

Blindness And Partial Sight

The statutory definition for the purposes of registration as a blind person under the National Assistance Act, 1948, is that the person is “so blind as to be unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential”. In considering this matter there are three important points to be noted viz;

- the test is not whether the person is unable to pursue his ordinary occupation or any particular occupation, but whether he is too blind to perform **any work** for which eyesight is essential; and
- only the visual conditions are taken into account and other bodily or mental conditions are disregarded but poor mobility, hearing impairment and other relevant information is recorded on a Certificate of Vision Impairment.
- The principal condition to be considered is the visual acuity at distance (i.e. the best direct vision obtainable with each eye separately or both together, where both are present, as tested by Snellen type *with* any refractive error corrected), but regard must also be paid to other ocular conditions.

Partial sight on the other hand is defined as being “substantially and permanently handicapped by defective vision caused by congenital defect, or illness or injury”.

In 2005 the Certificate of Vision Impairment replaced the old BD8 in England and is now the only form used for registration purposes. A consultant ophthalmologist must complete the form.

Although the statutory categories of visual impairment have changed in England, the definitions have remained the same and are generally followed throughout the UK. A person may be registered if they fall into one of the following categories:

Severely Sight Impaired (Blind)

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- Acuity below 3/60 or 1/18
 - Acuity better than 3/60 but below 6/60 with a very restricted visual field.

Sight Impaired (Partially sighted)

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- from 3/60 to 6/60 with a full field
 - Up to 6/24 with moderate restriction of visual field, opacities in the media or aphakia
 - 6/18 or better with a gross field defect (e.g. hemianopia) or a marked constriction of the field (e.g. glaucoma or retinitis pigmentosa)

Registration as blind or partially sighted requires examination and certification by an ophthalmologist using form BD8.

The patient needs to give consent for the information given on the form to be given to the appropriate agencies. Parts 1-4 of the form are sent to the Local Authority Social Services Department and Part 5 to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, for statistical purposes, and to the G.P.

It is the responsibility of the Social Services Department to contact the newly registered to discuss the perceived needs for services and, if appropriate, to carry out a comprehensive assessment.

Some of the financial benefits of registration depend on the category of registration. It is not inappropriate for optometrists to mention that registration may be an option when referring patients to their G.P. It is also a highly emotive issue for the patient and this needs to be borne in mind.

It should be noted that certification is based on the opinion of the examining ophthalmologist which is subject to appeal to the Ophthalmic Referee Service which is provided in England and Wales by the South Regional Association, the North Regional Association and the Wales Council.

Benefits of Registration are provided for under a number of legislative instruments. The RNIB has a series of leaflets explaining the benefits of registration.

