathering information about their knowledge, skills and understanding, including their progress towards targets, to support teachers in re-assessing need, evaluating teaching strategies and interventions, setting new learning targets and formulating new learning plans.

Contributing to maintaining pupil records

6. Contribute to the maintenance of pupil records as agreed with the teacher and/or SENDCO and help to maintain the record keeping system.

Using technology to support pupils' (or the pupil's) learning

7. Support the use of technology and optical aids to promote the pupil's learning by:
 - 7.1 Checking that any equipment used by the pupil is functioning properly.
 - 7.2 Developing skills in the use of specialist equipment used by a VI pupil, including software applications.
 - 7.3 Taking steps to ensure any problems with equipment are dealt with as quickly as possible.
 - 7.4 Promptly informing the teacher/technician if there are any problems.
 - 7.5 Supporting the pupil(s) and staff in the use of technology, encouraging pupils to use the equipment independently.

Supporting children's emotional and social development

8. Support pupils' social and emotional development by:
 - 8.1 Supporting positive behaviour, giving praise and encouragement as appropriate to build confidence and self-esteem.
 - 8.2 Providing support to enable the pupil(s) to have the opportunities to participate in all school activities, to make choices and take decisions for themselves.
 - 8.3 Encouraging pupils to evaluate their own progress and to take an active part in reviews of their progress, when appropriate.
 - 8.4 Observing how pupils express their feelings and emotions and relate to others and feedback to the teacher and/or SENDCO, recording any findings accurately.
 - 8.5 Delivering programmes designed by specialists to support this area as appropriate.
 - 8.6 Encouraging other pupils to develop an understanding of the needs and skills of a VI pupil.

Learning environment

9. Working with colleagues to ensure the classroom provides a good learning environment for a VI pupil, paying particular attention to lighting, layout and auditory factors.

Liaising with parents

10. Support teaching staff and SENDCOs to discharge their responsibility in involving parents by providing information on the pupil's engagement with learning and interactions with other pupils and helping to maintain home-school liaison records.

Continuing professional development

11. Participate in training and other learning activities to develop the competencies to effectively support VI pupils and to ensure knowledge and skills are kept up to date.

Appendix 2: Model person specification

School-based teaching assistant (or learning support assistant) supporting pupils with a vision impairment

A2.1 Person Specification

1. Specialist Knowledge and Experience
 - 1.1 Experience of working with or supporting learners.
 - 1.2 Ability to build a rapport with learners, including those with special educational needs.
 - 1.3 Ability to understand child development and the implications of vision impairment.
 - 1.4 Ability to use ICT and to learn new ICT skills.
2. Organisation
 - 2.1 Ability to organise time effectively, creating work schedules, prioritising workload and meeting deadlines.
3. Using Initiative
 - 3.1 Ability to take responsibility for own actions and make decisions without referring to others on occasions.
4. Resilience
 - 4.1 Ability to remain calm and self controlled under pressure.
5. Personal drive and commitment
 - 5.1 Ability to be proactive, enthusiastic and committed by taking ownership to ensure tasks are delivered.
6. Communication
 - 6.1 Ability to communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing, adapting style to suit the audience e.g. preparing reports.
7. Team Working
 - 7.1 Ability to work effectively within a team.
8. Equal Opportunities
 - 8.1 Ability to understand and demonstrate commitment to [name of school or setting]'s Equal Opportunities Policy and to ensure all activities are consistent with the Equal Opportunities Policy. This includes all staff activities and their interface with the general public.
9. Special Conditions
 - 9.1 Appointment is subject to an Enhanced DBS [or country equivalent] check.
 - 9.2 Must be prepared and willing to work occasional extra hours as agreed with the Senior Management Team.

Appendix 3: Suggested interview questions

A qualified Teacher of VI would be able to advise on the attributes that are most essential to meet the needs of a particular pupil and advise on questions that may be asked at interview to test the extent to which candidates meet essential criteria in the person specification.

Questions the interview panel may wish to ask may include:

1. Think about a VI child (or, if no experience of working with VI children, any child with SEND) with whom you have worked.
 - What particular needs did they have when it came to learning?
 - Choose one of these needs and describe the support you provided.
2. Describe the main actions you take in your current/last post to support the inclusion of a pupil with SEND both inside and outside the classroom.
3. What is your understanding of safeguarding?
4. How might the type of support a CYP with VI needs change over time? You may refer to a specific CYP in your answer if you wish.

(Prompts could be given to elicit whether the interviewee's aspirations for CYP align with the principle of the L2A/A2L model)
5. What do you think the main roles of a TA are?

(In a subsidiary question you can tease out task completion versus pupil understanding and independence).
6. Describe a situation where you have been asked to observe a child's learning and then report back to the class teacher.
 - What were you looking for?
 - What did you feed back?
7. In the local supermarket, you meet the mother of a child you are supporting and she wants to know how her child is progressing – how do you respond?

Appendix 4: Case studies

A4.1 Case study 1

TA supporting a blind child in a nursery, Brent VI Service

K had previously been attending the Children's Centre and has moved to the nursery within the Children's Centre. The family was new to the country last year and so English was a new, additional language. The nursery manager made the decision about who should support the child based on her knowledge of the staff available and who seemed to have the right skills. Prior to the child starting her placement in the nursery, her level of support from the VI team had been discussed and relevant training put into place. To support her transition, it was decided that a weekly visit was needed from the QTVI, but that there should be flexibility as to when this should happen, depending on the needs of the nursery and the changing needs of the child. More visits were made during the period before and immediately after her transition.

There were some key factors that made K's transition very successful and that enabled her to make very good and fast progress:

1. Positive and welcoming attitude of the nursery
2. Training
 - General training for all nursery staff
 - Ongoing training each week for TA in specialist aspects of the role
 - Liaison with the nursery manager in order to generalise the good practice in place for K, thereby increasing the nursery's capacity to meet her needs
3. Skills of TA
 - Child centred, reliable, quietly confident and a good team member
 - Good early years practitioner
 - Ability to train in a new area
 - Flexible
 - Has lots of initiative but knows when to seek advice
 - Good understanding of her role and how it fits in with others
4. Planning and liaison
 - TA has access to written weekly plans with daily updates
 - Planning with QTVI weekly in order to identify activities which require modification in terms of strategies to be used and what resources are needed
 - Time to collect/adapt resources
 - Methods of recording child's response to activities and progress (photos, annotations on plans)
 - Liaison with other professionals involved
 - TA shares her skills regarding this child with other staff in the nursery
5. Relationships and communication
 - TA shows respect for K's space and knows how to give time for her to 'do' rather than step in to 'help'
 - Support enables K to build relationships with other children
 - TA acts upon K's response to activities
 - QTVI and nursery set up systems for effective communication with all concerned

- TA communicates with parents as appropriate – her role in this area is clearly defined so that it is supportive and responsive but not too close
- TA has developed professional relationships with therapists and has a good understanding of how the team around the child works
- TA is part of the Children’s Centre team and much valued by the Centre manager

A4.2 Case study 2

TAs promoting independent learning in a secondary school, Brent VI Service

There are two students (twins) in year 9 who require all materials adapted to font size 28. They are in different classes for all subjects, many of which are set by ability. There is an established system set up between the TAs and the subject teachers to ensure the timely production of large print materials, including the widespread use of email to send curriculum materials to the TAs and, sometimes, directly to the students.

The students have identified:

- The lessons in which they would like direct support
- The lessons in which they may need direct support sometimes
- The lessons in which they don’t require direct support

Both students identified Maths, Science and Technology as the only lessons in which they needed a TA regularly. The SENDCO then planned the timetable for the TAs accordingly, so that they only went into those lessons. The TAs built up excellent working relationships with the subject teachers and they have become very familiar with the subject content of the lessons in which they support. They received training from the VI team when they started in the principles and practice of adapting high quality materials and now need hardly any direction. When they are not in class, the TAs are timetabled for adapting materials and carrying out other tasks, such as locating large print text books etc.

What is very positive about this set up is that:

- The role of the TAs is understood across the school
- The students are in control of their support
- The school understands that support does not mean someone having to be in class all the time and that having timetabled sessions for adapting work is vital
- The teachers take responsibility for the students’ learning

A4.3 Case study 3

Preparation of learning materials. TA in County Down, Northern Ireland.

Specialist Teaching Assistants are involved in the preparation of learning materials that are specifically designed and made for use with children with a sensory impairment.

Often, topics covered in maths are visual in presentation and require significant adaptation and preparation in order to be accessible to a child with a vision impairment.

The TA in County Down works in a mainstream primary school, supporting a child with a severe vision impairment alongside sighted peers.

The TA had to consider how to make bar graphs meaningful and accessible.

In order to do this, a range of specialist resources were used: squared paper, with darker lines, Wikki Stix to mark out the Y and X axis, shorter lengths to mark numbers on X axis. Braille and print labels for Y axis, Foam stickers to represent number of.

Using these techniques and developing an understanding of the concept and task the information was then able to be transferred across to another version of a Bar Graph using Numicron tiles. This method of presentation allowed sighted and children with VI to work alongside each other with the same resource.

At the end of the lesson photos were taken and the TA wrote an evaluation both of the work achieved, level of independence to do so and effectiveness of resources with reflections for future use.

A4.4 Case study 4

Support for social interaction. Cheshire East VI Service

A specialist teaching assistant worked with a severely vision impaired pupil with specific difficulties in relationships with her peer group.

The pupil needed support to identify what was available for play within the nursery environment and play needed modelling to encourage her to play with the tools appropriately.

The STA trained the school based TA to ensure the pupil was aware of who was playing within the peer group. The group was widened as successes in this area were noted. Support from the TA was monitored to ensure that she stood back when appropriate and intervened only when necessary.

The STA provided tactile games and books for the pupil with VI to share with others and she was encouraged to do so. Persona dolls were used to create scenarios and act out situations which caused difficulty for the pupils, opening up avenues for discussion on a one-to-one basis with the VI pupil or in small group situations. The STA also made tactile books to encourage stories about children playing together and to present information to the VI pupil that the other pupils were experiencing, about which she had no knowledge, to give her the opportunity to join in with their discussions and play. Any items provided were made as realistic as possible to help play and experiences.

The STA also made a time-line and used objects of reference so that the pupil with VI found it easier to move on from one activity with the rest of the group. This strategy limited tensions in this area which had previously alarmed the VI pupil and had created barriers and wariness within the possible friendship groups.

A4.5 Case study 5

Learning and supporting touch typing in primary schools. Oxfordshire VI Service

Student A has started using her laptop during the last year, setting it up independently, learning some function keys and the home row keys. She was supported by her QTVI, teaching her half an hour a week, which was then followed up by her TA in a second session and by her parents at the weekend. A workbook was made for the student including the steps the QTVI would follow in her approach to teach touch typing, and many pages with a table to record activities and actions. This enabled the TA to support the student effectively and independently and helped communication between everyone.

A4.6 Case study 6

Induction and Training for Pupil Support Assistants. Fife VI Service

PSAs begin their induction by shadowing TVIs and PSAs for a period of four weeks. This allows PSAs to meet all pupils and work with peripatetic VI staff to learn how they support the pupils on their caseload.

A PSA induction pack has been developed to support the PSA taking ownership of their skill development when supporting a student, as well as developing their awareness of their responsibilities in the workplace in relation to both the setting and the service. The pack incorporates both specialist knowledge requirements and wider expectations relating to workforce development.

Through regular planning meetings, the PSA is asked to consider the balance of support provided with a view to empowering the student to become independent.

The PSA is supported through regular case reviews with the service manager, regular liaison with the TVI and through weekly PSA team meetings.

A4.7 Case study 7

Joint teaching VI awareness session. Oxfordshire VI Service

The class teacher, the QTVI, the VI child's mum and the specialist TAs employed by the school jointly taught a VI awareness session during term two in the Foundation class. Led by the QTVI, the children were made aware of different eye conditions and the problems children could have, before they went into a carousel of activities including trying out simulation spectacles inside and outside, working with a magnifying glass and looking at a model of the eye. The children enjoyed the morning very much including the VI child who seemed much more at ease in school after that. Doing work in a carousel arrangement meant that every adult was needed and felt part of a great team.

A4.8 Case study 8

Effective use of technology. Educational Service for Hearing and Vision, Hull

All our Braillists use a variety of technology, these include laptops equipped with a screen-reader, refreshable Braille displays, and Braille notetakers. All TAs undergo training in how students use these devices as part of their induction programme.

J (the student) originally used his TA to print work on the notetaker to give to the teacher. They would also emboss off a copy for J. J is now able to print or share files with the teacher directly.

We have found that having online tutorials really makes a difference. They help the TAs to feel supported and reduce their sense of isolation and fear of technology. This is vitally important if a student is to become a confident and independent user of a range of devices.

A4.9 Case study 9

Collaborative Working. Berkshire Sensory Consortium Service

The class teacher provides termly plans, from which activities appropriate to a blind child with learning difficulties are selected by the QTVI for development and extension.

The QTVI cross-references the selected items with activities found in the *Developmental Journal for Babies and Children with a Visual Impairment*. Using the above, in addition to targets identified with the class

teacher from the EYFS profile, the QTVI produces a weekly planner. The planner has sub-headings found in the Developmental Journal and others such as tactile and listening skills.

Recommendations from other external professionals such as the speech and language therapist and occupational therapist are also subsumed into the plan where appropriate.

This plan is shared with the class teacher, the child's TA and the SENDCO and other members of the BSCS team working with the child.

The QTVI delivers the programme when in school. The TA implements the plan when BSCS staff are not present and feeds back outcomes to the QTVI.

The documentation is used to appraise parents and school staff and to assist in the completion of the record of developing vision found in the DJ.

A4.10 Case study 10

Collaborative Working. Wakefield Children's Sensory Impairment Team

When their school moved to setting homework on Microsoft Teams, two learners with VI were able to continue to access work that way, but L reported that he 'couldn't find what he was supposed to do because there was too much on the screen'. L, the TA and the QTVI talked the problem through and decided that it would be best for homework to continue to be provided as paper copies.

Close working and a regular channel of communication between TAs and QTVIs ensures that the strategies in place for individual pupils adapt to any new developments.

A4.11 Case study 11

Vision and communication development session. Vision Impairment Service (SenCom)

The *Vision and communication development session* was devised to enable the VI service to work productively and effectively with VI/MSI children or young people in special schools and provide instant feedback to the class staff on present and future targets.

Staff receive training in VI/MSI awareness and communication including the structure of the vision and communication development session. Once this has occurred the sessions can begin in class.

Specialist Teaching Assistants are instrumental in delivering the session, which is based on the areas of visual skills highlighted in the *Positive looking programme* by Gwyn McCormack of Positive Eye Ltd.

The vision and communication development session can be delivered to one child or young person or to a group. A group should ideally be no more than 6 CYP with each CYP having an adult with them.

The STA positions themselves at the front directing the session and prompting staff in the correct way to interact with the CYP to elicit positive reactions and encourage visual development and communication.

The structure of the session is written down in a booklet and for each particular visual skill there is a visually stimulating item and accompanying song, e.g. pompom for visual awareness and mirrors for fixation.

The CYP quickly start to remember the routine of the session and predict each activity.

Delivering sessions this way has meant that we can work directly with over 60 CYP in 3 day.

Appendix 5: Training providers

Many specialist vision support or sensory support services offer coaching support and training for TAs. Schools are advised to consult their local service for details.

Some national organisations that offer training are listed below:

VIEW (<https://viewweb.org.uk/training/>) provides several nationally available courses leading to the award of a VIEW certificate for TAs and other education professionals:

- *Understanding vision impairment in children and young people* is an online course to improve the quality of learning opportunities available to children and young people with vision impairment. It is a 'roll on roll off' course with no fixed start dates involving around 50 hours of study
- *Vision impairment and complex needs in children and young people* is an online course which focuses on facilitating development in children and young people who have vision impairment and complex needs. It is a 'roll on roll off' course with no fixed start dates involving around 50 hours of study.
- *Partners in Learning* is a blended learning course at Level 3 for teaching assistants and other education professionals wishing to explore and share effective practice in supporting learners with vision impairment in a range of educational settings. It involves around 180 hours of study and is studied over a school year, starting in September. The course is studied mainly online with two scheduled Zoom sessions.

Mary Hare School in partnership with **Berkshire Sensory Consortium**

(www.maryhare.org.uk/teaching_assistant_courses) offers training including the BTEC Level 3 Advanced Level Qualification for TAs working with sensory impaired young people (HI and VI).

OnLine Training (<https://www.oltinternational.net/courses/paid-courses/vision-impairment>) offers an online certificated course (non-accredited) which involves 15-20 hours specialist tutor-led learning.

Positive Eye (www.positiveeye.co.uk) is an educational consultancy and training service for professionals who work with children and young people with a vision impairment

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