

# M A K I N G Y O U R P R A C T I C E A C C E S S I B L E

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for people with  
learning disabilities  
and autism.



# Introduction

by **Scott Watkin**

SeeAbility's Eye Care and Vision Development Officer

Did you know that people with learning disabilities are much more likely to have serious sight problems than other people?

As a person with a learning disability and keratoconus, looking after my eyes is really important to me. It's likely that over half of people with learning disabilities will need spectacles to correct their vision. Despite this, many people with learning disabilities or autism are not accessing the eye care they require.

Many people don't realise they have poor vision or cannot explain changes in their vision. Some carers may not be able to explain changes in someone's vision and supporters may not know that eye tests are possible with people who find it hard to communicate. A big part of my role is travelling the country, speaking with people and trying to put this right by encouraging people to have regular eye care like I do.

There is much that optometry practices can do to make their service more accessible to adults and children with learning disabilities or autism. Making some of the following changes will make it easier for them to access eye care at your practice.

I have a job, a home and a family just like many of you, so my biggest and most important message is don't make assumptions about people and try to see the person and not their disability at all times.







**“ Making some of the following reasonable adjustments will make it easier for people with learning disabilities to access eye care at your practice. ”**



## Quick tips: attracting patients to your practice

Register your practice on SeeAbility's optometrist database.

This will help patients to find out about your service.

[www.seeability.org/find-an-optometrist](http://www.seeability.org/find-an-optometrist)

If your area has a specialist sight testing pathway for people with learning disabilities, ask about joining this.

[www.seeability.org/pathways](http://www.seeability.org/pathways)





# 1. Welcoming patients with learning disabilities and autism

Ensure your reception staff are welcoming and know about the reasonable adjustments you can make.

Make your practice inviting and physically accessible to people with disabilities including people who use a wheelchair.

Ask patients if they have any communication and support needs.

This will help your practice to meet the Accessible Information Standard. It is the responsibility of everyone providing NHS services to meet these standards.

[www.seeability.org/accessible-information-standard](http://www.seeability.org/accessible-information-standard)

Set up a flagging system to identify returning patients with learning disabilities and autism so people don't have to explain their needs each time.

Invite the patient to fill in SeeAbility's "[Telling the optometrist about me](#)" form before their test – your reception staff can download this from our website and give it or post it to the patient or carer when they make their appointment.

It works best if they can fill it out at home and send it ahead of the appointment. This will help the optometrist to provide the right approach to suit someone's individual needs and help them understand more about their eyes and vision.

To help reduce any anxiety, offer a pre-appointment familiarisation visit when the practice is quiet so people can have a look around so they know what to expect at their appointment. This will help to reduce any anxiety.

Offer a choice of appointment times – if possible offer a time when people are less likely to be kept waiting and the optometrist has more time to prepare such as at the start of a clinic. If there is going to be an unexpected delay let people know as they may prefer to come back when you are ready to see them.

A quieter seating area may be helpful for some patients.

Offering longer appointments or two shorter appointments will help some patients.



## 2. During the eye test

Explain or demonstrate what you are going to do first, so there are no surprises. Keep checking with the patient that they consent to what you are going to do, for example - "Is it OK if I turn out the room light/shine this light in your eyes?"

Use easy to understand language and try to avoid jargon and long words. Start with parts of the eye test that feel less like a 'test' such as checking eye movements or visual fields by confrontation. Identify the patient's preferred vision testing method and make sure this is available.

Not everyone can name letters and it's OK to ask if they prefer to look at letters, numbers or pictures.

Ideally, be able to offer preferential looking tests such as Cardiff or Keeler Cards.

Learn some basic Makaton signs for people who use it to communicate- learning the signs for your picture tests is easy and really helpful.

[www.seeability.org/  
makaton-signs-for-eye-tests](http://www.seeability.org/makaton-signs-for-eye-tests)

Always talk to the patient rather than the carer. Even if the person can't talk for themselves they may understand what you say. It is polite and shows respect as it is their appointment.

Involve the supporter if there is one by practising parts of the test on them first to show what you are going to do - for example shining the light in their eyes. This is especially useful for anxious patients.

People with a learning disability often have poor accommodation, even in childhood, so may need reading glasses when young.

Make sure you are looking out for keratoconus and cataracts which are more common and happen at a younger age in people with a learning disability.

### 3. After the eye test

Summarise the results of the eye test verbally at the end of the test, complete the "[Feedback from my optometrist](#)" form and give it to the patient.

Giving patients a summary in an easy read format will help them understand the results of the appointment and share this with people who support them, including when glasses should be worn.

When the person's next appointment is due, send them a reminder in their preferred format which may be an easy read letter.

Here is an example that we think is good:

[www.healthelanarkshire.co.uk/letter-templates/easy-read-eye-test-appointment-letter-tool](http://www.healthelanarkshire.co.uk/letter-templates/easy-read-eye-test-appointment-letter-tool)



## 4. Dispensing glasses and the next steps

Offer the services of your dispensing optician to people to ensure a good fit.

Make frames for people with special facial characteristics available in your practice.

Make sure the person can identify the correct glasses if they have 2 pairs – offer engraving of frames and labelling of cases.

Show the person how to clean their glasses and how to look after them.

Give advice on how someone can get used to a new pair of glasses. Make sure patients and their supporters are aware that this can take time and that they will need support as getting used to new glasses may be hard at first.

Offer a follow up appointment with the same dispensing optician to check the person is getting on with their new glasses.

Give the patient easy read information about:

- eye tests
- wearing glasses
- eye conditions including cataracts, keratoconus, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy

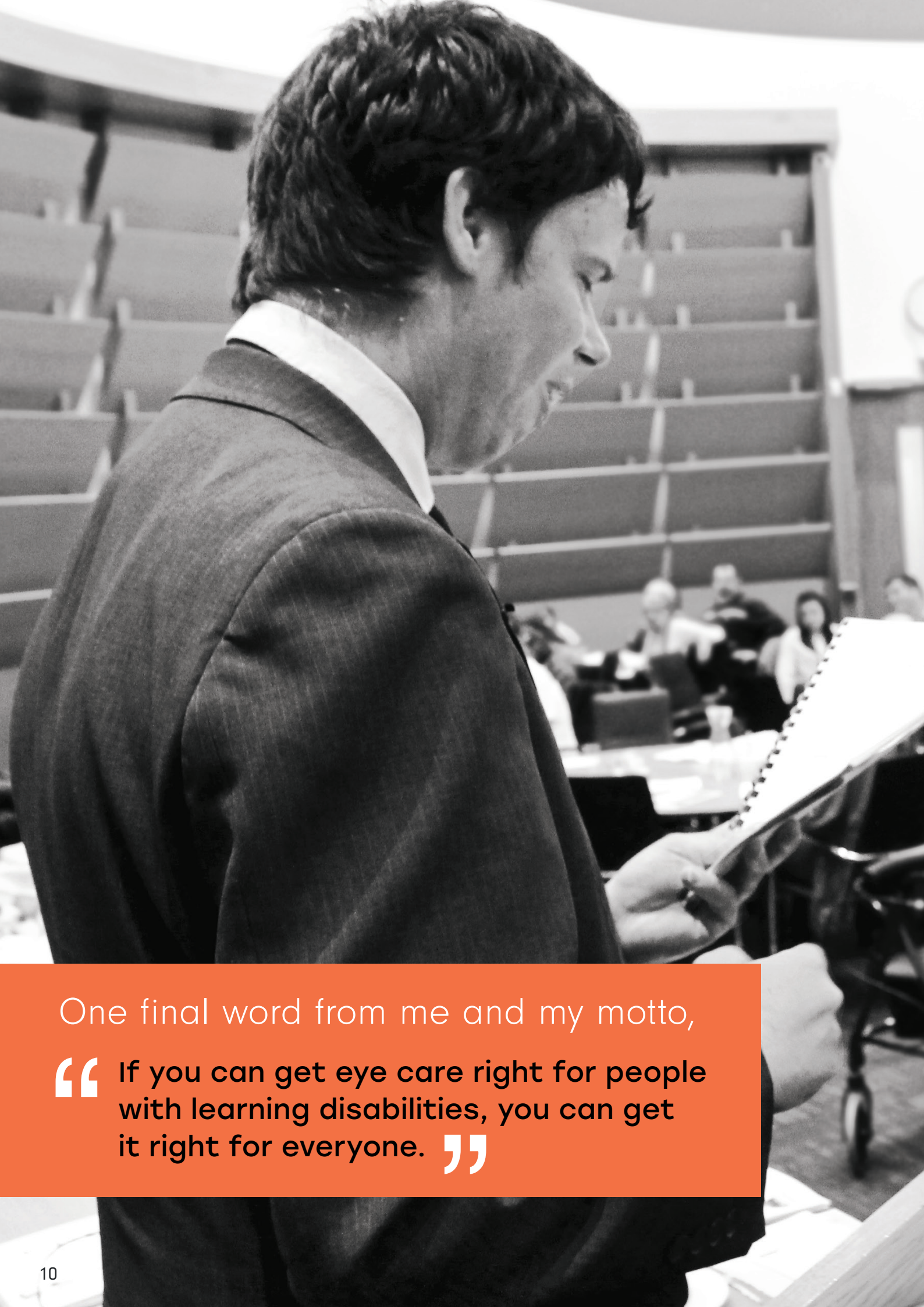
[www.seeability.org/looking-after-your-eyes](http://www.seeability.org/looking-after-your-eyes)

Check whether any advocacy groups in your area are delivering SeeAbility's training about eye care to people with learning disabilities.

[www.seeability.org/peer-educator-network](http://www.seeability.org/peer-educator-network)

Have a look at the College of Optometrist's Quality Standards for Patients with Learning Disabilities:

[www.vision2020uk.org.uk/download/2015%20quality%20standards%20LD%20optometry%20FINAL%20\(1\)\(2\).pdf](http://www.vision2020uk.org.uk/download/2015%20quality%20standards%20LD%20optometry%20FINAL%20(1)(2).pdf)



One final word from me and my motto,

**“ If you can get eye care right for people with learning disabilities, you can get it right for everyone. ”**





## Contact Scott

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide, if you want any further information about making your practice more accessible including training, get in contact with me:

[s.watkin@seeability.org](mailto:s.watkin@seeability.org)



# Feel inspired?

**Our vision is to enable the extraordinary every day. But we need help to achieve this.**

SeeAbility works tirelessly to improve eye care and prevent avoidable sight loss for thousands of adults and children with learning disabilities and autism across the UK. This is only possible through the money raised by our supporters.

If you feel inspired to join them, there are many ways in which your practice could get involved. From simply having a collection

tin on reception, to fundraising as a team, participating in one of our many challenge events or organising in-practice activities that engage with your patients, you can make a difference.

To find out more about how a bespoke partnership with SeeAbility could work for your business please contact:

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## About SeeAbility

### **We don't underestimate people**

SeeAbility encourages people with disabilities to challenge what they expect from life, from themselves and from wider society.

The people we support overcome huge barriers to achieve exciting new things every day: some big, some small, all extraordinary.

They challenge us all to rethink disability.

SeeAbility provides extraordinary support and champions better eye care for people with learning disabilities and autism, many of whom have sight loss.

Registered as The Royal School for the Blind, SeeAbility is one of the oldest disability charities in the UK and has pioneered specialist support for over 200 years.

Help us rethink disability.