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Together, we can light up lives
CHAIRMAN’S REPORT
By Douglas Osler

During the past year Royal Blind has achieved an enormous amount and I am proud to report our developments, achievements, events and activities in this report.

A new service for school leavers
A major success story for 2010 is the launch of Forward Vision, an exciting new service that offers a residential transition programme for school leavers aged 18-24 years. This service builds on the strength and quality of existing Royal Blind services and uses the excellent, fully accessible accommodation in the grounds of the Canaan Lane campus of The Royal Blind School.

School achievements
The Royal Blind School offers the highest quality of education and care to meet the needs of young people with a visual impairment. Important achievements for the school this year include a ‘very good’ evaluation report by the Care Commission across all quality indicators, and pleasing SQA results for our pupils which were achieved across a broad range of curriculum areas. The continuing success of the school in providing a vibrant environment which nurtures the achievements and confidence of the pupils is further illustrated in this detailed report.

Challenging times
The many superb achievements of the school have been accomplished during particularly challenging times. Changing patterns of referral are causing a decrease in the school roll. There has been a considerable decrease in income. There are a number of background reasons for this and other special schools as well as ours are affected. In response the Scottish Government has launched a review, the ‘Doran Review’, to find solutions. Our main focus for the future is to build up and market...
the school’s services whilst informing and influencing the review, pending which our building project, which has completed the design stage and gained planning permission, has been placed on hold.

Expansion opportunities for Braeside House
Braeside House provides first class services and facilities for older people who are blind or visually impaired, offering both residential and nursing care in purpose built premises. We are acutely aware that needs of the kind that we can meet so effectively in the Edinburgh area at Braeside House are equally present throughout the rest of Scotland, so moving forward we are now looking for ways in which we might successfully expand this service.

Sales growth at Scottish Braille Press
The Scottish Braille Press is a leading provider of high quality alternative formats. This year the supply of customer account statements and other documentation in large print, Braille and audio formats, grew strongly. As a result, total sales at the Scottish Braille Press increased by 40%, to £1.6 million. This success is a strong endorsement that we are continuing to meet and exceed customer expectations through sustained investment in skills and technologies.

Thank you
None of the achievements which I have the pleasure to report would be possible without the commitment, knowledge and skills of the people who work for Royal Blind or without our supporters from all walks of life who help us to achieve so much. I would like to thank them all for their very valued contribution to our charity. Together we continue to light up lives.

Douglas Osler

ROYAL BLIND HIGHLIGHTS 2010 – 2011

APRIL
A-list film star Johnny Depp helped raise thousands by taking part in our Easter Egg-stravaganza Event. The egg signed by Depp was designed to look like his Pirates of the Caribbean character, Jack Sparrow.

MAY
Try and Score has become one of our flagship events which we deliver in association with Aberdeen Asset Management. With its mix of fun, celebrities, great food, quiz and after dinner entertainers, the event raised thousands for Royal Blind.

JUNE
John Swinney MSP presented the Royal Blind School with a Scottish Enterprise Academy Award 2010 at the Ozen Mor in Glasgow. The Award recognised the achievements of the school in all areas of enterprise.

JULY
Volunteers from Ragan Osborne joined with staff from Braeside House to help serve residents a summer barbecue on the rooftop garden.
AUGUST
18 sporting celebrities helped with our successful Try and Score Celebrity Golf Day at the Dalmahoy Golf Club. Teams mixed with celebrities and fellow competitors over the dinner and trophy presentation.

SEPTEMBER
Murder for a Beer hosted by Ian Rankin and delivered in partnership with the Caledonian Brewery, won a Scottish Event Award in the Best Cause Related/Charity Event category.

OCTOBER
Saw the launch of Forward Vision, a service that offers care and support to young adults who have a visual impairment and disability. There is a person-centred focus on strengths and abilities to encourage greater independence.

NOVEMBER
The Cloundoctors visited The Royal Blind School, creating a light-hearted escape from class studies. Trained in specialist music Therapy, they catered their performance to the children who have a range of complex support needs.

DECEMBER
Prior to National Braille Week we launched a unique exhibition, featuring artwork and Braille messages from a host of UK celebrities to draw attention to Louise Braille’s amazing invention.

JANUARY
Our first Rabble’s Girls event was a real success and proved itself to be the perfect evening to beat off January blues. Thanks to our host Stephen Jardine, speaker Scott Wilson and comedienne Karen Dunbar, we turned the traditional evening for the lads into a fun occasion for the lasses.

FEBRUARY
Residents, staff and family gathered together at Brasiele House to watch a performance by singer Rose McBeth. During the performance the audience sang along to some of their favourite melodies.

MARCH
The Scottish Braille Press published Mavis’s Shoe. This was the first published novel for Sue Reid Sexton and thanks to SBP it was published simultaneously in print and Braille.
The pupils have celebrated many achievements this year. Among them are:

- The leaving pupils from our Canna Lane campus completed the ASDFIN Transition module.
- Pupils demonstrated their considerable skills in the expressive arts through their performances at the Edinburgh Festival of Music, Speech and Dance, the school concerts, at the Scottish Parliament and in a range of concerts and celebration events.
- Art works by the pupils featured in an exhibition celebrating Braille Week.
- In sport, the pupils competed in the Scottish Athletics Championships and the British Championships.

Many pupils achieved a selection of Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications across a broad range of curriculum areas. Of particular significance was a Grade A attainment by one of our pupils in Advanced Higher Music, and our Higher Grade
students attaining qualifications in French, Modern Studies and Music.

Inspections and accreditations
The Care Commission (now SCAS) inspect schools twice a year. We were very pleased to receive a consistent evaluation of ‘very good’ across all quality indicators for our inspections.

In 2010-11, the school started on its journey to achieve accreditation as a Rights Respecting School. This means we champion the rights of every individual to be acknowledged and supported. As part of this, we participated in ‘A Right Blether’, a conversation with Scotland’s youth, initiated by the Children’s Commissioner.

The school was very pleased to be awarded a Healthy Living Award in recognition of its work on providing nutritious school lunches and encouraging healthy eating.

Community responsibility
We actively encourage our pupils to participate in community initiatives. During the past year, our young people participated in the schools eco committee working with a local church to establish a prayer garden.

Several of our secondary pupils participated in the Rock Foundation Winter Sleepout, raising money for homeless people in Edinburgh. At Harvest Festival time, the pupils also donated food to support this group.

In addition the young people participated in a variety of enterprise activities including the Christmas Fayre and the Coffee Shop, proceeds from which were donated to various charities.

Special activities
At the school, we actively encourage our students to participate in special activities, to support the development of independent living skills. For example, boarding pupils participated in a broad range of extracurricular activities including Judo, Scouts, Guides and the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme.

A number of our pupils have attained swimming certificates for varying levels of water safety and swimming ability. They have also participated in a variety of outdoor education activities.

In cooperation with the Royal Blind’s Marketing and Fundraising Department, the school hosted a celebration event for supporters at the school. The young people presented several musical items and participated in an interview in which they spoke about their achievements and aspirations. They represented the school very positively.

Mobility
Mobility training enables young people to develop skills that allow them to safely move about their community with confidence. We have been closely involved with the Institute of Education (University of London) and the Scottish Sensory Centre (Edinburgh University) in delivering the Paediatric Habilitation course which is training participants to become either trained Habilitation Assistants or fully trained Habilitation Specialists.

"At the school, we actively encourage our students to participate in special activities, to support the development of independent living skills."
Links with other education providers
We are very pleased to have strong partnerships with other education providers. Some of our young people attend the school part-time, attending their local schools on the other days of the week. We also have excellent links with Firhill, St. Peters, St George’s, George Heriot’s, George Watson’s and Hazelwood schools. We have also been working cooperatively with the other grant-aided special schools.

International links
The School staff have been involved in a European Comenius Lifelong Learning project which culminated this year in the production of a resource booklet called "Optic – Optimising the Inclusive Classroom". A special event was held in the Scottish Parliament to celebrate the publication of the booklet which has since been widely disseminated to throughout the community.

In addition we continued our international links through MDVI Euronet and ICEVI (International Congress for Educators in Visual Impairment) and we hosted the annual meeting of the ICEVI Europe Board.

Once again, a group of pupils and staff visited France to be immersed in the French language and culture for a week.

Pupil numbers and staffing
The number of pupils in the school reduced to 79 in August 2010, with a disproportionately large decrease in residential numbers. Our staff have remained highly motivated and supported our work through a difficult time when we have needed to adapt our staffing numbers to the pupil numbers and fee income level.

Our business plan is to continue to sustain the capacity across both campuses to enable us to serve up to around 120 pupils across all ages and abilities, as we had in quite recent times. However, to do this we have to sustain a significant financial deficit and keeping the school running is the main purpose to

IT'S A NEW SCHOOL LIFE

Two 11 year old boys are enjoying their first year at The Royal Blind School. Life for Myles Fleming from Argyll and Harry Lovett from Renfrew is now very different, as both board at the school during the week and return home at the weekends.

Myles, who is visually impaired and has Down’s Syndrome, has settled in well and made lots of new friends. “As soon as I visited The Royal Blind School I knew it would be the right school for Myles, both from an educational and social point of view,” said his mum Beverley Fleming. “It was not easy to adjust to him being away, and we all miss him being at home, but we know he’s happy and he’s already learning to be able to do much more for himself.”

Harry has also settled well at the school and has enjoyed making new friends. “The school is offering Harry the chance to achieve his full potential, which is what every parent wishes for their child,” said his mum Fiona Lovett.

“Harry is already a valued member of the school community and is offered opportunities that he would not otherwise have in a mainstream school. Thanks to The Royal Blind School Harry now has a very bright future.”
which we are devoting our voluntary income. The Doran Review is considering the place of grant aided special schools in Scotland's education system, and the routes by which pupils are referred to the school. We have the opportunity to feed our knowledge and views into that review, and it is our hope that the outcome will be to confirm our position and to open the way to higher numbers of referrals once again. However, we need to be prepared for the eventuality that the outcome is otherwise, and avoid over-committing resources. For this reason we took the decision to postpone the start of our building project at Craigmillar Park for which we have the design work and planning permission fully in place.

School marketing
Over the past year we have redesigned the school website and have achieved extensive coverage in the print media, successfully profiling the school’s activities and pupil achievement. We have also been featured on the websites of HMIE and Learning and Teaching Scotland in recognition of our excellent practice.
FORWARD VISION

Our new service for school leavers

This new service opened its doors in August 2010 and is establishing itself successfully, thanks to the experienced team that is developing and managing it. By September there were four young people receiving the full residential service and a further two regularly make short stays.

The young adults attend college courses such as games and sport, and dance performance, and community activities enable them to interact with other young adults with similar needs.

We are now building up networks of support in our community and among other organisations to enhance the lives of our young people. For example:

- Disability Snowsport funded an organised ski trip to Aviemore at which our staff and young adults enjoyed three days learning how to ski.
- Social work students joined with our staff team at Forward Vision and now one student is taking forward the introduction of advocacy services.
- A music group has been established with the help of a volunteer.
Further social opportunities for one of our young adults is currently being facilitated with the help of another volunteer.

A gardening project has been started and is expanding, with plants and vegetables being planted in pots in the courtyard. An area has been identified within the grounds which will be used as a vegetable plot. Work at the allotment has also begun. Young adults and staff enjoyed a ‘house’ party to celebrate the recent Royal Wedding.

There have been continuing discussions and visits to other agencies providing care for young adults to look at what activities and college opportunities they are offering as well as looking at the type of accommodation and service on offer. These include group living and single tenancy settings.

All the young adults have had an initial review, and these have been very positive. Feedback has also been gained from parents/carers, and this has also been very positive, verifying that our young people have made the progress we hoped they would make with us in independence and socialisation.
Braeside House is again graded 5’s (“very good”) across the board on Quality of care, quality of leadership and management, quality of environment, quality of staffing by SCSUJS (the body that supersedes the Care Commission). This places us solidly within the top 20% of Care Homes, a reflection on the high standard of care delivered and the commitment of our dedicated staff.

The home operated at an average of 95.0% (2009/10 97.4%) of full capacity through the year, which is a great achievement as over the year we had 48 (2009/10: 30) vacancies to fill. Our average relet period was 28 (2009/10: 19) days. We reported last year that we closed with a number of vacancies, and the problem extended through until August 2010. For the last seven months of the year, we achieved 97.4% occupancy and a 16 day average relet period.

“These excellent figures reflect our efficiency, our excellent reputation and the numbers of older people with visual impairments needing our support.”
These excellent figures reflect our efficiency, our excellent reputation and the numbers of older people with visual impairments needing our support.

The average age in the Home is 92 years and the residents require increasingly complex care. Our programme of education keeps our staff up to date with current thinking on care practice, including dementia care and end of life care, both of which have become increasingly important. The average length of stay of those residents who died at Braeside House during this financial year was 17 years. Another major theme of our training this year has been in nutrition, and we have worked hard on introducing more formal procedures on weight monitoring of residents and pressure relieving care.

We have created two sitting areas with a “period” feel to them, with homely furnishings, fireplaces, ornaments and even big radios from the 1950’s. Many of our residents find these spaces to be calming and reassuring. Our day activities are adapted to the interests and needs of the residents we have at any time, and our Royal Wedding celebrations were a major event in the home.

Serena Rillan, our Head of Care, has been at the forefront of thinking on relationship-centred care, having co-authored with Dr Mike Nolan of Sheffield University “Implementing Relationship Centred Care within a Care Home Setting” and made a joint presentation of that work in Dublin. Serena attended the National Care Award ceremony in London, having been included in a shortlist of five for the Registered Nurse of the Year award.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the families, and friends of Braeside House for their continuing support over the past year, also the on-going hard work of our staff.

Margaret Nairn
Braeside House is now her home

Along a ledge in her room in Braeside House, 88-year-old Margaret Nairn keeps a row of model elephants. Elephants are her favourite animal— but the models are also a reminder of the years she served in the diplomatic corps in Pakistan.

“When I lived in Pakistan I remember elephants used to pass up and down in front of my house— they did all the hard work, like cutting down trees. This elephant used to come up to my door and I used to feed him biscuits.”

Two years ago declining sight and mobility problems brought Margaret to Braeside House.

“Most of the things I used to do in life— reading, sewing, knitting, crosswords, I have had to give up. It becomes harder to live— getting somebody to cook for me, making sure somebody does the garden. I’ve become lazy— but it is so easy to live here,” she says.

Like our other blind and partially sighted elderly residents, Margaret now needs 24-hour care. But the row of elephants on the shelf is a constant reminder that she was once one of the most adventurous and independent women of her generation.

Margaret Nairn pictured with Care Assistant Lynn Drummond at an organised visit to the Scottish Parliament.
THE SCOTTISH BRaille PRESS
The leading provider of high quality alternative formats

Our work for the financial sector, for whom we supply customer account statements and other documentation in large print, Braille and audio formats, grew strongly this year, as a result of which total sales increased by 40% to £1.5 million. The growth was particularly high in our specialist large print production.

As members of UKAP, we are working towards the development and introduction of a Braille quality accreditation scheme. Staff member Jim McCafferty became a member of the Braille Production Group which looks at all aspects of Braille production including accreditation.

This year we worked with the publisher Waverley Books to publish the Braille edition of the novel Mavis’s Shoe by Sue Reid Sexton on the same day as the print version was published. We continued to produce Braille magazines, for which we have 807 subscribers over our 4 titles. In addition, the Braille version of Royal Blind’s Iske magazine goes out to 514 individuals.

Nine of our staff are Blind or have a measure of visual impairment, and eight staff are otherwise disabled. The oversight of our supported employees has gone through a significant change this year, with the Shaw Trust appointed to work with us on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions, and a renewed contract with the City of Edinburgh Council that secures the funding of our present workforce into the future.

“During the year, we celebrated the retirement of Jimmy Milliken after 45 years’ service. Jimmy was a former pupil of The Royal Blind School.”
MARKETING AND FUNDRAISING
Raising our profile and raising funds

The key priorities for marketing and fundraising over the past year have been:

* to raise the profile of Royal Blind, in order to increase the knowledge of the organisation among potential supporters and among those with whom we may work to provide future services,

* to grow income from key target markets in order to build the financial viability of existing operations and services and build our capacity to raise funds, to enable future growth and security.

Having made a major investment in marketing and fundraising activities in the previous financial year in connection with our school building project, it was important this year to both build on the recognition and support we achieved last year and re-establish a firm base and financial return ratio.
It is good to be able to report that this has been achieved, even though the postponement of the school building project (see the report on the school, page 14) meant we had to suspend in mid-year the fundraising that we were doing for that specific purpose.

An important thrust for our marketing activities has been the development of our website and of other related web-based activity. Our network of websites is now impressive and accessible, and backed up less visibly by work and investment to ensure that search engine enquiries such as Google will bring anyone interested in our area of work to our website, whatever their purpose. This has an international reach and an enormous potential as increasingly people meet their information requirements in this way. Our activities are announced and commented upon through Facebook and Twitter to a growing community of followers.

We have continued to publish our charity magazine three times yearly. The latest edition was redesigned and the paper stock changed to reflect the development of our services and the circulation is now over 15,000. We have developed new marketing materials for Forward Vision and Braeside House to effectively market and promote the services.

Our range of campaigns and events included a repeat of our flagship event Try and Score, held in association with Aberdeen Asset Management, Light Relief Week – a week that encourages supporters to use an hour to actively
fundraise for the charity – ran for the second time in October and is developing and growing as a way of growing our support and raising funds.

National Braille Week aims to draw attention to Braille as a communication system which has been instrumental in opening up opportunities and empowering those who are blind or visually impaired. This year the campaign featured a unique exhibition, featuring artwork and Braille messages from a host of UK celebrities that included Stephen Fry, Susan Boyle, Michael Ball and Dougray Scott.

The Optic Event held at the Scottish Parliament (page 12) was widely publicised and provided good exposure and links for the organisation.

At the beginning of April 2011 we held an innovative event for donors and collectors to say “thank you” to those who support our work, many of whom have loyally supported us for many years. Bringing our supporters face to face with the people we support and who manage our services was a big motivator and we hope to hold similar events in the future.
One of our key priorities has been to raise our profile so that more people know about us and support our work.
Total incoming resources, at £33.3 million, decreased by 2% from the previous year. Falling numbers of pupils at the Royal Blind School meant reduced fee income, and investment income from interest rates and share dividends decreased once again. These decreases were offset to a large extent by the service income we received for the new Forward Vision service and a strong surge in sales at the Scottish Braille Press.

Our voluntary income rose by 2%. Although we suspended our appeal for the school development project for the time being, the support that was engendered by that campaign continued. Also, income from legacies increased following the previous year’s unusually low figure.

The operating deficit of the Royal Blind School continued at broadly the same level as the previous year, as costs were pegged back to match the fall in fee income. The operating deficit is significant, although smaller than is implied by these figures, which are affected by adjustments regarding our pension scheme that unfortunately distort the result year by year. The deficit is sustainable for the time being but reflects a position that is not satisfactory for the longer term.

The cost of generating funds is much decreased because in the previous year we had a large number of initiatives to launch the school development appeal. This year’s figures return us to a healthier return on our outlays.

The year has seen a continuation of the recovery in the world’s stock markets from their low position in 2008, and hence there are gains on investments in the year of £2.4 million. The investment manager’s fees are affected by the value of our investments, which explains the increase of 19% in investment management costs.

The accounts show actuarial gains in the pension scheme (under the FRS57 method of calculation) of £8.3 million, following the previous year’s losses of £5.2 million. These fluctuations are due in large measure to the way the figures must be calculated and changes in the assumptions that underlie the figure.

Total recognised gains for the year were £9.9 million. We continue to have a very strong financial reserve in relation to the size of our operations, which will serve us well in these challenging times.
### SUMMARISED BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2011

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<th>31 March 2011 £000</th>
<th>31 March 2010 £000</th>
<th>Increase/ (Decrease)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tangible Fixed Assets</strong></td>
<td>36,526</td>
<td>36,992</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Investments</strong></td>
<td>30,934</td>
<td>26,355</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Assets</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debtors</td>
<td>988</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash and Bank</td>
<td>1,951</td>
<td>2,030</td>
<td>(4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Liabilities</strong></td>
<td>2,995</td>
<td>2,925</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Current Assets</strong></td>
<td>2,143</td>
<td>2,117</td>
<td>(1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Assets excluding pension liability</strong></td>
<td>49,563</td>
<td>47,685</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pension liability</strong></td>
<td>(703)</td>
<td>(8,785)</td>
<td>(93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Assets including pension liability</strong></td>
<td>48,860</td>
<td>38,899</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
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**Represented by:**
- General unrestricted funds: 42,328 (32,472, 30%)
- Designated funds: 5,000 (5,000, -)
- Restricted funds: 1,472 (1,427, 3%)
- Total funds: 48,800 (38,899, 25%)

The designated fund is for the redevelopment of our facilities at Craigendar Park campus.

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**Principal Office**
P.O. Box No. 500, Gillespie Crescent, Edinburgh, EH10 4HZ

**Auditor** – PKF (UK) LLP, Registered Auditors, 65 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh

**Banker** – The Royal Bank of Scotland plc, 26 Home Street, Edinburgh

**Solicitor** – Pagan Osborne, 55-56 Queen Street, Edinburgh

**Investment Manager** – Aberdeen Asset Managers Limited, Donaldson House, 97 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh