Education Access in Ireland Project:
Supporting Vision Impaired Learners

2025 Report

Table of Content

List Of Abbreviations

AT	Assistive Technology
CA	Classroom Assistants
CFVI	Curriculum Framework for Vision Impairment
CYP	Children and Young People
EA	Education Authority
ECC	Expanded Core Curriculum
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
JCQ	Joint Council for Qualifications
NCSE	The National Council for Special Education
NI	Northern Ireland
QTVI	Qualified Teacher for Vision Impaired
ROI	Republic of Ireland
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs and Co-ordinator
SENDO	Special Educational Needs and Disability Order 2025
SEC	State Examinations Commission
SET	Special Educational Teacher
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SSP	School Support Plan

List Of Abbreviations

VR	Virtual Reality
VTVI	Visiting Teacher for vision Impaired
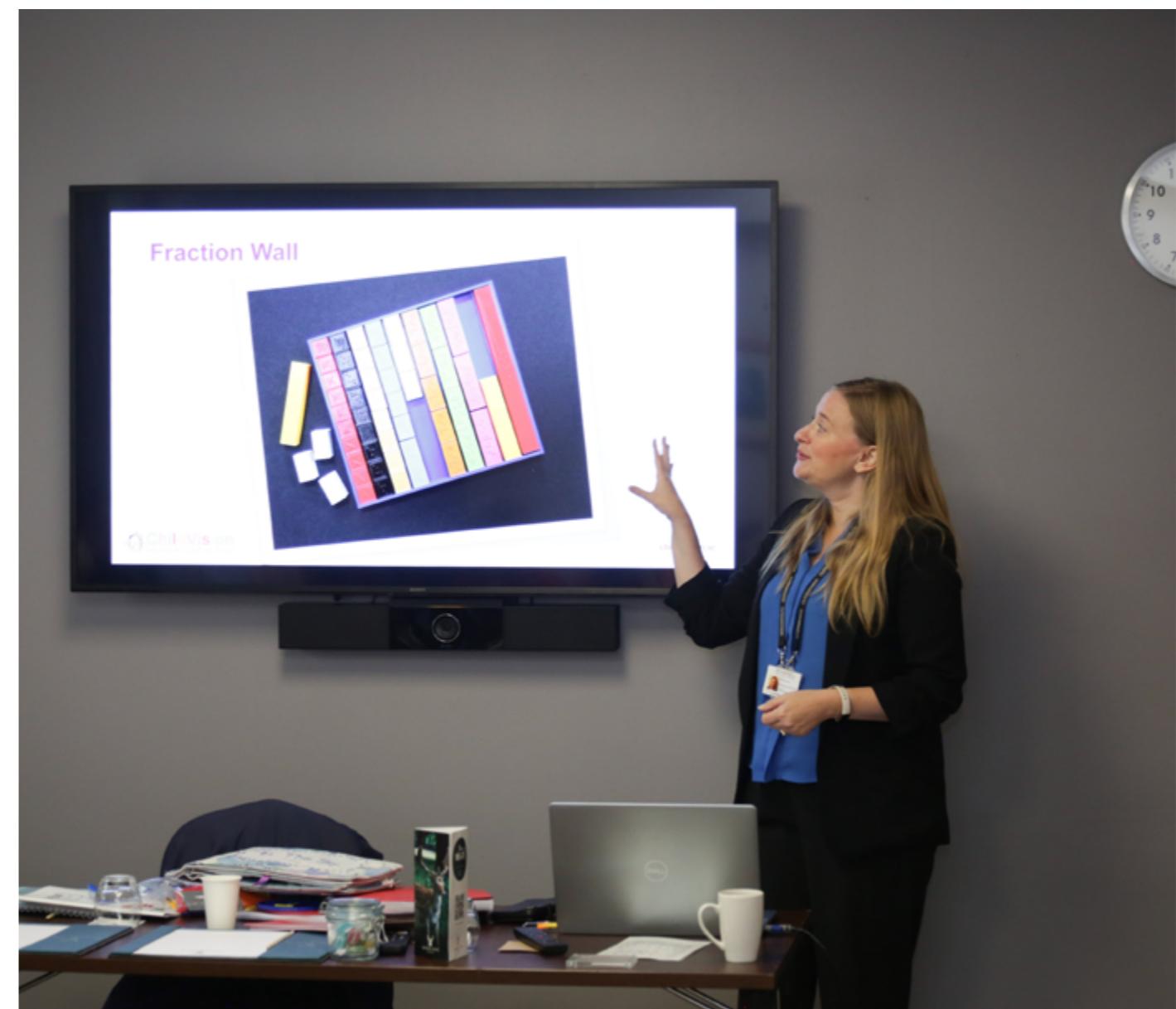
> ❝
>
> **I learned so much and will be passing on what I have learnt to my colleagues in Sutton Park. It was very informative and we could also apply what I learned to some of our SEN students. Thank you both so much again, and best of luck with your training tomorrow.**
>
> - Emma Kennedy

Executive Summary Education Access in Ireland Project:

Supporting Vision Impaired Learners: Training, Policy and Practice in NI & ROI

Background

This report builds on the 2024 Education Access in Ireland study by **Angel Eyes NI and Féach**, funded through the **Shared Island Civic Society Fund.** The earlier report examined how children and young people with vision impairment (VI) are supported across the education systems of Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI), identifying key strengths, challenges, and opportunities for greater collaboration between the two jurisdictions.

In 2025, the partnership expanded its impact through the joint delivery and evaluation of cross-border professional training for teachers, SENCOs/ SETs, and classroom/ special needs assistants, including those supporting pupils who use Braille. The training adopted a **whole-school, team-based model**, enabling all staff supporting a learner with VI to develop shared strategies and consistent practice.

Crucially, the workshops integrated lived experience: presenters who are blind or vision impaired co-delivered sessions alongside education and health professionals, offering authentic insight and practical solutions.

Over the past two years, the **Shared Island Civic Society Fund has invested £38,500** in Angel Eyes NI and Féach to deliver bespoke, **high-impact training to 84 education professionals**. This initiative demonstrates how civic society can identify shared gaps in statutory provision and, through targeted Shared Island funding, apply specialist expertise to deliver cost-effective, evidence-based solutions. The resulting training model provides a **scalable, voluntary-sector-led response** to the mounting pressures on Vision Support Services across both jurisdictions.

More than a successful pilot, this collaboration sets a benchmark for what meaningful cross-border partnership can achieve. It operationalises the Outcomes-Based Accountability model envisaged in the Northern Ireland SEN Reform Delivery Plan and the Republic of Ireland's EPSEN Act, turning legislative intent into measurable progress on inclusion, equity, and pupil outcomes. The evidence is clear: this approach works. Both governments should now adopt and resource this training as an integral, component of their special educational needs' strategies, embedding it as a wrap-around programme that strengthens frontline capacity, unifies standards, and delivers real, sustained impact for children and young people with vision impairment across the island of Ireland.

This report also draws on evidence collated from a desktop literary review, training evaluations, workforce focus-groups, including a One-Year On session with the 2024 cohort, and parent interviews.

Key Findings

01 Transformative professional learning

100%
of Participants reported increased understanding of vision Impairment

100%
of Participants had increase in confidence

96%
said the learning would benefit other pupils

Across both workshops, **100% of participants** reported increased understanding of vision impairment and a **100% rise in confidence** in their ability to create inclusive learning environments. **96%** said the learning would benefit other pupils, showing the broader value of inclusion-based training. Participants described the sessions as ***"transformative,"*** praising the practical focus and peer learning across jurisdictions

02 Persistent gaps in assistive technology and Braille training

- **58%** of large print workshop participants rated their AT knowledge as poor or very poor before training. Post-training, **100%** reported improved understanding of assistive technology use, and **90–95%** described this improvement as significant.

- In the Braille and tactile workshop, **95%** had never received any Braille-specific training, and **64%** had a poor understanding of the Braille learning journey. Following training, **100%** reported increased confidence, with **75%** describing their gains as significant.

03 Workforce under strain

Specialist services are operating under acute capacity pressures. In NI, each QTVI supports around **60 pupils.**

In ROI each VTVI support on around **95 students.**

Recruitment, retention, and succession planning remain urgent priorities across both jurisdictions.

04 Early intervention and habilitation remain inconsistent

Gaps persist in early access to assistive technology and delayed introduction of Braille for pupils with progressive conditions.

Habilitation provision remains critically underdeveloped: **only 1%** of pupils on the Education Authority's Vision Service caseload received habilitation support in 2024. For pupils in ROI habilitation training is only offered in three counties in Munster under Department of Education and Youth funding.

05 Inconsistent assessment and exam access

Disparities persist in time allowances for students. In NI, pupils with VI continue to face barriers in some standardised and transfer tests, while in ROI, exam accommodations remain narrower under current SEC guidelines.

06 The central role of families

Parents who understood their child's assistive technology or Braille reported higher engagement and attainment.

Families across both jurisdictions requested access to the same training provided to schools, to reinforce learning at home.

07 Lasting impact and dissemination

A "1-Year On" survey, from the 2024 training, showed **100% of participants** were still applying their learning, with many leading awareness sessions for staff or adapting classroom resources school-wide.

80% highlighted team-based learning with teachers and SENCos as most beneficial, and **100%** disseminated materials to colleagues.

Impact

- **Professional confidence and collaboration improved:**

  Participants described the training as "transformative," noting stronger communication between teachers and assistants and a clearer understanding of inclusive practice across the school team.

- **Cross-border knowledge exchange expanded:**

  Educators valued the opportunity to learn from colleagues and experts across jurisdictions, building a shared professional community of practice.

- **Policy influences emerging:**

  The project's findings have informed Education Authority and NCSE discussions on workforce development and highlighted improvement opportunities under both governments' inclusion frameworks.

> **Many thanks for the wonderful course today. It was so informative and I am looking forward to sharing it with my work colleagues.**
>
> -Gráinne Clare

Recommendations

01 Establish this Training as Statutory, Whole-School CPD on Vision Impairment (VI)

Adopt this collaborative, whole-school training model as a statutory, accredited component of national SEN Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and initial teacher education in both jurisdictions. The programme should be publicly funded and embedded within Department of Education professional learning frameworks, ensuring every teacher, SENCO SET, and classroom or special needs assistant receives mandatory training on Vision Impairment inclusion. Delivery can remain led by Angel Eyes NI and or Féach respectively, combining professional expertise, voluntary sector innovation, and lived experience to guarantee consistent standards, sustainable capacity, and long-term retention of specialist knowledge across the education workforce.

02 Strengthen Introductory Braille and Braille-Technology Training for All Staff and strengthen provision

Require all teachers and assistants supporting pupils who use Braille as their primary medium to complete accredited introductory training in Unified English Braille and Braille technology, building staff confidence and continuity of support.

03 Improve Braille Provision through Designated Specialists and Learning Media Assessments

Introduce designated Braille specialists within vision support

services in both jurisdictions. Require the use of Learning Media Assessments to guide early decisions on literacy medium (i.e. print, braille or both) and ensure consistent, high-quality teaching, monitoring, and progression for all Braille learners.

04 Guarantee Early and Continuous Access to Assistive Technology

Introduce early assessment and ongoing review of assistive technology within each pupil's School Support Plan (SSP), through ICT Assessments. Introduce Technology Specialist posts within sensory support teams and a standardised AT assessment process, supported by national guidance and ring-fenced funding for devices, training, and maintenance.

05 Align Assessment Access and Examination Accommodations across both jurisdictions

State Examinations Commission to further review and extend the Reasonable Accommodations at Certificate Examinations Scheme (RACE) offered to pupils with vision impairment to reflect those offered to students in the north.

Summary

This evaluation provides compelling evidence that inclusion is most effective when responsibility is shared, training is sustained, and lived experience informs delivery. It demonstrates that practical, cross-sector collaboration linking education, health, and the voluntary sector can bridge systemic gaps and deliver measurable improvements in confidence, competence, and consistency across schools.

The findings articulate a clear policy imperative: achieving meaningful inclusion for learners with vision impairment requires sustained, strategic investment in people, resources, and system-wide planning, ensuring the right support, from the right people, at the right time.

> "The practical nature of this course was really effective. Hearing directly from a parent about the student's perspective gave me a better idea of how best to provide support. I now know my main priority in the classroom will be helping my student independently access the curriculum. Excellent work.

- Fiona

Introduction

Angel Eyes Northern Ireland (NI), founded by parents in 2007, is a registered charity supporting over 800 families of children and young people with vision impairment. Guided by a vision of equity of opportunity to deliver the same outcomes as their peers, it provides specialist advocacy, emotional and practical support, and policy engagement. Since 2015, its bespoke Education Service has helped families secure appropriate provision by combining professional expertise with lived experience. Angel Eyes NI also delivers accredited vision awareness training for professionals and leads innovative initiatives such as *EmpathEyes VR,* which enhances staff understanding of paediatric eye conditions and their impact on learning.

Féach, a parent-led charity, supports around 600 families across Ireland, advocating for equal rights, access, and

opportunity. It offers tailored guidance at each stage of a child's educational journey, delivers webinars and professional learning for educators, and liaises with a network of over 500 teachers. Féach's *Guide for Schools and Assistive Technology Toolkit* have become integral education resources, while its peer-to-peer parent network ensures families remain central to policy and practice.

Together, Angel Eyes NI and Féach are recognised leaders in advancing inclusive education for children with vision impairment across both jurisdictions. In 2023, with support from the Shared Island Civic Society Fund, they launched a joint initiative that trained 34 classroom and special needs assistants and produced the first comparative analysis of educational support for pupils with vision impairment in NI and ROI. Building on that foundation, this second phase deepens collaboration through shared innovation, combining Féach's *Assistive Technology Toolkit* and Angel Eyes NI's *EmpathEyes VR* programme, to bridge systemic gaps through voluntary-sector leadership.

Both organisations have a strong track record of driving change. Angel Eyes NI's partnership with Ulster University led to an accredited Level 4 qualification for classroom assistants, completed by over 80 participants, while Féach has advanced the use of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) and improved supports for all visually impaired learners. Collectively, their work aligns with policy commitments under the SEN Framework and SEN Reform Agenda (NI), the EPSEN Act (ROI), and international obligations under the UNCRPD and UNCRC.

Building on Angel Eyes NI's 2023 findings, which highlighted urgent training

needs in schools, this report evaluates the next phase of the partnership, assessing the impact of joint training and demonstrating how rights-based, cross-border collaboration can drive systemic improvement and deliver more equitable educational outcomes for children and young people with vision impairment across the island of Ireland.

Part 1: Training Evaluation

Background

01 Workshops

Training reach

The Education Access in Ireland Report (2024) revealed significant gaps in the knowledge, skills, and confidence of classroom and special educational needs assistants supporting pupils with vision impairment. It also highlighted a disconnect between assistants and teaching staff, with many reporting difficulty implementing new strategies without active engagement from teachers, SENCOs, or Special Education Teachers (SETs).

In response, the 2025 training adopted a whole-school, team-based model, bringing teachers, coordinators, and assistants together to develop shared understanding and consistent practice. This collaborative approach

reflects policy priorities in both jurisdictions, recognising that inclusion is most effective when responsibility is collective and embedded across the school.

The programme also addressed the needs of a small but vital group, pupils using Braille as their primary learning medium. Although numbers remain low (16 in Northern Ireland and 79 in the Republic of Ireland), Braille literacy is fundamental to equitable participation, independence, and employability. To ensure representation, a dedicated workshop was co-delivered by four specialists, including two with lived experience, blending professional and personal insight.

Workshops were jointly promoted and codesigned by Angel Eyes NI and Féach and held in Dundalk, chosen as a central, cross-border location to support collaboration and peer learning. While uptake from Northern Ireland was lower than in 2024, likely due to concurrent Angel Eyes Virtual Reality school training and the timing of the new academic year, interest from the Republic of Ireland was exceptional: 85% of 124 respondents submitted expressions of interest within the first few days of launch.

Participant Profile:

Of the 124 respondents, 76% worked in mainstream schools, 10% in special schools, 5% in specialist provisions within mainstream schools (SPiMS) or learning units, 5% in further education colleges, and the remaining 5% in independent preschools. Just over half (51%) were employed within the primary sector.

Eligibility was limited to participants directly supporting pupils with vision

impairment, employed either as teachers, including Special Educational Needs Teachers (SETs) and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), or as assistants (Classroom or Special Needs Assistants). This group represented 89% of the total respondents. Of these, 55% were classroom or special needs assistants, while 45% were teachers; among the latter, 55% held roles as SETs or SENCOs.

Interest in the Braille-focused workshop was expressed by 34% of respondents, though only one was based in Northern Ireland. This relatively low uptake may reflect the Education Authority's recent expansion of Braille provision, including the appointment of a Braille and screen-reader specialist. Encouragingly, following awareness of this project, the Education Authority independently hosted two Braille workshops in Northern Ireland during July and August. Given that most respondents and presenters were based in or near Dublin, the Braille workshop was subsequently held there.

A total of 50 participants were selected to attend the training series: 27 took part in the Large Print workshop in Dundalk, and 23 in the Braille and Tactile Learners workshop in Dublin.

Overview:

124 respondents

- 76% worked in mainstream schools
- 10% in special schools
- 5% in SPiMS or learning units
- 5% in further education colleges
- 5% in independent preschools

Over half (**51%**) were employed within the primary sector

Roles and Eligibility
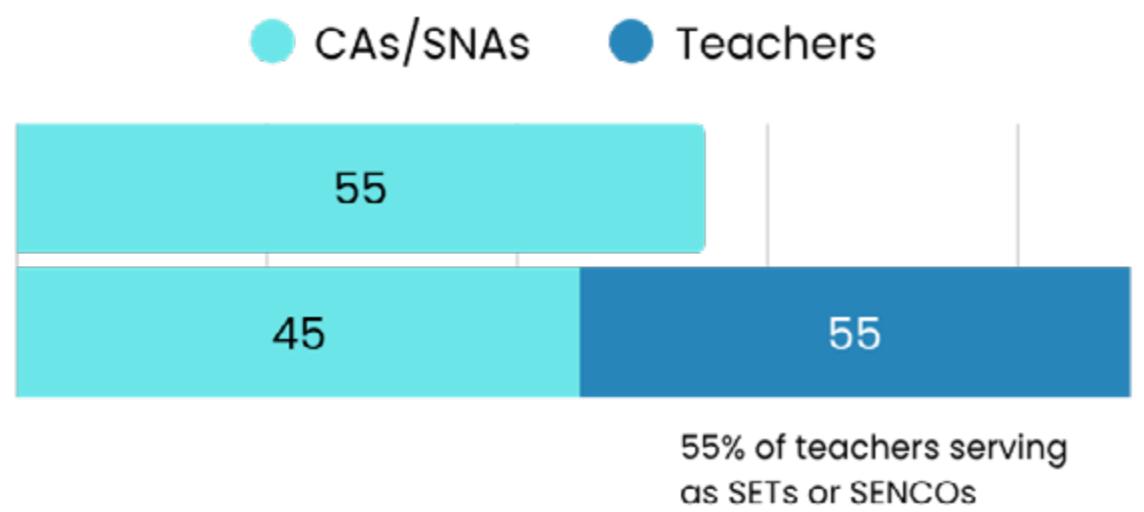
55% of teachers serving as SETs or SENCOs

Eligibility was limited to participants directly supporting pupils with vision impairment — 89% met this criterion. Of these, 55% were assistants and 45% were teachers, with 55% of teachers serving as SETs or SENCOs

Training attendance summary: 50 participants were selected

Workshop	Location	Participants
Large Print	Dundalk	27
Braille & Tactile Learners	Dublin	23
Total	--	50

Workshop Content

Was lead by The Angel Eyes NI Education Services Manager who is a qualified teacher, CEO of Féach, an education advocate with lived experience and Angel Eyes NI Eye Clinician. It focused on supporting children and young people with low vision who use enlarged print and covered the core principles of effective classroom support for pupils with vision impairment through four structured sessions:

- **Virtual Reality Technology:** using innovative technology as a training tool, the participants received a VR experience, simulating common paediatric eye conditions, including those of the students the participant's support. The session was CPD accredited and led by an eye-clinician, providing clinical insight and knowledge into how various eye conditions and functions can impact educational access.

- **Adapting printed materials:** participants received teaching and resources on the key fundamentals and strategies of how to appropriately adapt and reformat materials to make them accessible to visually impaired students.

- **Assistive Technology:** Participants learned practical strategies and received an age- and stage-specific AT/IT guide and resource toolkit. These materials showed them how to support students effectively to use their technology in the classroom and ultimately foster independent learning.

- **The Independent learner, through the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC)/ Curriculum Framework of Vision Impairment (CFVI):** participants were signposted to and provided information on the 2

frameworks, with discussion on how these might be implemented in their practice/ school environment.

The second workshop, held the following day in Dublin, focused on supporting children and young people who use Braille as their primary medium for learning. Four guest speakers delivered sessions on the fundamentals of Braille literacy, illustrating the developmental journey from early tactile concepts to advanced literacy skills, and emphasising how these underpin future independence, employability, and success in adulthood. The four structured sessions covered:

- **Early Braille Literacy and Concept Development:** Delivered by one of Vision Ireland 's Occupational Therapists with extensive experience supporting children and young people on their Braille journey, this session explored the development of tactile skills, Braille readiness, assessment, and the importance of a multimodal, early-intervention approach.

- **ChildVision Reading Services**: The service lead provided information to the group about the various resources available to support staff and tactile learners in the classroom, including hard copy and digital books, and 3D printed models and resources.

- **Assistive Technology (AT):** Led by the Chairperson of the Irish National Braille and Alternative Formats Authority (INBAF), a recognised authority on assistive technology in the Republic of Ireland and a Braillist with lived experience, this session explored how to effectively use and support the technologies employed by children and young people in their learning environments. The

session also examined the application of AT across STEM subjects.

- **Curriculum Access:** Delivered by a solutions architect and AI expert at the Central Bank of Ireland and a Braille user, this presentation combined personal educational experience with professional expertise, offering valuable pedagogical insights into the use of tactile diagrams, using the Perkins in the study of mathematics to enhance curriculum access, and the importance of becoming proficient in the use of technology that interacts with modern information systems in the world of work.

02 Evaluation/ Methodology:

The evaluation of the workshops aimed to assess their impact across three key domains: confidence, knowledge, and skills among teachers and assistants supporting pupils with vision impairment. Data were collected digitally via Microsoft Forms, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative questions. All participants completed pre and post-training evaluations, enabling comparative analysis of outcomes. Participant engagement was also observed throughout the sessions, noting the depth of interaction, questioning, and shared reflection with presenters. To supplement these findings, two online focus groups were convened, one for attendees of each workshop, to explore emerging themes in greater depth and gain richer insight into participants' perceptions of their roles and professional learning needs.

Key Findings

Workshop 1 – Enlarged Print for Low-Vision Pupils

Pre-Training Questionnaire:

- **55%** of participants had supported their pupil for over 1 year

- **75% had never received training specific to vision impairment**

- **46% rated their confidence as *poor* or *very poor*** (with 46% rating this as satisfactory)

- **58% rated their knowledge of how assistive technology can support students with vision impairment as *poor* or *very poor***

- **58% had a *poor* or *very poor* understanding of how to adapt materials** to support a student with vision impairment

- **42% rated their knowledge of creating an inclusive environment as *poor* or *very poor***

Post-training Evaluation

- All participants (100%) reported an increased understanding of vision impairment, accompanied by a 100% rise in confidence in creating inclusive classroom and school environments. Notably, 96% also felt that their learning would benefit other pupils in their class.

- 100% reported improved knowledge of how to adapt and modify learning materials and environments, with 95% describing this increase as significant.

- 100% reported enhanced understanding of how to effectively use assistive technology to support pupils' curriculum access, with 90% describing this increase as significant.

- 100% strongly agreed that delivering training at a whole-school level would be highly beneficial.

Workshop 2: Braille and Tactile Learners

Pre-Training Questionnaire:

- 53% of participants had supported their pupil for over one year, indicating sustained engagement with learners using Braille.

- **95% had never received training** specifically focused on supporting tactile or Braille learners.

- 63% rated their confidence as satisfactory, while **27% described it as poor or very poor.**

- **48% reported poor or very poor knowledge of how assistive technology** can support students with vision impairment.

- **26% indicated a poor or very poor understanding of how to adapt learning materials**, with 63% rating their knowledge as satisfactory.

- **53% rated their knowledge of how to create an inclusive learning environment as poor or very poor.**

- **64% reported a poor or very poor understanding of the Braille learning journey.**

Post-training Evaluation

- **100% increase in knowledge and understanding of how to use assistive technology** to support students with vision impairment, with 75% rating this as significant

- **100% increase on how to source learning resources** and materials for the tactile learner

- **100% increase in participants overall confidence** and in their understanding of facilitating inclusivity for a blind pupil

- **100% strongly agreed that delivering training at a whole-school level** would be highly beneficial.

Discussion and Thematic Analysis

The workshops were characterised by high levels of interaction, with participants engaging actively through questioning, reflection, and professional dialogue within a supportive learning environment. Analysis of observations, evaluations, and focus group discussions identified three overarching themes:

01 The benefits of the team-training model

Participants consistently highlighted the value of learning alongside colleagues in different roles. Teachers and classroom/ special needs assistants reported that joint training supported shared understanding and improved communication, enabling a more cohesive, "joined up" approach to supporting pupils with vision impairment. Evaluation data reinforced this finding, with 100% of participants rating joint training as invaluable to their professional development. As one SNA reflected, *"I have worked with the student for two years, now the SET and class teacher have a better idea of how to support them. There's a more joint-up approach."*

The need for a whole-school approach to training was repeatedly emphasised, particularly within post-primary settings, where pupils have several teachers, can inhibit consistent practice. As one participant noted, *"A whole-school approach would help get all the teachers on board; in post-primary, it's very hard to get everyone to understand the need."*

02 Continuous professional development and early intervention

Participants expressed a strong desire for sustained professional development to enhance confidence and knowledge. While all recognised the value of early training at the initial stages of pupil support, many emphasised the importance of ongoing learning to keep pace with evolving student learning needs, technology and practice. One participant commented, *"It's beneficial to work with the student before the course. Now I have even more questions about technology and other stuff that seems relevant now."*

Across both workshops, there was clear evidence of unmet need in assistive technology training. In Workshop 1, over a quarter of participants identified this as the area in which they most wished to develop further expertise. Similarly, in Workshop 2, participants prioritised Braille resource modification and assistive technology for future training.

Early intervention was a recurring focus in both groups, with unanimous agreement that introducing technology and tactile learning at an early stage can normalise its use and improve long-term outcomes. As one assistant observed, *"Early intervention, especially in the use of technology, is very important. We have one student who will use it and one who won't—the academic achievement is very different."*

Parental involvement also emerged as a critical factor influencing pupil engagement with technology. Participants noted that pupils whose parents were knowledgeable and supportive tended to be more compliant and confident in using assistive tools.

03 The strength of the collaborative delivery model

The cross-sectoral nature of the training, delivered by professionals from health (orthoptics), education, lived experience, and the voluntary sector was repeatedly praised for its authenticity, relevance, and depth. Participants valued the integration of professional expertise with personal experience, describing it as both inspiring and practical. One evaluation noted, *"An extremely useful training today… really impressed by the education and parental insights. Knowing this support and knowledge is out there a great help."*

Nearly half (47%) of Workshop 2 participants reported that they would immediately apply their learning on tactile diagrams, particularly in STEM subjects, citing improved understanding of the importance of description and concept development.

Quantitative findings supported these themes: 42% of large-print workshop participants and 53% of Braille workshop participants rated the current guidance and advice they receive to support their pupils as poor or very poor. Collectively, these findings underscore the need for systematic, ongoing professional development embedded within a whole-school framework, supported by cross-disciplinary collaboration and informed by lived experience.

The evaluation provides strong evidence that collaborative, whole-school training, grounded in lived experience and professional expertise, significantly enhances staff confidence, knowledge, and practice. Participants valued the authenticity of cross-sector delivery and the opportunity to exchange strategies across jurisdictions. The findings highlight both the effectiveness of this model and ongoing gaps in specialist capacity, professional development, and early intervention.

They point to the need for sustained investment in training, workforce development, and cross-border collaboration. The next section examines the wider policy and service context across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, identifying shared strengths, structural differences, and opportunities for joint action to improve educational outcomes for children and young people with vision impairment.

> **Thank you both so much for having this course on Tuesday. It was extremely interesting and helpful. I did mention it the other day that this course should be delivered in all schools. Our school would definitely be interested to receive some training on this, especially the VR as this was very interesting to see how the student can struggle with the simplest of tasks. Please don't hesitate to contact me if this is something you can offer and we can arrange something.**
>
> - Gillian Harte

Part 2: Comparative Analysis

Background

Through the development and delivery of the training sessions, several key similarities and differences in provision were identified across the two jurisdictions. This project has created a valuable platform for shared learning, enabling the exchange of effective practice and innovative approaches between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. By drawing on the strengths and identifying areas for development of each system, this collaboration offers meaningful insights and evidence-informed recommendations to enhance outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs across the island of Ireland.

The information in this section is informed by a desktop literary review, training questionnaires, workshop discussion, two focus groups with teachers and assistants (all including SENCos and SETs), and 4 parent interviews. It considers provisions for the spectrum of visually impaired students, including a focus on those who are braille users.

01   Policy Context & Training

Both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have established robust legislative frameworks to support children with vision impairment within the broader context of SEND, safeguarding participation and inclusion, including the duty of schools to make reasonable adjustments.

In both jurisdictions, the legislative and policy architecture supports that

training for teachers and assistants is not discretionary but fundamental to realising inclusive education. This commitment is grounded in international rights frameworks, most notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which obliges states to provide inclusive education systems supported by appropriately trained staff, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which enshrines every child's right to education without discrimination. These frameworks establish a clear rationale: to translate rights into practice, education systems must invest in a well-prepared, multidisciplinary workforce capable of meeting the diverse needs of all learners.

In Northern Ireland, the Minister for Education, has reaffirmed this commitment through the SEN Reform Agenda and Five-Year Delivery Plan (2025–2030), which sets out a comprehensive workforce strategy aligned with the Programme for Government's "Right People" pillar. This pillar focuses on developing a confident, skilled, and child-centred workforce across both teaching and support roles. Key actions include: a mandatory minimum SEN and inclusion component within initial teacher education; structured professional development pathways for teachers; and, for assistants, the introduction of a fit-for-purpose SEN qualification, a career progression framework, and train-the-trainer peer-learning networks. The plan also emphasises the creation of cross-departmental and multidisciplinary teams, a principle consistent with the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, which mandates collaboration across public bodies to improve outcomes for children and young people.

In the Republic of Ireland, the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 protects the right of students with special educational needs to be educated in inclusive settings, supported by appropriately trained personnel. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) advances this through the Special Needs Assistant Workforce Development Unit and a suite of professional learning and advisory supports for teachers and school leaders. The NCSE's Policy Advice Paper, *An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society* (2024), further underscores the need for continuous, high-quality professional development focused on differentiation, curriculum adaptation, and assistive technology to ensure effective inclusion.

Collectively, these legislative and policy commitments across both jurisdictions establish a strong rationale for cross-border, collaborative training models, such as the one delivered through this project. Training that brings together educators, health professionals, and voluntary-sector experts with lived experience reflects the intent of both governments to embed whole-school, team-based learning as a mechanism for advancing inclusion and improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs across the island of Ireland.

02 Overview of Educational Specialist Support Service for VI in NI and ROI

Schools and students with vision impairment, in NI and ROI, receive specialist support through a peripatetic Vision/ Sensory Service, staffed by Qualified Teachers of the Vision Impaired (QTVIs)/ Visiting Teacher for Vision Impairment (VTVI), employed by the Education Authority (EA) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) respectively. The

service in both jurisdictions works with pupils from age 0 – 19 years, conducts functional vision assessments, provides advice to schools on reasonable adjustments and exam access, supports children and young people in their braille learning, and provide some training and assistive technology. In both jurisdictions a criterion is applied to determine which pupils with a vision impairment can avail of support.

Across both jurisdictions, the specialist vision impairment workforce is operating under significant strain. In Northern Ireland, Freedom of Information data (RNIB, 2024) reveal that QTVIs carry caseloads exceeding 60 pupils each, with some outreach staff supporting more than 150. Despite the SEN Reform Agenda (2025–2030) outlining plans to strengthen the inclusion workforce, the Vision Support Service remains overstretched, with increasing demand from pupils presenting with complex or multiple needs. Similarly, in the Republic of Ireland, Visiting Teachers for pupils who are blind or visually impaired, is currently reported at 16 nationally, with 2 associate teachers, supporting over 1,520 students (National Council for Special Education, 2025). The RNIB 2024 FOI calls for 'high needs funding' to help deliver specialist education services that meets the needs of the children and young people.

Both jurisdictions benefit from the specialist expertise of their vision-impairment services. Yet without increased investment and strategic workforce planning, the capacity to deliver equitable, specialist support will remain at risk. A review of delivery models is warranted to ensure an outcomes-based approach aligned with current policy and legislation. Workforce capability could be strengthened through targeted posts in areas such as Braille and assistive technology, for example, the Education

Authority in Northern Ireland's recent appointment of a Braille/Screen-Reader Specialist. In parallel, collaborative cross-border training models can alleviate pressure by diffusing specialist knowledge to mainstream teachers and assistants, building shared capacity, and embedding inclusive practice across schools.

03 Assistive Technology for Students with Vision Impairment

Best practice in the education of children and young people with vision impairment (VI) integrates assistive technology (AT) across the continuum from low vision to blindness. For Braille users, *Refreshable Braille Displays* (RBDs) underpin digital literacy by uniting tactile and electronic text, supporting inclusive, technology-based pedagogy (Willings, 2020; WHO, 2018). For learners with low vision, tools such as tablets and laptops with magnification and text-to-speech functions enhance independent access, extend writing fluency, and improve self-editing skills (Orr et al., 2007). Across all profiles, appropriately matched and explicitly taught AT is associated with greater independence, academic achievement, and employability.

Among the 124 training respondents, only 10% supported a pupil who did not use AT, reflecting growing awareness of its value. Angel Eyes NI and Féach advocate that every learner with VI should have individually matched technology, introduced early to normalise its use and sustain engagement throughout education.

In Northern Ireland, AT is largely provided through the Education Authority's

Vision Impairment Advisory Service and QTVIs, but allocation remains largely criterion-based, with overreliance on visual acuity. This approach risks excluding pupils whose needs extend beyond acuity measures. Assessment should instead be grounded in a holistic functional profile, considering contrast sensitivity, visual fields, fatigue, co-occurring needs, preferred learning media, and task demands. In the Republic of Ireland, the Department of Education's Assistive Technology Grant provides funding for AT/IT for all students supported by the Visiting Teacher Service based on their access needs. However, as in NI, training remains inconsistent: almost two-thirds (58%) of low-vision workshop participants and nearly half (48%) of those supporting Braille users rated their AT knowledge as poor or very poor, with most reporting no formal training.

Focus-group participants called for ongoing, practical support, including refresher sessions two to three times annually and accessible troubleshooting advice. Many described situations where pupils were left without functional equipment due to ambiguity over the equipment repair process and responsibilities. Encouragingly, since 2024, the Education Authority has expanded device provision, including laptops, digital magnifiers, and distance cameras, bringing NI closer to parity with ROI. However, participants in both jurisdictions were unaware of any standardised AT or ICT assessment process to ensure devices are age, task, and environment-appropriate before allocation.

Differences were also noted in Braille technology provision. NI primarily supplies RBDs, which pair with mainstream computers and smartphones, developing transferable workplace skills such as screen-reader use, email, and document management. ROI tends to favour stand-alone Braille note takers, which offer limited software compatibility (Perkins School for the Blind). Research shows over half of employed blind adults use RBDs at work (McDonnall et al., 2024), and that Braille literacy correlates strongly with educational attainment and employment outcomes (Ryles, 1996; RNIB, 2020). Given that 38% of young people with VI aged 16–25 are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), compared with a UK average of 20% (RNIB, 2018), systematic AT instruction is critical to long-term equity.

Across both systems, participants reported a lack of structured teaching and assessment of AT skills. AT proficiency should be viewed as a learning continuum, with clear progression goals, baseline and follow-up assessment, and regular review to ensure effectiveness and alignment with pupils' evolving needs.

Internationally, best practice highlights the impact of embedding dedicated technology specialists within vision support services. For example, Hertfordshire County Council employs a specialist who conducts individual assessments, coordinates AT training for QTVIs, teachers, assistants, and families, and provides ongoing troubleshooting support. Adopting similar roles in NI and ROI would build sustainable expertise, enhance staff confidence, and ensure that technology use is systematically integrated into learning.

04 Exam Access

The Education Access in Ireland report (2024) highlighted significant disparities between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the access arrangements available to children and young people with vision impairment undertaking state examinations (A-Levels, GCSEs in NI, and Junior and Leaving Cert in ROI). These differences were most evident in the provision of digital examination papers, the specifications for modified materials, and the amount of extra time allocated to students to complete their exams.

In 2024, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) invited the State Examinations Commission (SEC) to review the *Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Examinations* (RACE) scheme for students with vision impairment. This review involved a series of constructive engagements with the SEC, Féach, and other key stakeholders, marking a significant step forward in recognising and addressing the barriers faced by students with vision impairment during state examinations. The comparative analysis between Northern Ireland and Ireland, as presented in the *Education Access in Ireland report* (2024), provided valuable evidence that informed these discussions and supported the development of a more equitable approach to assessment.

While the final report of the review has not yet been published, several positive interim changes have already been implemented. These include an increase in the allocation of additional time, from 10 to 15 minutes per hour of examination, the availability of all modified past papers for vision-impaired candidates on the SEC website, and the continued provision and development of modified digital examination papers. Collectively, these measures represent meaningful progress towards a more inclusive and rights-based assessment framework for learners with vision impairment.

However, significant disparities remain. While the increased time allocation in the Republic of Ireland is a welcome development, it remains out of step with practice in Northern Ireland, where students using braille receive 100% additional time, substantially more than their counterparts in the south. Parents and educational professionals are unanimous in their view that students who use braille require the full 100% extra time (and, in subjects such as mathematics, potentially up to 150%) to demonstrate their knowledge and complete all examination questions to their fullest potential. This position is consistent with evidence from the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and international accessibility standards, which recognise that braille users require additional processing and navigation time due to the complexity of tactile reading and transcription.

It is equally important to highlight the persistent accessibility barriers that hinder primary school children with vision impairment, both north and south of the border, from participating fully in standardised assessments across the key stages, and in Northern Ireland, the post-primary transfer process. The increasing reliance on computerised and timed testing presents significant challenges for pupils with vision impairment. Consequently, pupils are frequently excluded from participation, and in many cases, their results are omitted from school-level reporting and national datasets.

Of particular concern is the ongoing practice in Northern Ireland, whereby the Secondary Education Admissions Group (SEAG) does not

provide modified or accessible examination papers for pupils with vision impairment undertaking transfer tests. This omission effectively treats these pupils differently from their sighted peers, contrary to the principles of equality and inclusion articulated in the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 and Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Such practices not only disadvantage children educationally but also risk undermining their confidence and sense of belonging within the education system.

05 Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is a cornerstone of educational success, and its importance is amplified when a child has a vision impairment. Parents are not peripheral supporters but essential partners in enabling their child's learning, independence, and wellbeing. Across both jurisdictions, parent interviews revealed a consistent call for stronger communication, clearer information about available supports and options, and meaningful involvement in key decisions affecting their child's education, particularly around assistive technology, specialist provision, and transitions.

Such collaboration is not only best practice but a rights-based obligation. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, Articles 12 and 23) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, Article 24), education systems must ensure that parents and children participate in decisions that shape learning and inclusion. This principle is embedded in both the EPSEN Act (2004) in the Republic of Ireland and the SEN Reform Agenda (2025–2030) in Northern Ireland,

which emphasise partnership, transparency, and co-production in planning and provision. To realise these commitments, parents must receive accessible information, regular updates, and joined-up communication from all professionals involved, including Qualified Teachers of Vision Impairment (QTVIs), SENCOs/SETs, and classroom assistants, ensuring alignment between home and school.

Parental engagement is especially critical in Braille literacy development. When parents are supported to engage in tactile awareness, consistent home practice, and shared reading, they reinforce the behaviours and motivation that underpin fluent literacy (Winantyo, 2019). Studies show that parents who learn elements of Braille and provide accessible books at home create richer literacy environments (Kamei-Hannan et al., 2012). Recent research on print–Braille hybrid reading also demonstrates how shared experiences strengthen both learning and parent–child connection (the "Cuddling Up" Study, 2024). Given the complexity of Braille instruction, parents should be equipped as co-educators through scaffolded training, practical materials, and regular collaboration with professionals.

In systems already under pressure, sustained parental engagement becomes even more critical. Without structured partnership and continuous communication, the gains from specialist teaching risk being diminished, undermining the potential for learners with vision impairment to thrive academically and socially. Building strong, informed, and participatory relationships with families is therefore central to delivering on both jurisdictions' commitments to inclusive, equitable education.

06 Curriculum Framework for Vision Impairment (CFVI)/ Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC)

Both the Curriculum Framework for Vision Impairment (CFVI) and the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) set out the additional specialist skills that children and young people with vision impairment must develop to succeed in learning, life, and work.

In Northern Ireland, the CFVI is endorsed by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), supported by the Vision Support Service, and published on the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) website. Importantly, while not referenced by name, the SEN Reform Agenda and Five-Year Delivery Plan (2025–2030) references under its Curriculum Review action area the need for a dedicated curriculum framework for learners with vision impairment, signalling the Department of Education's intention to embed CFVI principles within mainstream reform. This marks a positive step toward integrating specialist curricula within wider inclusion policy.

In contrast, the ECC or an equivalent framework has yet to achieve similar recognition or formal adoption in the Republic of Ireland, despite its clear alignment with the aims of the EPSEN Act (2004) and the NCSE Policy Advice on Inclusive Education (2024).

However, none of the participants attending the training had previously heard of either framework, underscoring the urgent need for greater awareness and practical implementation. Embedding the CFVI and ECC within everyday school practice is vital to ensuring equitable participation and improving outcomes for learners with vision impairment. School staff must be supported not only to understand these frameworks but to apply them effectively through curriculum planning, assessment, and pedagogy.

Integrating the CFVI and ECC into national inclusion and curriculum policy, under the SEN Reform Agenda (NI) and EPSEN Act (ROI), would align both jurisdictions with international best practice and the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), ensuring that independence, participation, and lifelong learning are systematically embedded in education for all learners with vision impairment.

07 Provision for Children and Young People Accessing Braille; Teaching & Learning

Braille Provision and Workforce Expertise

In 2024/25, there were 79 students using braille in schools across the Republic of Ireland, including approximately 29 dual users of braille and print (Department of Education and Youth, 2025). In Northern Ireland, 16 students were reported as braille users or expected braille learners (RNIB, 2024), though no data were available on dual users.

Teaching braille is a highly specialised skill requiring expertise in tactile literacy, spatial orientation, fine-motor development, and the translation of visual concepts into tactile form (McCall & Mason, 2013; Salisbury, 2008). O'Connor et al. (2025) emphasise that pupils with vision impairment experience barriers to participation when staff lack this expertise, reinforcing the need for highly trained professionals capable of delivering

explicit, sequential, and individualised instruction.

Across both jurisdictions, provision is largely delivered by a Qualified Teacher of Vision Impairment (QTVI) or Visiting Teacher for Vision Impaired (VTVI) who visits the school weekly or fortnightly to teach braille, advise on assistive technology, and support classroom staff. In Northern Ireland, this is supplemented by an external Braille and Screen Reader Specialist, employed part-time by the Education Authority, who trains QTVIs, classroom assistants, and pupils in the use of assistive technologies. This model, led by a practitioner with lived experience of vision impairment, has significantly strengthened service quality and staff confidence.

In the Republic of Ireland, a similar model of collaborative team teaching operates, with teachers, Special Education Teachers (SETs), and assistants working collectively under the VT's guidance. However, in both jurisdictions, there is a clear gap in mandatory training: while Northern Ireland requires classroom assistants to complete an introductory Unified English Braille (UEB) course delivered by RNIB, this is not extended to teachers; and in the Republic, neither SETs nor SNAs are required to complete such training. Many staff therefore self-initiate online courses in their own time, as there is no ring-fenced professional development allocation within the school day.

Parent interviews and focus groups consistently highlighted the importance of having multiple staff members in each school proficient in braille to mitigate the impact of staff absence or turnover. Parents and professionals alike advocated for designated braille and technology specialists within vision support services and across school clusters. These specialists would coordinate training, provide troubleshooting and home–school liaison, and ensure that learners' literacy development is systematically monitored and supported.

Participants also called for greater consistency in assessment, noting the absence of standardised tools to track braille literacy progress. Internationally validated frameworks, such as the Texas Assessment of Braille Literacy Skills (ABLS), MNREAD-Braille, and APH Braille Brain, could strengthen consistency, target-setting, and reporting across the island of Ireland.

The impact of team-based, cross-border training delivered through the joint Angel Eyes NI and Féach workshops was clear: participants valued opportunities to exchange expertise, problem-solve collaboratively, and reflect on shared challenges. This collegial approach revealed substantial in-house knowledge but also concern over how specialist expertise is retained once a pupil transitions to another setting.

Learning Media Decisions and Dual-Media Instruction

Best practice dictates that decisions about a child or young person's literacy medium should be guided by a Learning Media Assessment (LMA) alongside a Functional Vision Assessment. For pupils with unstable or inefficient residual vision, such as those with progressive eye conditions, dual-media instruction (braille and print taught together) is often recommended (Koenig, 1995). Research demonstrates that when teams coordinate materials, schedule explicit time for both codes, and share roles between home and school, dual instruction is both feasible and effective; the main risk arises from insufficient intensity in either medium (Lusk & Corn, 2006). Starting braille early for learners likely to experience

vision loss protects long-term literacy and independence (Rex et al., 2010). Effective programmes integrate braille, print, and assistive technology to build fluency, manage fatigue, and maintain curriculum access (TSBVI, 2020; De-Miguel & Álvarez, 2013).

A common counterargument is that introducing braille too early may reduce reliance on sight or slow the development of visual literacy. Advocates of a print-first approach argue that large print and magnification support inclusion with sighted peers. However, dual learning can place additional cognitive and perceptual demands on pupils, as each medium requires distinct processing and motor skills (Koenig & Holbrook, 2000; Wormsley, 2016). Without adequate support, this can initially slow progress or risk disengagement. Yet delaying braille until vision loss becomes severe carries far greater risks, literacy regression, dependence, and emotional distress, particularly for adolescents facing high-stakes examinations.

In 2025, the Department of Education and Youth (ROI) reported 29 dual-media learners among 79 braille users. Although data are unavailable for Northern Ireland, Angel Eyes' Education Advocacy Service supports several children with progressive retinal conditions who remain large-print users only. Parent interviews across both jurisdictions revealed that LMAs are rarely conducted, and decisions are often based on immediate visual ability rather than long-term need. As a result, braille is typically introduced only when usable vision is minimal, often during teenage years, leaving pupils under prepared for transition and assessment.

Parents described the emotional and educational toll of this late intervention: grief, frustration, and a loss of confidence compounded by an inability to access materials or keep pace academically. Many stressed that even limited early exposure to braille would have safeguarded literacy and supported emotional resilience as vision declined.

Habilitation

Habilitation refers to the systematic teaching of *orientation, mobility, and independent living skills* that enable children and young people with vision impairment to navigate safely, move confidently, and participate fully in school, home, and community life. It is a core element of educational inclusion and personal autonomy, building the practical competencies required for independent learning, social participation, and transition to adulthood.

In the Republic of Ireland (ROI), there is no reliable national data on the number of children and young people receiving habilitation or orientation and mobility (O&M) support. Provision operates through a mixed system spanning health, education, and the voluntary sector. The NCSE Visiting Teacher Service, funded by the Department of Education, identifies pupils' mobility needs but does not deliver O&M instruction directly due to staffing and role constraints. The Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind (IGDB), through its *Child Mobility and Independent Living Skills Programme*, provides habilitation in three counties in Munster under Department of Education and Youth funding. Despite running successfully for over two decades, this programme remains a long-standing *pilot* and has not been extended nationally. Outside these counties, limited provision is reported via Vision Ireland's Children and Young Persons Team, funded by the Health Service Executive (HSE). Consequently, children's access to habilitation is marked by geographical inequality, extended waiting times, and reliance on non-

statutory charities, with no national framework or county-level transparency to guide planning or ensure equitable delivery.

In Northern Ireland (NI), the RNIB Freedom of Information Report (2024) highlights a comparable but quantitatively documented shortfall. Only 1% of pupils on the Education Authority's (EA) vision impairment caseload received habilitation support in 2024, down from 2% in 2023. This indicates that the majority of children with vision impairment are not receiving specialist mobility or independence training, despite its critical role in educational access and lifelong skills development. Habilitation is not centrally delivered by the EA but spot-purchased from external providers, primarily Guide Dogs NI, which undertakes assessment and training. At Jordanstown School, 43% of pupils were either receiving or awaiting support, evidencing substantial unmet demand. Commissioning responsibilities are shared between Children's Services and Education, resulting in fragmented accountability and regional inconsistency. RNIB recommends that the Department of Education establish a dedicated funding stream and delivery framework within the SEND Transformation Programme to secure equitable and sustainable provision.

In addition, some Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) Sensory Support Teams deliver aspects of habilitation through rehabilitation workers. However, such provision remains inconsistent, and Guide Dogs NI continues to be the only organisation delivering formal, qualified habilitation programmes.

While both jurisdictions recognise the importance of habilitation for children and young people with vision impairment, their delivery systems remain fragmented and uneven. Nonetheless, examples of effective local practice and professional commitment demonstrate the potential for a shared island strategy to embed habilitation as a coordinated, rights-based entitlement across education and health systems.

Resources

In the Republic of Ireland, ChildVision's Reading Services functions as the national transcription centre for educational materials in Braille and other accessible formats, operating under an annual Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Department of Education. In 2019/20, the service transcribed almost 7,000 educational titles across a range of formats, including Braille, large print, digital, tactile, and 3D resources, an essential mechanism for ensuring curriculum access for learners with vision impairment. The availability of the full range of materials in one place, offers clarity to educators supporting students with vision impairment. However, there is no publicly available data on the overall budget allocation, cost per title, or per-student expenditure associated with this service, limiting transparency and evaluation of value for money.

In Northern Ireland, comparable provision is delivered through the Education Authority's (EA) Sensory Service, which oversees the production of large print and some digital materials, and procures Braille transcription for key curriculum areas such as mathematics, science, and literacy. This is complemented by the RNIB Bookshare Service which also provides digital books and alternative formats.

Both jurisdictions fund these services through their respective Departments of Education; however, unlike in the Republic, there is no published data in Northern Ireland detailing the number of titles produced, procurement

expenditure, or unit costs. The RNIB Freedom of Information Report (2024) further highlights systemic pressures within the Northern Ireland service, noting a growing population of pupils with vision impairment without a commensurate increase in resources.

I really enjoyed the course on Tuesday, it was so informative and I am looking forward to supporting the child I am working with as best I can after getting some great tips and advice.

- Karen

I attended the workshop because I have a personal interest in the area—my 18-year-old child has a visual impairment—and I wanted to be well prepared for when I do have a child to support in my preschool setting. I don't currently have a child with a visual impairment to support this year, but I'm looking forward to using what I learned in the future.

- Marta

Conclusions & Recommendations

This cross-border evaluation highlights the transformative impact of collaborative, team-based professional development in strengthening inclusive education for children and young people with vision impairment. The partnership between Angel Eyes NI and Féach has demonstrated that when educators, assistants, parents, and voluntary-sector experts learn together, the result is a richer understanding of pupils' needs, greater confidence in classroom practice, and stronger continuity of support across settings and transitions.

Evidence from workshops, focus groups, and parent interviews underscores a consistent message across both jurisdictions: inclusion is not achieved through goodwill alone, but through structured, sustained investment in the people, systems, and resources that make equitable

access possible. Despite strong legislative and policy foundations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, specialist services remain under significant strain, with high caseloads, limited habilitation access, inconsistent training, and gaps in early intervention. The findings of this study point clearly to the need for a coherent, island-wide strategy that moves beyond pilot projects toward a systemic model of inclusive practice that is evidence-informed, rights-based, and sustainable.

Drawing together the insights from this research, the following policy recommendations outline the key actions required to improve outcomes for learners with vision impairment and to ensure compliance with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Key Policy Recommendations

01 Establish this Training as Statutory, Whole-School CPD on Vision Impairment (VI)

Adopt this collaborative, whole-school training model as a statutory, accredited component of national SEN Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and initial teacher education in both jurisdictions. The programme should be publicly funded and embedded within Department of Education professional learning frameworks, ensuring every teacher, SENCO/SET, and classroom or special needs assistant receives mandatory training on Vision Impairment inclusion. Delivery can remain led by Angel Eyes NI and/or Féach respectively, combining professional expertise,

voluntary-sector innovation, and lived experience to guarantee consistent standards, sustainable capacity, and long-term retention of specialist knowledge across the education workforce.

02 Strengthen Introductory Braille and Braille-Technology Training for All Staff and strengthen provision

Require all teachers and assistants supporting pupils who use Braille as their primary medium to complete accredited introductory training in Unified English Braille and Braille technology, building staff confidence and continuity of support.

03 Improve Braille Provision through Designated Specialists and Learning Media Assessments

Introduce designated Braille specialists within vision support services in both jurisdictions. Require the use of Learning Media Assessments to guide early decisions on literacy medium (i.e. print, braille or both) and ensure consistent, high-quality teaching, monitoring, and progression for all Braille learners.

04 Guarantee Early and Continuous Access to Assistive Technology

Introduce early assessment and ongoing review of assistive technology within each pupil's Individual Education Plan (IEP/PLP), through ICT Assessments. Introduce Technology Specialist posts within sensory support teams and a standardised AT assessment process, supported by national guidance and ring-fenced funding

for devices, training, and maintenance.

05 Align Assessment Access and Examination Accommodations across both jurisdictions

State Examinations Commission to further review and extend the Reasonable Accommodations at Certificate Examinations Scheme (RACE) offered to pupils with vision impairment to reflect those offered to students in the north.

Closing Reflection

Inclusion for learners with vision impairment must move from aspiration to implementation. The progress evidenced through this partnership demonstrates what is possible when training is collaborative, informed by lived experience, and embedded within a supportive policy environment. By implementing these recommendations, both jurisdictions can deliver on the shared ambition of "the right support, from the right people, at the right time and in the right place," ensuring that every child and young person with vision impairment can learn, participate, and thrive on equal terms with their peers.
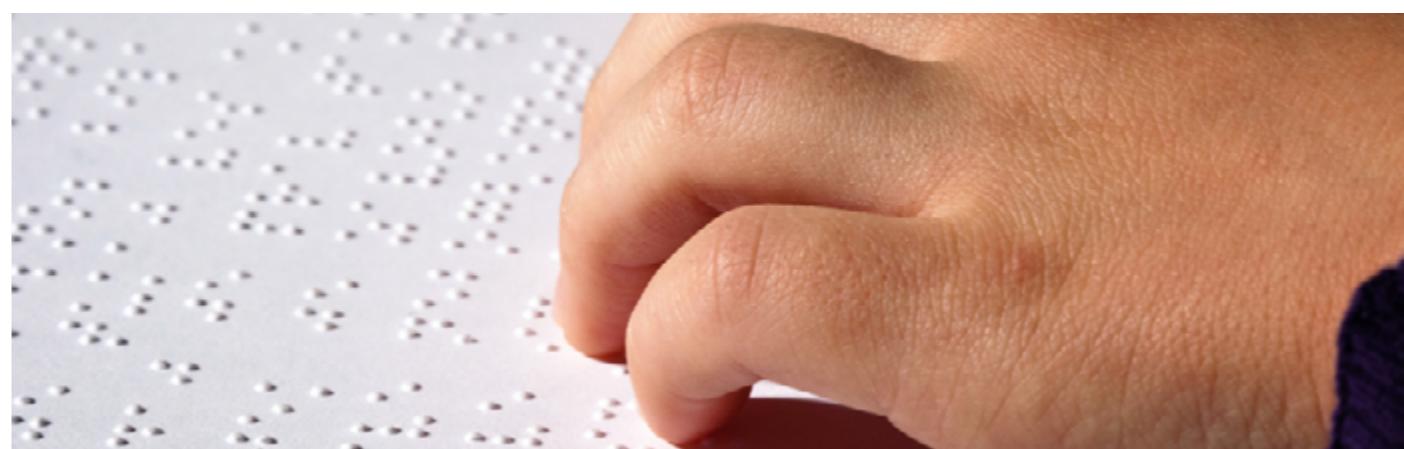
References

Angel Eyes NI (2024). *Education Access in Ireland Report.* [Online] Available at: https://www.angeleyesni.org/publications

Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), Low Vision Division 7 (2014). *Position Paper: Literacy Media Decisions for Students with Visual Impairments.*

Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) (2022). *Developed by VIEW, Thomas Pocklington Trust, and RNIB, in collaboration with the Department for Education (DfE) and sector professionals.* [Online] Available at: https://viewweb.org.uk/cfvi/

Department of Education (Northern Ireland) (2025). *SEN Reform Agenda and Five-Year Delivery Plan* (2025–2030). [Online] Available at: https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/sen-reform-agenda-delivery-plan

Hatlen, P. (1996). 'The Core Curriculum for Blind and Visually Impaired Students, Including Those with Additional Disabilities.' *RE:View*, 28(1), pp. 25–32.

Kamei-Hannan, C., Holbrook, M. C. & Ricci, L. A. (2012). 'Reading with my fingers and my eyes: The role of parents in promoting literacy for children with visual impairments.' *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 106(10), pp. 621–632.

Kameswaran, V. et al. (2024). 'Cuddling Up with a Print-Braille Book: Parent–Child Shared Reading and Multimodal Literacy.' In *Proceedings of the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '24).* ACM Digital Library.

Koenig, A. J. & Holbrook, M. C. (1995, 2nd ed.). *Learning Media Assessment of Students with Visual Impairments: A Resource Guide for Teachers.* AFB Press.

Koenig, A. & Holbrook, M. (2000). *Foundations of Braille Literacy*. AFB Press.

Lusk, K. E. & Corn, A. L. (2006). 'Learning and Using Print and Braille: A Study of Dual-Media Learners (Part 1 & Part 2).' *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 100(1), pp. 36–51; 100(2), pp. 110–116.

McCall, S. & Mason, H. (2013). *Visual Impairment: Access to Education for Children and Young People.* Routledge.

McClelland, J. F. et al. (2023). 'Exploring the Role and Experience of Classroom Assistants Supporting Pupils with Visual Impairment.' *International Journal of Inclusive Education.*

McDonnall, M. C., Sessler-Trinkowsky, R. & Steverson, A. (2024). 'Use of Braille in the Workplace by People Who Are Blind.' *Journal on Technology and Persons with Disabilities (CSUN).*

McDonnall, M. C., Steverson, A., Boydstun, J. & D'Andrea, F. M. (2025). 'Factors Associated with Proficient Braille Skills in Adults.' *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 119(2), pp. 97–108.

O'Connor, U. et al. (2025). 'The Participatory Experiences of Pupils with Vision Impairment in Education.' *British Journal of Visual Impairment,*

43(3).

Perkins School for the Blind (n.d.). An *Overview of Braille Devices.* [Online] Available at: https://www.perkins.org/

Radojichikj, D. & Chichevska-Jovanova, N. (2015). 'Students with Visual Impairments: Braille Reading Rate.' *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education*, 3(1), pp. 21–27.

Rex, E. J., Koenig, A. J., Wormsley, D. P. & Baker, R. L. (2010). 'Teaching Early Braille Literacy Skills within a Balanced Literacy Program.' *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 104(10), pp. 640–645.

RNIB (2020). Braille Displays and Readers: *An RNIB Guide to Braille Displays for Blind and Partially Sighted People.* [Online] Available at: https://www.rnib.org.uk/

RNIB (2024). *Freedom of Information Report: Education Provision for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment in Northern Ireland.*

Ryles, R. (1996). 'The Impact of Braille Reading Skills on Employment, Income, Education, and Reading Habits.' *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 90(3), pp. 219–226.

Salisbury, R. (2008). *Teaching Pupils with Visual Impairment: A Guide to Making the Curriculum Accessible.* Taylor & Francis.

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) (2020). *Guidelines and Standards for Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Texas.* [Online] Available at: https://www.tsbvi.edu/

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) (n.d.). *Braille Display Devices.* [Online] Available at: https://www.tsbvi.edu/

VIEW (2021). *Learning Media Assessment Resource.*

Willings, C. (2020). *Teaching Visually Impaired: Assistive Technology Guidance.*

Winantyo, Y. (2019). 'Parent Engagement in the Early Stage of the Braille Learning Process for Blind Children.' *In Proceedings of the International Conference on Special and Inclusive Education (ICSIE 2018). Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research.* Atlantis Press.

World Health Organization (2018). *Assistive Technology: Fact Sheet.* WHO, Geneva.

Funded by Department of Foreign Affairs, Dáil Éireann

An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

ANGEL EYES NI
EQUALITY FOR CHILDREN
WITH VISION IMPAIRMENT

Féach
For Kids with Low or No Vision

www.angeleyesni.org

www.feach.ie