



Sight
Scotland

iSight

Spring 2025 | sightscotland.org.uk



Inspiring Bright Futures



Dear Supporter

Welcome to the latest edition of iSight; a chance to say thank you to all our donors and to showcase all the fantastic work being done across this great charity.

At Sight Scotland, we're focused on helping people of all visual abilities live their best lives. We can't do this without your support. Your donations and fundraising efforts allow us to provide essential services, push for important changes, and fund research into the prevention and treatment of eye conditions. By listening to real-life experiences, we make sure every penny raised has a real impact on those who need it most.

In this issue, we celebrate the success of our Fair Rail campaign, which will see free rail travel for blind and partially sighted people, along with their companions, available on all Scotrail train journeys across Scotland from Spring 2025. This transformative pilot scheme will allow individuals with an Eye+1 National Entitlement Card (NEC) to travel with a companion at no extra cost, supporting independence and connection within the community.

We also shine a spotlight on the inspiring work taking place at the Royal Blind School, the launch of a new Braille activity group in Glasgow and explore why alt text is essential for making social media more inclusive.

I hope you enjoy reading about the difference your support makes.

Davina Shiell
Director of Cause and Engagement



Sight Scotland Support Line
Talk to us on **0800 024 8973**
Open 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Did you know?

There are three types of canes used by people with vision impairments in the UK. The symbol cane signals that a person has low vision, the guide cane helps with detecting obstacles like kerbs and steps, and the long cane is used for navigation, providing information about obstacles on the ground and in the path ahead.

iSight in alternative formats. To receive iSight in large print, braille or audio CD, please contact us on 0131 229 1456 or email fundraising@sightscotland.org.uk

Sight Scotland Sight Scotland is the operating name of Royal Blind. Scottish

Charity Number SC017167. Sight Scotland Veterans is the operating name of Scottish War Blinded, a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, charity number SC047192

Address: Sight Scotland, 2A Robertson Avenue, Edinburgh EH11 1PZ



Specsavers staff run for Sight Scotland

This May, four staff members from Specsavers Gyle Centre and Specsavers Straiton Sainsbury's will take part in the Edinburgh Marathon to raise funds for Sight Scotland.



Gemma Robertson, Andy Dunn, Ian Hobson, and Emma Gallacher will take part in the Hairy Haggis Team Relay, where a team of four runners completes the full 26.2-mile marathon, with each member running one leg of the race.

Ian Hobson, store director at Specsavers Gyle Centre and Specsavers Straiton, said: "As an optical practice, supporting a charity such as Sight Scotland which provides care for thousands of people across the country suffering from sight loss is incredibly important to us, so we are delighted to be able to fundraise for them."

“ I’m extremely proud of everyone who’s taking part in the marathon to raise funds for a vital service which supports so many people in the Edinburgh area, and I’d like to thank everyone who has already kindly donated.”

We are extremely grateful to the Specsavers team for their fantastic fundraising efforts.

If you'd like to take on a fundraising challenge like this, visit sightscotland.org.uk/get-involved/fundraise or email fundraising@sightscotland.org.uk.

Life-changing support transforms Rocco's life

Rocco is thriving at the Royal Blind School with his family saying it 'was the best decision we ever made'



Fifteen-year-old Rocco Wood was born three months premature, weighing just 985 grams. Due to complications at birth, he developed quadriplegic cerebral palsy and is visually impaired. Despite these challenges, Rocco thrives as a residential pupil at the Royal Blind School in Edinburgh, staying there four nights a week.

Securing a place at a specialist school, such as the Royal Blind School, can be a complex process, so Rocco's mum, Louise, was delighted when the decision was made. She knew the placement would have a profound impact on his life and bring the family peace of mind, knowing his care needs would be met.

"When considering Rocco's education, we realised mainstream schooling wouldn't suit him," Louise explains. "He attended mainstream provision until he was five, but we were unsure about his next steps. A chance meeting with a teacher from the Royal Blind School changed everything. She understood Rocco's needs and reassured us the school would provide the perfect environment."

Louise worked closely with all the professionals around Rocco to ensure they clearly understood his needs. When Rocco was awarded a place in 2019, the family was so happy.

Now, Rocco is flourishing. "He's happy, in a great routine, and receiving top-quality education and care," Louise says. The school provides one-to-one teaching, with support from specialists like physiotherapists, speech therapists, and Qualified Vision Impairment (QVI) teachers. The residential staff know Rocco personally and understand his unique needs.

"Rocco is gaining independence, socialising, and enjoying life. Facilities like the Innowalk and hydro pool have been incredible for his strength and wellbeing. We even helped fundraise for the Innowalk, which allows him to stand and cycle. The school tailors everything to his needs, ensuring he receives exceptional, personalised care."

Louise adds: "I don't worry about Rocco during the week because I know he's in the best place, cared for and happy. The school's dedication to the children's growth and happiness is remarkable. The curriculum, family fun days, and Christmas shows are fantastic. Getting Rocco into the Royal Blind School was the best decision we ever made."



Launch of new braille group in Glasgow

A new braille group has launched in Glasgow, providing life-changing support to its members.

A new braille group has launched at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow. The group was created in response to local feedback highlighting a lack of braille learning opportunities in the city. It all began when Glasgow resident Robert Meikle expressed a keen interest in learning braille. Inspired by this, Community Activity Assistant Andrea Curro teamed up with experienced braille tutor Margaret Cowie to turn the idea into reality.

Braille sessions run on the second and fourth Thursday of each month from 1pm to 3pm.

'Learning braille has transformed my life'

Robert Meikle, 28, from Glasgow, has Aniridia, a rare condition where the iris is missing or underdeveloped. He also has Glaucoma. His sight began to deteriorate at 13, making school increasingly difficult. By secondary school, he had lost all vision in his left eye, and after developing a cataract in his right eye, he became completely blind in 2017. This had a huge impact on his confidence and independence.



Recently, he underwent surgery to remove the cataract, but his biggest breakthrough has come from learning braille through Sight Scotland's activity groups in Glasgow.

"Learning braille, along with taking part in Sight Scotland's other activity groups, has been life changing. After losing my sight fully in 2017, and then living through the pandemic, I lost all confidence and independence. I was struggling to find help.

"I had always wanted to learn braille but didn't know where to start. It's been incredibly empowering, it has transformed my life. I can now label things at home, meaning I no longer have to rely on others for everyday tasks like cooking.

"The opportunities are endless. Braille has given me confidence, independence, and control over my life again."



Learn
more!

Are you interested in finding more about our community activity groups?
Please visit <https://sightscotland.org.uk/how-we-help/community-events>

The power of technology

Amy McAinsh, new Assistive Technology Specialist at Sight Scotland Veterans, shares her journey with technology and the vital role it plays for people with vision impairment.

I have lived with a visual impairment since birth, having been born at just 24 weeks. In my daily life, I rely on a screen reader and a braille display every day. My personal experience with technology has fuelled my passion for helping others access it.

In January 2024 I joined Sight Scotland Veterans as the Assistive Technology Intern on a 9-month paid placement as part of Thomas Pocklington Trust's Get Set Progress Internship scheme. During the internship, I had the opportunity to lead a project introducing the NaviLens app into parts of Sight Scotland Veterans, enhancing the accessibility of our activity centres for people with visual impairments.

Following the success of my internship, I was offered a permanent position as the Assistive Technology Specialist. In this role, I work closely with individuals to assess their accessibility needs, provide tailored training, and support them in integrating assistive technology into their daily lives. My primary focus is on helping people regain their independence through the use of this technology.

This experience has been transformative, allowing me to grow in confidence both personally and professionally. It has been incredibly rewarding to help others discover how technology can positively impact their lives.

If you or someone you know could benefit from assistive technology, we're here to help. Please call 0800 024 8973.



AI helping the visually impaired in everyday life

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming a part of our daily lives, offering significant benefits to those with visual impairments. Apps like Be My Eyes and Seeing AI use AI to describe images, read text, and even recognise handwriting. Tools like ChatGPT can also assist with everyday tasks, such as proofreading emails or rewording messages.

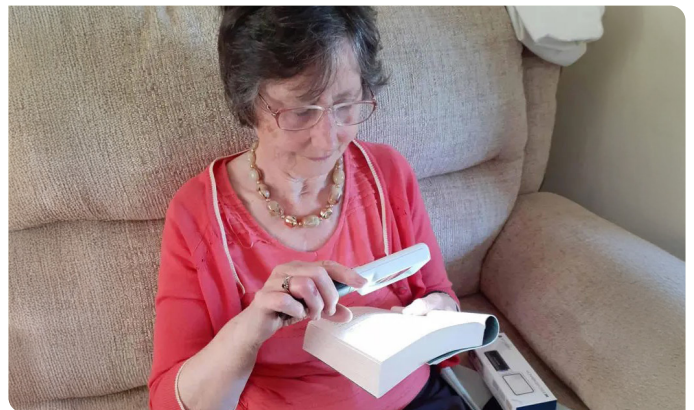
Cala Homes donates £6,874 for assistive learning technology

This generous donation will enable Sight Scotland to enhance its habilitation and rehabilitation services, benefiting more than 100 blind and partially sighted people each year.

The funding will purchase essential tools such as specially designed measuring cups, under-cupboard task lighting, and high-quality optical magnifiers. These vital resources will make everyday tasks easier for those with visual impairments, empowering them to navigate daily life with confidence. It will also support the launch of Sight Scotland's first centralised resource hub for assistive technology. This hub will provide demonstrations and training for individuals, families, and healthcare professionals, making it easier for assistive tools to be seamlessly integrated into home environments.

Many businesses support local charities but need staff to nominate them. Could you ask

your employer about any available programmes and encourage friends and family to do the same? For more information, contact us at fundraising@sightscotland.org.uk.



Sight Scotland inspires Emirates to donate more than 12,000 eye shades for teacher-training

Emirates recently distributed more than 12,000 Business Class eye masks to schools for the blind, sensory services, and vision support centres across the UK.

The donation was inspired by Tracy Pearce, an outreach teacher at the Royal Blind School, who contacted Emirates last year to ask if they had any spare eye masks for training purposes. Emirates gladly agreed and encouraged Tracy to reach out to her network of teachers across the UK. Within days, over 80 teachers from across the country expressed their interest in using the eye masks in training sessions.



Royal Blind School pupils shine in national poetry competition

Pupils from the Royal Blind School have showcased their incredible talent by earning recognition in the national poetry competition run by Young Writers.

Each of the school's entrants, Lucia, Jemima, Isla, and Rebeka, had their poems selected for publication. The competition, themed "The Beautiful Truth," aimed to inspire young people to express themselves on topics that matter to them, fostering a love for poetry and creative expression.

The school is immensely proud of the pupils' achievements. Teacher Pam Cameron-Young shared: "Their creativity and desire to make their voices heard is truly inspirational. I'm so pleased that their poems were chosen for publication. It's lovely to see their hard work recognised in this way."



One standout piece was written by Jemima, 18, who explored her personal journey with sight loss and how the Royal Blind School helped her embrace a new way of living. Her moving poem, *Vision Beyond Sight*, captures the challenges and triumphs she has experienced.



Vision Beyond Sight

When I first found out about my sight loss
I really DID feel at a loss.
I felt angry, frustrated, and very bad,
This news was indeed very sad.
But out of the darkness, there is light.

There were meetings, appointments,
assessments galore,
There were days it was hard to keep my
chin off the floor.

I just wanted everything to be normal,
All this talking was way too formal.
But out of the darkness, there is light.

One of the assessments was very cool,
It was at The Royal Blind School.
Lots of doubters thought I would fail,
But at the end of that day someone said
I could learn braille.

But out of the darkness, there is light.

Braille became my superpower,
I worked so hard, hour after hour.
I also learned cane skills in mobility,
I love my cane, she's called Missy.
But out of the darkness, there is light.

As time passed and my skill set grew,
I learned Independent Living Skills and
Assistive Tech too.

I still had to fight despite my success,
I tell you; the system is truly a mess.
But out of the darkness, there is light.

They can't keep me down; I've turned
round my frown.

I have lots of new friends on whom I
depend,
They're from Haggeye, RNIB, Interest Link
to name just some.

I'm learning this new life can be rather fun.

Out of the darkness and into the light,
Now I have vision beyond sight!

Alex learns to live with new reality

Alex Galloway, 64, from North Berwick, has played golf all his life. This became much harder in August 2018 when he suffered three strokes over five days while on holiday in Germany.

Alex was blind for a week after the strokes and now has permanent vision impairment, along with severe balance and mobility issues. He had to relearn how to walk and still faces daily challenges.

“I had to learn to live with a new reality,” Alex explains. “It was extremely difficult, especially at first. There was a lot of anger, depression, and a huge lack of confidence. I didn’t know how I was going to cope. I lost all my vision for a week, and now I can only see out of half my eyes and am completely colour blind. I spent over two and a half months in hospital learning to walk again.

“When something like this happens, you have to learn to live again. It’s a new life you didn’t choose, but you learn to adapt. My advice is to ask for help—life doesn’t end with sight loss, but it does change.”

Since 2021, Sight Scotland’s Family Wellbeing Team has helped Alex regain his confidence. The charity has provided financial advice, ensuring he accesses the benefits he’s entitled to.

“Sight Scotland has been a great help. Just knowing there’s someone to answer my questions is incredibly reassuring. Anita from the Family Wellbeing Team has been amazing and helps with whatever I need. They don’t just see you as a number and understand that each person with vision impairment is unique. I’m still

learning to cope, but Anita has shown me it’s okay to have bad days and to be kind to yourself.”



Learn
more!

If you would like to help more people like Alex please consider donating today. For more information visit sightscotland.org.uk/donate or email fundraising@sightscotland.org.uk

Habilitation helps pupils thrive in education and in life

Cameron Henderson, a newly qualified habilitation specialist at the Royal Blind School in Edinburgh, believes habilitation is essential for children with vision impairment to thrive in education and life.



Habilitation helps build confident learners who can achieve success and independence. While rehabilitation is about relearning skills after losing sight, habilitation teaches these skills to those with existing visual impairments, requiring a different teaching approach.

There are three key areas of habilitation: mobility, orientation, and independent living skills. Mobility involves learning how to navigate safely, whether it's using a long cane or moving through different environments. Orientation is about knowing where you are in a space and mapping your environment. Independent living skills cover vital everyday tasks like shopping and cooking. These skills form the foundation for other learning, promoting independence, problem-solving, and resilience. Habilitation gives pupils the chance to reach their full potential.

Habilitation work varies greatly for each pupil, as a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. Each pupil has unique abilities and learning styles. The crucial part of my role is to develop personalised programs, ensuring students gain the right skills at the right time. It's a bridge between education, healthcare, and social care. Skills aren't learned in isolation. By starting early, we're giving children skills for life.

It's great to see families connecting with VI professionals early on. We need to ensure blind and partially sighted pupils have the skills to match their ambitions, to prevent isolation in school and life. I'd love to see habilitation formally recognised in the curriculum. It's great if a student has five Highers, but they also need to know how to shop for dinner or travel to a job.



Habilitation



How habilitation helped Aidan gain independence

Cameron shares Aidan's journey at The Royal Blind School, highlighting how habilitation empowered him with essential skills for independence, from navigating Edinburgh to pursuing further education.

Aidan is an extraordinary young man. He joined The Royal Blind School at the age of 10, transitioning from a mainstream primary school. Blind since birth, Aidan required specialist support to acquire the skills that would enable him to thrive. Habilitation played a vital role in his development, supported by input from his parents at home, his local authority, and the dedicated professionals at the school.

The combined efforts of Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired (QTVIs), subject teachers, and therapists were essential in addressing Aidan's unique blend of needs and helping him to develop his understanding of the world. Through habilitation, Aidan refined his long-cane technique, learning to navigate a variety of locations, including mastering the skills required to use public transport. These skills enabled him

to independently access and navigate routes within Edinburgh city centre.

In addition to mobility instruction, Aidan learned Independent Living Skills (ILS), such as shopping, cooking, budgeting, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. These skills were essential in helping him gain independence and confidence in everyday life. He also developed effective communication skills, which equipped him to seek employment and secure his own work experience opportunities.

While at school, Aidan embarked on a project with a London-based filmmaker, which remains ongoing. Recently, he graduated and moved on to Further Education in the south of England, where he has embraced life on campus.

Cameron has worked at the Royal Blind School for nearly twenty years. He initially began as a physiotherapist before transitioning to a classroom assistant. Cameron will now divide his time between the Royal Blind School and delivering habilitation training through our Outreach service in mainstream schools.

Did you know?

Gift in Will enables Scottish Braille Press to invest in new £60K braille printer

The Scottish Braille Press, part of Sight Scotland, has been able to invest £60,000 in a state-of-the-art braille printer thanks to a generous gift in Will left to the charity.

This vital investment ensures that visually impaired people across the UK continue to have access to essential information in accessible formats.

The Scottish Braille Press specialises in producing Braille, large print, and audio materials, enabling individuals to receive key documents such as bank statements, benefits leaflets, insurance details, and exam papers in formats that support their independence.

Colin Hilditch, Head of Enterprise, said: “By upgrading our equipment, we can ensure that we continue to provide reliable and efficient services while meeting the growing demand for accessible formats, as more customers recognise the benefits of receiving information tailored to their needs.”

This transformational investment was made possible by a gift left in a Will, a powerful way for supporters to leave a lasting impact. If you or someone you know are interested in leaving a gift in your Will, please visit sightscotland.org.uk/leave-a-gift-in-your-will or email giftsinwills@sightscotland.org.uk.



Seeing social media clearly: Why alt text matters

Former Royal Blind School pupil, Samantha Gough, shares why alt text is crucial on social media.



Hi there! I'm Sam, a 21-year-old former pupil of the Royal Blind School, and I'm also a social media influencer. I've got a vision impairment, so navigating the online world comes with its challenges. But one thing that's made a huge difference for people like me is alt text on social media. It might sound like a tiny detail, but trust me – it's a game changer.

Alt text is a description that you can add to images when you post them online. It's super important for anyone who can't see the picture, as it helps us understand what's there. Without it, all we hear is something like "image" or "photo," which doesn't tell us much! Imagine scrolling through Facebook or Instagram and not knowing what half the posts are about. That's what it's like without alt text.

When people use alt text, it makes social media way more inclusive. If you're posting a selfie, a pic of your new outfit, or a gorgeous sunset, adding a short description lets those of us with sight loss join in on the fun. It helps us feel connected and part of the conversation, which is what social media is all about, right?

I get that sometimes people don't know about alt text or why it matters. But if you're a content creator, an influencer, or just someone who loves sharing photos, taking a few extra seconds to add alt text can make a world of difference.

As someone who uses a screen reader, I really appreciate when people include alt text on their posts. It makes social media more engaging and inclusive for those of us with sight loss. So, next time you share a photo, consider adding a brief description – it's a small step that can make a big difference in creating a more accessible online world for everyone.

Thanks for reading... and keep those alt texts coming!

Sam

Sam has been visually impaired from birth due to cerebral visual impairment (CVI) – a condition which means the eyes are healthy, however the brain's visual pathways do not work, resulting in sight loss.



Free rail travel announced for blind and partially sighted people and their companions

After over two years of dedicated campaigning, we are delighted to announce a big win for our Fair Rail Campaign.

From 01 April 2025 free rail travel for blind and partially sighted people and their companions will be available on all Scotrail train journeys across Scotland.

This new pilot scheme will allow individuals with an eye +1 National Entitlement Card (NEC) to bring a companion with them at no additional cost. This policy marks a transformative step in supporting visually impaired people, helping them maintain independence and stay connected with their communities.



By invitation only

Two senior pupils at the Royal Blind School, Rebeka and Jemima, have opened a special fortnightly café, by invitation only! They design the menu, shop for ingredients, and bake everything from scratch during their habilitation and independent living skills lessons. Guests are treated to a warm welcome and table service by the talented duo. Keep an eye out for an invite!

Equalities Minister visits policy group

Kaukab Stewart backs our Accessible Venues campaign.



The Minister met with our policy group - comprised of blind and partially sighted members who play a vital role in shaping our policy and campaign work - to discuss the importance of improving access and inclusion across Scotland's venues. She emphasised that everyone should have the freedom to enjoy life and visit places of their choice, such as theatres, cinemas, concert halls, galleries and attractions, without facing accessibility barriers.

Got a campaign idea?

Feel free to contact us at policy@sightscotland.org.uk with any ideas or thoughts about campaigns that matter to you.

Sight Loss Councils to give recommendations to Scottish Parliament

A group of visually impaired volunteers from Scotland's Sight Loss Councils were recently given a tour of the Scottish Parliament. The volunteers will use their own experiences to suggest ways to improve accessibility for people with sight loss. Their ideas will help make the Scottish Parliament easier to navigate and more inclusive for everyone with a visual impairment. If you, or someone you know, would like to join the Sight Loss Councils please call 0800 035 6409 or email callum.lancashire@sightscotland.org.uk.



Did you know?

Our Rehabilitation and Mobility team writes a regular blog, *Mobility Matters*, offering helpful tips and insights on navigating the world with sight loss. Stay informed and empowered by reading their expert advice at sightscotland.org.uk

Could you be our next superstar fundraiser?

We rely on your support to help people of all visual abilities live independently and with confidence.

Your donations and fundraising enable us to provide vital services, drive change, and fund research into preventing and treating eye conditions.

Together, we see a world where everyone with vision loss can thrive. We see hope, courage, and opportunity.

There are lots of ways you can raise money and we have a calendar of challenges for team Sight Scotland, including:



- **Edinburgh Marathon Festival - Scotland's biggest running festival!**

The Edinburgh Marathon Festival takes place on Saturday 24 May and Sunday 25 May 2025.

Entries for the full and half marathon are now closed, but there are still spaces for the 5k, 10k and kids events.

- **Kiltwalk - Join team Sight Scotland and help us tackle vision loss.**

The Kiltwalk is back for 2025 and is taking place in four locations throughout the country: Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh.

- **Scottish 10K – 17 August 2025 in East Lothian.**

- **Scottish Half Marathon - 17 August 2025 – Edinburgh.**

- **Supernova Forth Bridge - 1 November 2025 - the iconic Forth Road Bridge will be completely closed for you to walk, jog or run 5k.**

Our Fundraising team is here to help you every step of the way, so if you feel like being our next fantastic fundraiser in 2025 please get in touch today! To find out more or sign up email fundraising@sightscotland.org.uk



Community Events for people with sight loss

Our Community Events aim to reach and engage more individuals with sight loss, providing a platform to combat isolation and loneliness.

Glasgow community events:

Braille Social Study, meets at Gorbals Library, or online, every first and third Thursday of the month from 1pm to 3pm.

Braille Teaching, meets at Mitchell Library, or online, every second and fourth Thursday of the month from 1pm to 3pm.

Arts & Crafts Group, meets at St. Francis' Community Centre, every Wednesday from 4pm to 6pm.

Peer Support Group, meets at Mitchell Library, or online, every second and fourth Friday of the month from 11am to 1pm or every first and third Friday of the month online only.

Parents Support Group, meets at Mitchell Library, or online, every last Wednesday of the month from 11am to 1pm.

Edinburgh community events:

Adult Social Group, meets at Edinburgh Rehabilitation and Support Service, every Monday from 11am to 1pm.

Yoga for the Visually Impaired, meets at Morningside Parish Church, Thursday from 1-2 pm or at Portobello Library, every Friday from 12-1pm.

Social Group, meets at Musselburgh Library, every second Monday on odd weeks, from 2:15pm to 3:15pm.

Times and dates are subject to change, and spaces in some classes are limited, so please email communityactivity@sightscotland.org.uk or call 0800 024 8973 if you are interested in attending.

If you have a vision impairment and would like to get involved, or know someone who might be interested in taking part, please call us on 0800 024 8973 or visit <https://sightscotland.org.uk/how-we-help/community-events>.

**Yes, I want to change
the lives of people
with sight loss**



**Sight
Scotland**

Tackling vision loss together



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Here is my donation of: £54 £22 £12 or my own choice of £ _____

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OR please debit my card:

Credit/debit card CAF Charity Card

Card No: - - -

Expiry Date: / Security code:

Name on card: Signature:

Or

2. I would like to make a monthly gift

Giving a regular gift to Sight Scotland helps us plan ahead with confidence, which is vital to us reaching and supporting more people with sight loss across Scotland.

I would like to make a monthly gift of £12 £8 £5 Or my choice of £ _____

Please collect my payment on the 1st or 15th of every month
(please tick your preferred date).

Name and full address of your Bank/Building Society:

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Name(s) of Account Holder(s): _____

Bank / Building Society Account Number Branch Sort Code - -

Service User Number



Reference (for office use only)

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