



UNIVERSITY OF  
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## Network 1000

# Visually impaired people's access to employment

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## **Executive summary**

This report presents findings from Network 1000 Survey 2. The data was collected during interviews with 503 visually impaired people of working age between November 2006 and January 2007. All the participants were registered as either blind or partially sighted and lived in Great Britain. Sampling and analysis accounted for the age distribution of the visually impaired population.

The report focuses upon data relating to employment. More specifically the report presents data in relation to:

- 1) Overview of employment status;
- 2) Services received by those currently in work;
- 3) People who are not in work;
- 4) Barriers and enablers to employment.

### **1. Overview of employment status**

#### **Overall employment rates**

Employment rate amongst the population of working age people who are registered blind or partially sighted is estimated as 33%. This figure is approximately the same as the estimate based on Network 1000 Survey 1 (2005). In terms of differences across ages, the highest proportion of respondents in employment is found in the 30-49 age group (44%) then the 18-29 group (at 33%) and the lowest proportion in the 50-64 group (only 22%).

People who described themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' are the biggest group within the working aged visually impaired population (36%). Again this is linked with age – 17%, 32% and 45% in the 18-29, 30-49 and 50-64 age groups respectively. The overall proportion of people who described themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' has grown since Survey 1.

As we might expect, respondents in the 18-29 category were much more likely to classify themselves as a student (22%) than in the other two age groups, but also unemployment was higher in this age group (22% compared with around 10% in other age groups, and overall 12%). High proportions of people aged between 50 and 64 years of age described themselves as retired (19%) although they were not old enough to receive a state pension.

The employment rate amongst visually impaired people is very low compared to the general working age population. Overall, three quarters of the general population reported being in some form of employment (General Household Survey 2006; ONS, 2008). Visually impaired individuals of working age are

much more likely to describe themselves as being unemployed, long term sick or disabled, or retired than those in the general population.

### **Factors associated with employment**

The report presents the findings from a regression analysis which examined the net effect of each independent variable on employment status while controlling for other variables. The key variables which were found to be associated with likelihood of being employed were: registration status (blind or partially sighted), educational attainment, and housing tenure. In summary:

- The severity of visual impairment has a significant impact upon likelihood of employment – those who are registered as blind are less likely to be employed than those registered partially sighted.
- Level of educational attainment has a significant impact upon likelihood of employment. People with higher qualifications are significantly more likely to be employed. While age appears to be a key factor in predicting employment in this population it seems that it is educational attainment which has the greater association (in fact the highest association of all the variables examined).
- Housing tenure has a significant association with employment. Those employed are more likely to be buying (or to have bought) their home. This finding most probably reflects the economic advantage of employment.

### **Changes in employment status over time**

A comparison of self-reported employment status across Network 1000 Survey 1 and Survey 2 gives a picture of how things have changed in the 18 months between the surveys. Most notably, the proportion of people who described themselves as unemployed has dropped (20% to 12%) and the proportion of those who described themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' has risen (22% to 36%).

Furthermore, because Network 1000 is a longitudinal study (i.e. the data was collected from the same participants) we are able to track the status of individuals across the two surveys and gain a more dynamic picture of change.

In summary:

- Those who are employed tend to stay employed.
- Very few people who are looking for new employment are successful.
- There appears to be a general 'drift' towards 'long term sick or disabled' (self-reported) status amongst those not in work.
- Those who are unemployed tend to either stay unemployed or, more likely, re-categorise themselves as 'long term sick or disabled'.
- Those who describe themselves as retired tend to either stay retired or re-categorise themselves as 'long term sick or disabled'.
- Those who describe themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' most likely remain in this category.

## 2. Services received by those currently in work

In this section of the report the analysis focuses upon visually impaired people of working age who were working at the time of the interview. This gave a sub-sample of 171 people.

### Support when in work

Those participants who were currently in work were asked about the different types of practical support provided by their employer. 89% described receiving some type of support while only 11% reported that they had not received any support. Examples of support received by high proportions of visually impaired employees are:

- 61% of participants had been given time off for medical attention (diagnosis or treatment).
- 59% used special aids or equipment to enable them to carry out their job.
- 45% of participants reported that their employer had arranged adaptations within their work environment.
- 33% of participants had been allowed to change their working hours.
- 65% of participants said they had received support from other staff.

Examples of support which was received by lower proportions of visually impaired employees are:

- 19% reported receiving special training or re-training.
- 17% reported being offered a change of jobs within their company.
- 18% had been in receipt of specialist services such as reading or clerical support.
- 3% of participants reported having taken time off for rehabilitation and adjustment to their visual impairment.
- 10% had been given a specially designed job by their current employer.

These figures become more meaningful if we are able to compare the support experienced by people who are in work to people who are *no longer* in work. The proportion of the 'not working' group who had received support was less in the majority of areas compared to those who were in work. The differences were particularly high (greater than 20%) in relation to 'special aids or equipment to do the job' and 'support from other staff'. In keeping with this, a larger proportion of people no longer in work reported they had received 'no support' compared to those in work (38% and 11% respectively).

Approximately 30% of visually impaired people who were no longer working believed they could have been able to continue in their job if they had been given more support (19% thought this was definitely the case while 11% thought it may be the case). This suggests that significant numbers of visually impaired people

who have lost their job feel that they could still be working if they had received more support in relation to their visual impairment.

### **Access to written material when in work**

Visually impaired people reported accessing text in a variety of ways at work. For example:

- Standard print (42% without any low vision aids, 58% with low vision aids).
- Large print on paper (53%) and a computer screen (58%).
- Having someone to read things to them (39%).
- Speech output through computers (21%) and tape / CD digital formats (29%).
- Reading paper-based braille (9%) and braille presented through electronic braille displays (6%).

Flexibility shown by many visually impaired people in the ways in which they access written material was evident. Almost 70% of those questioned reported using three or more of the access methods above (and 47% used four or more), e.g. people using speech output from a computer as well as various forms of print.

### **Getting employed**

Those participants who were working at the time of the interview were asked questions about sources of information and agencies used when seeking employment. The more commonly reported sources of information in job searches were adverts (37%), Job Centres (30%), the internet (19%), and newspapers (11%). The more commonly reported agencies were Job Centre staff (16%) and recruitment and temping agencies (7%). Many people reported that they had not used any agencies (65%). When prompted, 31% described using disability employment officers – of these, three quarters were satisfied with the support they had received.

## **3. People who are not in work**

In this section of the report the analysis focuses upon visually impaired people of working age who were not working at the time of the interview. This includes people who described themselves as unemployed as well as people who described themselves as not being in the labour market – long term sick or disabled, retired, looking after family or home, and students (who were not also working). This gave a sub-sample of working age visually impaired people who are not working of 331 people.

## **Services received by those looking for work**

Participants who were not working at the time of the interview were asked about any training in new skills that they had received:

- Approximately a third of people who were not working (37%) described themselves as having never looked for work whilst they have been visually impaired. Unsurprisingly, the majority of these described themselves as economically inactive (most commonly 'long term sick or disabled').
- A further 38% said they had never been offered training in new skills for a job or other work and again the majority of these described themselves as economically inactive.
- The remaining 25% had been offered retraining by an employer (2%), by Government Employment Services or Job Centres (18%), and/or by a charity (9%).

Those participants who were not working at the time of the interview (and had looked for work whilst visually impaired) were asked questions about sources of information and agencies used when seeking employment. By far the most commonly reported source of information in job searches were Job Centres (34%). Other sources of information reported were RNIB (11%), Action for Blind People (7%), Social Services (6%), and adverts (4%). When prompted, 29% described using disability employment officers – of these 57% were satisfied with the support they had received and 40% were not satisfied.

## **Likelihood of becoming employed**

Participants who described themselves as unemployed (73 people) were asked whether they were currently seeking paid work. Their replies were fairly evenly divided amongst the three response options 'seeking paid work', 'not seeking paid work, but would like it', and 'not seeking paid work and do not want it'.

All participants who were not employed (except students) were asked a standard question about likelihood of obtaining paid work in the next year. On the whole they provided a rather pessimistic forecast about their employment prospects:

- 66% of participants stated that they believed they were 'very unlikely' to obtain paid work in the next year.
- This rises to 90% who believed they were 'very unlikely' or 'unlikely' to obtain paid work in the next year.
- Older participants were more pessimistic about employment than younger participants.
- Participants who are not part of the labour market (largely those who describe themselves as 'long term sick or disabled') were more pessimistic about employment than those who described themselves as unemployed.



## **4. Barriers and enablers to employment**

The final section of the report draws upon more qualitative data and draws out visually impaired people's understanding of their own situation.

### **Participants who were not working**

Individuals who were classified as economically inactive were asked if they would like to work, assuming they could change their circumstances. Overall, the majority of this group (72%) said they would still like to work if they could. Less than a quarter responded that they would not like to work and 5% were unsure.

Participants who said that they would like a job were asked "What would help you get a job?" and "Put another way, what stops you getting a job?" This generated ideas about perceived barriers and enablers people had to finding employment:

- 'Individual-based' or 'within-person' barriers were identified by many.
- Over half of the participants identified their visual impairment as a key barrier to employment.
- Other barriers commonly identified were general health issues (36%) and mobility (21%).
- 'Social-based' or 'beyond person' explanations were less commonly identified.
- Of those that were, they included availability and location of jobs (15%), training and qualifications (16%), transport-related factors (13%), and attitudes of employers (12%).

### **Participants who were working**

The majority of visually impaired people who were working said that they were happy with their job (88% compared with 10% who said they were not happy and 2% who were unsure). A follow-up question asked participants to explain why they felt this way:

- Of those who said they were happy with their job, many gave reasons that one would predict sighted people might give in answer to the same question. This was also true of some of those who were not happy with their job.
- A number of the participants who described themselves as happy also described positive reasons relating to their visual impairment, e.g. understanding, supportive and responsive colleagues, visual impairment was never made into an issue, and the presence of a support worker.
- Even so, some also talked about difficulties they encountered which suggests they need more support in order to do their job more effectively (e.g. in relation to access to information, difficulties getting to work or around the workplace, attitudes of their boss or colleagues, or a lack of understanding and support for their visual impairment).

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In March 2004, Vision 2020 UK and the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR) at the University of Birmingham were commissioned by the Big Lottery Fund to carry out the research project “Network 1000: Surveying the changing needs of visually impaired people”. The initial funding was for three years and covered ‘Phase 1’ of the broader Network 1000 project. Network 1000 Phase 2 started in April 2007 and has been funded by the Thomas Pocklington Trust, RNIB and GDBA. Phase 2 aims to further analyse the data gathered in Phase 1 as well as maintain the Network 1000 sample.

The project has four key aims. The first was to establish a consultation network of over 1000 visually impaired people aged 18 or over. The second aim was to adopt a more longitudinal approach to data collection that would enable the project to report and record changes in circumstances over time and enable further comparative data to be evaluated. This report presents some of the *second* round of this data collection.

Thirdly, the project is underpinned by a commitment to consult with visually impaired people. To this end the research team have adopted a collaborative approach to ensure that people with a visual impairment have had an input into the design process.

Finally, the project aims to provide statistically useful data on the changing views, experiences and needs of visually impaired people that can be used to influence service development and provision. Our aim is to report not only the voices of those who have taken part in the survey, but also to ensure that the statistics produced from the survey will enable these voices to be generalised to the wider visually impaired population.

This report particularly draws upon the data collected from over 500 visually impaired people of working age. The report focuses upon data relating to employment. More specifically it focussed upon participants’ experiences of: being employed or not employed and their views of the enablers and barriers they face in finding employment.

## 1.2 Description of the sub sample of working age participants

At the time of the Network 1000 Survey 1, the sample consisted of 1007 visually impaired adults split across five age groups (see Douglas, Corcoran and Pavey, 2006). All the participants were on the registers of blind and partially sighted people held by 20 social services departments in England (15), Scotland (4) and

Wales (1). Of this Survey 1 sample, 561 were of working age and interviewed directly. This sub-sample dropped to 502 who were re-interviewed in Survey 2. We define working age as those aged between 18 and 64 years for men and aged between 18 and 59 years for women, taking into account the differing ages at which people can receive the state pension in the UK.

The weighting used in the analysis in this report is based upon the age distribution of people on the 20 registers used in the sampling. This distribution is almost the same as estimates taken from the official registration figures for England (Department of Health 2003), Scotland (Scottish Executive 2003), and Wales (National Assembly for Wales 2003, note figures are for 2001-2). These figures combined enable an approximate base population and population distribution to be calculated. The Network 1000 survey results can be statistically generalised to this base population.

**Table 1: Distribution of the sample across three age groups of participants in Network 1000 Survey 2 by sex and distribution of population. Base: sample of directly interviewed participants of working age (N=503).**

Age group	Male	Female	Total sample (N)	Base population
18-29	(57)	(76)	(133)	9,000
30-49	(98)	(104)	(202)	28,000
50-64	(100)	(68)	(168)	31,000
Total	(255)	(248)	(503)	* 68,000

\*Based upon estimates taken from official registration figures for England (Department of Health 2003), Scotland (Scottish Executive 2003), and Wales (National Assembly for Wales 2003); Base population figures based upon people aged between 18 and 64 years.

The weighting applied in the analyses in this report is the same as that used in Network 1000 Survey 1 analyses, with slight adjustment to scale for the different sample size. Weighted percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest percent.

### 1.3 Access to employment

The main report of Network 1000 Survey 1 (Douglas, Corcoran and Pavey, 2006) contained a section on employment, and the general theme of employment was also identified as important by many participants. In Survey 2 we re-visited the topic of employment for two reasons. Firstly, we wanted to check if circumstances and opinions had changed in the 18 months between interviews. Secondly, we wanted to gather more information about support and services people received in relation to employment as well as their own views about the barriers and enablers that they believed they faced. The report is split into the following sections:

- **Overview of employment status.** This section focuses upon people of working age (N=502) and explores some of the factors which are found to be associated with employment. We also examine how employment status has changed between the time that Survey 1 and Survey 2 were carried out.
- **Services received by those currently in work.** This section focuses upon people who are currently working and explores the support they get in work and the process of getting a job. We also examine the methods people use to access written information whilst at work.
- **People who are not in work.** This section focuses upon people who are not working, ie. those who described themselves as ‘unemployed’ (economically ‘active’) and those who described themselves as either ‘retired’ or ‘long term sick or disabled’ (economically ‘inactive’).
- **Barriers and enablers to employment.** This final section presents data in relation to how participants who are not working view their chances of getting employment. The section particularly focuses upon their views of what is stopping them getting a job (‘barriers’) and what would help them get a job (‘enablers’).

We intersperse the report with quotations from our participants in order to give a personal context to the figures being presented. These are *verbatim* where possible and are recorded in italics; where this is not possible and depending on the method employed by the interviewer, the quotations have been paraphrased to capture the meaning of the quotation and are reported in ordinary print. In all cases, the response has been checked and confirmed as a correct reflection of the comment at the time of interview. Quotations are used more extensively in the section on ‘Barriers and enablers to employment’ and for this reason we also provide relevant characteristics of the quoted participant.

Some employment categories are composites, e.g. ‘long term sick or disabled’ or ‘looking after family or home’. In order to clarify communication in the report we put single quotes around these employment categories.

## 2 Overview of employment status

This section focuses upon participants of working age who took part in Network 1000 Survey 2 (N=502). First we present data related to people's self-reported employment status and go on to explore some of the factors which are found to be associated with employment. We also examine how employment status has changed between Survey 1 and Survey 2.

### 2.1 Employment status in Survey Two

Table 2 provides a snapshot of the breakdown of self-reported employment status. The picture is quite similar to that obtained in Survey 1 (Douglas, Corcoran and Pavey, 2006). Overall, the employment rate is 33% and this is clearly linked with age. In terms of differences across the three age groups, the highest proportion of participants in employment was found in the 30-49 age group (44%), followed by the 18-29 age group (at 33%); the lowest proportion was in the 50-64 group (only 22%). As we might expect, participants in the 18-29 age group were much more likely to classify themselves as a student (22%) than in the other two age groups, but also unemployment was higher in this age group (22% compared with around 10% in other age groups, and overall 12%).

People who described themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' were the biggest group within the working aged visually impaired population (36%). Again this was clearly linked with age – 17%, 32% and 45% in the 18-29, 30-49 and 50-64 age groups respectively. The overall proportion of people who described themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' had grown since Survey 1 and this is discussed in more detail in a later section.

Relatively smaller numbers described themselves as belonging to one of the other categories: student (3%), looking after family or home (4%), retired (10%) or something else (2%). High proportions of people aged between 50 and 64 years of age described themselves as retired (19%) although they were not old enough to receive a state pension.

**Table 2. Employment status by age group. Base: working age participants (N=502), weighted.**

	18-29 years (%)	30-49 years (%)	50-64 years (%)	Total weighted (%)	Total sample (n)
Employed	33%	44%	22%	33%	171
Unemployed	22%	13%	9%	12%	73
Long term sick or disabled	17%	32%	45%	36%	159
Retired	0%	4%	19%	10%	39
Looking after family or home	0%	5%	4%	4%	19
Student	22%	1%	0%	3%	29
Something else	6%	1%	1%	2%	12
Number interviewed	132	202	168	100%	502

There are clear differences in employment status when comparing the visually impaired and general working age populations. Overall, three quarters of the general population report being in some form of employment (General Household Survey 2006; ONS, 2008). The equivalent figure for visually impaired individuals is only a third. Visually impaired individuals are much more likely to describe themselves as being unemployed, 'long term sick or disabled', or retired than those in the general population.

## **2.2 Factors that are associated with employment**

We carried out a series of analyses which explored how different factors affect employment. By initially using cross-tabulations we can examine whether there is a potential association between two variables (such as educational attainment and employment status). The cross-tabulations (not shown here) indicate that:

- Age (as discussed above) is clearly linked with employment status. In particular, participants in the 18-29 and 50-64 age groups were less likely to be in work compared to those aged between 30-49 years old.
- Men were more likely to be in work than women.

- People with additional disabilities or long term health problems (in addition to their visual impairment) were less likely to be in work.
- People registered as partially sighted were more likely to be in work than those registered as blind.

In order to carry out more robust tests, however, it is necessary to go beyond analysing each variable in turn. By using ‘multivariate analysis’ we can examine the net effect of each independent variable on employment status while controlling for other variables. The technique we used was regression analysis and we examined the following variables: age group, registration status (blind or partially sighted), sex, educational attainment (ie. qualifications), housing tenure, age of onset of visual impairment and presence of additional disabilities or long term health problems. Specifically, by using logistic regression techniques we can see which factors increased or decreased the probability of an individual being in work or not. The following points summarise the key findings from the multivariate analysis:

- Being registered as blind decreases the probability of being in employment compared to those who are registered as partially sighted. This variable is statistically significant when controlling for other explanatory factors.
- Housing tenure is related to the probability of being in work. Specifically, owning a property outright or having a mortgage is associated with increased probability of being in work compared to those in other tenure categories (such as those renting their homes, etc). This variable is statistically significant when controlling for other factors.
- There is a clear and strong relationship between educational attainment (i.e. the highest qualification held) and the likelihood in being in work. Compared to those with no qualifications, the higher the qualification held the stronger the probability of being in work. This variable is statistically significant when controlling for other factors.
- When controlling for other factors, however, participant’s sex, age of onset of visual impairment and the presence of an additional disability or long term health problem did not appear to be significantly linked to employment status. Also, age did not appear to be statistically significant over and above the other factors.

A comparison with the general population clearly shows that people who are registered blind or partially sighted are far less likely to be employed than people who are sighted. The analysis above provides more detail about other factors which are associated with employment. Firstly, it appears that the severity of visual impairment has a significant impact – those who are registered as blind are less likely to be employed than those registered partially sighted. Secondly,

level of educational attainment also has a significant impact (in fact the biggest impact of all the variables examined). People with higher qualifications are significantly more likely to be employed within the registered visually impaired working age population. While age appears to be a key factor in predicting employment in this population it seems that it is educational attainment which has the stronger impact. Finally, housing tenure also has a link with employment – those employed are more likely to be buying (or to have bought) their home. This finding most probably reflects the economic advantage of employment.

### **2.3 Changes in employment status: Survey One to Survey Two**

A comparison of self-reported employment status across Network 1000 Survey 1 and Survey 2 gives a picture of how things changed in the 18 months between the surveys. Most notably, the proportion of people who described themselves as unemployed has dropped (20% to 12%) and the proportion of those who described themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' has risen (22% to 36%). Furthermore, because Network 1000 is a longitudinal study (ie. the data was collected from the same participants) we are able to track the status of individuals across the two surveys and gain a more dynamic picture of change. This is best captured through a rather complex cross-tabulation of the data which is presented in the Appendix. However, the key findings from this analysis are described below.

The most stable group by far are those who are employed. Of those who were employed during Survey 1, 90% were still employed 18 months later at time of Survey 2. Given the employment rate is approximately static across the two surveys, it follows that few people had left employment (those who did had become unemployed, 'long term sick or disabled', or retired). When questioned, most of these participants described their deteriorating health or vision as the main reason for leaving their job. Similarly, few people had become newly employed (those who did had been either unemployed or a student previously).

Two of the biggest groups in Survey 1 were the 'unemployed' and 'long term sick or disabled' groups. Just a quarter of participants who said they were unemployed at the time of Survey 1 reported the same status in Survey 2. Very few of these participants had moved into employment. In fact over half now redefined themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' and therefore were no longer describing themselves as being part of the labour market.

In contrast, people who described themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' in Survey 1 tended to still describe themselves in that way in Survey 2 (75% of them), and those who did change their status had generally not entered the labour market. Of greater significance was the increased proportion of participants who reported themselves as being 'long term sick or disabled' in Survey 2 compared with Survey 1. There is a sizeable increase in the number of



people who place themselves in this category (158 in Survey 2 compared to 99 in Survey 1). There appears to be a general 'drift' towards 'long term sick or disabled' amongst those not in work. This is particularly true for those who described themselves as unemployed (as already discussed) or retired. When we look at this more closely and unpick the figures for each of the three age groups, we find this pattern is much more pronounced in the 30-49 and 50-64 age groups than in the 18-29 age group (figures not shown here).

To sum up, it appears that the employment status of visually impaired people has the following dynamics over time:

- Those who are employed tend to stay employed;
- Very few people who are looking for new employment are successful;
- There appears to be a general 'drift' towards 'long term sick or disabled' amongst those not in work;
- Those who are unemployed tend to either stay unemployed or, more likely, re-categorise themselves as 'long term sick or disabled';
- Those who describe themselves as retired tend to either stay retired or re-categorise themselves as 'long term sick or disabled';
- Those who describe themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' most likely remain in this category.

### **3 Services received by those currently in work**

This section of the report focuses upon a sub-sample of participants who were in work at the time of Network 1000 Survey 2. This sub-sample consisted of 171 participants (divided between 150 who described themselves as employed and 21 who described themselves self-employed). Firstly, we report details about the general support they said they received when in work. This analysis also is linked to support received in work by those who no longer have a job. Secondly, we examine the methods people use to access written information whilst at work. Thirdly, we report the support that people said they received when seeking work.

#### **3.1 Support when in work**

Those participants who were currently in work were asked about the different types of practical support that their employer may have provided them with (shown in Table 3). As might be expected, the numbers who had received particular forms of support varied considerably across the range of options. Nevertheless, approaching 90% described receiving some type of support while only 11% reported not having received any support.

For instance, 61% of participants had been given time off for medical attention (diagnosis or treatment) and a similar percentage (59%) used special aids or equipment to enable them to carry out their job. In addition to those in receipt of specialist aids or other equipment, 45% of participants replied that their employer had arranged modifications within their work environment. Around a third of participants had been allowed to change their working hours. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of participants cited support from other staff as one form of help they had received from their current employer (the highest level for any response option).

Fewer participants reported that they had been provided with special training or re-training (19%), to change jobs within their company (17%), or that they had been in receipt of specialist services such as reading or clerical support (18%). Only 3% of participants reported they had taken time off for rehabilitation and adjustment to their visual impairment. Less than 10% had been given a 'specially designed job' (which accommodated their visual impairment) by their current employer.

The 13% of participants who described some other form of help tended to elaborate on the support they had received (e.g. accessible computer set-up on login, enlarged reading materials, transport between work and home, car sharing), or in a number of cases made reference to the source of funding for the support (e.g. Access to Work was named by ten participants).

**Table 3. 'We would like to know whether your current employer has ever done anything to make it easier for you to work with your visual impairment'. Base: employed participants of working age (N=150), weighted.**

	Total weighted (%)	Total number (n)
Receive support from other staff	65%	98
Allowed time off (at time of diagnosis/during treatment)	61%	91
Special aids or equipment to do the job	59%	88
Arranged adaptations to the work environment	45%	70
Allowed you to work different hours	33%	47
Provided special training or re-training	19%	27
Special clerical, reading or other services	18%	24
Allowed you to change jobs within the company	17%	28
Some other form of help	13%	19
Provide a specially designed job	10%	14
Time off for rehabilitation and adjustment	3%	6
None of these	11%	16
Number interviewed	-	150

A similar question about support at work was asked of the 21 participants who were self-employed. The general responses were similar to those described in the previous table (although the general level of support was slightly lower).

These figures become more meaningful if we are able to compare the support experienced by people who are in work to people who are *no longer* in work. Participants who were not working were asked if they had ever had a paid job whilst being visually impaired. A sub-sample of 148 participants answered 'yes' to this question and these participants were asked about the help they received when in work. The question prompts were parallel to that given to participants who were in work (with some reduction) and this allows for comparison between the two groups (see Table 4).

The most frequent form of assistance mentioned was receiving support from other staff (around 43%). Nearly 38% reported that they had been supplied with special aids or equipment in order to undertake their job. All other forms of support options were reported less often: 16% had received help with training or re-training; 13% had had the opportunity to change job within the same company or receive special clerical reading or other services; and 10% had been allowed time off work for rehabilitation or adjustment.

The proportion of the 'not working' group who received support was less in the majority of areas compared to those who were in work. The differences were particularly high (greater than 20%) in relation to 'special aids or equipment to do the job' and 'support from other staff'. In keeping with this, a larger proportion of people no longer in work reported receiving no support compared to those in work (38% and 11% respectively).

**Table 4. The support and help received while working by participants in work compared to participants no longer in work. Base: Participants of working age (N=298) – those participants currently not working but who have had paid work in the past (N=148), and employed participants (N=150), weighted.**

	Not working (%)	Working (%)
Support from other staff	43%	65%
Special aids or equipment to do the job	38%	59%
Retraining or more training	16%	19%
Special clerical, reading or other services	14%	18%
Opportunity to change job within same company	14%	17%
Some other form of help	9%	13%
Time off for rehabilitation and adjustment	10%	3%
None of these	38%	11%
Number interviewed	148	150

Participants were then asked whether they had ever had to stop work because of sight problems. Approximately 30% replied that they had and that they believe they could have been able to continue in their job if they had been given more

support (19% thought this was definitely the case while 11% thought it may be the case). This suggests that significant numbers of visually impaired people who have lost their job feel that they could still be working if they had received more support in relation to their visual impairment.

**Table 5. ‘If you had help/more help at the time you had to stop doing your job, do you think you could have continued in the job?’ Base: those participants currently not working but who have had paid work in the past (N=148), weighted.**

	Total weighted (%)	Total number (n)
Yes, definitely	19%	28
Yes, maybe	11%	15
Probably not	6%	8
Definitely not	18%	25
Not applicable (not related to sight problem)	45%	72
Number interviewed	100%	148

### 3.2 Access to written material when in work

Accessing written material is a key challenge for many visually impaired people. Many jobs require employees to access information in this way. We asked those currently in employment (employed and self-employed) about the range of methods they use in order to access written information in the workplace (see Table 6).

As would be expected from previous studies (including Network 1000 Survey 1), many visually impaired people access various forms of print. This is often ‘standard’ print (42% without any low vision aids, 58% with low vision aids). In addition, many make use of large print on paper (53%) and a computer screen (58%). As well as print, many access written material in alternative formats: the use of speech output through computers (21%) and tape / CD digital formats (29%) was reported by many. Braille was less commonly used in work as might be expected given that print can be accessed by many. Nevertheless, 9% read paper-based braille and 6% read braille presented through electronic braille displays. Significantly, 39% of visually impaired people who are working describe having someone who reads things to them.

It is also worth noting the flexibility shown by many visually impaired people in the ways in which they access written material. Approaching 70% of those questioned reported using three or more of the access methods presented in Table 6 (and 47% used four or more). This included many combinations: e.g. people using speech output from a computer as well as various forms of print; people using braille as well as computer speech, readers and standard print with a low vision aid.

**Table 6. Which of the following methods do you use to access written information that you need in you work' (per cent responding 'yes' to each item). Base: participants of working age in employment (N=171), weighted.**

	Total weighted (%)	Total number (n)
Do you read enlarged print on a computer screen	58%	101
Read standard print using a low vision aid (including CCTV)	58%	97
Do you read large print on paper	53%	90
Read standard print without aids	42%	73
Someone else reads things to you	39%	69
Do you access information through tape/CD/digital download	29%	54
Do you use speech output on a computer	21%	33
Do you read braille on paper	9%	14
Do you read braille in other formats	6%	11
Other	6%	10
None of these	1%	2
Number interviewed	-	171

Those participants in employment were then asked a short subset of questions about their use of braille (results presented in Table 7 and Table 8). Only around a quarter of working participants had ever tried to learn braille (this 25% was split between 15% who had lessons from others, 4% who had tried to teach themselves, and 6% who had tried both).

**Table 7. ‘Have you ever had any lessons to learn braille or tried to teach yourself braille?’ Base: participants of working age in employment (N=171), weighted.**

	Total weighted (%)	Total number (n)
Yes - both lessons and tried to teach self	6%	12
Yes - lessons from others only	15%	25
Yes - tried to teach self only	4%	9
No	75%	125
Number interviewed	100%	171

Those participants who had tried to learn braille were asked whether they could read grade 1 or grade 2 braille (to read a braille book or magazine). While numbers are small (a sub-sample of just N=46) it is clear that participants had a wide range of braille reading experience and proficiency: 42% read grade 2, 28% read grade 1, whilst 30% were not proficient enough to read a book or magazine in either grade. This variety of experience was reflected in the participants’ answers to other questions in relation to braille. Approximately 70% described their knowledge of braille as being not at all useful in either getting or keeping their job. Nevertheless, around 20% found the braille very helpful in this regard (rising to approximately 30% who found it either ‘very’ or ‘a little’ helpful).

**Table 8. Various questions about the use of braille. Base: participants of working age in employment who have tried to learn braille (N=46), weighted.**

	Total weighted (%)	Total number (n)
<b>Did you become good enough to read/understand a grade 1 or grade 2 braille book or magazine? (N=46)</b>		
Can read/understand grade 1	28%	11
Can read/understand grade 2	42%	20
Not good enough to read either grade	30%	15
<b>How helpful has your knowledge of braille been in helping you to get a job? (N=45)</b>		
Very helpful	19%	8
A little helpful	7%	3
Not that helpful	2%	2
Not at all helpful	72%	32
<b>How helpful has your knowledge of braille been in helping you to keep your job? (N=42)</b>		
Very helpful	20%	8
A little helpful	13%	6
Not that helpful	0%	0
Not at all helpful	67%	28

These questions clearly only provide limited data in relation to braille use amongst people who work. Even so, it is clear that it is those who are most proficient at reading braille who found it most useful (nearly all those who found it helpful were grade 2 braille readers).

Follow-up qualitative questions also gave an insight into different people's views and experiences of braille in the workplace. Those who were more positive about braille sometimes described it in simple positive terms (e.g. "*wouldn't have managed without it*") or highlighted that it was their main form of reading. Others were more specific and described how it offered a flexible alternative format for



them (e.g. being able to read information when away from the desk and computer: *"I use it for making notes and presentations and in meetings"*, *"[I am] able to keep up to date with journals"*). One participant was a braille teacher so braille was central to her job.

Those who were less positive sometimes simply said that it wasn't needed (e.g. *"I don't really use it"*, *"never needed it"*). Some highlighted that their braille proficiency was not adequate for it to be useful in the work context (e.g. *"knowledge is too basic"*, *"I haven't learnt enough braille for it to be of use"*, *"never uses braille at work – [I'm] too slow at it for it to be commercially viable"*). Some specifically described how learning braille had been challenging for them (e.g. *"He couldn't get his head round braille - his hands (from farming) are very tough so he couldn't use braille"*, *"Didn't become at all proficient so it hasn't played any part in his working or leisure life"*).

Some highlighted that alternative formats had been adequate (e.g. *"I mainly rely on computer speech output"*). Others felt that the types of jobs they were employed in meant braille had not been necessary or possible (e.g. *"there are no books or manuals done in braille for my trade"*, *"She doesn't use [braille] because all the format from the other solicitors [is not braille]. She uses equipment, speech output etc."*, *"Nobody is set up to provide information in braille"*). Indeed, related to this some felt it was difficult because so few other people understand braille (e.g. *"no one understands how to read it so it's not widely used where she works"*, *"nobody else uses it"*). For one person this apparent drawback of braille meant that she felt braille was of little help: *"It's outdated. Useful for small personal notes, but as none of colleagues read braille, there's not a lot of use for it. She wishes they had done more about typing than they had about braille. Tapes and computers are better for our modern day."*

Even so, some did say that whilst braille wasn't used at work, it did play a part in their personal life (e.g. *"He's never had to use braille for work, so it's not been helpful. He only uses braille in personal time"*, *"I don't use braille at work – I'm learning braille so I can read to my little boy at home"*).

### 3.3 Getting employed

Those participants who were working at the time of the interview were asked questions about the process of getting a job. More specifically they were questioned about sources of information and agencies used when seeking employment (see Table 9).

**Table 9. Sources of information and agencies used when seeking employment (options not prompted, 0% removed). Base: participants of working age in employment (N=171), weighted.**

	Total weighted (%)	Total number (n)
<b>What sources have you used in the past to obtain information about jobs?</b>		
Adverts	37%	68
Job Centres	30%	54
Recruitment agencies	9%	16
Speculative letters	3%	4
Careers service	3%	7
Other (total)	37%	76
Other (internet)	19%	45
Other (newspapers)	11%	18
Other (word of mouth)	5%	11
None used	28%	39
<b>What agencies, if any, supported your job search?</b>		
Disability employment officers [prompted option]	31%	53
Job Centre staff	16%	25
RNIB	2%	4
Careers service (incl. school and college)	2%	3
Action for Blind People	1%	3
Job Club	1%	1
Other (total)	15%	28
Other (recruitment and temping agencies, incl. Remploy)	7%	11
No agencies used	65%	109
Number interviewed	-	171

In terms of sources of information, adverts (37%) and job centres (30%) were the most commonly recalled. The internet was also highlighted by many (19%), suggesting that access to computers and ICT skills are important when finding a job. Other sources of information were recalled relatively rarely by those interviewed (all less than 10%). In fact, a considerable number did not recall using any sources whatsoever (28%).

Participants were then given a follow-up question asking whether these sources had helped them to secure employment (excluding those who had not used any sources). The responses were largely positive, with 71% replying 'yes' and 29% saying 'no'.

In terms of agencies used when seeking employment, around 65% of participants reported that they had not received assistance from any agencies. Although the majority did not recall using an agency at all when seeking work, those who did generally thought the support provided helped them to get a job (75%). Of the agencies which participants did recall receiving, the most common was Job Centre staff (16%). The other agencies were cited by much smaller percentages (all less than 10%), with the use of recruitment agencies (including temping agencies and Remploy – a provider of employment services to disabled people) the most common (7%). It is worth noting that, unsurprisingly, participants often find it difficult to recall or recognise the different agencies involved in supporting them (e.g. mixing up voluntary and statutory sector agencies). This may be particularly true in instances when statutory services are sub-contracted to voluntary organisations.

It should be noted that the options presented in Table 9 were not prompted. Nevertheless, participants were also specifically asked whether they had ever received advice and support from specialist employment officers (whilst in work or looking for work) – see Table 9. Around 30% said they had received this support while the remainder had not.

The relatively small sub-sample who did (N=58) provided information about the support that was given by the specialist employment officer (see Table 10). The most commonly reported types of support given was in relation to special equipment or aids (59%), advice on types of jobs to consider (43%) and how to apply for jobs (43%). Other advice was also relatively commonly reported, e.g. training courses (35%) and support in an existing job (33%).

**Table 10. What did the specialist employment officer do? Base: those participants in employment who had spoken to a specialist employment officer (N=58), weighted.**

	Total weighted (%)	Total number (n)
Tell you about any special equipment or aids for work	59%	32
Give you advice on how to apply for jobs	43%	28
Suggest types of jobs for you to consider	43%	26
Find jobs you could apply for	36%	22
Suggest any training courses to prepare you for work	35%	20
Suggest that you went to a job centre to see what sort of work you could do	34%	21
Give you help in a job you were already doing	33%	18
Help you when you started a job	25%	15
Offer to accompany you to interviews	18%	13
Help you to retrain in a job you were already doing	11%	6
Number interviewed	-	58

Participants were also asked how satisfied they were with the support given. Opinion was generally positive with around three quarters replying that they were satisfied with the help they had been given and a quarter replying they were not satisfied. Those who were not satisfied were prompted for reasons. Most tended to highlight general frustration about the service, e.g. how long it took to meet people, the type of advice received and lack of visits to the workplace to assess equipment needs. Several participants felt that the employment officer did not have an understanding about visual impairment and its implications, e.g. *“When I asked what sort of job I should look for all she said was whatever job I wanted to do. I didn’t feel this was helpful as there are jobs I can’t do.”*; *“She didn’t even provide information in a format I could access.”*; *“I don’t think they knew much about visual impairment.”*

## **4 People who are not in work**

This section focuses upon the views of participants of working age who were not employed. In the UK a distinction is made between people who are part of the labour market (economically active) and those who are not (economically inactive). People who are part of the labour market include those who are in some kind of employment and, most relevant to this section, those who are seeking work, i.e. unemployed (a sub-sample of N=73). People who are not part of the labour market include people who describe themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' (N=159), retired (N=39), 'looking after family or home' (N=19), and students (and not working) (N=29). Combining these group (plus the N=12 participants who were not working but did not fit neatly into other categories) gives a sub-sample of working age visually impaired people who are not working of N=331. The views of these participants are explored in this section.

### **4.1 Services received by those looking for work**

A detailed battery of questions about services relating to employment was also asked of those participants currently not in work. These questions were in relation to the types of support and advice participants had received from a range of different agencies when out of work. There are a wide range of agencies who could potentially offer advice and support to participants in their search for employment and this assistance can come in a number of forms. Table 11 summarises responses to a question about training in new skills for a job or other work. Approximately a third of people (37%) who were not working said they had never looked for work whilst they have been visually impaired. Unsurprisingly, the majority of these described themselves as economically inactive (most commonly 'long term sick or disabled'). A further 38% said they had never been offered such training and again the majority of these described themselves as economically inactive. This left a remainder of only 25% who had been offered training. Some of these had been offered retraining by an employer (2%), by government employment services or a job centre (18%), or by a charity (9%). In terms of those who had received training from a charity (N=24) all were over 30 years of age and the charities involved were RNIB (8), Action for Blind People (4), St Dunstan's (1), and 'other' charities (11).

**Table 11. Sources of training in new skills for a job or other work. Base: those participants currently not working (N=328), weighted.**

	Total weighted (%)	Total number (n)
By the government employment services/job centre	18%	56
By a charity	9%	25
By an employer	2%	5
Never been offered such retraining	38%	129
Not applicable*	37%	123
Number interviewed	-	328

\* Participant has never looked for work whilst visually impaired.

Similar to those currently in employment, participants who were not working were asked about sources of information they have used or support they had received when searching for work (not prompted) – see Table 12. The most frequently used source was job centres (and their staff) with around a third of participants citing this option. Most other sources had been used much less frequently. Around 11% and 7% reported they had been supported by the RNIB and Action for Blind People respectively. Approximately 17% described ‘other’ agencies and sources of advice. Many of these participants described voluntary sector organisations (e.g. local societies for visually impaired people, ‘Blind in Business’, Shaw Trust, Workability and Royal British Legion Institute) as well as links with schools, colleges, Connexions and general reference to the Internet. Approximately 15% reported they had not used any agencies or sources when they had been looking for employment.

Finally, over a quarter of this group replied that they had not had never looked for work while visually impaired (following prompting, this is in *addition* to those who said they had never looked for work whilst visually impaired earlier in the interview, as reported previously, Table 11). This highlights further that many people have never felt able to seek employment while they have had their visual impairment (approximately 50% of those not working).

**Table 12. Sources of information and agencies used when seeking employment (options not prompted, % less than 3% excluded). Base: those participants currently not working who on a previous question had described themselves as having looked for work as a visually impaired person (N=209), weighted.**

	Total weighted (%)	Total number (n)
Job Centres/Job Centre staff	34%	80
Disability employment officers [prompted option]	29%	49
RNIB	11%	21
Action for Blind People	7%	17
Social services	6%	10
Careers service (including in school and college and elsewhere)	4%	12
Adverts	4%	11
Other agency/source	17%	37
No agencies/sources used when looking for work	15%	29
None used - never looked for work	27%	50
Number interviewed	-	209

Participants were then asked to rate whether or not these agencies or sources had been helpful in obtaining them a job. Around 23% of participants said that these agencies or sources had been of help in them obtaining work while 33% stated that they had not been of help to them in anyway. Nevertheless, 44% said that while these agencies or sources had not been of specific help in getting work they had provided them with assistance in other ways. For example, many participants reported receiving advice on getting technical aids and equipment, links to training (especially in relation to IT) and advice on benefits. Many also described getting useful advice on employment even though it had not resulted in a job (e.g. interview strategies, application completion) and for many this had helped their confidence.

Participants were also specifically asked whether they had ever received advice and support from specialist employment officers whilst in work: around 30% had while the remainder had not.

The relatively small sub-sample (N=61) provided information about the support that was given by the specialist employment officer (see Table 13). The most commonly reported support given was in relation to special equipment or aids (53%), advice on types of jobs to consider (52%), how to apply for jobs (48%), and advice on training courses (52%).

Participants were also asked how satisfied they were with the support given. Around 57% said they were satisfied while 40% were not satisfied. When compared to responses with those obtained from people in work it is clear that levels of satisfaction were lower for those participants not employed. Perhaps this is not surprising given the groups' situations were different. Those who were not satisfied provided a range of explanations. Often participants were generally frustrated and dispirited that the employment officer was of no help in finding a job. Others were more specific feeling that the employment officers seemed ineffective or ill-informed (e.g. about benefits and the local labour market), and some felt that the employment officer's understanding of visual impairment was limited. For example: *"It was like they stereotyped me. They thought as a visually impaired person I should be an audio typist or a piano tuner, not a nanny or child carer."*, and *"The language used was ridiculous and overly politically correct. There was a complete unawareness of what blind people could do and what equipment was available."* Some felt that the challenges they faced were more linked to broader policy issues in relation to disability rather than to their employment officer in particular, e.g. *"They don't seem to have the clout or power. Employers are able to choose the level of disability. [...] Government should insist on employment at all levels of disability."*



**Table 13. What did the specialist employment officer do? Base: those participants currently not working who had spoken to a specialist employment officer (N=61), weighted.**

	Total weighted (%)	Total number (n)
Tell you about any special equipment or aids for work	53%	32
Suggest types of jobs for you to consider	52%	35
Suggest any training courses to prepare you for work	52%	32
Find jobs you could apply for	48%	33
Give you advice on how to apply for jobs	33%	25
Suggest that you went to a job centre to see what sort of work you could do	33%	23
Help you when you started a job	19%	12
Give you help in a job you were already doing	19%	11
Offer to accompany you to interviews	15%	12
Help you to retrain in a job you were already doing	9%	5
Number interviewed	-	61

## 4.2 Likelihood of becoming employed

In the UK a distinction is made between people who are part of the labour market (economically active) and those who are not (economically inactive). People who are part of the labour market include those who are in some kind of employment and those who are seeking work, i.e. those who are unemployed. While this definition is relatively clear-cut, in surveys where people give their 'self-described' employment status the distinctions can become blurred. For example, people who describe themselves as unemployed may say that they are not looking for work at a given time. Similarly, people who describe themselves as 'long term sick or disabled' may hope that they will find employment. There may be all kinds of reasons and rationales for this which are explored in more detail in the next section of the report. In this section we explore visually impaired people's views of their likelihood of getting a job.

Participants who were unemployed (N=73) were asked whether they were currently seeking paid work (Table 14). Their replies are fairly evenly divided amongst the three response options 'seeking paid work', 'not seeking paid work, but would like it', and 'not seeking paid work and do not want it'. This question was not asked of other groups who were not working.

**Table 14. 'Are you currently seeking paid work?' Base: those participants who are currently unemployed (N=73), weighted.**

	Total weighted (%)	Total sample (n)
Seeking paid work	32%	28
Not seeking paid work, but would like it	32%	22
Not seeking paid work and do not want it	36%	23
Number interviewed	-	73

All participants who were not employed (except students) were asked a standard question about their thoughts on the likelihood of obtaining paid work in the next year (Table 15 and Table 16). On the whole they provided a rather pessimistic forecast about their employment prospects. In fact, two-thirds of participants who were asked this question stated that they believed they were 'very unlikely' to obtain paid work in the next year, and, perhaps even more strikingly, approximately 90% believed they were 'very unlikely' or 'unlikely' to obtain paid work in the next year. Whilst this pessimism was found in all age groups, it is clearly linked with age – older participants were more pessimistic than younger participants (Table 15).

presents the same data but this time broken down by economic activity. The economically active group comprises those who are currently unemployed while the economically inactive group comprises those who described themselves as either not seeking work or unable to work (in the main this was people who described themselves as either 'long term sick or disabled' or retired). Overall, there are clear differences between the two groups. Nearly 30% of those classed as economically active believe it likely that they will find work in the next year, compared to 6% of economically inactive participants. Even so, this means that around 70% of economically active participants predict that they are at least 'unlikely' to begin paid work in the next twelve months. The corresponding figure for the economically inactive group is over 90%.

**Table 15. ‘How likely do you think it is that you will begin paid work in the next twelve months?’ by age group. Base: those participants who are unemployed or economically inactive, excluding students (N=291), weighted.**

	18-29 years (%)	30-49 years (%)	50-64 years (%)	Total weighted (%)	Total sample (n)
Very likely	0%	7%	3%	5%	14
Likely	29%	7%	2%	6%	25
Unlikely	29%	27%	18%	22%	67
Very unlikely	43%	59%	75%	67%	179
Don't know	0%	0%	2%	1%	6
Number interviewed	56	106	129	-	291

**Table 16. ‘How likely do you think it is that you will begin paid work in the next twelve months?’ by those economically active and inactive. Base: those participants who are unemployed or economically inactive, excluding students (N=292), weighted.**

	Unemployed	Economically inactive	Total weighted (%)	Total sample (n)
Very likely	10%	3%	5%	14
Likely	19%	3%	6%	25
Unlikely	33%	20%	23%	68
Very unlikely	38%	72%	66%	179
Don't know	0%	1%	1%	6
Number interviewed	73	219	-	292

## **5 Barriers and enablers to employment**

In previous sections we have looked at figures for those employed and those who were not employed. In the section entitled 'Overview of employment status' the analysis identified variables which were associated with employment status. Most notably, the participant's level of vision and educational attainment were identified as key factors. In subsequent sections we first looked at those who were employed and then looked at those who were not employed. These sections explored the services and advice people had received in relation to employment.

These analyses give some indication of the factors that lead to employment or otherwise, as well as some indication of the importance, efficiency and reach of some of the available employment services.

Another important insight into visually impaired people's employment is an analysis of their own understanding of this situation. For example, looking at the barriers and enablers to employment that people perceive, and how this interacts with whether people 'want a job' (complex though that is) and the likelihood they think they have of getting a job. Some of these concepts were introduced in the previous section.

In this section we first use some relatively subjective data collected from people who were not working (excluding students). In Network 1000 Survey 1 we developed a style of question which asked participants what stopped them getting a job (barriers) and what would help them to get a job (enablers). The questions required the interviewer to code the participant's open ended responses at the time of the interview. This questioning style was also successfully applied to other contexts, e.g. the use of computers and leaving the home / isolation (see Douglas et al, 2007; Douglas et al, 2006).

Secondly, we consider those who are employed. Here we present the analysis of responses in relation to how 'happy' people are with their current job. Again this presents an insight into the enablers and barriers visually impaired people experience in relation to employment.

### **5.1 Participants who were not working**

As already reported, participants who were unemployed were asked whether they were currently seeking paid work. Their replies were fairly evenly divided amongst the three response options 'seeking paid work', 'not seeking paid work, but would like it', and 'not seeking paid work and do not want it'. Those individuals who were classified as economically inactive were similarly asked if they would like to work, assuming they could change their circumstances.

Overall, the majority of this group (72%) said they would still like to work if they could. Less than a quarter responded that they would not like to work and 5% were unsure.

As outlined above, participants who said that they would like a job where asked “What would help you get a job?” and “Put another way, what stops you getting a job?” This generated ideas about perceived barriers and enablers to people finding employment. When these responses were collapsed and combined some interesting individual and social explanations emerge (see Table 17).

**Table 17. ‘What do you think would help/stops you getting a job?’ (per cent responding ‘yes’ to each item). Base: those participants who are economically inactive who would like to work and those participants newly unemployed who are seeking paid work or are not seeking paid work but would like it (combined N=189), weighted.**

	Economically inactive (%)	Newly unemployed (%)	Total weighted (%)	Total sample (n)
Nothing would help me	10%	13%	10%	18
<b>Individual-based explanations:</b>				
Visual impairment	56%	36%	54%	99
General health/other disability	39%	13%	36%	64
Mobility (difficulty with)	24%	2%	21%	37
<b>Social-based explanations:</b>				
Training and qualifications	16%	14%	16%	30
Availability/location of jobs	15%	17%	15%	28
Transport-related factors	12%	16%	13%	23
Attitudes of employer	10%	28%	12%	25
Hours/inflexibility of work	2%	9%	3%	7
Don't know	11%	14%	11%	22
Other: within person factor	12%	22%	13%	25
Other: beyond person factor	15%	23%	16%	35
Number interviewed	161	28	-	189

Over half of the participants identified their visual impairment as a key barrier to employment. Other barriers commonly identified were general health issues (36%) and mobility (21%). Interestingly, these comprise ‘individual-based’ or

'within-person' explanations. Perhaps it is not surprising that these types of explanation tend to dominate given that a high proportion of these participants were 'long term sick or disabled', an employment category which is defined as having an inability (or 'incapacity') to work due to ill health or a disability. Even so, 'social-based' (or 'beyond person') explanations were also identified by some participants (although this was relatively less common), e.g. availability and location of jobs (15%), training and qualifications (16%), transport-related factors (13%), and attitudes of employers (12%).

We can also compare the responses of the two sub-groups of people not working, i.e. those economically inactive and those newly unemployed (although numbers in the latter group are very low).

Looking firstly at the 'within-person' reasons, in both groups visual impairment was the most frequently mentioned factor (cited by 56% of economically inactive participants and 36% of those newly unemployed). Also, mobility and 'general health or disability concerns' were commonly mentioned by economically inactive participants. Within-person factors were consistently cited by a lower proportion of those newly unemployed.

In contrast, there was little difference between the groups for 'beyond-person' explanations. In fact it was the newly unemployed who more commonly cited 'attitudes of employers' as a barrier (28% compared with 10% of those who were economically inactive).

Low numbers mean that we must be cautious about these findings but they seem to suggest that different groups identify different barriers (and enablers) to employment. Visually impaired people's own visual impairment is identified by many as a key barrier to employment and earlier analyses suggest that the level of visual impairment is indeed linked to likelihood of finding a job. Interestingly, training and qualifications was identified as a route to finding a job by relatively few. This is in spite of the finding that level educational attainment had the highest association with employment amongst working age visually impaired people.

Given also that earlier analyses in this report suggested that there is 'drift' overtime from economically active to economically inactive amongst visually impaired people who are not working, it may also be that this is linked to a shift in people's perception of their own disability. That is, over extended periods of unemployment people become more likely to see their own impairments as barriers to employment rather than disabling aspects of the labour market.

## 5.2 Participants who are working

The participants who were currently in some form of employment (N=171) were asked, “Overall would you say you were happy with your work?” The majority of people said that they were happy with their work (88% compared with 10% who said they were not happy and 2% who were unsure). This generally positive pattern appeared not to be linked with registration status. There was, however, a suggestion that older people (between ages 50 to 64 years) were more likely to report being happy with their employment (97%) compared with people under the age of 50 years (85%). A follow-up question asked participants to explain why they felt this way. This provided more qualitative data regarding the barriers and enablers that people with visual impairment face when *in* employment. An analysis of this qualitative data revealed a variety of reasons behind job satisfaction, as well as reasons for being unhappy at work. Illustrative examples are presented verbatim where possible (and *italicised*), or as summarised by the interviewer at the time of interview.

Of those who said they were happy with their job, many gave reasons that one would predict sighted people might give in answer to the same question. Examples include people describing the variety offered in their work, good levels of remuneration and benefits provided and the friendliness of people that they interact with including colleagues, customers and clients. A number of the participants also described reasons relating to their visual impairment. For example:

28 year old male, registered blind  
No additional health problems or disabilities  
Has permanent, full time job as a booking coordinator in a customer services department (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

*“My work have been incredibly understanding about my sight. I am very grateful to them.”*

45 year old male, registered blind  
No additional health problems or disabilities  
In paid employment as an industry analyst for a telecoms consultancy (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

*“I enjoy the work and like the company I work for; they are very responsive to any needs I may have”.*

41 year old female, registered partially sighted  
Has additional health problems/disabilities following a stroke  
In full time permanent paid employment as a service quality assurance manager for a housing association; same employer but different job from the time of the 1<sup>st</sup> interview as she has been promoted

*"They are a good employer, they've never had an issue with my visual impairment; they are very driven by equality and diversity, so I have been able to progress through my career very well up to management level. I've got good working terms and conditions."*

48 year old female, registered blind  
No additional health problems or disabilities  
In paid employment as an executive officer for the home office (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

*"It is reasonably easy to get to [so] I can get there on my own. I have a support worker to help me do the job. It has good holidays and flexi time and the work is ok - sometimes a bit boring but it's ok."*

45 year old female, registered blind  
No additional health problems or disabilities  
In paid employment as a social work team manager in a social services department (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

*"She describes herself as happy because she has very flexible working hours; her employer understands that caring for children and having a visual impairment may mean she takes longer to do things."*

Many of the participants who described themselves as being largely happy with their work spoke of the positive aspects of their work, but some also talked about difficulties they encountered which suggests they need more support in order to do their job more effectively (e.g. in relation to access to information and difficulties travelling to work):

52 year old female, registered partially sighted  
No additional health problems or disabilities  
In paid employment as a project manager in an insurance company (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

*"She said that she's always enjoyed her work, taking pride in what she does and is generally a positive person. However, she has experienced problems in recent years as she's got older – e.g. difficulty reading information on a computer screen."*



53 year old female, registered partially sighted  
Has additional disability due to a weak left side so tends to trip  
In paid employment as a care assistant in a residential home for the elderly  
(same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

*“Yes, reasonably so; however it’s such a struggle to get there in the morning and getting home at night because walking is so difficult but once there it’s fine.”*

Of the 10% of participants who said they were not happy with their work, some described the reason as low pay or that they didn’t find the work interesting or fulfilling (again, arguably, it might be expected that sighted people would experience similar dissatisfaction). A number of participants described the barriers they faced in their work, in particular the (negative) attitudes of their boss or colleagues, or a lack of understanding and consideration of their visual impairment:

22 year old female, registered partially sighted  
No additional long term health problems or disabilities  
In paid employment as a legal secretary in the legal profession (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

*“My employers are terrible, not aware at all [of my visual impairment]. For example they leave wires all over the place - health and safety disaster. They tried to make me redundant at the end of last year because of my visual impairment; they tried to move my office to one that was a long way from here, a bus and a train journey away [which would have been] really hard to get to. It basically meant I would have to leave. I threatened to take them to a tribunal, [so] they then said I could stay at this office. They haven’t messed with me since. The [local voluntary organisation that supports people with visual impairment] gave me some great help and advice, effectively meaning I kept my job.”*

38 year old male, registered blind  
No additional long term health problems or disabilities  
In paid employment as a ‘stock replenisher’ in the retail industry (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

*“He finds it very frustrating as he needs lots of special equipment to be able to do the job but doesn’t get any help at work. When he had a problem with a magnifier it took 11 months to be solved. He struggles to get the right equipment for work.”*

50 year old male, registered blind  
Has additional long term health problem with arthritis  
In paid employment as an attendance officer in the education sector (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

“He believes that he is working at a much lower level than his abilities would allow – because he has a visual impairment people treat him as if he is less capable than he actually is.”

47 year old female, registered blind  
Has additional long term health problems with fatty liver disease, growth hormone deficiency, and an irritable bowel  
In paid employment as a clerical assistant in a university (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

“She felt that being disabled is a disadvantage. She works on a reception desk and there are only two places to sit. In order to see visitors she needs to sit on the left desk but her boss has asked her to swap, so now she cannot see properly due to her tunnel vision.”

Others described being unhappy due to the difficulty they experienced in terms of travel and/or mobility, whether getting to work or around the workplace:

25 year old female, registered blind  
No additional long term health problems or disabilities  
In paid employment as management trainee in the financial services sector (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview) and a student

*“I am looking for a promotion at the moment but finding it hard which is frustrating. The main problem is that I can’t drive. I do generally like my work and want to stay in the same industry.”*

49 year old male, registered blind  
No additional health problems or disabilities  
In paid employment as a managing director in the utilities industry (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

*“No, because I don’t have the same flexibility as before, I have to rely on other people to take me places.”*

In some cases, it appeared that the participants needed to receive further support in order to help them do their job; for example:

23 year old female, registered partially sighted  
No additional health problems or disabilities  
Currently on maternity leave from paid employment as a machine operator in the engineering industry (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

“She felt it was starting to get harder to cope with her visual impairment and working.”

40 year old male, registered blind  
At the time of interview he was awaiting diagnosis of a possible heart problem  
In paid employment as a engineer in a telecommunications company (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

“He feels he could do something more challenging, but with his health problems at the moment he remarked that it is nice to be able to do an easier job.”

One participant who said he didn't know whether or not he was happy with his current job simply described finding the job more difficult as his sight loss progressed:

46 year old male, registered partially sighted.  
No additional long term health problems or disabilities  
In paid employment as an admin worker in the civil service (same job as at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

“He said he doesn't know if he is happy with his job, but feels it is getting more difficult due to his deteriorating eyesight.”

## 6 References

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## 7 Appendix – Changes in employment (Survey 1 to Survey 2)

A comparison of self-reported employment status across Network 1000 Survey 1 and Survey 2 gives a picture of how things changed in the 18 months between the surveys. Furthermore, because Network 1000 is a longitudinal study (ie. the data was collected from the same participants) we are able to track the status of individuals across the two surveys and gain a more dynamic picture of change. This is best captured through a rather complex cross-tabulation of the data which is presented below (Table 18). However, the table is large which means it very difficult to navigate using a screen reader. For this reason we present an alternative description of the table below.

Table title: Employment status in Survey One (columns) by employment status in Survey Two (rows). Base: working age participants (N=500), weighted.

Table overview: The table presents a matrix of self reported employment status in Survey 1 and the same participant's employment status 18 months later in Survey 2. Employment status is reported in seven categories: employed, unemployed, 'long term sick or disabled', retired, 'looking after family or home', student, and 'something else'.

Employment status totals from Network 1000 Survey 1 (N=500): 35% employed, 20% unemployed, 22% 'long term sick or disabled', 11% retired, 6% 'looking after family or home', 5% students, and 2% 'something else'.

Employment status totals from Network 1000 Survey 2 (N=500): 32% employed, 12% unemployed, 37% 'long term sick or disabled', 10% retired, 4% 'looking after family or home', 3% students, and 2% 'something else'.

Cross-tabulations taking each of the seven employment statuses in turn:

1. Employed. Of the 174 participants who were employed in Survey 1, in Survey 2 90% are still employed, 2% are unemployed, 7% are 'long term sick or disabled', 2% are retired, 0% are 'looking after family or home', 0% are students, and 0% are 'something else'.
2. Unemployed. Of the 102 participants who were unemployed in Survey 1, in Survey 2 3% are employed, 26% are still unemployed, 51% are 'long term sick or disabled', 6% are retired, 6% are 'looking after family or home', 6% are students, and 3% are 'something else'.
3. Long term sick or disabled. Of the 99 participants who were 'long term sick or disabled' in Survey 1, in Survey 2 0% are employed, 8% are unemployed, 76% are still 'long term sick or disabled', 11% are retired, 3% are 'looking after family or home', 0% are students, and 3% are 'something else'.
4. Retired. Of the 41 participants who were 'retired' in Survey 1, in Survey 2 0% are employed, 11% are unemployed, 37% are 'long term sick or disabled',

53% are still retired, 0% are 'looking after family or home', 0% are students, and 3% are 'something else'.

5. Looking after family or home. Of the 29 participants who were 'looking after family or home' in Survey 1, in Survey 2 0% are employed, 27% are unemployed, 27% are 'long term sick or disabled', 0% are retired, 36% are still 'looking after family or home', 0% are students, and 9% are 'something else'.
6. Student. Of the 42 participants who were 'students' in Survey 1, in Survey 2 13% are employed, 25% are unemployed, 13% are 'long term sick or disabled', 0% are retired, 0% are 'looking after family or home', 38% are still students, and 13% are 'something else'.
7. Something else. Of the 13 participants whose employment status was categorised as 'something else' in Survey 1, in Survey 2 0% are employed, 33% are unemployed, 67% are 'long term sick or disabled', 0% are retired, 0% are 'looking after family or home', 0% are students, and 0% are still 'something else'.

**Table 18. Employment status in Survey Two (rows) by employment status in Survey One (columns). Base: working age participants (N=500), weighted.**

Survey 1 (columns)	Employed	Unemployed	Long term sick or disabled	Retired	Looking after family home	Student	Something else	Total weighted (%)	Total sample (n)
Survey 2 (rows)									
Employed	<b>90%</b>	3%	0%	0%	0%	13%	0%	32%	170
Unemployed	2%	<b>26%</b>	8%	11%	27%	25%	33%	12%	73
Long term sick or disabled	7%	51%	<b>76%</b>	37%	27%	13%	67%	37%	158
Retired	2%	6%	11%	<b>53%</b>	0%	0%	0%	10%	39
Looking after family or home	0%	6%	3%	0%	<b>36%</b>	0%	0%	4%	19
Student	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	<b>38%</b>	0%	3%	29
Something else	0%	3%	3%	3%	9%	13%	<b>0%</b>	2%	12
Total weighted per group (%)	35%	20%	22%	11%	6%	5%	2%	<b>100%</b>	
Total sample (n)	174	102	99	41	29	42	13		<b>500</b>