



29TH February 2008

Call for evidence – Narrowing the Gap (in outcomes)

Together the Association of British Dispensing Opticians, the Association of Optometrists, the College of Optometrists and the Federation of Ophthalmic & Dispensing Opticians represent the 10,000 optometrists, 5,000 dispensing opticians and optical businesses who provide high quality and accessible eye care services in the UK.

We welcome this call for evidence. Although we are not responding with specific evidence at this stage (although we would be happy to provide further information if that would be helpful), we would like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance of eye health services for vulnerable children. Good eye health is important for all children to develop academically and socially and to develop their potential. We believe that all children regardless of whether they are in mainstream education or not should have access to the same levels of eye care services.

A child's eyesight is often overlooked particularly when they have other social or health problems, yet improving their eyesight can have significant benefits for their development and overall wellbeing. Problems with a child's vision may lead to a child being introverted, disruptive or described as slow and not achieving their full potential but the child, having nothing to compare with, will not realise there is anything wrong. It is therefore important for those working with children in schools and children's centres as well as parents and carers, to be aware of potential problems so that they can be treated early. It is also important that they are aware of the eye care services available through the NHS.

The eye is still developing up until around the age of 7 so it is important for any problems to be picked up as early as possible so they can be treated. If problems are treated when the eye is still developing it can make a difference which lasts a lifetime. Signs which could indicate a problem with a child's sight include:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Behavioural problems
- Headaches
- Rubbing their eyes a lot
- An eye appearing to turn in or out
- Closing one eye to see.

It is important to treat problems as soon as are they are detected. However, for many children who develop a problem such as amblyopia (lazy eye) in one eye only, there will be nothing upon which the parent can judge something is wrong. The child is unlikely to complain and to a parent their vision will seem normal. There may not be any symptoms such as headaches or eyestrain which might alert an adult to a problem. It is for this reason that we advocate that all children should be included in a local eye health screening programme or should be checked before they start school at a local community optometric practice. All children under the age of 16 are entitled to a free NHS sight test.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely
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Head of Public Affairs

For and on behalf of
Sir Anthony Garrett
General Secretary
**Association of British
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Bob Hughes
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