



Network 1000: Scotland

**A report on the opinions
and circumstances of blind
and partially sighted people
in Scotland**

by

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Foreword

Welcome to the Network 1000: Scotland report. This report forms part of a larger nationwide study of blind and partially sighted people across Great Britain, carried out between spring 2005 and spring 2006.

This report was produced by Clair Cairns and Dr Paul Herriotts (RNIB Scotland and RNIB respectively) with the support of colleagues from the University of Birmingham and is the first of its kind to be conducted for Scotland with major sector wide involvement. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the authors of the report, particularly Clair and Paul who had the original idea for developing a Scotland-specific report.

There have been both political and methodological values in producing this report. Large UK-wide surveys can often lose the detail in their overarching conclusions and potentially lose the richness of the people's lives they are trying to represent. As well as losing the fine grain detail that is valuable to policy makers, it can also actively alienate groups who can benefit from research. By drawing out the Scottish voices from the Network 1000 data, we hope we have presented a more relevant report for the people of Scotland. Not only is this an efficient and cost effective way of working, but also it is in keeping with the original intentions of the Network 1000 project and benefits from the rigorous way that research was undertaken.

The Network 1000: Scotland report has highlighted a range of similarities with the wider UK population including the reported marital status and household composition, the type of vision problems encountered and the knowledge of their conditions, use of low visual aids (LVAs) and the types most commonly used, perceptions of financial status, independent living skills and the types of activities blind and partially sighted people participated in both inside and outside their homes.

In addition to the similarities, there were also some significant differences, which will have both positive and negative implications. In Scotland, there are a considerably lower number of blind and partially sighted people who own their house outright in comparison with England and Wales. Unsurprisingly, there are a much higher number of blind and partially sighted people who rent their accommodation. Considering that sight loss is more likely to occur in older age, this has implications for housing support, and possibly housing benefits and the financial security of this population. It is also startling that there are significantly fewer blind and partially sighted people of working age in Scotland who are employed, in comparison to England and Wales. In addition, there are notably more blind and partially sighted people in Scotland of working age who classify themselves as long term sick or disabled. Again, this has implications for our employment services not only in terms of highlighting and supporting blind and partially sighted people into employment opportunities, but also in engaging with those who are currently dependent upon benefits for financial support.

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On a more positive note, for those blind and partially sighted people who chose to go on to further education in Scotland, those who went on to college were more likely to go to a mainstream college than a specialist one – attendance to specialist college for students with a visual impairment was much lower in Scotland than in England and Wales with 34 per cent having attended, or currently attending university.

The Network 1000: Scotland report also highlighted a range of issues, findings and further questions that need to be explored further. These were:

- People's perceptions of employment and employability.
- The high occurrence of disabilities and long term health issues in addition to sight loss.
- The role of blind and partially sighted people as carers.
- People's perceptions of their financial status and security.
- People's perceptions of barriers to going out and about.
- Use of computers.

RNIB Scotland and the Network 1000 Management Panel chaired by Mike Brace welcome ideas and feedback on these results and the project as a whole. We are proud of this important piece of research and hope it informs and supports your work.

John Legg
Director, RNIB Scotland

Executive summary

This report presents findings from 165 telephone interviews with people registered blind and partially sighted living in Scotland. This forms part of a larger nationwide study of blind and partially sighted people across Great Britain, carried out between spring 2005 and spring 2006.

The sub-sample had the following age characteristics: 18-29 (n=40); 30-49 (n=33); 50-64 (n=46); 65-74 (n=28); 75+ (n=18). The sample was taken from the registers of blind and partially sighted people held by four social services departments in Scotland.

The following summarises the findings from the interviews. Throughout, figures are weighted to account for the age characteristics of the blind and partially sighted population.

Results

The interviews were successful in generating useful data that highlights the opinions and circumstances of blind and partially sighted people in Scotland.

Results are presented in the following areas:

People and their homes

- 44 per cent of the population were widowed.
- 52 per cent of the population lived alone.
- 13 per cent of the population lived with someone who was sick, disabled or elderly.
- 44 per cent of the population were renting, with a similar percentage living in a home that was owned outright.

Vision and eye condition:

- 17 per cent said they could read ordinary newspaper print.
- 63 per cent said they could see well enough to read a newspaper headline.
- 46 per cent have macular degeneration.
- 10 per cent did not know the name of their eye condition.

Reading and access:

- 74 per cent of the population listened to recorded tapes.
- 66 per cent of the population said they read large print.
- 50 per cent of young people communicated using text messages on a mobile phone.

Low vision aids (LVAs):

- 71 per cent of the population used magnifiers for reading.
- More sophisticated LVAs were less widely used.

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Health, other disabilities and hearing:

- 35 per cent of the population reported being registered disabled.
- 70 per cent of people reported that they had long term health problems or disabilities (additional to their visual impairment).
- 36 per cent of the population had difficulty with their hearing.

Employment:

- Only 25 per cent of working age people were in employment.
- 29 per cent of working age people were either long term sick or disabled.
- 67 per cent of the population were retired from paid work.

Finance:

- The majority of the population felt they were at least 'just about getting by'.
- 82 per cent said they had not gone without anything over the past year.

Independent living skills:

- Difficulties in preparing a meal and household cleaning were most commonly named by 19 per cent and 25 per cent of people.

Travel:

- Older people were less likely to leave their homes everyday.
- The most commonly given reasons for leaving home were: shopping (76 per cent) and leisure/hobbies (40 per cent).
- Private car/taxi was the most commonly described method of transport (63 per cent).
- Public transport (46 per cent) and walking (49 per cent) were commonly used travel methods.
- 40 per cent of the population told us they would like to leave home more often.

Computer use:

- 79 per cent of the population never use a computer.
- Computers are mainly used by younger people.
- The majority of younger people had a computer at home.

Education:

- 45 per cent of the population had some level of qualification.
- The older population was less likely to have a qualification.

Leisure:

- 49 per cent listened to radio and music.
- 46 per cent listened to talking books.

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- 42 per cent listened to and watched TV, videos and DVD's.
- 32 per cent stated they did gardening.
- Outside the home, the most popular activity was walking (27 per cent), followed by meeting friends and family (20 per cent).

Issues of importance

To provide the participants with an opportunity to talk about other themes of personal importance which were not covered elsewhere in the survey, a final 'catch-all' question was included, that invited participants to talk about any issue that they felt was important to them in relation to their sight loss. Rather than having a pre-defined list of possible responses as in the earlier questions, participants were encouraged to describe this issue in their own words. The question gave the participants an opportunity to emphasise and elaborate upon themes already discussed or to introduce new themes.

The majority of themes identified had been covered in the telephone interview. The 'top ten' issues which emerged are as follows:

1. Travel, transport and mobility (73 participants).
2. Social and emotional issues (33 participants).
3. Independent living skills (31 participants).
4. Communication and reading (25 participants).
5. Leisure activities – outside of home (19 participants).
6. Counselling, emotional needs and adjustment (19 participants).
7. Employment (18 participants).
8. Awareness of sight loss of sighted people (15 participants).
9. Family issues (15 participants).
10. Attitudes of others (14 participants).

Of the top ten, five were new themes raised by the participants. These were:

- Social and emotional issues.
- Counselling, emotional needs and adjustment.
- Awareness of sight loss issues by sighted people.
- Family issues.
- Attitudes of others.

Conclusions

The Network 1000: Scotland survey has demonstrated that while there are many positive messages about registered blind and partially sighted people in Scotland, there are still many areas where inequality exists.

The survey findings demonstrate that while there are many similarities with the blind and partially sighted population within Great Britain as a whole, there are significant differences particularly in the areas of housing, employment and health.

This report highlights for the first time the situation facing registered blind and partially sighted people in Scotland at the beginning of the 21st century. The findings will help inform policy in Scotland to address these issues, based on the particular needs of this unique population.

1 Introduction and description of sample

1.1 Introduction

This study forms part of a larger Great Britain study, Network 1000: Surveying the changing needs of blind and partially sighted people.

Data from this larger study (Douglas, Corcoran and Pavey, 2006) has been re-examined with the focus now being on those participants living in Scotland (165 of the original 1007 participants).

The aim was to produce a report on the views, experiences and needs of blind and partially sighted people in Scotland. This report is therefore intended to help inform policy within Scotland in order to address the issues described here.

1.2 Overview of sample and reporting protocol

1.2.1 Design weighting

The figures presented in this report have been weighted to aid generalisation to the wider blind and partially sighted population. The process of weighting described in Douglas, Corcoran and Pavey (2006) is adopted and was based upon the age distribution of people on the 20 registers used in the overall sampling. This distribution is almost the same as estimates taken from the official registration figures for Scotland (Scottish Executive 2003). The Network 1000: Scotland survey results can be statistically generalised to the population of Scotland.

Given the sample in this report is relatively small ($n=165$), the best way to interrogate the data is to look at age groupings separately (age group breakdowns is generally presented in the tables). It is particularly important to look carefully at differences between responses of participants of working age and those of retirement age.

1.2.2 Rationale behind the survey design

The rationale behind the design is as described in Douglas, Corcoran and Pavey (2006).

1.2.3 The sample

The Network 1000: Scotland sample size is 165, all of whom were interviewed directly.

1.2.4 Description of variables relating to the total sample ($n=165$)

The sample of 165 is split across five age groups. All the participants were on the registers of blind and partially sighted people held by four social services departments in Scotland.

Other key variables that were recorded were registration status (blind or partially sighted) and gender. Weighted frequencies from the sample reflect the expected distribution.

1 Introduction and description of sample

Table 1: Distribution of the registration status, sex, and participant type of the sample.

Base: whole sample (n=165), weighted and unweighted

Characteristic	Sample (unweighted) %	Weighted %
Registration status		
Blind	48%	38%
Partially sighted	49%	58%
Unknown status	2%	1%
Unaware of registration	1%	3%
Gender		
Male	44%	32%
Female	56%	68%
Number interviewed	(165)	(165)

Other key variables in relation to the sample were ethnic group, country of birth, religion and marital status. In terms of ethnic group, 96 per cent of the sample (95 per cent weighted) described themselves as White UK. Similarly, 97 per cent of the sample (98 per cent weighted) were born in the UK. In terms of religion, 77 per cent described themselves as Christian (88 per cent weighted), and 2 per cent (1 per cent weighted) another religion (including Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh). Twenty per cent described themselves as having no religion (11 per cent weighted).

In terms of marital status, the two biggest groups were those who were widowed (43 per cent) and those who were married (30 per cent). This first figure links to the high number of blind and partially sighted people who lived alone, which will be discussed later (see section 2.1.1 at page 14).

1 Introduction and description of sample

Table 2: Distribution of the marital status of the sample.

Base: whole sample (n=165), weighted and unweighted.

Marital status	Sample (unweighted) %	Sample (weighted) %
Single/never married	32%	13%
Living together as a couple	5%	2%
Married	35%	30%
Widowed	17%	43%
Divorced	10%	11%
Separated	1%	1%
Number interviewed (n)	(165)	(165)

1.2.5 Reporting style and protocol

The reporting style and protocol are reported in Douglas, Corcoran and Pavey (2006).

2. Main findings (based on 165 interviews)

In this chapter we present the main findings from the survey. These findings are presented in the order of the questions posed in the telephone interview. They do not reflect the order of importance. Results relating to the following themes are presented: the home, vision and eye condition, reading and access, low vision aids, health, employment, finance, independent living skills, travel, computer use, education and leisure.

2.1 The population and their homes

2.1.1 Relationships and household

In this section of the report, we present findings relating to the blind and partially sighted population and their home.

As would be expected, reported marital status was closely linked with age. While 44 per cent of the blind and partially sighted population were widowed, many of these were in the older age groups. Similarly, people who were single and never married tended to be younger. In terms of household composition, 52 per cent of blind and partially sighted people lived alone. Again, this was closely linked with age, being more common among older people. Conversely, people who lived with their parents tended to be younger.

The figures in table 3 (at page 15) reflect different stages of people's lives:

- Younger people (18 to 29 year olds) were often living with parents in their family home, often with brothers and sisters. However, an equal proportion were living alone. It is also common for this age group to be living with a spouse or partner, sometimes with children.
- This pattern was changed for 30 to 49 year olds, who were often living with a spouse (50 per cent), and had children under 16 as part of the household (36 per cent), but far fewer (7 per cent) were now living with their parents.
- Across the age range 50 to 74, the likelihood of living with children under 16 dropped, though patterns of living with a spouse remained approximately fixed.
- It was over the age of 74 years when the frequency of living alone increased (67 per cent) and the likelihood of being a widow or widower increased significantly.
- Some 13 per cent of people said they were living with someone who was sick or disabled. This was most commonly the case in the 50 to 64 age group (19 per cent). Overall, blind and partially sighted people often provided all (73 per cent) or some (20 per cent) of the support (however, it should be noted that the sample size was small in this case). Again, this was most often the case in the older age groups.

2. Main findings

Table 3: Marital status and household composition.

Base: whole sample (n=165), weighted.

	Age group					Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-64 %	65-74 %	75+ %		
Marital status							
Single/never married	83%	36%	10%	6%	6%	13%	(53)
Living as a couple	17%	7%	0%	0%	0%	2%	(8)
Married	0%	36%	60%	53%	16%	30%	(58)
Widowed	0%	0%	15%	35%	67%	43%	(28)
Divorced	0%	21%	15%	6%	11%	11%	(16)
Separated	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	(2)
Household composition							
Living alone	40%	36%	24%	44%	67%	52%	(61)
Living with children*	20%	36%	19%	6%	11%	15%	(30)
Living with children <16	20%	36%	9%	0%	0%	1%	(20)
Living with grandchild	0%	0%	5%	6%	6%	5%	(5)
Living with siblings	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	(9)
Living with parents**	40%	7%	9%	0%	0%	4%	(19)
Living with spouse	20%	50%	62%	56%	22%	36%	(72)
Living sick/disabled person	0%	14%	19%	12%	11%	13%	(20)
Number interviewed	(40)	(33)	(46)	(28)	(18)	-	(165)

* includes children, step children, foster children, and children-in-law.

** includes parents, step-parents, and parents-in-law.

2. Main findings

Table 4: Frequencies of the level of support provided by participants to persons living in their household who are sick, disabled or elderly and in need of special help.

Base: those living with people who are sick, disabled or elderly and require special help (n=19), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
All of support	40%	90%	73%	(8)
Some of support	40%	10%	20%	(7)
No support	20%	0%	7%	(4)
Number interviewed	(14)	(5)	-	(19)

2.1.2 Tenure and accommodation

A significant proportion (41 per cent) of blind and partially sighted people lived in a home that was owned outright. However, a similar proportion overall (44 per cent) said they were renting. Interestingly, a significant proportion in each age group were renting. This was generally more common in Scotland than England and Wales.

Table 5: Home tenure.

Base: whole sample (n=165), weighted.

	Age group					Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-64 %	65-74 %	75+ %		
Own outright	0%	21%	40%	53%	45%	41%	(49)
Buying with mortgage	0%	36%	25%	13%	6%	13%	(30)
Part rent/ part mortgage	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	(1)
Renting	60%	43%	35%	27%	49%	44%	(67)
Rent-free (including relative's)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	(3)
Lives with parents	20%	0%	0%	7%	0%	2%	(8)
Unknown	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	(7)
Number interviewed	(40)	(33)	(46)	(28)	(18)	-	(165)

2. Main findings

The most commonly reported types of accommodation were semi-detached houses or bungalows (26 per cent), flat/maisonette (in a small block) (24 per cent) and detached house/bungalow (20 per cent). Sixteen per cent of the population said they lived in sheltered accommodation (all of whom were people of retirement age).

Table 6: Type of accommodation in which people live.

Base: whole sample (n=163), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Detached house/bungalow	13%	23%	20%	(27)
Semi-detached house/bungalow	31%	24%	26%	(41)
Terrace/end terrace	13%	4%	7%	(19)
Flat/maisonette (<10 dwellings)	31%	22%	24%	(52)
Flat/maisonette (10+ dwellings)	9%	4%	6%	(11)
Sheltered accommodation	0%	22%	16%	(7)
Institutional accommodation	0%	0%	0%	(2)
Various other*	3%	0%	1%	(4)
Number interviewed	(117)	(46)	-	(163)

* Including: various types of converted flats and bed-sits as well as mobile homes, caravans, and houseboats.

2. Main findings

2.2 Vision and eye condition

In this section we describe the population in terms of vision and eye conditions.

We asked the participants whether they could see well enough to read different sizes of print when wearing glasses/contact lenses, but not using a magnifier of any kind:

- 17 per cent said they could read ordinary newspaper print.
- 63 per cent said they could see well enough to read a newspaper headline or large print.
- 15 per cent of people could not read any kind of print without a magnifier.

Participants were also asked six questions (see Table 7 at page 19) regarding how much they could see, as used in the 1991 RNIB Adults Needs Survey (Bruce, McKennell and Walker 1991):

- 2 per cent of the population reported having no light perception.
- The majority (95 per cent) could see the shapes of furniture in a room (or better).
- 11 per cent could see well enough to recognise a friend across a road.

The six questions enabled the 'scoring' of participants' level of functional vision on a seven point scale (0-6) which is summarised in the table below.

2. Main findings

Table 7: Frequencies of participants' functional vision scores.

Base: whole sample (n=164), weighted.

	Age group					Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-64 %	65-74 %	75+ %		
No light perception	10%	6%	7%	0%	0%	2%	(9)
Can tell by the light where the windows are	3%	12%	7%	7%	0%	3%	(10)
Can see the shapes of furniture in a room	3%	9%	22%	14%	39%	28%	(25)
Can recognise a friend if close to their face	10%	12%	16%	7%	28%	21%	(22)
Can recognise a friend at arm's length away	28%	21%	22%	46%	11%	19%	(43)
Can recognise a friend across a room	23%	30%	20%	14%	11%	16%	(34)
Can recognise a friend across a road	25%	9%	7%	11%	11%	11%	(21)
Number interviewed	(40)	(33)	(45)	(28)	(18)	-	(164)

As would be expected, these self-reported levels of vision appear to be linked to registration status. Partially sighted people were much more likely to be able to see well enough to recognise a friend across a road (functional vision score 6) than people who were registered blind (18 per cent compared with 5 per cent respectively).

Participants were asked how old they were when they (or others) first noticed that their sight loss was affecting everyday things. A large proportion (80 per cent) of those aged 18 to 29 first noticed the effect of their sight loss during their childhood. The majority (88 per cent) of those aged 65 to 74 first noticed the effects of their sight loss during adulthood. Similarly, the vast majority (94 per cent) of those aged 75 and above first noticed their sight loss during adulthood.

2. Main findings

Table 8: Is the difficulty you have with your sight greater or less than it was a year ago?

Base: Whole sample (n=165), weighted.

	Age group					Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-64 %	65-74 %	75+ %		
Greater than a year ago	23%	45%	41%	57%	61%	54%	(70)
Less than a year ago	5%	6%	2%	0%	11%	7%	(7)
About the same	65%	48%	57%	43%	28%	38%	(85)
Don't know	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	(3)
Number interviewed	(40)	(33)	(46)	(28)	(18)	-	(165)

Under half of blind and partially sighted people (38 per cent) felt that the difficulty they had with their sight was about the same as a year ago. In contrast, 54 per cent reported that the difficulty was now greater, while the remainder felt it was less of a difficulty. There was an interesting pattern in terms of age, where younger people were more likely to say it was “about the same” compared to older people who were more likely to report that the difficulty was greater than it had been a year ago.

2.2.1 Sight loss and eye conditions

People described a variety of different visual conditions which caused their sight loss. As would be expected, these reflect the fact that many conditions are age related.

- 46 per cent of people reported having macular degeneration. This was the most commonly reported condition among those of retirement age (58 per cent).
- The next most commonly reported conditions were glaucoma (18 per cent) and cataract (17 per cent).
- Diabetes-related eye conditions were reported by 4 per cent of people.
- Retinitis pigmentosa was reported by 2 per cent of the population
- 35 per cent also described other eye conditions.
- 10 per cent of people did not know the name of their eye condition.

Both the latter groups combined (45 per cent) were asked follow-up questions about the nature of their condition and were asked to describe in their own words what was wrong with their eyesight.

2. Main findings

Table 9: Reported eye conditions.

Base: whole sample (n=160), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Macular degeneration	12%	58%	46%	(34)
Glaucoma	15%	20%	18%	(13)
Cataract	9%	20%	17%	(18)
Diabetic related	9%	2%	4%	(10)
Retinitis pigmentosa	3%	2%	2%	(8)
Injury	9%	0%	2%	(7)
Detached retina	9%	1%	3%	(9)
Other	56%	28%	35%	(75)
Don't know	15%	8%	10%	(25)
Number interviewed	(116)	(44)	-	(160)

An analysis of this additional information was carried out with the support of a qualified optometrist. The descriptions people gave of their eye conditions enabled categorisation into some recognised visual conditions, but more commonly into 'symptoms' and 'signs' of sight loss.

The responses to these questions illustrate that people who are registered as blind and partially sighted have a range of eye conditions (and often more than one) and a range of functional vision. For many, this vision is becoming worse (particularly those who are older, many of whom have macular degeneration). Many people do not know, or are uncertain of, the name of the eye condition that is causing their visual impairment.

2. Main findings

Table 10: Post-hoc analysis of additional descriptions of visual condition provided by participants.

Base: participants who described their condition as 'other' or 'don't know' (n=102), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Field loss				
Related to stroke/tumour	12%	0%	5%	(6)
General	8%	3%	5%	(7)
Anterior eye disease				
Uveitis	4%	0%	2%	(3)
Aniridia	4%	0%	2%	(3)
Corneal	0%	13%	7%	(2)
Optic atrophy				
Leber's amaurosis	0%	0%	0%	(3)
Tumour	4%	3%	3%	(3)
General	8%	0%	4%	(6)
Other				
High myopia	4%	0%	2%	(4)
Other retinal	12%	28%	21%	(13)
Nystagmus	8%	0%	4%	(7)
Ocular albinism	4%	0%	2%	(4)
Retinoblastoma	4%	0%	2%	(2)
Other eye conditions	4%	3%	3%	(4)
Unclear and don't know	13%	16%	14%	(17)
Number interviewed	(78)	(24)	-	(102)

2. Main findings

2.3 Reading and access

“I miss reading books, [I] find it very hard to get used to talking tapes, some people do enjoy them. I have given up some things I used to do because [it] strains my eyes.”

Female, age 39, registered blind, lives alone, not working.

“I used to read a lot of autobiographies, newspapers, would rather do that than watch TV. There are large print books out there, but there isn’t the variety. Talking books are fine, but they’re not the same. – I do listen to them though, but I prefer reading.”

Male, age 63, registered partially sighted, does not live alone, employed.

“I find it very difficult – you feel so lonely sometimes because you can’t communicate in the way you did. I feel that I’m losing skills in communicating with people. It’s quite traumatic”.

Female, age 75, registered blind, does not live alone.

In this section we describe results relating to reading and access to information.

When asked about the different ways in which people read it was found that:

- Around half of the population (48 per cent) read ordinary print either with or without a magnifier. When broken down by registration status, a much greater proportion of people registered partially sighted read ordinary print than those who were registered blind (58 per cent compared with 32 per cent respectively).
- Around two-thirds (66 per cent) read large print (with or without a magnifier).
- A very small proportion (3 per cent) read braille.
- Only 1 per cent of the reading population used Moon.
- The most popular method of reading was by listening to audiotapes, with 74 per cent of people reporting that they read in this way. This was more common among blind people (89 per cent) than partially sighted people (64 per cent).
- 35 per cent of people described having someone who read to them.

2. Main findings

Table 11: Frequencies of methods of reading by registration status (excluding those who did not know their status).

Base: those who knew their registration status (n=160), weighted.

	Registration status		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Blind %	Partially sighted %		
Ordinary print *	32%	58%	48%	(88)
Large print *	43%	81%	66%	(107)
Braille	6%	1%	3%	(14)
Moon	2%	0%	1%	(3)
Do you listen to tapes	89%	64%	74%	(106)
Someone reads to you	59%	19%	35%	(62)
Computer speech output	15%	3%	8%	(29)
None of these	0%	0%	0%	(2)
Number interviewed	(79)	(81)	-	(160)

* Reading with or without a magnifier.

A small proportion (15 per cent) of the population used a computer to communicate in writing (compared with 5 per cent of people who used a typewriter). People aged between 18 and 64 were most likely to use a computer to communicate in writing. In contrast, no people aged 75 and above used a computer in this way. Similarly, younger people (18 to 24) were much more likely to communicate using text messages on a mobile phone (50 per cent). Over half of the population (59 per cent) communicated with people through handwriting.

2. Main findings

2.4 Low vision aids

“For years I found it difficult to come to terms with my visual impairment, once registered it made a huge difference. I became aware of CCTV/voice recognition which opened doors to qualifications to secure opportunities and employment”.

Male, age 60, registered blind, does not live alone, employed.

“Having moved from one district to another I’ve found it very difficult to transfer things from there to here. (Interviewer: “What kinds of things?”) Social worker for the blind – in four and a half years I’ve met him once. When you contact him all you get is a recorded message. No facilities for visual aids where I live, they just give you a catalogue that you have to send away and you have to get somebody to explain what there is in the catalogue – it’s stupid.”

Male, age 58, registered partially sighted, does not live alone, not working.

In this section we describe results relating to use of low vision aids:

- A large proportion (71 per cent) of the population said they used magnifiers for reading and 29 per cent indicated that they did not. This figure includes 8 per cent of the population who told us that they did not read at all.
- The most popular low vision aids (LVAs) that people had access to were hand-held magnifiers (50 per cent) and hand-held magnifiers with a light (49 per cent).
- Some of the people had sophisticated LVAs, for example, a magnifier mounted in/on spectacles, and a considerable number had Closed Circuit Televisions (CCTV - 16 per cent). CCTV was taken to include cameras attached to a television and small scanners with a screen for reading labels, as well as more traditional CCTVs.

2. Main findings

Table 12: Types of LVA people reported having.

Base: people who reported using a LVA (n=95), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Magnifier – hand-held	45%	52%	50%	(42)
Hand-held magnifier with a built-in light	41%	51%	49%	(41)
Pocket magnifier (often used for ‘outdoor’ tasks)	26%	19%	20%	(26)
Magnifier – on a stand with light	5%	12%	11%	(6)
Magnifier – on a stand without light	0%	6%	5%	(2)
Magnifier – attached to spectacles	4%	1%	2%	(3)
Magnifier mounted in/on spectacles	6%	8%	7%	(8)
Binoculars – monocular or hand-held telescope	12%	9%	10%	(13)
CCTV	28%	13%	16%	(28)
Other	19%	9%	12%	(19)
Number interviewed	(53)	(42)	-	(95)

Although there is an interesting range of LVAs, it should be noted the above table refers to the kinds of LVAs that the participants reported that they **had access to**, not necessarily ones that they **used**.

2. Main findings

2.5 Health, hearing and other disabilities

“Again, I could deal with the visual impairment as it’s been over 15 years, but it’s the arthritis in my knee that holds me back more. There are other health problems which are more of a problem than my visual impairment – I cannot do any of the things I used to enjoy doing because of my health and mobility problems, I cannot get out of the house anymore as it’s too painful for me to move around”.

Female, age 57, registered partially sighted, does not live alone, not working.

“My other medical conditions are more of an obstacle than my visual impairment, which I don’t find to be so much of a barrier anymore”.

Male, age 28, registered blind, lives alone, not working.

In this section we describe findings relating to health, hearing and other disabilities.

- Around a third (35 per cent) of people reported being registered disabled, the greatest proportion of whom were in the 50 to 64 age groups (65 per cent), while those in the oldest age group (75 and above), reported the lowest level of registration at 22 per cent.
- A further 6 per cent did not know whether or not they were registered as disabled.
- Almost three-quarters (70 per cent) reported that they had long term health problems or disabilities, other than their eye condition. The likelihood of this increased with age, with 73 per cent of those aged 65 and upwards reporting additional health problems or disabilities compared with 50 per cent in age groups 18 to 29.

Participants were asked to describe their additional health problems or disabilities and their responses were later coded. This is presented in table 13 (at page 28). Some of the conditions were clearly linked with age, for example, heart problems and arthritis.

All participants were asked whether they had difficulty with their hearing. Around a third (36 per cent) of the population did. This increased with age, as high as 50 per cent for the 75 and above age group. Of these, 56 per cent had a hearing aid, the greatest proportion (68 per cent) was found in the 75 and above age group. When asked whether the difficulty they had with their hearing was greater or less than it was a year ago, the majority (78 per cent) felt it was about the same. Of the remaining people who reported difficulty with their hearing, 20 per cent felt the difficulty was greater than it was a year ago.

2. Main findings

Table 13: Describe your long term health problem or disability (post hoc coding).

Base sample: all those who said they had a long term health problem or disability other than their sight loss (n=103), weighted.

	Age group					Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-64 %	65-74 %	75+ %		
Heart problems	0%	11%	21%	18%	46%	33%	(18)
Strokes	0%	0%	8%	8%	8%	7%	(7)
Arthritis	0%	11%	14%	46%	22%	22%	(21)
Diabetes	0%	22%	21%	9%	0%	7%	(13)
High blood pressure	0%	11%	8%	18%	22%	18%	(11)
Circulatory system	0%	11%	0%	9%	0%	2%	(4)
Skeletal system	0%	22%	36%	27%	22%	25%	(25)
Nervous system	0%	0%	21%	8%	0%	5%	(11)
Respiratory system	33%	0%	7%	18%	16%	14%	(13)
Digestive system	0%	0%	7%	0%	8%	6%	(4)
Urinary tract/kidney	0%	11%	0%	0%	0%	1%	(5)
Other	50%	38%	8%	18%	0%	8%	(23)
Cancer	0%	0%	0%	8%	0%	1%	(4)
The ear/hearing	0%	0%	7%	0%	0%	1%	(2)
Number interviewed	(19)	(21)	(30)	(20)	(13)	-	(103)

2. Main findings

2.6 Employment

The following three cases illustrate the contrasting experiences of people at the beginning, middle, and end of their working life:

“I’m doing work experience at the moment which has been positive. Sometimes I’ll find things difficult, but if I do, I try just to do the best that I can everyday, or I’ll ask someone for help if I need to”.

Female, age 19, registered blind, does not live alone, not working.

“I did find that at work they were really good, getting the screen and the software – they got it in the office where I work most of the time, but also have it in another building where I sometimes work”.

Male, age 34, registered partially sighted, lives alone, employed.

“I think probably the one thing which strikes me is how people who are unaware of visual impairment (VI) issues [and] find it difficult to relate to people with VI. People ask me “can you see my hand?” They lack understanding of how my impairment impedes my life and the level of adjustment I have to make to normal living. Not being able to drive, not being able to follow the varieties of career paths for someone with vision who could drive. I couldn’t be a policeman because of my VI, (not that I particularly wanted to be one). Otherwise, would describe myself as pretty well adjusted. I’m conscious of the fact that there are many people who are worse off than I am”.

Male, age 49, registered partially sighted, does not live alone, not working.

In this section we describe findings relating to employment.

When participants were asked to describe their employment status, the majority of the population (67 per cent) described themselves as retired from paid work altogether. This is not surprising considering the age characteristics of the blind and partially sighted population. More relevant however, is the employment status of people of working age. Twenty seven per cent of those of working age described themselves as unemployed, and more significantly, 29 per cent described themselves as either long term sick or disabled. A significant proportion also described themselves as being employed (the majority) or self-employed (25 per cent). Two per cent were described as looking after family and 7 per cent described themselves as being retired from paid work altogether (most of whom were aged 50 or over).

2. Main findings (based on 165 interviews)

Table 14: Frequencies of participants' self-reported employment status by working/retirement age group.

Base: whole sample (n=164), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Self employed	4%	0%	1%	(3)
Paid employment (inc part-time)	20%	1%	6%	(21)
On maternity leave	0%	0%	0%	(0)
Unemployed	27%	1%	8%	(30)
Retired	7%	89%	67%	(58)
Looking after family or home	2%	0%	0%	(2)
Student (full or part-time)	6%	0%	2%	(13)
Long term sick or disabled	29%	1%	9%	(27)
Paid employment and a student	2%	0%	1%	(3)
Something else	3%	9%	7%	(7)
Number interviewed	(104)	(60)	-	(164)

Even within the working age population, people's self-described employment status was linked to age. The overall employment rate was only around 26 per cent, but was higher for the 30 to 49 age group (33 per cent). Not surprisingly, those in the younger 18 to 29 age group had a lower employment rate (17 per cent), which can be partly attributed to the 33 per cent who described themselves as being a student. The 50 to 64 age group also had a very low employment rate of 21 per cent. Interestingly, 14 per cent of people in this age group described themselves as being retired (although they were not old enough to receive a state pension). More significantly, 43 per cent described themselves as long term sick or disabled (this was higher than in any other age group).

In terms of self-reported registration status, those who were registered partially sighted were much more likely to be employed or self-employed than those who were registered blind (50 per cent compared with 6 per cent respectively).

2. Main findings (based on 165 interviews)

Table 15: Frequencies of participants' self-reported employment status by age group.

Base: people of working age (n=104), weighted.

	Age group			Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-64 %		
Self employed	0%	0%	7%	3%	(3)
Paid employment (inc. part-time)	17%	33%	14%	22%	(20)
On maternity leave	0%	0%	0%	0%	(0)
Unemployed	33%	33%	21%	28%	(29)
Retired	0%	0%	14%	6%	(5)
Looking after family or home	0%	0%	0%	0%	(2)
Student (full or part-time)	33%	0%	0%	6%	(13)
Long term sick or disabled	17%	33%	43%	34%	(25)
Paid employment and a student	0%	0%	0%	0%	(3)
Something else	0%	0%	0%	0%	(4)
Number interviewed	(40)	(33)	(31)	-	(104)

2.6.1 Non-working people – reasons for leaving last paid job

Of those who were not working at the time of the interview, 12 per cent said the main reason for leaving their last job was the onset of their sight loss or deterioration of their sight. Other reasons included retirement (29 per cent), health (18 per cent), leaving to look after family (12 per cent) and redundancy (3 per cent).

Of those people registered blind, who were unemployed at the time of interview, 17 per cent left due to the onset of their sight loss or deterioration of their sight. Other reasons for leaving included being made redundant (5 per cent) and being in a temporary position that came to an end (3 per cent).

2. Main findings

2.6.2 Long-term sick or disabled people

A significant 34 per cent of working age blind and partially sighted people described themselves as long term sick or disabled. The proportion of people who described themselves as such increased with age from 17 per cent in the youngest age group to 43 per cent of those aged 50 to 64. The majority (75 per cent) said that they left their last paid job due to either their health or their sight loss.

Further analysis will be available from phase two of Network 1000 due to be published in 2008.

2. Main findings

2.7 Finance

“I’m very short sighted and need varifocals, but can’t afford them – they are a ridiculous price”.

Female, age 49, registered partially sighted, does not live alone, not working.

In this section we describe findings relating to financial issues.

Participants were asked about their income, including pensions, disability allowances, benefits and tax credits, benefits and payments for unemployment, family benefits and allowances, housing benefits and allowances, and a range of other types of income.

The number of participants who actually received the various payments and allowances described below could potentially be higher, as participants were not prompted by researchers on individual types of income, unless they were unsure of the name of the benefit or payment that they received.

2.7.1 Pensions

Table 16: Frequencies of those receiving pensions (grouped by people of retirement/working age).

Base: whole sample (n=165), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
State Retirement Pension	0%	96%	70%	(59)
Pension from previous employer	12%	25%	22%	(27)
Pension from spouse’s employer	0%	29%	21%	(13)
Private Pension/Annuity	3%	3%	3%	(7)
Widow’s/War Widow’s Pension	0%	0%	0%	(0)
War Disability Pension	0%	4%	3%	(1)
Pension Credit	0%	21%	15%	(12)
Other	3%	0%	1%	(2)
Don’t know	0%	0%	0%	(0)
Refused to answer	0%	0%	1%	(2)
No, none of these	79%	4%	25%	(91)
Number interviewed	(105)	(60)	-	(165)

2. Main findings

The vast majority of people of retirement age (96 per cent) said that they received the State Retirement Pension. Twenty five per cent of the population received pensions from a previous employer, with 29 per cent receiving a pension from their spouse's employer. Twenty one per cent received pension credit. Three per cent of those of retirement age said they received income from a private pension/annuity.

2.7.2 Disability allowances, benefits and tax credits

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) was commonly received by 76 per cent of working age people who reported that they received at least one of the two components (mobility and care). Only people under 65 years of age can apply for DLA, although it is possible to continue to receive the benefit beyond this age. Therefore it is not surprising that the numbers in receipt of DLA over the age of 65 were lower than that of those under 65.

2. Main findings

Table 17: Frequencies of those receiving disability allowances, benefits or tax credits (grouped by people of retirement/working age).

Base: whole sample (n=165), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Severe Disablement Allowance	12%	1%	4%	(13)
Industrial Injury or Disablement Allowance	3%	0%	1%	(2)
Disability Living Allowance – mobility component	67%	23%	35%	(92)
Disability Living Allowance – care component	71%	19%	33%	(93)
Disability Living Allowance – care and/or mobility component	76%	29%	42%	(104)
Attendance Allowance (if aged 65+)	0%	33%	24%	(13)
Carer's Allowance (formerly Invalid Care Allowance)	1%	8%	6%	(3)
Incapacity Benefit (formerly Invalidity Benefit)	32%	1%	9%	(32)
Working Tax Credit*	7%	0%	2%	(8)
Blind Person's Tax Allowance	5%	7%	6%	(11)
Don't know	3%	14%	11%	(11)
Refused to answer	1%	1%	1%	(2)
No, none of these	8%	30%	24%	(24)
Number interviewed	(105)	(60)	-	(165)

* Disabled Person's Component (formerly Disabled Person's Tax Credit/Disability Working Allowance).

In total, 6 per cent said that they received Carer's Allowance, a benefit that is paid to informal carers of people who are severely disabled. There may be some ambiguity, however, since some participants may have said that they received Carer's Allowance when in actual fact a relative received the benefit for the care they provided for the participant. It is interesting to note that earlier in the report, it was stated that 13 per cent of the population had lived with someone who was sick or disabled.

2. Main findings (based on 165 interviews)

Incapacity Benefit is a weekly payment for people under State Pension age who cannot work due to an illness or disability, although some types of work are allowed (called 'Permitted Work'). Of the working age population, around a third (32 per cent) said that they received Incapacity Benefit.

A person can claim the Blind Person's Tax Allowance if they are registered blind, or are unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential. Of those who said they were registered blind, only 15 per cent said that they claimed the Blind Person's Tax allowance. Earlier in this report, we noted that of those registered blind and not working, 17 per cent said they left their last job due to the onset or deterioration of their eye condition.

2.7.3 Benefits and payments for unemployment

Table 18: Frequencies of those receiving benefits or payments for unemployment (by age group).

Base: non-working participants of working age (n=60), weighted.

	Age group			Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-64 %		
Income Support	47%	41%	12%	28%	(11)
Job Seeker's Allowance	0%	0%	0%	0%	(0)
Don't know	12%	0%	4%	4%	(4)
Refused to answer	0%	5%	0%	2%	(2)
No, none of these	41%	55%	85%	66%	(43)
Number interviewed	(18)	(15)	(27)	-	(60)

Of those of working age who were not working, no one said that they were claiming Job Seeker's Allowance. In contrast, 28 per cent of working age people who were not working at the time of interview were in receipt of Income Support. A person can claim Income Support if they are aged between 16 to 59 and are either a lone parent, registered sick or disabled, or caring for someone who is sick or elderly and they do not have savings of £8,000 or more and do not work, or work on average less than 16 hours a week.

2. Main findings (based on 165 interviews)

2.7.4 Family benefits and allowances

Five per cent of blind and partially sighted people have children living in their household who are aged under 16. Of these, 67 per cent said that they received Child Benefit, while 26 per cent received the family component of Working Tax Credit.

Table 19: Frequencies of those receiving family benefits or allowances.

Base: Participants with children under 16 years of age living at home (n=18), weighted.

	Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
Widowed Mother's Allowance	0%	(0)
Child Benefit	67%	(11)
Child Benefit as a lone parent	0%	(0)
Working Tax Credit – family component*	26%	(4)
Maternity Allowance	0%	(0)
Don't know	7%	(1)
Refused to answer	6%	(1)
No, none of these	20%	(5)
Number interviewed	-	(18)

* Formerly Working Family Tax Credit/Family Credit.

Note: Due to the low aggregate numbers, no breakdown by age is given for this table.

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2.7.5 Housing benefits and allowances

Table 20: Frequencies of those receiving housing benefits or allowances (grouped by people of working/retirement age).

Base: whole sample (n=164), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Housing Benefit/rent rebate	28%	31%	30%	(47)
Council Tax Benefit/Allowance	36%	45%	42%	(57)
Heating Allowance	1%	1%	1%	(3)
Don't know	1%	5%	3%	(4)
Refused to answer	1%	1%	1%	(2)
No, none of these	58%	43%	48%	(91)
Number interviewed	(105)	(59)	-	(164)

A significant proportion of people (42 per cent) said that they received council tax benefit or allowance, while 30 per cent said that they receive housing benefit or a rent rebate or allowance. Of those aged 60 and over (over 80 per cent of the blind and partially sighted population), only 1 per cent mentioned that they receive the tax-free annual heating allowance (also known as the 'Winter Fuel Payment'). This allowance is only available to those who are 60 years old and above. However, this low figure could possibly have been higher if participants had been prompted about the payment by the researcher.

2.7.6 Perceptions of financial situation

Everyone participating in the survey was asked how well they felt they were managing financially, and were offered five possible descriptions (on an ordinal scale) to choose from to summarise their opinion. Surprisingly, the majority felt they were at least 'just about getting by' with only 1 per cent feeling they were finding it quite difficult or very difficult. Forty five per cent of the population felt they were 'living comfortably', 33 per cent 'doing alright' and 21 per cent 'just about getting by'. Participants were not prompted.

The oldest in the population (those aged 75 years old and above) were most likely to describe themselves as 'living comfortably'.

Participants were asked whether there was anything that they had gone without or had to use less than they needed to because they could not afford it, over the previous 12 months. Participants were not prompted.

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Table 21: Frequencies of goods and services that participants have gone without or used less than they needed to because they could not afford it (by working/retirement age).

Base: whole sample (n=164), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
No we haven't gone without anything	65%	88%	82%	(121)
Water	0%	0%	0%	(1)
Gas	3%	0%	1%	(2)
Electricity	3%	0%	1%	(5)
Telephone	3%	0%	1%	(2)
Food	3%	0%	1%	(5)
Clothing	6%	4%	5%	(8)
Holidays	9%	4%	6%	(9)
Visits to friends/family	3%	0%	1%	(2)
Specialist equipment	3%	1%	2%	(3)
Gifts for friends/family	0%	0%	0%	(0)
Hobbies/activities in the home	0%	0%	0%	(1)
Leisure/activities outside the home	3%	0%	1%	(4)
Home improvements	3%	4%	4%	(4)
Other	6%	6%	6%	(10)
Don't know	3%	1%	2%	(3)
Refused to answer	0%	0%	0%	(2)
Number interviewed	(61)	(103)	-	(164)

The majority (82 per cent) felt that they had not gone without anything over the past year. Nevertheless, 18 per cent did report going without things because they could not afford them. For example, 6 per cent did state that they had gone without a holiday, 5 per cent mentioned clothing, and a further 4 per cent mentioned home improvements. 6 per cent of people mentioned other things. This other category included statements like "everything" or that they simply had to live cautiously in order to live within their

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means. It also included more specific personal items such as hairdressing, smoking, private medical insurance, replacing furniture in the home, and costs associated with having a car (for example, replacing the car with a newer model, or car running costs).

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2.8 Independent living skills

“It’s difficult to cope with the visual impairment transition. It takes much longer to do everyday tasks that used to take not so long. You never fully appreciate eye sight and how much of hindrance it is when it’s gone”.

Female, age 42, registered blind, does not live alone, not working.

“I find cash point keys too small, so it’s difficult to get money if the bank is closed”.

Male, age 44, registered partially sighted, lives alone, employed.

“You can’t see bus numbers or notices in the doctor’s surgery. There are so many things that are difficult, for example, choosing clothes, looking for something and panicking when you can’t find something important. You just have to get on with it”.

Female, age 75, registered blind, does not live alone.

In this section we describe findings relating to the topic of independent living skills.

Participants were asked about household tasks they found “particularly challenging”. These questions were asked first without prompting and then with prompting.

Combining the responses illustrates that participants found difficulties in preparing a meal and household cleaning to be the most challenging (by 19 per cent and 25 per cent of people respectively).

Table 22: Difficulty experienced with household tasks (prompted and unprompted questions combined) by working/retirement age.

Base: whole sample (n=164), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Difficulty preparing a meal	27%	17%	19%	(48)
Difficulty with household cleaning	27%	24%	25%	(45)
Difficulty with personal care	9%	2%	4%	(13)
Difficulty getting about the home	9%	6%	6%	(12)
Number interviewed	(104)	(60)	-	(164)

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For those who lived with someone, 82 per cent received help with these types of daily living skills. This figure was particularly high for those who were aged 75 and over. People who helped often included the husband or wife (or partner), particularly for those aged 30 and over. Similarly, parents often gave support, particularly to those under 30 years of age. Fifty eight per cent of people (including those who lived alone) reported getting help from people outside the household.

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2.9 Travel

“The thing I find most difficult is when I’m out, I find roads quite difficult. If I’m walking with friends and they stop, I don’t notice that. I worry that if I’m shopping or out someone could steal something from my pockets and I wouldn’t notice, I have pockets with zips so I know that they can’t steal something. I’m scared if I turn round suddenly that I might hurt a child or an old person; knock them over because I can’t see them. I hate the fact that I can’t drive. Mum used to drive me into the countryside and since she died, I know I’ll not be able to go again”.

Male, age 25, registered partially sighted, does not live alone, not working.

“The shops sometimes have steps and that’s difficult, especially when there’s lots of people around. Sometimes I wish the cars would stop when I’m crossing the road. When I’ve got the white stick, cars don’t stop when I’m waiting to cross. Then people say ‘Did you see the number plate?’ (that is, to report it) but how can I see it when I’m partially sighted?”

Female, age 45, registered blind, does not live alone, not working.

“I have a horror of falling outside, but I’m amazed at the amount of places that don’t have a yellow edge or white line on steps. It makes a tremendous difference, especially when you’re coming out and going down steps”.

Female, age 61, registered blind, lives alone.

In this section we describe findings relating to travel and mobility.

Participants were asked a number of questions about travel and going out beyond their homes. Fifty four per cent of blind and partially sighted people said that they left their home every day, and this rose to 79 per cent of people who left their home several times a week or more. This was linked with age – older people were less likely to leave their homes every day (for example, an estimated 68 per cent of working age people left their home every day compared with only 49 per cent of people of retirement age).

This was also reflected in the described purposes of the journeys. Nine per cent left their home to go to work, a higher proportion of those in the younger age groups did so. Nevertheless, the most commonly given reasons for leaving the home were shopping and general leisure and hobbies (76 per cent and 40 per cent respectively).

2. Main findings

Table 23: How often do you leave your home and go outside (by working/retirement age)?

Base: whole sample (n=165), weighted

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Every day	68%	49%	54%	(104)
Several times a week	21%	27%	25%	(36)
At least once a week	9%	20%	17%	(20)
At least once a fortnight	3%	4%	4%	(4)
At least once a month (or less)	0%	0%	0%	(1)
Number interviewed	(119)	(46)	-	(165)

Table 24: What are the main purposes of your journeys?

Base: whole sample excluding those who do not go out at all (n=165), weighted.

	Age group					Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-64 %	65-74 %	75+ %		
Work	20%	36%	18%	6%	0%	9%	(31)
To visit family	17%	14%	10%	13%	0%	6%	(17)
To visit friends	40%	21%	10%	20%	12%	15%	(33)
To visit hospital/doctor	0%	14%	10%	7%	12%	11%	(15)
To go to the shops	60%	71%	67%	88%	78%	76%	(115)
Leisure/hobby	40%	36%	43%	47%	39%	40%	(67)
Other examples	40%	21%	19%	20%	33%	28%	(46)
Getting out/exercise/walking the dog	(1)	(0)	(2)	(2)	(11)	-	(15)
Education/course/training	(1)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	-	(7)
Number interviewed	(40)	(33)	(46)	(28)	(18)	-	(165)

2. Main findings

A variety of modes of transport were described. Forty five per cent of the population described travelling by private car and 18 per cent by taxi. Nevertheless, public transport was used by many (for example, 46 per cent told us they used the bus), and walking was one of the most common methods described (49 per cent). Mode of transport appears to be linked to age. A private car was more commonly used as a mode of transport by people of retirement age, while people of working age were more likely to walk and use public transport.

Table 25: When you leave your home, how do you normally travel (by age group)?

Base: whole sample excluding those who do not go out at all (n=165), weighted.

	Age group					Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-64 %	65-74 %	75+ %		
Private car	40%	29%	38%	69%	45%	45%	(69)
Bus	60%	71%	45%	27%	45%	46%	(84)
Train	20%	21%	14%	7%	6%	10%	(25)
Other public transport (coach/tube/tram)	20%	0%	0%	7%	0%	2%	(8)
Taxi	20%	14%	5%	19%	22%	18%	(22)
Dial a ride	0%	0%	5%	6%	6%	5%	(7)
Walk	40%	62%	71%	27%	45%	49%	(84)
Other	0%	0%	5%	7%	6%	5%	(9)
Number interviewed	(40)	(33)	(46)	(28)	(18)	-	(165)

People were asked “If you were able to, would you like to leave your home more often?” 40 per cent of blind and partially sighted people told us that they would. People of working age were more likely to say they wanted to leave their home more often than people who were of retirement age (48 per cent and 36 per cent respectively). Follow-up questions were asked of these people inviting responses on what would help them get out more, and what may be stopping them. The answers to these questions gave an insight into the range of situations blind and partially sighted people deal with.

- Sight loss was identified as a key barrier by many (31 per cent), though this was often linked to age (retirement age 38 per cent as opposed to working age 18 per cent).

2. Main findings

- Other common individual explanations were poor general health and mobility (8 per cent and 14 per cent respectively), both of which were more commonly expressed by people of retirement age.
- A common social explanation given by 20 per cent of the population was related to their perception that they could not go out alone or unaccompanied.
- Similarly, 16 per cent of people considered that general issues relating to transport, such as cost and availability, posed significant barriers. This was more common among those of working age (35 per cent compared with 6 per cent of those of retirement age).

Table 26: “What do you think would help you get out of your home more often?” and “Put another way, what stops you from getting out of your home more often?” (by working/retirement age)*.

Base: participants who would like to get out more often (n=78), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Individual-based explanations:				
Problem related to sight loss	18%	38%	31%	(12)
Mobility	12%	16%	14%	(9)
Poor general health/other disability	0%	12%	8%	(2)
Confidence – lack of	6%	3%	4%	(5)
Social-based explanations				
Does not want/unable to go out alone	18%	22%	20%	(17)
General issues related to transport	35%	6%	16%	(19)
Number interviewed	(54)	(24)	-	(78)

*Low frequency categories dropped or collapsed.

2. Main findings

2.10 Computer use

“When I am on the computer, I have difficulty, I have to look quite closely at the computer and it hurts my eyes and it’s too bright”.

Female, age 20, registered partially sighted, does not live alone, not working.

In this section we describe findings relating to computer use, including frequency of use, type of use and barriers to use.

Table 27: How often do you use a computer (by working/retirement age)?

Base: whole sample (n=165), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Every day	32%	2%	10%	(41)
Several times a week	18%	2%	6%	(22)
At least once a week	6%	2%	3%	(10)
At least once a fortnight	3%	0%	1%	(3)
At least once a month	0%	0%	0%	(1)
Less than once a month	3%	0%	1%	(4)
Don't use/never use	38%	94%	79%	(83)
Not since onset of VI	0%	0%	0%	(1)
Use with someone else	0%	0%	0%	(0)
Other	0%	0%	0%	(0)
Number interviewed	(119)	(46)	-	(165)

A high proportion of the population appeared to be split between those who used computers often and those who did not use them at all. This was clearly linked to age. Younger people were more likely to use computers than older people. The resultant weighted frequencies reflect this. An estimated 79 per cent of the population never use a computer (93 per cent of those of retirement age, 38 per cent of those of working age). The use of computers did not appear to be linked to registration type.

2. Main findings

Table 28: What do you use computers for (by working/retirement age)?

Base: Those who use computers (n=81).

	Working age %	Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
Word processing (for example, writing letters)	81	77%	(63)
Sending and receiving emails	80	80%	(64)
Surfing the world wide web/internet	81	74%	(62)
Spreadsheet work	43	35%	(29)
Database work	35	31%	(26)
Anything else – including:	35	39%	(32)
Games/leisure/photography (n)	(4)	-	(17)
Number interviewed	(75)	-	(81)

*Note that there were few people of retirement age who responded.

Of those people of working age, word processing, emailing, and use of the internet were the most commonly cited uses of computers.

The majority of people aged 18 to 29 and 30 to 49 had a computer at home (80 per cent and 72 per cent respectively). These numbers decreased with age (47 per cent in the 65 to 74 age group, but 0 per cent in 75 and above age group). Similarly more people in the younger age groups had access to a computer outside the home.

When we asked all participants “Would you like to use computers more than you do currently?” a significant proportion (38 per cent) said yes. Of the people who said they did not use a computer at all (79 per cent of the overall population), 37 per cent wanted to use computers. Those who said they would have liked to have used computers more were asked, “What would help you use computers more?” and “Put another way, what stops you from using computers more than you do now?”

- Sight loss was identified as a key barrier by many (35 per cent), and this was more common among those of retirement age compared with those of working age (42 per cent and 20 per cent respectively).
- A more social explanation related to the accessibility of equipment (for example, inaccessible screen or keyboard) was also seen as a key barrier (20 per cent). In contrast, this perception was more common among people of working age than those of retirement age (39 per cent and 11 per cent respectively). These contrasting findings suggest that social explanations of disability (in relation to computer use at least) are more common among younger people with sight loss than older people.

2. Main findings

- Lack of confidence (9 per cent), financial costs (for example, of specialist equipment and installation/use of internet connections) (17 per cent), and general issues related to training and courses (for example, cost and availability) (4 per cent), were explanations given which did not appear to be age related.
- The general availability of equipment (both specialist and generic) was seen as a barrier by many (18 per cent).
- Douglas, Corcoran and Douglas (2007) provide a more detailed analysis of perceived barriers to computer use by visually impaired people.

Table 29: What stops and helps the participant to use a computer (more often).

Base: Those who would like to use computers more than they do currently (n=69), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Individual-based explanations:				
Problem related to sight loss	20%	42%	35%	(17)
Confidence – lack of	3%	12%	9%	(2)
Time and priority/motivation	1%	0%	0%	(1)
Social-based explanations:				
Cost of equipment	16%	18%	17%	(11)
Availability of equipment	22%	17%	18%	(13)
Accessibility of equipment	39%	11%	20%	(24)
Issues relating to training courses	13%	0%	4%	(6)
Don't know	2%	30%	21%	(8)
Number interviewed	(44)	(25)	-	(69)

2. Main findings

2.11 Education

“I went to a mainstream school and so got treated the same as everyone else. I think I’ve had it easy as I’ve had my parents and friends support”.
Female, age 23, registered partially sighted, does not live alone, employed.

“My college has been a big thing for me, the first day I was so frightened because I couldn’t see them and I couldn’t see their reaction. The more I’ve gone on the more my tutor has praised me because I’m still worth something and can still contribute towards the community. My confidence is growing – the second module of the course has gone really well. My tutor said that everyone can learn from me because of the trauma I have gone through and I am still growing as a person. When I do qualify he says I will be an asset to [the area that I live in]. I’m pleased that he appreciates that I’m worth my salt.

Female, age 41, registered blind, does not live alone, not working.

In this section we describe findings relating to educational attainment and provision.

Participants were asked a series of questions about their educational qualifications. For ease of analysis, this data was collapsed into five categories of people’s ‘highest’ qualification ranging from no qualifications to degree and postgraduate qualifications (plus an ‘other qualification’ category).

- 45 per cent per cent of blind and partially sighted people described themselves as having a qualification.
- 12 per cent had achieved a degree or higher.
- 36 per cent had a standard grade (or GCSE/O level) or higher qualification.

Taking the population overall, older participants were less likely to have any qualifications, only 26 per cent of 18 to 29 year olds did not have a qualification compared to 72 per cent of people aged 75 and over. This pattern was repeated throughout, although it was more likely that older people would have a qualification in the category ‘other qualifications’ than their younger counterparts.

We also asked the entire sample “Do you currently want to do any formal education or training?” 82 per cent of the population did not want to do any formal education. Those of working age were more likely than retired to want to carry out some form of education (44 per cent compared with 6 per cent respectively).

2. Main findings

Table 30: Frequencies of participants' highest educational qualification by age group.

Base: whole sample (n=163), weighted.

	Age group					Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	18-29 %	30-49 %	50-64 %	65-74 %	75+ %		
No qualifications	26%	33%	33%	39%	72%	55%	(60)
Ordinary Level	21%	18%	16%	14%	0%	7%	(25)
Advanced Level	31%	12%	18%	7%	0%	7%	(26)
HE below degree*	10%	21%	2%	7%	11%	10%	(16)
Degree and higher**	13%	9%	20%	7%	11%	12%	(21)
Other qualifications	0%	6%	11%	25%	6%	9%	(15)
Number interviewed	(39)	(33)	(45)	(28)	(18)	-	(163)

* Including 'Nursing and medical qualifications'

** Including post graduate certificates and diplomas.

We carried out further analysis relating to educational placement and achievement on the data from the sub-sample of participants (n=66), who had lost their sight in childhood and had been in compulsory education within the previous 25 years (that is under the age of 42 at time of interview). This group represents an estimated 5 per cent of the visually impaired population as a whole. Twenty five per cent had attended a special school for those with a visual impairment. The onset of this group's visual impairment occurred at an earlier age. They also tended to be older (reflecting a shift in educational policy of the previous 25 years). Nine per cent had attended a non-visual impairment special school. Forty nine per cent had attended a mainstream school with support provided for their visual impairment. They tended to be younger, again reflecting shifts in educational policy towards inclusion in mainstream schools.

In terms of educational achievement, onset of visual impairment at an earlier age was associated with higher educational achievement. While the explanation for this is unclear and warrants further investigation, this may reflect the positive impact of early intervention strategies on educational outcome, or may indicate the detrimental effect of later onset of visual impairment on educational access. It may also be associated with other difficulties including the emotional impact of visual impairment. A fuller discussion regarding impact of education across Great Britain can be found in Pavey, Douglas, and Corcoran (2008).

2. Main findings

Table 31: Education provision by age when sight loss was first realised.

Base: participants whose onset of sight loss occurred at or before school age, and who were in compulsory education within the previous 25 years (n=66), unweighted.

	Age when sight loss was first realised			Total sample %	Total sample (n)
	Pre-school (0-4 years)	Primary school (5-11 years)	Secondary school (12-16 years)		
Special school for blind and partially sighted people	22%	51%	0%	25%	(12)
Special school for other disability	11%	0%	16%	9%	(5)
Mainstream school with support	48%	30%	84%	49%	(26)
Mainstream school with no extra help	33%	30%	0%	29%	(29)
Special college for blind and partially sighted people	3%	0%	0%	2%	(4)
Ordinary college of further education	49%	40%	67%	49%	(26)
Sixth form college	0%	20%	0%	4%	(2)
Adult education classes	0%	0%	0%	0%	(3)
University/polytechnic	19%	30%	0%	19%	(13)
No formal education	0%	0%	0%	0%	(0)
Number interviewed	(36)	(19)	(11)	-	(66)

After school, those who went on to college were more likely to go to a mainstream college than a specialist one (49 per cent and 2 per cent respectively). Attendance to specialist college for students for a visual impairment was much lower in Scotland than in England and Wales. Thirty four per cent of the sub-sample went to or were at university.

2. Main findings

2.12 Leisure

“Basically, it’s the reading papers and things; I have to rely on TV and radio more now. I used to read a lot of autobiographies and newspapers and would rather do that than watch TV. There are large print books out there, but there isn’t the variety. Talking books are fine, but they’re not the same; I do listen to them though, but I prefer reading. I used to be a spectator at football. I used to watch Celtic games, but can’t follow the ball anymore. I miss that more than anything”.

Male, age 63, registered partially sighted, does not live alone, employed.

“I miss knitting and reading to myself. I am lucky enough to have tapes, but I do miss knitting and gardening and in general being outside in my garden!

Female, age 82, registered blind, lives alone.

In this section we describe findings relating to leisure activities inside and outside the home. We asked all participants about the things they like to do in their spare time, both at home and outside of their home. The questions were open-ended (unprompted) and answers were pre-coded into categories by the researcher at the time of interview.

2.12.1 Activities at home

A variety of leisure activities at home were described by participants without prompting. In order of popularity, these were:

- Listening to radio or music (49 per cent).
- Reading/listening to Talking Books (46 per cent).
- Listening to/watching television, videos or DVD’s (42 per cent).
- Gardening (32 per cent).
- 19 per cent mentioned ‘other’ activities, some of which included socialising with friends and family at home, playing musical instruments, doing DIY tasks, and housework.

2. Main findings

Table 32: Leisure activities at home by working age/retirement age (with prompted and unprompted responses).

Base: whole sample (n=165), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
TV and videos/DVD's	54%	37%	42%	(86)
– following prompt	88%	82%	83%	(146)
Listen to radio or music	52%	47%	49%	(84)
– following prompt	96%	90%	91%	(156)
Reading/Talking books	49%	45%	46%	(78)
– following prompt	72%	59%	63%	(113)
Gardening	23%	35%	32%	(41)
Caring for pets	5%	10%	8%	(10)
Arts, crafts and handicrafts	8%	1%	3%	(9)
Knitting and/or needlework	6%	11%	10%	(12)
Crosswords	0%	11%	8%	(7)
Use computers and Internet	9%	1%	3%	(17)
Talk to family/friends on phone	4%	1%	2%	(7)
Playing card or board games	0%	4%	3%	(2)
Cooking	7%	2%	4%	(11)
Rest/sleep	2%	5%	4%	(5)
None	1%	4%	3%	(2)
Other at home activity, eg	22%	18%	19%	(39)
Socialising	(0)	(4)	-	(4)
Playing musical instruments	(2)	(1)	-	(9)
DIY	(0)	(5)	-	(4)
Housework	(1)	(1)	-	(4)
Number interviewed	(105)	(60)	-	(165)

2. Main findings

Four specific 'at-home' activities were then prompted to participants who had not mentioned it spontaneously in the previous question. These particular activities were chosen as they were both prompted and unprompted in the 1991 RNIB survey, and were predicted to be popular activities. Following these prompts, the most popular at-home leisure activities were:

- Listening to radio or to music (91 per cent).
- Listening to/watching television or videos/DVD's (83 per cent).
- Reading/listening to Talking Books (63 per cent).

In terms of the age of participants, there were no particularly significant differences in the at-home activities specified, with the exception of gardening, which was more popular among people of retirement age and use of computers and the internet which were more popular among people of working age.

2.12.2 Activities outside the home

When people were asked about the things they liked to do outside of their home (unprompted), their responses in order of popularity were:

- Walking (27 per cent).
- Visiting/meeting friends or family (20 per cent).
- Attending meetings for local groups (17 per cent).
- Going shopping (16 per cent).
- Practising religion (13 per cent).
- Having a meal in a restaurant, pub or café (12 per cent).
- Other outdoor trips (10 per cent).

Ten per cent said that they did not do any leisure activities outside of their home at all. As with the question regarding at-home activities, 8 activities were then prompted to participants that had not mentioned them spontaneously (see Table 33 at page 58). Subsequently, the most popular activities were practising religion (41 per cent), attending meetings for local groups (36 per cent) and going shopping (35 per cent).

Older people were much more likely to practise religion than those in the younger age groups with 41 per cent overall (following the prompt, 49 per cent and 21 per cent for retirement and working age respectively). Similarly, older people were more likely to attend meetings for local groups than those in the younger age groups, with 36 per cent overall (following a prompt 39 per cent of those of retirement age compared to 28 per cent of people of working age).

2. Main findings

Table 33: Unprompted/prompted leisure activities outside the home by working/retirement age (with prompted and unprompted responses).

Base: Whole sample (n=165), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Religion (worship, church, related activities)	4%	16%	13%	(13)
- following prompt	21%	49%	41%	(48)
Go to a shopping centre, other than for regular shopping	20%	15%	16%	(38)
- following prompt	49%	30%	35%	(83)
Take your children (under 16) out for activities	6%	0%	2%	(6)
- following prompt	13%	0%	4%	(14)
Go for a drink at a pub or club	15%	1%	5%	(20)
- following prompt	47%	21%	28%	(68)
Attend leisure activity groups such as evening classes	7%	6%	6%	(12)
- following prompt	13%	15%	14%	(22)
Attend meetings for local groups (not VI specific)	13%	18%	17%	(23)
- following prompt	28%	39%	36%	(49)
Attend meetings for clubs or groups for VI people	3%	1%	2%	(5)
- following prompt	16%	9%	11%	(22)
Do unpaid voluntary work	8%	2%	3	(10)
- following prompt	29%	10%	15%	(38)
Number interviewed	(105)	(60)	-	(165)

2. Main findings

Table 34: Unprompted leisure activities outside the home by working/retirement age.

Base: Whole sample (n=165), weighted.

	Age group		Total weighted %	Total sample (n)
	Working age %	Retirement age %		
Play sport	9%	6%	7%	(14)
Sport spectator	3%	9%	7%	(7)
Go swimming	6%	6%	6%	(11)
Go walking	35%	23%	27%	(47)
Go to the cinema	9%	1%	3%	(17)
Go to a concert, theatre or other live performance	12%	7%	8%	(18)
Go to a museum, heritage site or building	3%	4%	4%	(6)
Visit a theme park, fairground, fair or carnival	0%	0%	0%	(0)
Visit a zoo, wildlife reserve, aquarium, or farm park	0%	0%	0%	(0)
Other outdoor trips – countryside, going for drive	6%	11%	10%	(11)
Go dancing	3%	6%	5%	(6)
Go to bingo	0%	4%	3%	(1)
Go to a library	0%	0%	0%	(1)
Have a meal in a restaurant, café or pub	9%	13%	12%	(19)
None	9%	11%	10%	(13)
Other activities beyond the home, for example	35%	24%	27%	(57)
Visit/meet friend/family	19%	21%	20%	(31)
Holiday	3%	2%	3%	(6)
Number interviewed	(105)	(60)	-	(165)

3 Analysis of open-ended question

In this chapter we describe findings of the final stage of the survey, the open-ended question, relating to issues of importance to blind and partially sighted people.

3.1 Rationale

As described in Douglas, Corcoran and Pavey (2006) a final question participants were asked was:

“We have discussed many things about you and different aspects of your life and hope that the questions we have asked have given you a chance to express things which are important to you. However, I wonder if you could spend a final minute or so telling us about things in relation to your visual impairment that are very important to you – this might be something you have found really difficult now or in the past, or alternatively something that has been very positive.”

This invited the participant to talk about any issue that they felt was important to them in relation to their sight loss, whether this was a negative or positive experience or an observation regarding the past, present or future. Rather than having a pre-defined list of possible responses as in the earlier generative questions, the participant was encouraged to describe this issue in their own words. The interviewer summarised what the participant said, and read the summary back to them to confirm that it reflected the point the participant was making. In short, the question gave the participants an opportunity to emphasise and elaborate upon themes already discussed or to introduce new themes.

3.2 Method of analysis

The open-ended question was analysed as described in Douglas, Corcoran and Pavey (2006). For the purposes of this report, the data generated by participants from Scotland was separated from the Great Britain sample and then analysed separately.

3.3 Outcomes

Twenty three themes were identified and coded in the analysis. These include the following, listed in the order of most cited (the first seven of which were cited by over 10 per cent of the sample):

1. Travel, transport and mobility (73 participants)*.
2. Social and emotional issues (33 participants).
3. Independent living skills (31 participants)*.
4. Communication and reading (25 participants)*.
5. Leisure activities – outside of home (19 participants)*.
6. Counselling, emotional needs and adjustment (19 participants).
7. Employment (18 participants)*.
8. Awareness of sight loss by sighted people (15 participants).
9. Family issues (15 participants).
10. Attitudes of others (14 participants).
11. Leisure activities at home (13 participants)*.
12. Medical and other issues related to sight loss (13 participants)*.
13. Agencies and user groups (11 participants).
14. Education (7 participants)*.
15. LVAs and lighting (5 participants)*.
16. Other disabilities and health difficulties (4 participants)*.
17. Finances (4 participants)*.
18. Laws and policy issues (4 participants).
19. ICT and computers (3 participants)*.
20. Voluntary work (3 participants)*.
21. Blind and partially sighted people’s awareness of sight loss (2 participants).
22. Technology and gadgets (2 participants)*.
23. Religion (1 participants)*.

Fifteen of the themes (denoted with an asterisk above) clearly overlapped with previous sections in the interview schedule. We refer to these as “existing themes”.

A number of the often illuminating quotes regarding these themes have been added as quotes to the appropriate sections earlier in the report.

The remaining eight themes more clearly stand alone. We refer to these as “new themes” and describe most of these with illustrative quotes below.

Analysis of open-ended question

In addition to the themes listed below, 15 people said that they had nothing further to say or did not know how to answer the question, and 3 people said that everything was difficult due to their sight loss, and did not feel able to elaborate any further.

3.4 New themes

3.4.1 Social and emotional issues (33 participants)

This new theme included aspects of sight loss that people felt impacted upon being able to socialise and communicate with others, for example, being aware of and understanding other people's body language, and social conventions, making it particularly difficult to make new friends as well as sustain established friendships. Others talked about whether they felt able to ask others for help, and having self-confidence.

The 33 participants who talked about these social and emotional issues were fairly evenly spread in terms of age, which suggests that these are fundamental issues regardless of age. The following are some examples:

"My major problem is loneliness. If I walk along the street, I can't spot people and smile at them. People have to approach me, so I feel like I'm in a world of my own, which is quite damaging at times. If I did go out to a pub or a club, because I'd never be able to make the eye contact, it would be hard to make more friends, so that's a problem."

Female, age 22, registered partially sighted, lives alone, not working.

"I feel awkward walking into pubs when I'm meeting a group of friends. I can't see them in a crowd and feel silly that I just look lost. I also feel embarrassed when I don't recognise people in the street and they think that I'm ignoring them".

Male, age 20, registered partially sighted, does not live alone, employed.

3.4.2 Counselling, emotional needs and adjustment (19 participants)

A number of participants talked about the emotional needs they currently have or have had in the past, in relation to their sight loss. Some people reflected on the support that they were given, particularly at time of diagnosis, or the support that they felt they should have been offered. For example, counselling services that could have helped them in some way. Others talked about different strategies that they followed in order to adjust emotionally to their eye sight loss. This theme is in many ways related to the previous theme "social and emotional issues", as it looks at the psychological wellbeing of people with sight loss, and some of the strategies that participants have used or felt they would have benefited from, in order to adjust, cope or come to terms with their circumstances.

Analysis of open-ended question

Comments included:

“The only thing I’ve found difficult is coming to terms with blindness, I feel someone should have helped me in that respect. There must be other people in the same position with me with the same problem. Once you get to my age, no one wants to know you, that’s the feeling you get”.

Male, age 65, registered blind, lives alone.

“When I was diagnosed with macular degeneration, I didn’t have a clue what it was and it was very worrying. People could do with more information at the beginning”.

Female, age 74, registered partially sighted, does not live alone.

Others have accepted and adapted to their circumstances, for example:

“No I’ve come to terms with everything and I’m quite happy about my life and I’ve not really got problems”.

Male, age 70, registered partially sighted, does not live alone.

3.4.3 Awareness of sight loss by sighted people (15 participants)

Many participants commented on the awareness of sighted people (for example, work colleagues, service industry staff, the general public) about issues relating to sight loss and how it can affect blind and partially sighted people. This theme was particularly common among the first four age groups, with participants aged 75 years and above less likely to comment about it.

The majority of the participants who commented felt that the level of awareness of the sighted people was very low, often resulting in negative consequences for them. The following are examples:

“I think probably that the one thing that strikes me is how people who are unaware of visual impairment (VI) issues find it difficult to relate to people with VI. People ask me ‘can you see my hand?’ Their lack of understanding of how my impairment impedes my life, the level of adjustment I have to make to normal living”.

Male, age 49, registered partially sighted, does not live alone, employed.

“Some people think that because I’m not seeing right, I’m a bit stupid. People get the wrong impression”.

Female, age 72, registered partially sighted, does not live alone.

Analysis of open-ended question

“I find it hard that people can’t understand, because I don’t have a white stick or dark glasses so they can’t tell I’m blind. I wish they could walk in my shoes for a day and experience what it’s like”.

Female, age 79, registered blind, lives alone.

3.4.4 Family issues (15 participants)

This topic covers issues relating to participants’ family members. Examples include the support provided by participants’ families, the changing roles within the family since losing their sight, support for family members to help them cope and adapt to the loss of their loved one’s sight, and support for blind and partially sighted parents in caring for their children.

While many participants clearly appreciated the support their families gave them, some lamented how much they missed having independence and the opportunity to be more spontaneous. For example:

“If I did have children in the future, partly because my condition is congenital, there’s a 50/50 chance the child would be blind, so that’s always preying on my mind. Although society has come on leaps and bounds, I don’t know if I’m ready to bring a child into the world as other children can be very cruel. They are teaching children about how to deal with guide dogs and visually impaired people, but there is still a lot of misunderstanding”.

Male, age 29, registered blind, lives alone, employed.

“My son is 11 and he has accepted his Mum’s blindness and he’s not afraid to take my hand to help me across the road – a lot of 11 year olds wouldn’t. He helps me with my blood meter and insulin; he’ll read them for me”.

Female, age 41, registered blind, does not live alone, not working.

3.4.5 Attitudes of others (14 participants)

This theme includes participants’ descriptions of incidents where they encountered positive or negative attitudes regarding their sight loss and circumstances from other people (for example, from family and friends, work colleagues, medical and other agency staff, service industry staff, and the general public). This theme overlaps with the previous theme “awareness of sighted people”, since many participants attributed negative attitudes of sighted people to their lack of awareness about sight loss issues.

Analysis of open-ended question

“There’s a minority of people who don’t have a consideration for the blind, you will get people who don’t move out of your way, who maybe bump you and don’t say sorry to you.

Male, age 27, registered blind, lives alone, not working.

“People need a greater understanding of visual impairment and how it affects people. This includes employers who need to give support and become more aware”.

Female, age 22, registered blind, lives along, not working.

3.4.6 Agencies and user groups (11 participants)

A number of participants talked about issues relating to statutory and voluntary agencies that support blind and partially sighted people, and self-help or organised groups for blind and partially sighted people.

“On the positive side, the doctors at the clinic and the social workers have been very helpful, when I was told I was going blind”.

Male, age 27, registered blind, lives alone, not working

“Information to the visually impaired person is not forthcoming from associations and charities who get money for doing exactly this”.

Male, age 41, registered blind, does not live alone, not working

“The best thing that’s happened is a listening support group, when you speak over the phone to others. I don’t have contact with people except on the phone for that hour when I speak to other people in the support group. It’s nice having the company. It’s the RNIB ‘Talking Support’, when people in similar situations can chat to one another. It’s really positive and makes a big difference. Big disappointment is the lack of volunteers – I want someone to befriend me, in which I could meet them in town.”

Female, age 60, registered blind, lives alone.

“I go to the partially sighted club, but I feel like a teenager because the other people are a lot older. I don’t go too often because I find that people can be more inclined to focus on the problems, I feel that people should go out and mix with everyone”.

Female, age 56, registered blind, does not live alone, not working

4 Conclusions

The Network 1000: Scotland survey has been successful in demonstrating that while there are many positive messages about registered blind and partially sighted people in Scotland, there are still many areas where inequality exists.

The survey findings demonstrate that while there are many similarities with the blind and partially sighted population within Great Britain as a whole, there are significant differences particularly in the areas of housing, employment and health.

This report highlights for the first time the situation facing registered blind and partially sighted people in Scotland at the beginning of the 21st century. The authors of this report hope that the findings will help inform policy in Scotland to address these issues, based on the particular needs of this unique population.

Having established the current opinions and circumstances of blind and partially sighted people in Scotland, the research team intend to repeat this study with the aim of establishing the change in circumstances of blind and partially sighted people in Scotland over time.

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