Submission from Elizabeth McCann

Access to qualified and experienced teacher of VI, especially for those pupils who are blind.
Access to non-teaching assistants who, if working with Braille using children have undertaken grade 2 Braille qualification.
Equality of access to QTVI across Scotland (not all local authorities give the same level of support for pupils with the same condition. It is a postcode lottery.)
Importance of Early Intervention recognised - especially for most severely VI children - and all children have access to QTVI from diagnosis.

Major improvements required in the mandatory training of teachers of the VI.
- No longer required to learn any Braille to be regarded as a QTVI.
- Teachers can learn grade 2 Braille but neither the mandatory qualification nor the Braille competency course gives any instruction on how to teach early Braille or pre-Braille skills or Braille itself.

Non-teaching staff trained to produce materials in appropriate formats (large print, Braille, raised diagrams etc.) and given time to create them.

Expansion of materials on websites such as Load to Learn. This has gone some way towards making materials more accessible however with the introduction of new courses at SCQF levels 4 and 5; these new materials are not always readily available. Across the country valuable time that could be better spent supporting pupils is being used to create materials.

Equality of access to mobility (or habilitation) specialist. In Toronto, Canada blind children receive one hour of mobility training per week and even more a times of transition. Mobility, independence and self confidence in moving around an environment is much greater than any blind child I have ever witnessed in Scotland. Clackmannanshire currently has no access to this service.

VI Resourced Bases such as those at Knowetop Primary and Uddingston Grammar have obvious advantages. One of which is that inexperienced teachers can work alongside those who have been working in this area for some time, thus gaining invaluable experience that cannot be replicated when you are a peripatetic teacher. Although there may be larger numbers of Braille using pupils in certain authorities, there is a reluctance to open a similar facility as it is seen as going against the ASL Act 2004 and the presumption of mainstreaming. This issues needs to be addressed.

Many teachers who work in the field of Visual Impairment work with a Line Manager who has no experience of Visual Impairment and colleagues who are equally inexperienced. Therefore when they come across a problem there is no one to consult and solutions are often arrived at by "muddling through". If advice
from an experienced teacher is required “someone” – may I suggest the Scottish Sensory Centre? – should be able to provide a list of experienced teachers, who could be able to give advice by telephone or email. Sharing of expertise across authorities without undue bureaucracy would also be beneficial.

The most severely visually impaired children require specialist technology in order to be independent learners and to prepare them for life post school. This money needs to be ring fenced.

Most severely visually impaired children come to school by taxi. This can be a barrier to accessing after school study groups and homework clubs because the taxi pick-up time cannot be changed. These children often come from families where the parents are unable to support their child with homework tasks and studying. This issue needs to be addressed so that alternative transport arrangements can be made that are still centrally funded.

There has to be a reduction in the curriculum for both Primary and Secondary pupils who are blind in order to have time to teach the skills and concepts that sighted children learn incidentally. This has to be recognized at school, Local Authority and national levels.

Elizabeth McCann
Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired.