

Foreword

As the current RNIB chief executive officer (CEO) with a history degree under my belt from 30 years ago, I was delighted when I learned that Ian Bruce was completing a history of RNIB from 1970 to 2010. We can learn a lot from the past and, if there ever was a time we needed to, it is now. The world is changing fast with real challenges within societal and economic shifts. Climate change needs to be addressed, technology informs our lives, culture wars abound and there are very recent geopolitical challenges to the established liberal world order. Understanding where we have come from is always useful to work out where we should go, and how we should navigate the challenges and opportunities that result from change.

As Ian Bruce draws out, charities have a significant role to play in combatting this turmoil. Their rights and responsibilities have grown dramatically over the end of the twentieth and the start of the twenty-first centuries. Charities, of which RNIB is one, are organisations which are used to working against the odds and winning, eventually. RNIB is a charity which has been tenacious since 1868 in fighting for the rights of blind and partially sighted people and developing and delivering much needed services. As this book makes clear, we have an enviable track record, maintained to this day, to deliver focussed services, based on the needs and wishes of our beneficiaries.

This history describes the evolving organisational techniques we have used to achieve this through applying

socio-educational professionalisms combined with organisational methods such as strategic planning, marketing and HR policies. Mostly, we have been successful and sometimes we have failed but always we have learned.

Indeed, RNIB will learn from this history and I believe others can too as we are in many ways a typical large British charity which Ian Bruce has placed in an evolving socio-political setting. Those 'others' to my mind include other charities, students of politics and sociology, people who work for charities and non-profit organisations who want to learn from our successes and mistakes, especially students on charity management courses and, of course, historians of the voluntary sector.

As a major charity RNIB has involved and employed many thousands of staff and volunteers over this history, making it a team effort. I commend Ian for naming so many of them, inevitably a tiny fraction, but showing the co-operative nature of our enterprise.

Matt Stringer,
RNIB Chief Executive