

Vision UK Legacy Report

Background

VISION 2020 UK achieved charitable status in September 2002 in response to [VISION 2020: The Right to Sight](#) which was launched in 1999 by the World Health Organization and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness. In 2018, Vision UK was launched bringing together VISION 2020 UK, the UK Vision Strategy and the England Vision Strategy and operating within lean staffing levels.

The intent of Mike Brace, VISION 2020 UK's inaugural CEO, was to provide a neutral space, acting as an honest broker, for the various partners in the eye health and sight loss sector at a time when levels of collaboration were not as strong as they are today. This broadened over the years with the establishment of a number of expert committees, a recognised ability to act as a thought leader for the sector, and the strength to unite partners around common goals to achieve change.

By the time Vision UK finally closed its doors due to financial constraints on 31 July 2020 it had become known for the following:

- Thought leadership;
- Collaboration: creating a neutral space for partners to collaborate, speak with a collective voice, develop work in partnership, and undertake work collectively across the breadth of the UK;
- Its role as an honest broker;
- Network facilitation;
- Collaborative conference and event staging;
- The opportunity it provided for partners to be involved with work without the need to dedicate resource to undertake delivery; and

- A respected place of trust.

CEOs of VISION 2020 UK, and subsequently Vision UK, have been: Mike Brace CBE (2001 – 2012), Anita Lightstone (2012 – 2014), Mercy Jeyasingham (2014 – 2017), Keith Valentine (2017 – 2018), and Matt Broom (2018 – 2020).

Vision UK's Legacy

Always operating with a minimal staffing model, Vision UK delivered far more than the sum of its parts over its lifetime. It provided a unifying voice for the sector and brought together partners where historically this had not been possible to the same extent. In doing so, it enabled the following:

- Development of eye health and sight loss pathways for both adults and children. These have led to improved design and delivery of services across health and social care to improve patient outcomes, experience and reduce the risk of people 'falling through the gaps' in the system;
- Development of Starting Point which is a crucial guide for parents and carers whose child has a vision impairment and has been adopted by Welsh Government and continues to be promoted by Guide Dogs and other partners;
- Recognition of the associations between dementia and sight loss leading to development of associated guidelines by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists and a joint conference with Age UK and Dementia UK before others were discussing this important link. The Care Quality Commission now has sight loss included in their inspections following engagement with Vision UK on this issue;

- Recognition of the mental health needs of blind and partially sighted people including the first related conference addressing sight loss, mental health and counselling. This recognition was achieved via the thought leadership of Vision UK and partners in discussing these issues long before they became part of the status quo;
- Raising the profile and importance of eye health with public health bodies across the UK, including Public Health England (PHE), leading to specific eye health related workstreams within PHE;
- VISION 2020 UK with the UK Vision Strategy persuaded the Department of Health to include sight loss certification per 100,000 population at risk to be included amongst the openly accessible Public Health Outcome Framework data which was brokered in 2013. The presentation of a unified and coherent argument allowed this additional and previously unplanned public health indicator;
- For people with learning disabilities and sight loss, Vision UK brought together partners including SeeAbility, the College of Optometrists, the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, FODO and ABDO to discuss this important issue. In the long term, this led to an APPG on learning disabilities and sight loss, to the development of the LOCSU learning disability pathways and the special schools work with NHS England which has and will continue to benefit thousands of people;
- The formation of the Rehabilitation Workers' Professional Network which arose from a Vision UK conference. In addition, Vision UK campaigned ardently for the continuation of the vision rehabilitation course at Birmingham City University, the closure of which would have risked the future of the workforce;
- Closer working with social care and the voluntary sector via Vision UK's role as Secretariat to the ADASS Physical and Sensory

Disabilities and HIV Network. This led to strong input from the sector into the changes to the Certificate of Vision Impairment and inclusion of veterans, people with learning disability, people with dementia, and children on the certificate. This also enabled development of the ADASS Statement on Vision Rehabilitation which came via support from the network;

- The reforming of the Certificate of Vision Impairment Committee which sought and gained funding from the Department for Health and Social Care to continue processing the CVIs which provide important data to the sector;
- Establishment of the BAME Vision Committee in 2019 following recognition by Vision UK of the lack of racial diversity within the sector, both in terms of delivery and staff, and the need to actively address this. At the time of writing, an Equalities Statement developed by Vision UK awaits final adoption and this would be part of a fitting legacy;
- Endorsement of Eye Clinic Liaison Officers by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists which was achieved following a Vision UK arranged meeting;
- Work with the Department of Transport to improve the travel experiences of blind and partially sighted people. Producing both the inclusive transport strategy and the 'It's everyone's journey' campaign. This work was endorsed by Nusrat Ghani MP, Undersecretary of State for Transport and Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State for Transport at the time;
- Vision UK worked in partnership with SAGE journals to create and launch a new journal - Therapeutic Advances in Ophthalmology <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/oed>.

- The establishment (with the UK Vision Strategy team at the RNIB) of separate Country strategies for the devolved nations and the recent re-establishment of the English, Scottish and Welsh Vision Strategies. This work was, and is, of great importance as devolution increases the differences in health and social care in the four countries of the UK. The recent Scottish Vision Strategy conference (Feb 2020) with government and senior social and medical services input is testament to the efficacy and need for the work to continue.
- Vision UK also worked with international partners and was a member of the IAPB. This work included: advising on the setting up of VISION 2020 USA, input into the International Diabetic Retinopathy Barometer, input into the World Report of Vision and the adoption by the UK government of the Marrakesh Treaty facilitating access to print works in formats adapted for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled.

Following the closure of Vision UK, partners have worked together to continue to work in the same ethos of collaboration. Within the VI charity sector, Blind Veterans UK, Glaucoma UK, Guide Dogs, Macular Society, Retina UK, RNIB, Thomas Pocklington Trust and Visionary, have all come together to form the VI Charity Sector Partnership. This is a collaborative partnership seeking to tackle key themes which cannot be undertaken on a solitary organisational basis. Operating under a Memorandum of Understanding and led at CEO level, initial work being undertaken will address Crisis Response including Mental Health and Wellbeing, as well as Talent Development and Lived Experience Leadership. This partnership was formed within a short few months of the announcement of Vision UK's sad closure. That simply would not have been possible without the trust and camaraderie developed

through Vision UK over its nigh on two decades of existence and much of the experience gleaned from this is being reflected in the principles of collaboration that are being applied in current work.

In addition, Visionary has led the development of a Sight Loss Sector Charter which will provide the ethos for how we work collectively in the sector, predominantly within the charity side, in our endeavours to work for and with blind and partially sighted people and those at risk of sight loss. The messaging within the Sight Loss Sector Charter builds on the ethos and approach of Vision UK in how we all collaborate effectively.

Finally, Vision UK developed many valuable Committees; groups of subject matter experts and those with authority to effect change. With the closure of Vision UK, work has been undertaken to review and continue a number of these Committees where possible and appropriate. Within those Committees there is a huge desire to continue to work together, recognising the enormous value of collaboration and simply sharing information about activity and issues impacting, negatively and positively, on blind and partially sighted people and those at risk of sight loss.

In closing, Vision UK showed what can be achieved when we come together and work in collaborative partnerships under an agreed framework. Its neutrality enabled so much and its impact will positively affect the lives of thousands of blind and partially sighted people and those at risk of sight loss for years to come.

Conclusions from the Former Vision UK Board of Trustees

The Trustees are grateful to Thomas Pocklington Trust for compiling this report, following the sad demise of Vision UK which was precipitated by the COVID 19 pandemic.

We wholeheartedly concur with its contents, in particular the sentiments expressed within the final paragraph. We are now anxious that the valuable work undertaken and achievements made are not lost.

We therefore wish to now pass the baton on to the VI Charity Sector Partnership and ask them to address the following in their future work together:

- What elements of the experience and achievements of Vision UK can be used to ensure that the collaborative working of the future can succeed? Some of these collaborations were innovative, with sectors working together effectively in new ways. These should not be lost.
- How can representatives working to address eye health issues be incorporated into the work of this partnership, to ensure that the whole UK Eye Health and Sight Loss Pathway can be addressed? For example, the Trustees believe it essential that bodies such as the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, the College of Optometrists, ABDO, FODO and the GOC, for example, should all be involved going forwards.

- What further work is needed to ensure that the work carried out to achieve the UK Vision Strategy across all four nations is not lost but is built upon and continued?
- What is needed to ensure that future progress is fully disseminated and utilised to benefit the lives of the blind and partially sighted people of the UK, both today and in the future?