



Eyes on Equality

Thomas Pocklington Trust and Sight Loss
Councils Vision for a New Government

This manifesto has been developed by Thomas Pocklington Trust and Sight Loss Councils to demand action on some of the biggest issues that the next Government will face in meeting the needs of blind and partially sighted (BPS) people.



The First 100 Days of a New Government

Enhance Accessibility

Commit to making government communications, publications and websites more accessible, addressing a longstanding concern of blind and partially sighted individuals:

- ▶ Deliver a strengthened NHS accessible information standard and raise awareness of its requirements.
- ▶ Launch a review of all government and public body information and communications to improve accessibility and reduce inequality of access.

Support Political Participation

Commit to reforms to enable blind and partially sighted people to participate in the democratic process:

- ▶ Guarantee the right of blind and partially sighted people to vote independently and in secret, including using the latest technology.
- ▶ Deliver a new way to provide financial support so that disabled people can stand for elected office, ensuring full inclusion in democracy.
- ▶ Provide targeted bespoke advice for blind and partially sighted people wishing to stand for election or seek appointment to a public body.

Improve Employment Opportunities

Create more opportunities for when blind and partially sighted people are seeking employment:

- ▶ Introduce a one-year National Insurance holiday for employers recruiting new blind and partially sighted staff.
- ▶ Support the development of assistive technology skills by launching a national training programme targeting blind and partially sighted adults and children.
- ▶ Launch an awareness campaign to highlight to employers and employees the support offered via the Access to Work scheme.

Advocacy and Change

Commit to supporting the Pocklington Pledge to fight for a more accessible society:

- ▶ Support the delivery of vision awareness sessions for all MPs and Peers and engage with sight loss organisations to understand practical challenges.
- ▶ Join the All Party Parliamentary Group on Eye Health and Visual Impairment.
- ▶ Attend our parliamentary events and regularly meet with your local Sight Loss Council.



Education

To conduct a rapid review of the current SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement plan, ensuring:

- ▶ The plans address known issues in the support provided to blind and partially sighted children and young people.
- ▶ That Local Authority Sensory Impairment Education Services are included in the testing and implementation of changes.
- ▶ That blind and partially sighted students have access to the statutory support they are entitled to, including access to specialists and removing gaps in support at further education.
- ▶ The implementation and enforcement of the existing SEND legal framework (Children and Families Act 2014 and SEND Regulations).



The First Year of a New Government

Employment Schemes

Urgently launch new programmes to break the cycle of unemployment of blind and partially sighted people:

- ▶ This should include partnerships with businesses to improve understanding of visual impairments, sight loss training in the workplace, and making application processes accessible.
- ▶ Work with organisations like Thomas Pocklington Trust to pilot new employment support programmes and grow proven employment support including internships across all sectors and in government, targeting blind and partially sighted people.
- ▶ Commit to bringing down unemployment of blind and partially sighted people and close the wider disability employment gap.
- ▶ Deliver legislation to ensure that all public and private sector employment portals and application processes are accessible to blind and partially sighted people.
- ▶ Work with technology companies to ensure that the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies is fully accessible by design.

Disability Action Plan

Act on the current government's Disability Action Plan, which outlines initiatives aimed at improving the lives of disabled people including:

- ▶ Making rail travel more accessible.
- ▶ Implementing legislation to protect guide dog owners from illegal access refusals.

Accessible Technology

Focus on making the UK a global leader in accessibility by promoting assistive technology in government policy and public services:

- ▶ Undertake new research to assess the affordability and skills needed to use emerging technology and deliver an action plan to tackle gaps and inequalities.
- ▶ Fund a new programme to investigate opportunities for Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems so that disabled people can live independently.
- ▶ Update Care Act guidance on assistive technology to reflect changes in recent years and ensure blind and partially sighted people get access to technology needed.
- ▶ Review how blind and partially sighted children and young people can access mainstream and assistive technology whilst in education.



Benefits and Concessions

Ensure easy access to benefits and concessions so that blind and partially sighted individuals can live independently:

- ▶ Ensure application processes are accessible and that assessments and reviews of entitlement are carried out by professionals trained in vision impairment awareness.
- ▶ Introduce an energy social tariff to protect low-income households and those with higher fixed costs as a result of a disability.
- ▶ Review concessionary travel schemes to ensure they reflect the additional costs of living with a disability and the increased reliance on public transport experienced by blind and partially sighted people.

Healthcare

Deliver interventions to improve understanding of eye health conditions and joined up services to support prevention and good quality care:

- ▶ Commit to funding the roll out of the UK National Eye Health and Hearing pilot study to understand the true national picture of eye health and sight loss across the country.
- ▶ Invest in better sharing of data between primary and secondary care settings to ensure seamless services on an individual's sight loss journey.
- ▶ Commit to embedding the Low Vision Service Quality Framework into the delivery models of low vision services across the UK.
- ▶ Put the Eye Care Support Pathway onto a statutory footing to ensure that the NHS and social care sector can support the transformation of eye care services.

The First Term of a New Government

National Eye Health Strategy

Develop and implement a national eye health strategy to address the challenges faced by blind and partially sighted people, ensuring that their needs are integrated into all aspects of policy-making.

Education

Ensure that all blind and partially sighted students have access to the specialist and mainstream support needed to access education equitably and enable them to be ready to enter employment with confidence:

- ▶ Ensure that adequate ringfenced funding is available to deliver statutory services to blind and partially sighted students in all post-16 education settings.
- ▶ Adopt the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) in education policy to ensure that all blind and partially sighted children and young people get access to essential skill development.
- ▶ Make the Disabled Student Commitment mandatory for all Higher Education Providers.



Healthcare Services

Invest in specialised healthcare services, including regular eye check-ups, treatments, and support of people with sight loss, to prevent further deterioration of vision:

- ▶ Run regular campaigns to encourage people to regularly have their eyes tested and provide support for National Eye Health Week. Consider introducing new eye health MOTs to maintain good eye health in high-risk groups to tackle avoidable sight loss.
- ▶ Reduce waiting times for eye health treatments including initial appointments.
- ▶ Prioritise early intervention on preventable eye health conditions to combat avoidable sight loss.
- ▶ Require every NHS Integrated Care Board to employ at least one Eye Clinic Liaison Officer at every eye clinic in their area.

Accessible Infrastructure

Upgrade and maintain public infrastructure to be more accessible, with tactile paving, audible and tactile traffic signals, and braille signage widely implemented:

- ▶ Launch a national review of the accessibility of the built environment and fund local authorities to implement recommendations.
- ▶ Develop national guidance to ensure that streets remain clutter free and that updated information is issued regularly so that blind and partially sighted people can make essential journeys safely.

Public Awareness Campaigns

Run regular public awareness campaigns to educate society about the challenges faced by blind and partially sighted people and promote inclusivity.

Employment Support

Create a national employment strategy targeting blind and partially sighted people, including incentives for employers to hire and retain visually impaired staff:

- ▶ Deliver changes to Job Centre and Careers Service training to ensure specialised knowledge of the needs and skills of blind and partially sighted people.

Community Support Networks

Build and support community networks that provide practical and emotional support to blind and partially sighted people and their families:

- ▶ Implement a programme of mental health support targeting blind and partially sighted people that can be accessed at any point in an individual's sight loss journey, particularly at the point of diagnosis.
- ▶ Support a funding programme for local sight loss organisations across the country to help deliver practical interventions to blind and partially sighted people.
- ▶ Fund good quality specialist support through local authorities to blind and partially sighted people including vision rehabilitation, mobility training and accessible equipment.
- ▶ Ensure waiting lists and times for vision rehabilitation are well managed and resources to minimise delays in accessing support to enable independence.



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