

The mobility and independence needs of children with visual impairment: the development of an online resource for professionals

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Abstract: This poster describes two related research projects; the first explores the delivery of Mobility and Independence (M&I) Education to children with visual impairment in mainstream schools; the second builds upon the findings of the first project, by developing online resources aimed at professionals and others involved in the delivery process. The first project involved drawing upon the experiences and expertise of professionals employed by services involved in the delivery of M&I education across the UK, and culminated in a number of findings and practical recommendations intended for professionals working with children in mainstream schools. The second project, funded by the NLB, took the findings and recommendations from the first project, and made them into a freely available online resource, to aid professionals in assessing their own practice and to develop new or existing mobility and independence services in which they are involved.

Overview of Project 1

The first project was jointly funded by the Department for Education and Skills, the Royal National Institute of the Blind, the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and Opsis. The research was carried out over a one year period in 2001. It involved drawing upon the experiences and expertise of over 100 different professionals employed by services involved in the delivery of mobility and independence education across the UK. The scope of the research project was:

“To explore the orientation, mobility and independence needs of visually impaired children and young people, to identify the specialist standards, skills and attributes required of those who teach them and recommend pathways of professional education and training with dedicated sources of funding.”

Methods of data collection included: focus groups and interviews with over 70 mobility officers, rehabilitation officers, Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired, and Sensory / Visual Impairment Team Leaders employed by various LEAs, Social Services Departments and Voluntary Organisations within the UK.

Along with the description of a number of different models of delivery that occur within the UK, a number of practical recommendations were made, including:

- a recommendation for a mobility and independence curriculum framework, outlining key early and foundation mobility and independence and advanced mobility and independence skills;
- the identification of key people to be involved at each stage of delivery of the mobility and independence curriculum and the roles that should be adopted;
- the importance of shared responsibility for the delivery of mobility and independence education between different agencies and professionals involved with a child.

The findings and recommendations are presented in more detail in the full research report: Pavey S, Douglas G, McCall S, McLinden M, Arter C. (2002). *Steps to independence: the mobility and independence needs of children with a visual impairment. Full Research Report*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham. Available to download at: www.education.bham.ac.uk/research/victar

Overview of Project 2

Using funding provided by the National Library for the Blind, the findings and recommendations from the first project were used to develop an online resource for professionals who work with children with visual impairment.

The aim of this online resource is to help users to understand and consider the different factors that are involved in the delivery of mobility and independence education to children with visual impairment. In particular:

- the mobility and independence skills that need to be covered in a mobility and independence curriculum;
- how these skills can be ‘delivered’ to children including a description of the various stages, processes and people that are involved;

- the key considerations to make when developing a mobility and independence service including the training and background of professionals and issues relating to multi-agency provision;
- the implications of national educational policies upon the provision of M&I education within the UK.

Outcomes of Project 2

In summary, the resource features six virtual 'rooms', which can be used to assess individual practice and/or to develop new or existing mobility and independence services in which the users are involved. The six rooms include:

- *The Entrance Hall*
This describes the background and purpose of the resource.
- *The Curriculum Room*
This outlines the recommended mobility and independence curriculum.
- *The Delivery Room*
This describes the six stages involved in delivering mobility and independence education to children, including referral, assessment, programme design, intervention, review and completion.
- *The M&I Policy and Service Room*
This considers the issues that need to be addressed when developing new or existing M&I services within the UK.
- *The Education Policies Room*
This is aimed at professionals unfamiliar with educational terminology and policies that affect the provision of mobility and independence education within the UK.
- *The Resource Room*
This includes examples of good practice evidenced in the field, a list of the recommendations made by the research team, and other useful resources including examples of assessment checklists, key texts, and links to other sources of information, and references used in the research reports.

The resource was launched in the late summer of 2004, and can be accessed for free online at <http://sti.nlb-online.org>.

References

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