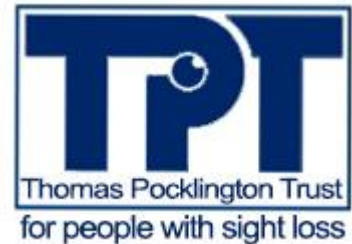


UNIVERSITY OF  
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# **Reflections of Transition Experiences by Young People with Visual Impairments aged 19-22**

**Technical report of findings to April 2016**

**January 2017**

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# GLOSSARY

DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
ESA	Employment and support allowance
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
ICT	Information and communications technology
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
QTVI	Qualified teacher of visually impaired children
RNIB	Royal National Institute of Blind People
SEN	Special Educational Needs
Statement	Statement of Special Educational Needs
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
VI	Visual Impairment
VICTAR	Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research
Year 11 cohort	Participants were in school Year 11, aged 15-16 when recruitment commenced in summer 2010
Year 10 cohort	Participants were in school Year 10, aged 14-15 when recruitment commenced in summer 2010
Year 9 cohort	Participants were in school Year 9, aged 13-14 when recruitment commenced in summer 2010

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The Longitudinal Transitions Study was designed in 2009 by a team from RNIB and the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR) at the University of Birmingham in response to the research brief prepared by RNIB.

The key objectives of the project were:

- To track the process of transition for blind and partially sighted young people from age 14 for [initially] five years;
- To identify the roles of professionals involved;
- To identify the factors that improve or reduce a young person's chance of gaining employment.

Phase 1 of the study involved the recruitment of an original sample of approximately 80 young people to the longitudinal study and carrying out several surveys of their views and circumstances. This took place between autumn 2009 – March 2012 and was funded by RNIB. This phase of research resulted in a number of reports (e.g. Hewett and Douglas, 2011a; Hewett and Douglas, 2011b, Hewett, Douglas, Ramli, and Keil, 2012). Phase 2 of the study was funded by the Nuffield Foundation, and centred on follow-up surveys and case studies of the sample of young people with visual impairment. Phase 3 commenced in November 2015 is being funded by Thomas Pocklington Trust.

This report focuses upon data collected between December 2015 and March 2016 when the young people were aged between 19 and 22 years old. The report is part of a series of technical reports which present all findings in the project since 2010.

## Overview of data collected in Y1 of Phase 3 (November 2015-October 2016)

The first round of interviews with participants in Year 1 of Phase 3 of the project took place between December 2015 and March 2016. These interviews covered the following topics:

- What the participants were currently doing (including details of transitions made and planned)
- SEND reforms and Education Health and Care Plans

- Reflections on specialist support received during time in compulsory education and level of preparedness

It was possible to speak with 59 of the participants in the first round of interviews. Sixty-three participants remain involved in the project.

In summer 2016 the participants were surveyed again to establish what setting they were in and what their plans were for the next academic year. Their responses have been collated with the transition data collected in the winter 2015/16 interviews and are presented in a separate report.

As in previous analyses in this project, it is helpful to consider an analysis of the *resources* that are available to young people as they navigate their transition to adulthood: individually-based resources include academic attainment and important independence skills, while socially-based resources include support mechanisms, services, inclusive practice by services and employers, and also policies and legislation. How the balance between these different resources is experienced will inevitably vary from person to person. Importantly, the balance, and how an individual conceptualises this balance, will *change* with time and place. It is this change, and the tensions and challenges associated with this change during periods of transition which is exposed by the research.

## **Initial Reflections**

The participants gave mixed responses with regards to how prepared they felt for the transitions they made after leaving school. Several of the participants described themselves as feeling generally confident making the transition from school. Examples of positive experiences identified by the young people in assisting them in making these transitions include: support from services or family members; having the opportunity to board at residential school to practice independent living skills; and having a good understanding of the adjustments that they would require. In contrast several participants felt extremely unprepared for the transitions they were making and gave examples of ways in which they had left compulsory education without certain skills in place or without having felt supported to make choices for their future.

Some participants had felt prepared for transitions at that time, but now felt that they had not been realistic with these expectations. Examples of unanticipated challenges faced included: finding it harder to access

support than expected and not being prepared for moving into a mainstream environment (from specialist schools and colleges).

Examples of positive support received whilst in education included:

- good support for accessing their course;
- encouragement to be independent;
- encouragement to participate in all school activities;
- positive guidance when preparing to transition into a new setting.

Examples of ways the young people felt support in education could have been improved included:

- more training to develop independent living skills;
- more opportunity to connect with the 'sighted' world for students in residential settings;
- more opportunities to learn to self-advocate;
- better support in lessons;
- better preparation for independent learning and development of independent study skills;
- better inclusive practice in schools;
- more practical support for making the transition into a new setting.

Examples of positive support the participants received from family members included:

- practical support (being accompanied to university open days);
- being encouraged to be as independent as possible;
- defending their rights as a disabled person.

Examples of ways in which the young people felt they had been restricted by family members included:

- being over-supported (which in turn had had a negative effect on them);
- their family not fully understanding the young person's visual impairment and how it affects them;
- their family's lack of confidence in their abilities.

## **Educational settings**

During their time in secondary school, over half the participants had been exclusively in mainstream settings while a fifth were in specialist settings. A fifth of the participants moved between specialist and mainstream settings.



The participants who had been in mainstream school had mixed opinions with regards to how well included they had been by their school. Almost two thirds felt like they had been included, whilst a third did not. Physical Education was particularly highlighted by several of the participants who illustrated how complex it was for them to be included in these lessons. The participants who did not feel included gave a range of explanations for this including:

- not feeling included by their peers;
- being sat at the front of the classroom;
- having to work with a teaching assistant;
- being told to use a laptop in lessons;
- not receiving the necessary adjustments in lessons.

Explanations for feeling included at school included:

- teachers addressing the participant's needs in a subtle way;
- having positive relationships with teaching staff;
- teachers having the same expectations of them as of the average student.

Only 2 of 17 participants who had been in a specialist setting felt that the experience had equipped them for leaving school/college and going into a mainstream setting. The main challenges that the participants identified were in terms of studying independently, living independently and socialising with others, as they felt they had been living in a 'bubble'. Positive factors identified of being in a specialist setting included:

- skills associated with preparation for living independently;
- learning to live independently;
- having the opportunity to be around people in the same situation.

## **Support to make transitions**

Planning transitions with young people at key points in their education is important. It allows individuals and services to organise and prepare for the next phase (e.g. college or apprenticeship) – this might be targeted skills and qualifications for the young person, as well as ensuring appropriate support and equipment is in place. A formal process for young people with SEN is the 'Transition Review' (and associated 'Transition Plan') which is an annual meeting at school which is held to talk about the young person's future.

Over three-quarters of the participants recalled going through a 'Transition Review' process at school. However, just under half the participants judged this to have been a negative experience and less

than a third viewed it positively. The participants gave various explanations for their views, including:

- 14 participants who did not view the process as sufficiently person-centred;
- 11 participants who viewed it simply as an extension of parents evening or their school report;
- 8 participants who felt only minimal time was invested into discussing their future;
- 4 participants who did not view the content of the meeting as relevant to them;
- 3 participants who felt that actions were not put into place following the meeting;
- 1 participant who felt that transition guidance was not available at the time when they most needed it (before moving into HE).

Just under two-thirds of the participants who went into FE recalled receiving some specific support for this transition. Examples given of such support included:

- taster sessions; being assigned a key worker;
- having specialist support to prepare for the transition (e.g. mobility support);
- being given new equipment.

A small number of the participants highlighted various challenges that they faced during this transition. These included:

- not knowing the full range of options available to them;
- not feeling confident about which course they wanted to do;
- not having the required support in place.

## **Careers advice and work experience**

At the time when the participants were in compulsory education (pre-2014), school-facilitated work experience placements were a statutory requirement. While this is no longer the case, there are clear benefits of well organised work experience placements as well as broader careers advice which includes disability-specific content (e.g. relevant individual skills, government schemes such as 'Access to Work'). This is part of a young person's general educational entitlement but it is also linked to transition planning.

All but four of the participants had work experience placements whilst in school as part of the school curriculum. The four participants who did not

receive work experience were all registered as severely sight impaired. Over half the participants viewed work experience to have been a positive experience, whilst just over a quarter viewed it negatively.

Positive outcomes identified included:

- experience of being in a working environment;
- help in forming ideas of future careers;
- help in developing confidence and independence;
- a boost to their CV.

Negative responses towards work experience included:

- not being able to do much in the workplace/not learning very much during their placement;
- placements not being long enough to be of real benefit;
- insufficient support in arranging placements;
- accommodations not being met;
- not being facilitated/allowed to be as independent as they would have liked.

Only 6 of the participants recalled receiving guidance for disclosing their visual impairment to potential employers, and in one of these cases it was after they had already left compulsory education. Over three quarters of the participants who had not received guidance felt that it would have been beneficial if they had done. Ten participants in particular noted that they either had faced situations where they did not know how to approach disclosing their visual impairment, or anticipated that they would be unprepared in such situations.

Around a third of the participants recalled receiving some guidance to think about careers in relation to their visual impairment. All but three of these participants thought that the advice that they received was helpful. Of 29 participants who had not previously received such guidance, 21 thought that it would have been beneficial.

Only 5 participants specifically recalled receiving guidance on the support available in employment (such as the government scheme Access to Work) during their time in compulsory education, although in total 12 participants had at least some awareness of the type of support that was available. Nineteen participants felt that they would have benefited from more guidance of this nature, while 6 did not.

## Accessing information

Being able to access information is a key barrier faced by visually impaired people. A dual approach is adopted in education (and beyond). Firstly, educational services are required to ensure that written material is prepared and available in an accessible format (e.g. available as braille, electronic format, and large print). Secondly, educational services are required to provide appropriate equipment and teaching to encourage efficient and independent access to information (e.g. access technology and teaching in the use of that technology). Skilful and efficient access to information is recognised as an important educational outcome for visually impaired young people.

The participants reported using a range of types of assistive technology to use a computer, including:

- Supernova (magnification and screen reader) (7);
- Jaws (screen reader) (5);
- Magnification/screen reader inbuilt into Windows/Apple operating system;
- Zoomtext (magnification) (4);
- unspecified magnification software (2);
- mouse with inbuilt magnification (2)
- CCTV (1).

A further 9 participants reported that they do not use any assistive technology and instead prefer to make basic adjustments to their computer, such as zooming in, changing the screen resolution and changing the font size. Nine participants stated that they changed the assistive technology that they were using as it was no longer fit for purpose. This includes participants who were allocated a particular software package in school or university but later moved to different software as they felt it was restricting them in their education, and participants who were given magnification software which they found to become too pixelated to be of benefit.

Importantly, young people need to learn and be taught to use technology effectively. Just over half the participants stated that they had received training for using assistive technology when in school. Twelve of the participants who reflected back on the helpfulness of the training they received said it had been of benefit to them. Nine of the participants viewed assistive technology as 'essential' to enable them to work; two participants recognised that assistive technology will be helpful to them on a day to day basis in the workplace and three further participants

anticipated that it would be helpful to them with some specific tasks. Twelve participants also identified touch typing as extremely an important skill they were taught during their time in school.

Less than half of the participants who had used Low Vision Aids (LVAs) when in school anticipated using them as they got older. However we do note that some of the young people in employment despite being initially reluctant to use LVAs have since identified situations where it was helpful to have a LVA. Therefore this could change in the future. Indeed, several of the participants who previously used LVAs are instead choosing to use mainstream technology instead, such as apps on their mobile phones.

All braille reading participants who were asked whether they anticipated braille having a role in their adult lives (and primarily in employment) agreed that it would, although to varying degrees. Six participants concluded that it would depend on the task that they were undertaking, such as when they needed to read information more deeply. Four participants also identified ways in which they would like to use braille more frequently in their everyday life.

## **Self-advocacy and social skills**

While organisations such as universities, employers and general services such as shops are required to make adjustments to be inclusive, it is also recognised that visually impaired people benefit from being able to confidently explain the adjustments they need. This is why attention to teaching in this area is recognised as an important educational outcome.

Only one participant recalled receiving guidance for how best to explain their visual impairment to others, while 28 participants said they had not received such guidance. Twenty participants felt that they were prepared to explain their visual impairment to others, while 14 did not. Several of the participants identified situations where this had proved to be a challenge to them. Practice was identified as a means of overcoming this. A small number of the participants described a reluctance to disclose their visual impairment to others.

Twelve participants recalled receiving guidance to equip them for explaining the support that they may need when in a new setting, whilst 26 participants said that they had not. Twenty nine of the participants felt prepared for this (with varying degrees of confidence) and a further 10

did not. It is worth noting that some of those participants who said that they would be prepared for explaining their support needs had not been in a position where it was necessary for them to do so. Enablers for explaining support needs included: prior experience; having had experience; having been encouraged to explain support needs; having had discussions with family. Barriers included: not having sufficient personal understanding; the young person being self-conscious; a lack of specialist guidance; and a lack of previous opportunities.

Only one participant recalled receiving guidance on how to self-advocate in the event of things going wrong, whilst 34 participants said that they had not received any support of this nature. Nevertheless, 20 participants felt that they would be prepared for doing this, whilst 12 felt unprepared. Enablers for self-advocating when things go wrong identified by the young people included:

- an underlying confidence;
- being encouraged to self-advocate when younger;
- being equipped through life experiences;
- having common sense;
- being able to develop positive working relations with others;
- having had previous positive responses.

## **Mobility and orientation**

Being able to efficiently and confidently move around the environment is recognised as an important educational outcome for visually impaired young people. This is why a key part of the additional support required at school-age is mobility and orientation training.

Thirty one of the participants reported having received mobility support around their local area when in school, whilst 12 reported that they did not. Of those who receive such mobility support, 15 of the participants viewed this support as helpful and 11 as unhelpful. The 'unhelpful' experiences were often attributed to the way in which the training had been delivered.

Only 4 of 27 participants had received training which was specifically designed to help them learn to navigate new places. Nineteen participants felt prepared for getting about in new areas, whilst 20 felt unprepared.

Twenty participants reported having had mobility support to learn to use public transport independently, while 11 participants stated that they had

not. Twenty one participants felt prepared for using public transport independently, and 17 did not. Barriers identified included: feeling anxious; infrequent mobility sessions and a lack of opportunity to practice.

## **Independent living**

Developing independent living skills such as shopping, managing one's home and cooking is recognised as an important educational outcome for visually impaired young people. This is why a key part of the additional support required at school-age is independence training.

Twelve participants reported receiving specialist training to help prepare them for cooking and preparing food, while 26 participants did not. Additionally, 4 of the participants stated that they did not receive this support when in compulsory education within mainstream settings, but did eventually when they moved into specialist settings. Twenty of the participants said that they felt prepared to cook and prepare food independently, whilst 12 said that they did not.

Fewer participants received specialist training for organising and cleaning their home environment (9) and shopping independently (9). Six participants said they did not feel prepared for organising and cleaning their home and nine did not feel prepared for shopping independently

A small number of participants who attended specialist schools felt they received insufficient training to develop independent living skills, while a further small group identified ways in which they had been restricted by family members in developing their independence.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND TO DATA COLLECTION

Between December 2015 and March 2016 the participants were asked a series of questions, inviting them to reflect back on their previous educational experiences. This section was introduced with the following statement:

One of the main purposes of this study is to investigate how well the education system is preparing young people with visual impairments for life after education, and in particular, for employment. In this section we would like you to reflect back on your time in compulsory education (up to the age of 16 when you did your GCSEs); the support and experiences that you had and the skills you were able to develop.

The interview covered the following topics:

- How prepared the young people felt for the next stages of their life after compulsory education
- The support the young people received to prepare for various transitions
- Careers advice and work experience received
- How prepared the young people felt they were for accessing information independently
- How prepared the young people felt they were for self-advocating in a variety of situations
- How prepared the young people felt for getting around independently in their local environment, new environments and using public transport
- How prepared the young people felt they were for living independently

In line with previous data collections, the winter interviews were tailored to each individual participant to reflect their most recent experiences, the amount of time they had available, and their previous responses. For example:

- A small number of participants had experienced complex and challenging transitions, and therefore more time was devoted to exploring this than with other participants
- Several participants, and particularly those in the last year of Higher Education, were only available to complete part of the interview due to pressures on their time



- Several participants who reported in multiple interviews that they have never experienced challenges relating to independent living (for example cooking, cleaning and shopping) were not asked questions of this nature, to prevent interview fatigue and maintain their interest in the study

For this reason each section does not report findings for all participants. In total 49 participants responded to at least a portion of these reflective questions. Due to time limitations not all participants responded to every question. Where the participants had limited time the researcher identified key questions to ask each respondent, building upon discussion in previous interviews.

## **1.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING**

The data collected has been analysed by looking at each section of the interview schedule in turn. The analysis and discussion of each section has followed a similar format:

- What support (including specialist support) the young people received
- Their evaluation of this support
- Whether they were prepared to transition into new settings such as FE, HE and employment as a result of this support
- Enablers and barriers noted

The data collected was managed within an SPSS dataset, and longer qualitative responses were analysed using NVivo. The report makes reference to some earlier findings of the longitudinal transition study; nevertheless this report is primarily a technical report links with the longitudinal data will be largely explored through other publications such as academic papers.

### 1.3 OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS

A detailed overview of the key characteristics of the participants who were recruited into the longitudinal study was provided in Hewett et al (2011). A comparison was made between the participants and the population from which they were recruited, and it was found that the cohort formed a sample which reflected many of the characteristics and circumstances of the wider population.

The table below provides an overview of some of the key characteristics of the 49 participants who took part in the 'Reflections' section of the interview.

**Table 1: Overview of key participant characteristics**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	24	49%
Female	25	51%
<b>Cohort participant recruited into</b>		
Year 9	16	33%
Year 10	6	12%
Year 11	27	55%
<b>Preferred reading format</b>		
Normal to large print (12 -17 point)	11	22%
Large print (18 – 27 point)	22	45%
Very large print (28 point +)	3	6%
Braille/Electronic	13	27%
<b>Registration type</b>		
Blind	20	41%
Partially sighted	18	37%
Registered – category unknown	1	2%
Not registered	7	14%
Unknown	3	6%

**Table 2: Setting of participants at the time of interview**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Higher Education	24	49%
Further Education	4	8%
Employment	11	22%
NEET	10	20%

## **2 INITIAL REFLECTIONS**

### **2.1 HOW PREPARED DID THE PARTICIPANTS FEEL TO MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM COMPULSORY EDUCATION?**

The opening section of the interview formed an initial discussion of the participant's perceptions of the support they received and how well it had prepared them for life after education. This section aimed to introduce the participants to the concept of 'preparation' for transition and to obtain their initial thoughts before moving onto more specific examples of preparation later in the interview.

The participants were asked to think back to when they first left school and made the transition into further education, higher education, and the labour market. They were asked:

- How prepared how did you feel at that time?
- Knowing what you know now, how prepared in reality were you?
- Looking back, what things would you have liked more support with?
- Looking back, what things do you think you were well supported with?

They were asked to consider both the support they had received during their time in education (focusing upon compulsory education), and also the support that they received from family members.

#### **2.1.1 How prepared did the participants feel at that time?**

The participants provided mixed responses with regards to how prepared they felt for the transitions they made after leaving school.

##### **2.1.1.1 Participants who felt prepared for the next transition**

Some of the participants described having a general sense of confidence once they made the transition from school:

Yeah I didn't feel perturbed at all, I just felt excited, I wasn't very worried at all.

I would say I was fairly prepared, and it's just because I was comfortable with my VI, and I knew how to get around it in a way.

Others who felt prepared provided examples of relevant experiences or support that they had received, as summarised in the following examples.

Firstly there were those who received support from services or family members which had boosted their confidence:

Very, very very prepared. I had support from Connexions people. They offered me help in terms of career pathways. That definitely helped, that's why I chose the course I did at college.

Yeah I felt really prepared. My secondary school and then I stayed there for sixth form, they had a fantastic learning support, and they gave me a lot of support. But because I was taking a gap year, they would have given me support to make that change to university, and even though I took gap year I was offered that if I needed it. My Mum was fantastic, so I didn't really need it, but the learning in general they were really good. And that gave me more confidence I think when the time came to go to university.

Five of the participants who had boarded at specialist schools or colleges shared how this gave them more confidence when moving into university halls of residence:

Pretty fine, because I mean at school I boarded, obviously and I lived a lot away from home, so I think that is a lot of the difficulty for people, is adjustment to living away from home. I adjusted to that pretty well, because obviously I was ok, I boarded.

Four of the participants felt prepared due their confidence that they understood the adjustments they would need to make with regards to their visual impairment:

I would say I was fairly prepared, and it's just because I was comfortable with my VI, and I knew how to get around it in a way.

#### **2.1.1.2 Participants who felt unprepared for the next transition**

In contrast several participants felt extremely unprepared for the transitions they were making:

Between 1 and 5 I would probably say 2, because to be honest I wasn't at all. That sounds really bad for [school] but at that point I felt I wasn't ready for anything really

Some of the participants reflected on how after once they made the transition from one educational setting to another they gained additional skills and experiences which helped them feel better prepared. This was particularly true for five participants who did not learn the independent living skills they desired whilst in mainstream schools/resource base. Instead they had chosen (and in four cases fought) to go to a specialist school or college for students with visual impairment where they felt these skills would be taught. For example, the participant quoted above reflected on her level of preparation far more positively after attending specialist college:

Definitely much more prepared than [last school]. I think one of the main goals in [specialist college] is to teach you independence and to teach you, not exactly reality, but teach you what life is like when you're a visually impaired adult. So I am quite happy I ended up going to that college, it did teach me a lot, I can do most of the things on my own now which I probably didn't before I went there.

Whilst these young people were able to gain these skills in their new settings, it is important to note that they had left compulsory education without them being in place.

Researcher: Thinking back to that time and the fact that you could have gone into employment at that stage, you could have left education altogether, how prepared do you think you would have been prepared for adulthood, if you had gone to get a job, how prepared do you think you would have been at that time?

Participant: Not at all! I would have been lost!

Researcher: In what aspects?

Participant: I didn't really have a firm grip on much to be fair... I didn't really know how the world works properly. I hadn't had much work experience and I was pretty dependent on parents still. I don't think I would have been able to leave for proper work at that point.

Four of the participants described being either scared of taking the next step in life, or identified that they would have been scared if they had gone directly into their next setting.

Not prepared at all! They don't prepare you at all for university, school is a sheltered environment where A-levels are basically tick boxing and teachers are like just dictating to you what you need to know. The moment you get to uni, literally... you aren't exactly a duck out of water, but you sit there....I had a bit more preparation

as I had a bit more life experience before I got to uni, but I think, just thinking back to me at 18 or 17, imagining me going to uni then I would have been terrified!

A number of participants felt unprepared for making decisions about their next pathway, having not felt supported to make these choices:

I was a bit prepared, they didn't really do a lot to help really unless you were going off to uni, they kind of didn't want to know. So when I said that I wanted to go to college, they said, well it was pretty much the case that if you wanted to go to college you had got to do it all yourself. So they didn't really help with much of it.

I don't think I was really prepared looking back. It was along the lines of get GCSEs, bugger off and go and get a job basically.

One participant in FE felt unprepared to make the next step from education into the labour market. Instead they suggested they needed to do voluntary work first to boost their confidence:

I am not confident to go straight into workplace, I don't feel I am. I want to do the volunteering sector before I go in, just to build my confidence up a bit more.

Similarly some participants described how nervous they were when moving into FE as they did not know what to expect:

When I first left school I was quite nervous because I was going to do my A-levels, and I knew I wanted to go into Further Education, but I was unsure whether to do A-levels or college. When I got my results and was able to do my A-levels it was nerve-racking because I didn't really know what to expect, and I didn't know whether I would have the same sort of attention that I got at school

The responses of a small number of the participants demonstrated the importance of being sensitive to the apprehension that young people may have. For example two participants in a specialist setting described reacting negatively to a presentation about higher education:

I think they scared us off a bit. They gave us this whole presentation about 'how to cope' and stuff, and I think it kind of freaked us a lot. A lot of fears did come true...



Three participants described feeling unprepared socially, with one participant saying they thought they would have been better prepared having been in mainstream education (in contrast with other points made about independent skill preparation). This is a theme which will be revisited later in this report:

I think it may have been slightly easier socially if I had been in mainstream, I don't know.

Finally four participants described feeling unprepared academically for the expectations of university.

They were trying to simulate a university based environment in the sixth form but I still felt it lacked the kind of university component because it still hadn't prepared me enough for knowing you really need to submit your work at a certain time or at a certain speed... there wasn't enough emphasis put on that in my opinion. So when I came to university I had to adjust again.

The academic step-up is an inevitable challenge many students face, regardless of whether they have a disability. However this challenge should be considered in the context of the many additional challenges that young people with visual impairment face in Higher Education, as presented in Hewett et al (2015f).

### **2.1.2 How prepared were the participants in reality?**

Those participants who reported feeling initially prepared for the transitions they were due to make were asked to evaluate how realistic they had been in feeling that way. Whilst many participants stated that they had been realistic in these expectations, despite some unexpected challenges, others reflected that they had not been realistic having found the transition harder than anticipated. For example, three participants found it harder to access the support they required than expected:

I guess the one thing that I wasn't really prepared for is that... I wasn't really properly told how to apply for DSA straight away, so that was an issue in the first year, trying to get all of that sorted out, and it was hard to get processed. I didn't know where to go to get the evidence I needed. I ended up needing to go back to the Children's hospital which I had been discharged from since, because my GP wasn't very helpful. So there was an issue with communication between the school and the NHS, and the different people that handle my case.

Two participants found it harder than they expected moving from a specialist setting into a mainstream environment:

No! I was not prepared for how different I felt to other students. I went obviously to a school for the blind for 7 years and we were quite institutionalised, it sounds weird actually, we were quite institutionalised in that we spent no time with other people apart from people in that school and that was select people. All blind and everything. So when I got out to meeting other people they seemed quite different to me. Yeah that was quite a weird transition.

One participant who felt confident before leaving secondary education realised that they were unprepared to make decisions for their future:

Participant: I wasn't prepared at all! Yeah, basically.

Researcher: Is there anything in particular that comes to mind that could have been better?

Participant: Maybe if I had more career advice, I would have found my way a bit quicker.

Researcher: So you mean you didn't really know what you were doing when you left school?

Participant: Yeah I wasn't sure at all what to do or anything.

Researcher: Did you feel that way at the time, or was it more after you left that you realised that you weren't...

Participant: After I left.

Finally, one participant who had been NEET since withdrawing from her college course three years ago responded:

I didn't realise it would be this difficult.

### **2.1.3 Reflections on support received in education**

The participants were asked to consider in what ways they had been well supported during their time in education to equip them for the transitions they had made, and also if they would have liked more (or different) support.

#### **2.1.3.1 Examples of positive support**

The most common example of positive support identified by the participants was receiving good quality support in school to enable them

to access their course. This has been illustrated throughout this study with participants achieving grades consistent with the national average, and generally speaking positively about such support throughout the duration of the study.

With exams and stuff, I was supported, and just in general really, in the classroom or something. Everyone was aware that I wouldn't be able to see certain things.

I was really well supported. All the teachers were always there for me, any questions that I had, I could go to them and ask them. I was really well supported yeah.

Linked to this, several of the participants highlighted that whilst they received support in school, they were also encouraged to become more independent. For example one participant who received support in lessons described how the school facilitated her desire to be independent in lessons:

I think all in all I was supported really well in school, I was part of a team called 'learning support', and I did have a teaching assistant in some classes, but then they, because they had a few people in learning support who obviously liked their independence, so they would obviously keep their distance, so you knew that they were there for you if needed them, but they weren't kind of in your face, which is good.

Another participant described how she benefited from her special school's ethos of encouraging students to get involved in all activities:

Just not to let my disability stop me. Like I went to a school for the visually impaired, and I think the key aspect of that, the ethos of the school was just because you are visually impaired doesn't mean you can't do stuff. I did climbing, we did judo, I think we did archery at one point. I have seen blind people play archery, and people might think 'what is going on', but it's more like the principle behind it, and I feel I was very well prepared for being able to articulate on my own, and 'no I have a right to this... I can do this, don't be so stupid'.

This was also the case for a participant who studied in a mainstream setting:

Yeah I would just I was always encouraged to just participate in everything... if you can't do it because of your sight you can always stop, but you have always got to try...

Several participants reported receiving positive guidance when they were preparing to make the transition into their next setting. This support came from various sources including the school itself, the visiting teacher service and Connexions workers who came into school.

Researcher: So with Connexions how did that happen, was it through school?

Participant: Through school yeah, they are based inside of school, so everyone in Year 11 had to have a one-to-one.

Researcher: I guess it's quite a specific career path. Did you feel they had the understanding to talk on that level?

Participant: They didn't have a great depth of knowledge obviously because there are so many other... but they gave me a vague idea of what I could do, which proved to be valuable.

### **2.1.3.2 Examples of support which could have been improved**

The participants also identified various ways in which the support that they received could have been improved. Firstly seven participants stated that they would have liked to have had more training to develop their independent living skills:

They didn't help with confidence or independence. They thought education was enough.

Just life skills really. I know it sounds silly but just sort of... taking me out into [local large town] or my local area and getting me used to shops and receipts and stuff like that

Three participants who were in residential settings would have liked more opportunity to connect with the world outside of their school or college. One participant felt unprepared with regards of how to explain their visual impairment to others as they had not had previous opportunities to do so:

I suppose it's difficult because it's a small boarding school with a small amount of people, I think they could have encouraged us to go out into the city, and joined some youth clubs in the city, and encouraged us to socialise with people who were fully sighted, and to get us to practice and interact with them, and how to explain our

visual impairment. I mean, half the time, if I don't tell people they don't know.

A further participant who had been in a specialist school shared her belief that more opportunities were required in education for the young people with visual impairment to learn to self-advocate thus facilitating them to self-advocate once in new settings:

...they don't realise getting everything is kind of a bad thing. Well you should be getting everything, but you should be advocating for stuff yourself, you shouldn't be expecting for it to just jump in front of you. Because at uni people aren't going to know what you need and you know, you have to explain and fight for what you need which is hard, but if I come to a school where everything is given, if I had done sixth form at [previous school] and then gone to uni, I don't think I would have been able to advocate for myself like I can, because I wouldn't have had to do it before, and I wouldn't know honestly what I needed.

Eight participants stated that they would have liked to have had better support in lessons, e.g.

My primary support were really good, they offered really good support in terms of materials and one to one work in the classroom. When I went to secondary it was just a battle all the time, there wasn't much in that place at all.

Three participants felt insufficiently prepared for independent learning in higher education, particularly with regards to independent research.

Participant: I would have liked to have done more tasks that involved research, or at least guidance on how to research materials yourself. There were a few things at school where we had to do our own research, like Biology research projects and things. Throughout those we were told what to do, but it's not quite the same as looking through journal articles or things like this. It was primarily looking at websites, which I already knew roughly how to do.

Researcher: Is it more at an academic level you could have done with more of that, or is it more the skills, the actual skills needed to navigate these sites, or a bit of both?

Participant: I think it might have been a bit of both. I think because it was A-level there wasn't a huge expectation to do a vast amount of research...

One participant felt they would have benefited with more support to develop their independent study skills:

I think I would have probably liked more support with figuring out study plans and maybe how to utilise areas like libraries, and ICT areas. I think I could have maybe done with learning how to make optimum use of those.

Two participants had felt restricted by a lack of inclusive practice. This is discussed further in the next section:

The first two schools I went to they were terrible. I think my first ever school panicked a bit with me. I remember being told I couldn't go and do things, like playing football they wouldn't let me do, which obviously as a six year old would piss you off because you want to ...If you are into football, you know I can see what I am doing, but they panicked. It wasn't just short-sightedness, it was 'you have got a problem, you can't see this'. As I got older it got easier I think.

Finally, five participants reflected that they would have liked more practical support for making their transition:

Researcher: So looking back, what things do you think you would have liked more support with?

Participant: Looking for different courses, and the best one, and then talking to the college and making sure that they could offer me the support that the school was. But yeah I got none of that, because I wasn't going off to uni.

I would have liked more people to sit down with me to help me realise what I wanted to do.

#### **2.1.4 Reflections on support received from family**

The participants were asked to consider ways in which they had been well supported by their family and equipped for the transitions they would make. They were also asked whether they would have liked any more (or different support). It was made clear to the participants that their responses would not be viewed as being critical of their families.

#### **2.1.4.1 Examples of positive support**

The most common example of positive support given by 11 participants was practical support. For example for participants going into higher education this included accompanying them to applicant days, speaking with disability staff and researching courses, whilst for participants looking to find employment this included helping them identify jobs to apply for, taking them to and from work and helping them prepare for interviews:

Mum was really supportive, she offered to drive me anywhere if I did manage to get a job at that place. Mum offered advice as well and my sister because they had obviously been to job interviews before, it was my first one, so a lot of information beforehand which kind of helped with what to expect.

She was the one who sat with me and helped me look for the course and helped me apply for it. Then she took me to my first interview at the college just so I knew where I was going and that. She helped me with any applications I had to do with that, so she's done better than the school did.

Nine participants described how they benefited from their family encouraging them to be as independent as possible:

Really there's a massive thing that I am always going to be thankful about, for both of my parents, because I have got a little brother – I say little, he's 17, but me and him, I wasn't treated differently just because I am blind. So they treated me the same as they treated him, and I think that gave me a lot of independence before I started learning anyway, and more confidence and that kind of stuff. They didn't say 'oh she's blind let's do it for her, they always said 'she's blind but can still do it'. I think that's the biggest thing they have done for me really.

Yeah, taking not necessarily a back seat, but let me make some mistakes... They have some friends who have a child who has the same problem I have, and she's a real mother and worries about him picking up a kettle in case he doesn't know it's hot. Mine just, they let me play cricket even though I clearly wasn't going to see the ball and I got smacked in the face, and they were like 'you've learnt now haven't you'. I guess it's letting you make your own mistakes, so yeah very trusting I guess would be the word.

Two participants also highlighted how they had benefited from their family standing up for their rights as a person with a visual impairment:

...with every step of the way, fought for things, they made sure everything was done on time, helped me move into uni early, I couldn't ask for more.

#### **2.1.4.2 Examples of support which could have been improved**

The majority of participants stated that there was no way in which the support that they received from their families could have been improved. However there were a small number who did identify some areas of challenge. Firstly, in contrast to the positive support which was identified, five participants felt that they had been over-supported by family which had had a negative effect on them:

I think in a way I was over-supported at times, like over-protected. Because like my mum would always be there to cross the road with me or something, and at times that would get embarrassing, a growing up teenager. But it was good because there were close calls sometimes!

Two participants found it difficult because they felt that their family did not understand the extent of their visual impairment and how it affected them.

They could have understood more about how my eyesight was affecting me. They kept telling me I could do it but I never actually felt like I could.

Finally one participant felt restricted due to a lack of belief from family of what he was capable of:

Researcher: Is there anything from your family you would have liked more support with?

Participant: Yeah, a lot more encouragement. Some of my family is like 'you can't see, you can't do nothing'... not in a horrible way, they just say people who can see find it difficult, let alone someone with a disability. I suppose that is true in a little way... just a bit more encouragement and motivation, that would probably...that would help now saying that.



## 2.2 EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

### 2.2.1 Secondary school settings

**Table 3: Secondary school settings**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Mainstream	28	57%
Specialist	10	20%
Specialist to Mainstream	4	8%
Mainstream to Specialist	3	6%
Resource base to Specialist	2	4%
Resource base Mainstream	1	2%
Resource base	1	2%
Total	49	100%

The table above provides a summary of the different secondary school educational settings that the participants were in during the course of the research. Over half were exclusively in mainstream settings, whilst a fifth were in specialist settings. A fifth of the participants moved between specialist and mainstream settings.

### 2.2.2 Inclusion in mainstream schools

The participants who had been in mainstream settings were asked whether they had felt included when in school lessons and extra-curricular activities. A summary of their responses is provided in the table below.

**Table 4: How well included were you at school?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Included	22	61%
Not included	14	39%
Total	36	100%

Of thirty-six participants who answered this question, almost two-thirds felt that they had been included, whilst a third did not. PE was particularly highlighted by the participants, with the responses illustrating how complex it was for them to be included in these lessons.

Yeah, I think they did very well, when I did have my PE lessons, say we were doing badminton that lesson, then they would find me a shuttlecock that was a different colour so it would either be black or red so it would stand out against the net, and then normally the teacher would go with me. But instead of playing badminton they would just say try and hit the shuttlecock so many times in a row, and that helped because of course when I was with a teacher, obviously the teacher is mature and they wouldn't have commented and so it... because if I had gone with someone in my class they probably would have said 'she's rubbish' or 'she can't even hit a shuttlecock', you know, the comments would have started.

And then in PE you had stuff like, like when they were doing netball, I would go swimming or go to the gym, stuff like that.

The broad responses given by the participants were analysed into themes. The most common response was with regards to how they were treated by others. Four of the participants reported that they did not feel any different to those around them. In contrast, one participant revealed that she felt unwanted:

I just felt like one of many, I didn't feel any different at all.

I was on the fringes, it was a case of if you need anything ask, but we don't want you around.

Eight participants felt included at school by the people around them, and often had good friendship groups. In contrast, nine of the participants did not feel included by their peers.

Yeah. I had quite a lot of friends; I had friends who understood what I had and were sort of happy to carry on with it.

Not really because it wasn't really the schools fault, the school themselves actually did really well. It was just a case of being bullied a bit when I was at school because of being visually impaired, and unfortunately that's the case for a lot of people that I know who are visually impaired and went through mainstream school.

Another common topic addressed by the participants was their seating position in the classroom. This brought about mixed responses - some participants found it isolating having been positioned at the front, whilst others viewed it as a means of inclusion:

I was included quite a bit, because I was obviously... I had to sit at the front all the time, I was sort of front row smack bang in the middle front row, so I was involved quite a bit, because I was in the teachers eye all the time. So if there was a problem then they would be the first to notice there was a problem.

I was a bit isolated because they would sit me up front or whatever, so I would sit separately from those around me

The response from one participant illustrated how the sensitivity with which adjustments are made has significance:

From what I remember, yeah. I had a couple of memories of a couple of teachers...there was one teacher in Year 3 or Year 4 and with the tables set up a certain way and what she did was pick up a table of people, put it right in front of the board maybe two or three feet and made me sit there, and she was horrible – a horrible lady!

Linked to this, several of the young people reported feeling isolated in the classroom. They often linked this to having a teaching assistant with them:

The only people that would talk with me were the support staff and the teachers and the only time others would interact was when we were forced to do group work, but even then it was limited, or they would carry on and do the work and just not let me do anything.

Most of the time because I had a learning support assistant with me, I always seemed to feel like the one who stuck out

One participant spoke of how she was told to use a laptop in lessons which she did not feel comfortable doing, believing it made her look different to her peers:

Sometimes I felt like the people providing my support were, as good as intentions were, a bit socially clueless... They had a laptop for me to use which in reality [...] I just didn't need in school,

I didn't really need it and there was a point in school where it got so stressful to be the only one in school to use a laptop that wanted to give it back.

Eventually she worked with a different specialist teacher who took her views into account. This was something identified as of importance by two further participants:

And also it was a really heavy laptop, and I was only small, it was all just a bit unnecessary, and they were not good at listening to me. But then I got a new advisor when I was a bit older who was better at listening to me, and so I think it was just that individual person was not as socially sensitive as other advisors have been

In the classroom I felt included, my opinions were put forward, etc etc

One of the participants who felt isolated in lessons said she would have felt more comfortable using a laptop rather than sitting close to the whiteboard. These contrasting opinions demonstrate the importance of engaging with the young person to ensure their views are taken into account.

Six of the participants said they felt included in lessons due to arrangements their classroom teachers made for them. Two of the participants highlighted in particular how this support was provided in a subtle way:

They were really good for it and they would always cater for it...If a teacher knew, and that was always the thing, if they knew they would take me to the side and say 'this is what we are doing, are you alright with this, what would you like me to do to make it better'.

Yeah the school never focused, never made a point of it, I never felt that I was included because of a sort of a positive discrimination if you like. I was just never aware that people knew about it, there was stuff going on behind the scenes I am sure, but I wasn't aware of it and that's how I always wanted it to be.

In contrast, two participants reported feeling as though they weren't included as the teachers did not make the adjustments they needed. One participant at a mainstream resource base felt that the teachers

could have made the lessons more accessible but chose not to, instead relying on the teaching assistant allocated to them:

I think it was a lot to do with the teachers, because the teachers weren't used to having blind people in the classes... and we used to say to them all you need to do is make sure you have the material a day before, so we have it a day before so it's ready for the lessons, and if you write something on the board just say it out loud... But because they had teaching assistants with us they didn't have experience having blind people on their own, so they just didn't bother doing half of the stuff they are supposed to do. But I think if there was less Teaching Assistants I think the teachers would have to concentrate more on making the lessons suitable for me as well as the other kids

Two participants identified relationships with staff as significant. One participant felt included having got on well with those around her, whilst the other felt restricted by those supporting her:

The staff didn't really want to... If I said I was staying behind for a sports activity or something it was a case of the support is not stopping behind, it's a case of get on with it or not at all.

Finally, one participant spoke of how she considered it important the school had the same expectations towards her as they would the general student. She found it challenging at first once she moved into a mainstream college after spending a long period of time in a specialist school:

To be honest that was the biggest problem, I was just not prepared to have people expect things of me. I was lazy and didn't work hard...there was never any, people didn't make allowances, and you know that's really great. I kind of wished I had been there for GCSEs and been prepared for that, because I think I could have done well at A-level there. I just was stupid and messed around, because at [previous school] they don't expect... they don't really care if you work to be honest, yeah so I wasn't really used to it.

### 2.2.3 How prepared were the participants to move into a mainstream setting?

**Table 5: How prepared were you for a mainstream post school setting?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Prepared	2	12%
Not prepared	8	47%
Mixed response	7	41%
Total	17	100%

Participants who had been in a specialist setting were asked how prepared they were for a mainstream setting after their experience in a specialist school or college. As the participants had moved between schools and colleges during the time of the project, their responses are reflective of their experiences in multiple different institutions. Of seventeen participants who answered this question, only two felt that their experience had prepared them for leaving the school/college and going into a mainstream setting.

Positive factors identified of being in a specialist setting included:

- preparation for living independently
- learning to work independently
- the opportunity to be around people in the same situation

It prepared me for the more non-academic things, like living away from home, and like doing your grocery shopping and washing and stuff.

Then the residential side of it, for me it was fine because it taught me independence.

The main challenge that the participants identified with being in a specialist setting was that they felt unprepared for integrating into a mainstream setting, having been 'in a bubble' (a phrase used by six of the participants), despite attending a variety of schools/colleges.

Not very well, I think they put you in a bubble and expect that life is going to be like this, when it's not really.

Six of the participants described how they did not feel prepared for the world outside of their residential settings, and highlighted limited opportunity to mix with people outside of their school/college.

I just think socially it really let me down, because we literally had no interaction with any sighted peers our own age... It was great going to [school] and getting to know and making friends with people who are VI, because you obviously have that in common. And it was nice not to feel the only one for a while, but then having to go back into the mainstream setting and being the only one, it was quite a shock to the system.

It's a big assumption to make, but I think if I had stayed in mainstream education, then that jump from going from that to uni may not have been so vast, so dramatic. Because I think part of why I struggled socially when I started at uni was I was used to hanging around with loads of blind people for two years. I didn't have many sighted friends left at school, I didn't really hang out with any sighted people apart from my family.

Four of the participants also shared that they felt they had been living in an over-protective environment, which had hindered them (or their friends) in their next setting:

But up until that point everything else was quite sheltered. It felt very much like you were living on a university campus, but because of that you were away from everything. I remember not really getting off campus much because of the fact that not many people did

This chimes with findings in a previous report (Hewett et al, 2015f) where it was identified that many of the participants with more severe visual impairment in higher education did not feel confident enough to move away from their halls of residence after the first year, instead choosing to stay in university accommodation.

Finally, two participants reported that they did not feel their time in specialist schools/colleges prepared them for working independently in a mainstream environment. In one case after reflecting on their experience the young person concluded they had not had the opportunity to understand what access methods were best for them. After specialist school they went into a mainstream 6<sup>th</sup> form which provided them with the opportunity to experiment with different technology:

I developed an understanding of what technology works best for me. I am using different technology to what I used when I transitioned from [specialist school], and that's good, not because the technology that I used when I transitioned was bad, but I kind of... I have got it down to a fine art of what I need to use when, and what software works best and what kind of PC I want, you know I am investing in new technology just to experiment with myself and see if that can help me... I definitely think that I am glad that I was given, that I took that opportunity. I think had I stayed in [specialist school] I would have got used to using a lot of hard copy braille and not anything else and that's not a realistic expectation in a university setting to be honest.



### 3 SUPPORT TO MAKE TRANSITIONS

The participants were asked to think about the support that they had received for the key transitions that they had made since completing their GCSE courses. For each transition they were asked to consider the support they had received in preparing for that transition, particularly with regards to any challenges or considerations that were made in relation to their visual impairment.

#### 3.1 TRANSITION REVIEWS

An important process for young people with SEN is the 'Transition Review'. This would have been an annual meeting at school which was held to talk about the young person's future. An outcome of this review would have been a 'transition plan'; a written document describing their plans for the future and what needed to be put into place to facilitate these. In Hewett et al (2011) we presented the participants reflections on Transition Reviews whilst they were still in school. In this interview we revisited this topic to explore whether the participants still held the same opinions.

**Table 6: Do you remember going through the transition review process?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	36	77%
No	9	19%
Unsure	2	4%
Total	47	100%

The participants were asked if they remembered going through the transition review process, to which over three-quarters responded that they did. This is in broad agreement with what was reported in the original interviews.

**Table 7: On reflection, how helpful a process did you find it?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Positive	10	30%
Negative	14	42%
Neutral	9	27%
Total	33	100%

We also asked the participants to consider how helpful a process they had found the Transition Review process. Just under half of the

participants judged it to be a negative experience, while less than a third viewed it positively. At the time of the previous interview half the participants evaluated the transition support received as positive.

The participants were given the opportunity to elaborate on their responses. These responses were analysed and are discussed below. As noted previously in Hewett et al (2011), the Department of Health (2007) identified the importance of people-centred Transition Reviews. This means that Transition Reviews should be conducted with the wishes and the needs of the individual at the centre. For example, instead of considering the services which are already in existence and where the young person would best fit into these, focus should instead be in terms of what services could be given to the young person to help them best to meet their objectives. It is therefore important that the young person involved is in attendance at the Transition Review. However, the responses of fourteen of the participants indicate that they did not perceive the review to be person-centred. Example explanations for this include the young person feeling on the fringes of the meeting and the young person not understanding the purpose of the meeting.

I personally didn't find it helpful. My parents couldn't come to it because they used to work so they never attended it, but all they did in those meetings was basically read the reports, and I kind of could have done that myself, so I didn't really find it... I found it quite embarrassing to be honest, but they have to do it I suppose. I found it a little bit intimidating actually, there's only you and there's about 15 adults reading your reports. I didn't go to all of them, I think I only went to two of them... what actually it was supposed to be I don't have a clue. I don't know, why did they do it?!

Participant: I didn't really find them helpful, if anything they were really patronising, because it was revolving around you. It's just like 'I don't want to be here if you are talking about me'.

Researcher: So not putting words into your mouth, but was it that they were more talking about you than with you from what you were saying?

Participant: Yeah.

Four participants did not view the content of the meeting as relevant to them and their current status of transition planning, whilst a further three participants viewed some of the people in attendance at the meeting as unnecessary:

They were like 'here's a UCAS form', and I was just like 'I am actually at a good school and I do... a Connexions lady tried to tell me what UCAS was and I was like 'you know I am in a really good mainstream school, I would be shocked if I wasn't aware what UCAS was'. I felt like some people were drafted in, like oh disabled let's get Connexions in, and actually they weren't very useful to me because I was so like... I was like why are you telling me stuff I know!

...you see them once every year and it's like 'I don't know you'

Three participants described how they had previously attended their review meetings, but due to the negative experience decided not to return. Positively one of these participants was allocated a key worker to help her advocate in future meetings, and ensure she felt comfortable enough to return:

I think I have already said, but reviews were generally not very pleasant affairs, they were kind of intimidating, really stressful and they usually ended up in arguments. I am pretty sure that the reason I got the key worker was because I turned round and said I didn't want to attend them anymore, because they were too...I didn't want to go, and they obviously wanted me to go and needed me there, but I really didn't want to go anymore...so I think they gave me this key worker because of that.

Three participants were disappointed as they felt there were times when actions were not put into place following the meeting:

Researcher: Did you find anything good about the process?

Participant: Not really, they mentioned things that you might need or want doing, but then it would never happen, so it wasn't effective. I didn't benefit from them.

I had the meeting and then nothing else happened after it so it didn't really help at all.

The responses of eleven participants demonstrated that whilst there was some discussion about transitions, the meetings tended to be dominated by discussion with regards to what was happening in their current setting, and sometimes felt like the extension of a school report or parents evening:

To be honest, I just thought it was like my parents coming in to be told how I was over the past year, it was almost an extension of a school report. I didn't really feel like I was getting much out of it. It kind of was more like keeping my parents up to date.

I think it was more a talk for mum and dad, to see how I was doing... It just felt like another parents evening, how I was doing in class. Not for me but for my parents

This last quote is a reminder of the importance of people-centred review meetings. It was clear in this young man's case that he did not view the meeting as being structured around him.

Eight participants reported there being minimal time invested into discussing their future, even though they would have appreciated further assistance for considering their future options:

Researcher: Was there much discussion... you were talking about going to college and there wasn't much support. Did they talk about that at all, like your plans for...?

Participant: A bit, but they weren't really interested. They were just, when it got to that bit they were just like '[Participant] is planning on going to college' and that was it, and then they moved on.

Researcher: So there wasn't any discussion on what you might need for that then?

Participant: No.

Researcher: Do you think if that were more the focus of the meeting, do you think that would have been beneficial?

Participant: Yeah definitely.

Participant: Yeah, I don't remember it being very helpful!

Researcher: So what are your memories of it?

Participant: At that time they kind of just asked me what I wanted to do, and because I didn't know they didn't really help me.

Researcher: Did you find anything good about the process?

Participant: They gave us a lot of links to go on to help us with our career paths.

Researcher: Can you think of any ways it could have been improved?

Participant: Maybe exploring different areas to figure out what I wanted to do would have been helpful, more suggestions.

Researcher: So was it more reliant on you knowing?

Participant: Yeah.

One participant felt that whilst they had received transition guidance, it was not available when they had most required it:

I don't know. I remember having one in like Year 10 or 11 which was specifically focused on transition, and that was quite helpful because we kind of put together an action plan and stuff, with my parents and the school and stuff... And in some ways they had done it for the transition to sixth form, and that was great, that was quite helpful. All the other reviews, I can't quite remember, they were helpful for ironing out small kinks etc. and certain things that teachers needed to make notes of or whatever, but actually the time at which a meeting probably would have been most helpful would have been in Sixth Form, the transition to university which I don't think I had, or if I did I don't think it was focused on transition.

There were however some positive reports regarding the Transition Review meetings. Three participants identified ways in which they felt the meetings had been person centred leading to more positive outcomes:

Participant: Yeah they were quite helpful, they brought together teachers from the school, people from the disability service, and then from the learning support base at school. So it brought together all who were looking at my needs and helped set my targets, and developed strategies to ensure I was successful. Yeah I think that was helpful.

Researcher: Anything particularly good about how they did all that?

Participant: I think it's tailored towards me, it wasn't a one size fits all thing.

Six participants identified ways in which the discussion regarding transitions at their review meetings had been beneficial and in some cases led to particular outcomes:

When I left, one of the ladies would come to my mums house and she would take me... if I needed to get to town by myself [for college] she would offer to take me, like go on bus journeys so I knew how to do it without anyone.

It helped me to discuss the subjects at the time that I was taking, to see whether the career path that I want to take being in IT was the best one for my vision.

As previously mentioned one positive story came from a participant who initially really struggled attending the review meetings as he found it very uncomfortable and did not feel able to share his views. To help overcome this they allocated him a keyworker who worked with him to help him advocate and to have better control over the meeting:

I went to see her a few times before every annual or interim review, or whatever. We made like a mind map of things I was concerned about, things I wanted to discuss, or things I wanted brought up, things that I wanted to say or have said, and we worked on things that, things that I thought were important to me, and where I wanted to see myself in 5 years, things like that. She was there, she could have either supported me to express views myself if I wanted to, or she was able to speak on my behalf if I wanted to as well. She did that a few times, I got her to speak on my behalf a few times, and the last two meetings she supported me to speak for myself, so that was really really useful. I really valued her support because it made the whole thing less stressful, because it's quite intimidating for me to go in there and try and say what I wanted to say, and express an opinion to this room of quite intimidating people!

## 3.2 TRANSITION INTO SIXTH FORM/FE COLLEGE

**Table 8: Any specific support received for the transition into Sixth Form/FE College?**

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	24	65%
No	13	35%
Total	37	100%

The participants were asked if they had received any specific support for the transition into Sixth Form or FE. Just under two-thirds recalled receiving some specific support for this transition, whilst around one-third said that they did not (and it is worth noting that there may have been additional behind the scenes support that they were unaware of).

**Table 9: Examples of transition support into Sixth Form/FE identified by participants**

	Total (N)
Taster sessions	5
Assigned a key worker	4
Specialist support to prepare for transition – e.g. mobility support	3
New equipment	2
Development of action plan	1
Transition review meeting	1
Not required – continued in same school	5

Five participants stated that they did not require any support as they continued in the same setting as their school had an attached sixth form. Three participants who stayed in the same setting had a continuation of support.

Five participants benefited from taster sessions in their new setting which gave them confidence for when they made the official transition:

Before you start you go on a taster for three or four days, it's an assessment to see if you would fit in well with their setting...I went there also a couple of years before for a revision course, and that got me familiar with the place... So after the assessment I thought 'I feel comfortable staying here'.

One participant highlighted the transition review meeting as helpful, whilst another said they met and developed an action plan to help prepare for the transition.

Four participants were assigned a key worker who was their source of contact in the event of problems and was there to discuss any support they required:

Yeah I got a lot of support, I was assigned a key worker, and she was brilliant, she acted like your second mum, she was really nice, and I am still in contact with her even though I left, so she really helped.

Three participants referred to specialist support that they received for the transition, including preparation for living independently in boarding school and orientation around their new setting, whilst two participants identified particular equipment that they were given for the transition:

It was more help with mobility and getting from one place to the other, and being aware of the area and my surroundings

I just got a new laptop I think, that was about it really.

A small number of the participants highlighted various challenges that they faced during this transition. These included: not knowing the full range of options available to them; not feeling confident about which course they wanted to do; and not having the required support in place.

I remember it being really difficult, because no one really knew what they wanted to do, I just knew I had to go to college. So I kind of just picked any subject, which I didn't know if I liked or not...I realised that it wasn't the course I wanted to do, and I ended up changing the course three times. But in the end I liked it.

Not particularly, it was, because it was all built into the one campus, it was sort of assumed that you would. I remember thinking at the time actually that I didn't really want to stay, because some students had left at that point, but there wasn't really much in terms of options, it was just assumed that would, not even treated as a different...I never really thought of GCSEs and A-levels as a different thing, the idea of college being separate to school wasn't really something that I was aware of until afterwards.



Two participants who moved from mainstream school into residential specialist colleges reflected back on what a complex process it had been in advocating for their place at these colleges:

There was a little bit, I had funding issues, before I started going to college I had a lot of funding issues, so actually the careers advisor that worked with me I think for probably about five years because she was at [school] the whole time I was there, she did a lot of work to actually fight my case to be able to go to [college]. And I had to have some social workers come in and do a report....I think my careers advisor did all the work to be honest bless her.

### 3.3 TRANSITION INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

The participants were asked about any support that they had received for the Transition into Higher Education. A comprehensive overview of the participants transition into Higher Education is provided in Hewett et al (2015f), but a brief overview of the participants reflections for this round of interviews is provided below.

**Table 10: Any specific support received for the transition into Higher Education?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	12	46%
No	14	54%
Total	26	100%

Just under half of the participants reported receiving some form of specific support for the transition into HE. Very few participants who were in mainstream schools received any form of specialist support for the transition, with the support they received tending to focus on course applications. This meant that these participants did not receive any local support with regards to applying Disabled Students Allowance and making contact with the university disability support office. Those participants who were in mainstream tended to instead receive support through the university disability support office who would have identified them through their UCAS application forms:

We had meetings with the enabling centre here, so there was just getting to meet them and know who they are, and sort out what is I needed for uni

One participant in mainstream education did note however that his school provided evidence of his support needs for him to provide to the university and another had advice through RNIB:

The school gave me all documentation like extra time that I might need to present to the university...I had a chat with the disability service at the university.

The participants who were in specialist settings reported that the guidance that they received was generally provided through workshops. The responses towards these were mixed, with some participants finding them helpful, whilst others found that they did not really equip them for what was coming next:

With the transition from school to university they did try to tell you that university was going to be much different, but they didn't really explain how or why. They sort of explained that it was going to be different from school because there would be more research, but they didn't really give you... What I expected them to do was give you some uni style tasks, maybe some sort of practice run before you actually get to university... that would have been helpful but they didn't do it.

One point of note is that several participants who took gap years before university reported that they did not receive any specialist guidance when they were preparing to make the transition to higher education, including those who had been in specialist schools. Instead they were reliant family support.

### 3.4 TRANSITION INTO APPRENTICESHIPS

Again, support into apprenticeships has been discussed in more detail in previous reports, however a small number of participants reflected back on the support that they had received for this transition.

Most notably all six participants who had gone into apprenticeships (or had wanted to) reported that they did not receive any guidance for this, despite it being a pathway they were actively pursuing for once they left school or college. This supports our findings in previous interviews where participants who wished to move into apprenticeships did not receive any guidance of where to locate suitable opportunities to apply for.

Researcher: So you were saying you didn't really have any guidance for going into an apprenticeship?

Participant: No.

Researcher: So how did you find out about that scheme you went through?

Participant: I just got told by relatives I guess, because they said that apprenticeships were better to go into at the time.

Researcher: So did you get more family support in applying for that then?

Participant: Yeah, rather than the school telling me.

### 3.5 TRANSITION INTO EMPLOYMENT

The participants who had considered going into employment after school or college were also asked to reflect back on support they had received to prepare them for the transition into the labour market.

Four participants reported that they received support through careers advisors. In the majority of cases this support was positive, however in one case the participant found the advice to be less helpful as they discussed options which he did not consider appropriate to his visual impairment. This is supported by the findings in previous reports (e.g. Hewett et al, 2013) where there was a very mixed response towards the careers advice that they received, with differing opinions on whether it is appropriate to provide careers advice which takes into account disability.

Two participants who had been in specialist settings spoke very positively about invited speakers who came in and shared from personal experience:

We had an hour every week on Mondays I think it was where they had different people coming in and talking to us, so they had ex-students that are working coming in, they had different people from different companies coming in and talking to us, and university people coming in and talking about university and stuff and I really found that quite interesting, I found it quite helpful, it says you can work even if you are blind, that's what they were trying to prove.

The most common type of support identified by 5 participants was job seeking skills, such as writing CVs, completing job applications and preparing for interviews:

At college we had loads of like, I can't even remember what called, we had three lessons a week where they were teaching us about employment, interviews, self-employment and how it works

Finally one participant reflected back that whilst initially she found the guidance she received for employment to be 'boring', now that she has had the opportunity to reflect back appreciates that it was helpful:

It was a bit overwhelming because there was so much information, but overall I did find it really helpful, and I don't think I would be able to do it without them, so I am glad they did do it. But at that

point I was really annoyed, I was like 'this is really boring' but now I am actually thanking them that they did do it.

Five participants stated that they did not receive any support in preparing for employment despite the fact they were looking to go straight into the labour market once they left school or college.

## 4 CAREERS ADVICE AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Participants were asked to consider any preparations which were made whilst they were at school for thinking about future careers, specifically in relation to their visual impairment. They were also asked to consider any support they may have received from family and friends during that time in relation to this.

### 4.1 WORK EXPERIENCE

Firstly the participants were asked whether they had had the opportunity to do a work experience placement as part of the school curriculum and to reflect back on how helpful an experience it was, what was good about it, and what could have been improved.

#### 4.1.1 Work Experience as part of School Curriculum

**Table 11: When in school did you have any work experience as part of the school curriculum?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	40	91%
No	4	9%
Total	44	100%

All but four of the participants had work experience placements whilst in school as part of the school curriculum. It is worth noting, however, that the four participants who did not receive work experience are all registered as severely sight impaired. Various explanations were given for this including being ill and unable to attend, the arrangements falling through at the last minute and being advised not to do work experience because it clashing with an exam:

I was supposed to have done, but I didn't end up getting it. My exams ended up in Work Experience week so they wouldn't let you just have one day of it where you had exams, if you had exams then you had to have the whole week, and you couldn't go into it – it was odd.

#### 4.1.2 What types of Work Experience did the participants do?

**Table 12: Types of Work Experience placement the participants did**

	<b>Total (N)</b>
School or nursery	13
Office administration	8
Retail	4
Library assistant	3
Media – radio, magazine/newspaper	2
Engineering and mechanic	2
Science – laboratory/pharmacy	2
Translator	2
Catering	2
IT	2
Performing arts	1

The table above summarises the types of work experience placement that the participants did whilst in school. The most common type of placement that the participants did was to work in a school or nursery. In most cases this was what the decision of the student, however a small number of participants described being ‘sent’ to work in a school:

Participant: They sent me to a nursery to a local school, to basically look after them which was very strange, because I was like ‘how can I see if they are doing something they shouldn’t do?!

Researcher: So you didn’t really know...

Participant: No.

Researcher: Was that something you are interested in doing at all?

Participant: Not really.

Researcher: So how did you end up doing that?

Participant: It was the only thing they could find.

However, some participants did identify their time in school as a rewarding placement:

Yeah, I think had some work experience working at my old primary school working as a teaching assistant which was fun

The next most common type of placement was working in an office environment helping with administrative tasks.



The first week I worked with my brother, at the time he worked in a conveyancing office, so I just did the paper work and shredding, so just got an office feel...

Four participants worked in retail, three in a library, two in media, two in engineering/mechanics, two in scientific placements, two shadowed translators two worked in IT, two in catering and one helped out backstage at a theatre.

#### 4.1.3 How helpful an experience was the Work Experience?

**Table 13: On reflection, how helpful an experience was this for you?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Positive response	22	55%
Negative response	11	28%
Neutral response	7	18%
Total	40	100%

The participants were asked to reflect back on how helpful an experience their work placement had been for them. Over half described it as a positive experience whilst just over a quarter viewed it negatively. Their responses are described in more detail below.

##### 4.1.3.1 Positive work experiences

**Table 14: Examples of positive outcomes of work experience placements**

	<b>Total (N)</b>
Experience of being in a working environment	11
Helped form ideas of future careers	9
Helped develop confidence and independence	4
Boosted CV	3

Eleven participants reported benefiting from being in a working environment, including understanding the expectations of being in the workplace:

I kind of realised how different it was from school and disciplined you had to be, being an employee.

Very helpful, because it's the first time I had been into work. The fact that I had never had a suit on before... well not a suit, a shirt and tie. Just feeling like an adult really, so it's a big step up.

Nine participants stated that it helped them form ideas about their future career, even if that was simply identifying what they did not want to do:

They were quite good, because it kind of showed me where I wanted to get to, and actually what I didn't want to do, and what I did want to do, so it was all good.

Yeah it was really good, I got a feel of what I did want to do and didn't want to do...

Four participants highlighted how work experience helped develop their confidence and independence, including in getting to and from the workplace independently:

It gave me a bit more mobility experience...getting to or from a shop or school on my own, and working there on my own.

Learning to go to a new place, going and talking to people on my own that was quite a good experience. That's what I would say it was best for, meeting new people and speaking to them for the first time on my own.

Finally three participants felt that their work experience placement helped boost their CV by enabling them to develop important skills further:

I have learned a lot, because obviously I have learned how to work with clients, and you used to get new clients every day, I got used to actually working for four hours non-stop, doing consultations and all that, so that was really helpful because obviously it helps me now because I am doing...

#### **4.1.3.2 Negative work experiences**

The main negative response which was given by seven participants was that they were they were unable to do much in the workplace, or did not learn very much during their placement:

I went to my old primary school, and I was in the nursery, but I didn't do anything there, I didn't find it useful at all.

They didn't really do much catering, it basically washing dishes for a fortnight. They showed me the kitchen, they showed me the utensils, they showed me what was done, but I didn't really get a chance to do anything.

Three participants observed that longer placements were required to really understand what it is like to be in the workplace. All three participants had independently arranged their own longer placements. One of the participants argued that more work experience is required in school to help young people identify what type of career they want to pursue:

I feel that there isn't enough. I think a couple of weeks experience of what work is like, it's kind of like you sit there and kind of think 'oh yeah, I got two weeks work experience, it's so cool', but I think there should be more integrated into curriculum, and I think it's only when you get to A-levels that people realise 'oh wait they have got to decide what to do for work'. Say you got Year 10 work experience, you have got kids who may want to leave in Year 11... you have got to stay until you are 18, you have got Year 11 where you have got to decide 'oh do I want to do an apprenticeship, what do I want to do'. You kind of think, having something in Year 10 is a bit late to start thinking about what you want to do

Four participants would have preferred more assistance in arranging their work experience:

Maybe slightly more support from the staff in helping to contact people, because it was left up to us, and they said just go out and ask people.

Particular challenges were experienced by three participants whose original plans fell through at the last minute:

We did - mine was a screw up. There were a couple of things planned for me which just fell through at the last minute, and suddenly things went wrong and I never actually got to do any work experience. I was meant to go with a Law firm and one of them was ill and the other was on a major case and couldn't take me.

Additionally three participants found that accommodations were not made for their visual impairment (including one participant who was asked to leave after the first day as they could not accommodate her needs), while a further two participants felt that the staff did not accommodate them in general on their placement:

Participant: Not very to be honest, because they didn't know much about VI. Researcher: How improved? Amy: A better knowledge of VI, and the think they could have put in place to make it easier for me.

We did, it was bloody horrible. I went over to [retail store] for about two weeks, it was basically free labour and it was horrible, it didn't help in the slightest, they basically said get on with it. I didn't even know what was the job I was supposed to be doing. I think it was along the lines of...I was there as free labour, and basically do what they want, and then fill in the booklet and that's it....

Finally, two participants reported that they were restricted in being as independent during their work experience placements, which meant it was not as realistic as it could have been:

Again, it was kind of organised through [school], they dropped you off in a taxi, they picked...there wasn't really any... it wasn't really a teachable moment, because it was still like everything was organised for you, it wasn't even like we had to call our own taxi to get to work, you just went and did it to be honest.

## 4.2 DISCLOSURE OF VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

The participants were asked whether they had ever received any guidance in how best to disclose their visual impairment to potential employers (for example on application forms and in interviews). If they had they were asked whether the guidance had been helpful, what was good about it, and what could have been improved. If they had not they were asked whether they thought such guidance would have been helpful.

**Table 15: Did participants receive any guidance in disclosing their visual impairment to employers?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	6	13%
No	41	87%
Total	47	100%

Only six of the participants recalled receiving guidance for disclosing their visual impairment to potential employers, and in one of these cases it was after they had already left compulsory education.

One participant stated that when she applied for university she was advised to make subtle references to her visual impairment in her personal statement:

When I was applying for uni I was told not to put that I have a visual impairment, just to be subtle about it, like drop hints but don't be obvious about it. That's what we have been told to put on our CVs as well. That way you will get the same opportunity.

Two participants said that they received advice from various sources on how best to disclose their visual impairment, or even whether to disclose it at all. The advice they received was contradictory which they found unhelpful:

I was given different information by different people, and it was contradicting information as well. Some people were saying to tell everyone, and some were saying not. So it wasn't really helpful in that aspect.

Similarly one participant said that she received advice through staff at her college, but she did not fully understand what they were advising her to do:

In college they just used to say...I can't really remember what they said, they always said make sure you always let them know what is wrong with you, and try to prove yourself... but they didn't really specify what they meant by it. I don't think you can really, I think you need to experience it yourself to be able to do it, I don't think anyone can tell you 'you should do this and this' because everyone's different at the end of the day and I think that's what they were trying to point out.

A further participant received helpful specialist advice through RNIB who advised him to detail the support he would require. This was also the case for another participant who received advice through both her specialist school and through RNIB Wales. She noted a vast difference in depth between the two sessions, stating that the advice received through RNIB Wales was more substantial:

...it was good but then the RNIB thing afterwards was just so much more detailed and more serious I suppose, and you couldn't really compare to be honest.

Those participants who did not receive any guidance on how to disclose their visual impairment to potential employers were asked whether they thought this type of guidance would have been helpful.

**Table 16: Did the participants who did not receive guidance on disclosing their visual impairment think that it would have been beneficial?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	25	78%
No	5	16%
Don't know	2	6%
Total	32	100%

Over three quarters of the participants who had not received guidance felt that it would have been beneficial if they had done. Ten participants in particular noted that they either had faced situations where they did not know how to approach this, or anticipated that they would be unprepared in such situations:

No, and that was the thing, and when it comes to me applying for jobs now I have absolutely no idea what to do.

I think, yeah, like as I say I think a lot of support that I really needed came at the 6th form level actually, and that was the time when I was getting my first job, so it was the first time it was going to come up... I never disclosed it actually, just kept on breaking things! Because I didn't know how to... and I was worried that as a 16/17 year old they would just fire me because it's more trouble than it's worth sort of thing...

Two participants reflecting back stated that whilst they now recognise they could have benefited from such support, having not realised so at the time:

Researcher: So by the sounds of things you think it would have been beneficial?

Participant: Oh god yeah, you don't think at the time, it's only at the time when you are in it and think 'oh shit!'

However, another participant observed that she probably would not have been prepared for such guidance at that time:

I don't know, it's difficult because when you are 17/18 you don't really want that.

One participant who now felt confident in knowing how to disclose her visual impairment having received help from her family, acknowledged that it was important for some young people with visual impairment to receive such advice:

Not really for me, for other people, I am confident to talk about it, and I know how to talk about it in a way that advocates, not like 'I need help 24-7, help me!' I know how to explain what I need, but not come across in a bad way, I think. But maybe for other people. Maybe having the option would be useful, so you don't have to take it, but it's there.

## 4.3 CAREERS GUIDANCE

### 4.3.1 Careers guidance received

The participants were asked whether they had received any guidance to think about careers in relation to their visual impairment.

**Table 17: Did the participants receive any guidance to think about careers in relation to their visual impairment?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	15	34%
No	29	66%
Total	44	100%

Around a third of the participants recalled receiving some guidance of this nature. The participants identified a number of sources for this guidance, including:

- Connexions/Careers Wales (5)
- School based careers advisor (3)
- School lessons (2)
- Individual advice from QTVI (1)
- Transitions officer (1)

### 4.3.2 How beneficial is careers guidance perceived to be?

The participants who had received careers guidance in relation to their visual impairment were asked how beneficial they had found this. All but three of the participants thought that the advice that they received was helpful. Five participants gave more detailed explanations for their response. One participant liked the fact that the person advisor presented them with what they considered to be a well-balanced perspective:

They would always help me align up what were the good reasons to do it as well as the bad, so it kind of added all up.

Another participant liked the fact she received consistent support through the same transitions officer. Whilst she did some advice whilst in school, what she found most beneficial was having support over a number of years by the same person:

But I have a Transitions Officer who is employed by RNIB Cymru who I have known since I was 14 or 15 and she has been much



more helpful and much more useful in terms of helping me with, like every transition, from secondary to [sixth form], [sixth form] to uni, and now from uni to work, she is like my go-to person sort of thing.

A third participant felt he particularly benefited from having advice from a teacher who is a specialist in the subject he was interested in pursuing. He called for this to become a standard working policy in his specialist school:

People should be matched, it shouldn't be random. So if someone wants to go into computing they should be put with one of the form tutors who is also the IT teacher because they will know stuff. I think that would really really help actually.

A final participant reported that she found the guidance she received helpful as it was delivered on a one-on-one basis by a Connexions officer who had prepared for the meeting. She did however think that she could have benefited from more sessions.

I think the fact that it was a one-to-one session, so it could be a bit more specialised and there was more time to talk through certain issues, I felt the advisor was quite well prepared in talking about it.

The participants who viewed the guidance received negatively also provided further explanation. One participant explained how the careers advisor he spoke with did not appear to understand his visual impairment, advising him to look into careers he did not think to be suitable, such as jobs which would involve driving:

Well yeah, the Careers Wales women, but she didn't really offer guidance, it was more of a hindrance

The other two participants did not feel they had sufficient guidance for it to be of benefit to them:

Not enough to think about exactly what to do when the situation comes really.

**Table 18: Did the participants who had not previously received guidance to think about careers in relation to their visual impairment think it would have been beneficial?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	21	72%
No	7	24%
Unsure	1	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100%</b>

Of twenty nine participants who had not previously received such guidance, 21 (or almost three quarters) thought that it would have been beneficial.

The seven participants who did not think it would have been beneficial gave a variety of reasons for this. One participant explained that he already knew what he wanted to do making such advice irrelevant, while another participant had previously avoided advice from the school-based careers advisor having heard negative reports from others. A further four participants reported that they would not like to receive such guidance, which they felt would involve inappropriately telling them what they could or could not do:

No, I don't think it would have helped, only because I think I am the type of person, not in a stubborn way, but it is a case of 'oh I don't think you could do that because you are visually impaired' ... if I wanted to do it I would do it anyway, and see for myself. So I don't think it would have made much difference. If anything it might have hindered me because it might have made me a bit nervous. I am very much I prefer to find out myself and if I fail so be it, at least I found out.

No, I know what I want to do. I know where I want to go with careers, so if there is a boundary I will see what there is when I get there. I don't want people putting a downer on it. I don't want people saying 'this isn't really realistic'.

## 4.4 SUPPORT AVAILABLE IN EMPLOYMENT

Finally the participants were asked whether they had ever received any guidance about the support which would be available to them once in employment in relation to their visual impairment. If they had they were asked whether the guidance had been helpful, what was good about it, and what could have been improved. If they had not they were asked whether they thought such guidance would have been helpful.

### 4.4.1 Guidance received on the support available in employment

**Table 19: Have the participants received guidance on the support available in employment?**

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes – when in school	5	12%
Yes – received at some point	7	16%
No	30	70%
Unsure	1	2%
Total	43	100%

Only five participants specifically recalled receiving guidance or information on the support available in employment during their time in education, although in total twelve participants had at least some awareness of the type of support that was available.

Access to Work was mentioned to us on a number of occasions, obviously ideas of a reasonable adjustment. Just my knowledge of the law, I know they have to make a reasonable adjustment, that's all I know. I think it's all you really need.

No, my mum's friend she's totally blind and she used to work, she got made redundant and her eyesight is worse. I said how did she manage getting back and forth, she had Access to Work. Obviously I asked and she said it's really good. Yeah I basically got told, no one in school or college... I think in college they may have mentioned it before but I think that was after I found out.

Two participants mentioned the organisation Blind in Business and their intention to contact them once they were looking to move into the labour market:

No, but I have found out bits and pieces to do with Access to Work through friends of mine who are trying to get into employment and they are also visually impaired. And I also got in contact with a charity called Blind in Business thanks to my family. They are definitely going to be a point of contact for me once I get to the stage of looking for employment.

Thirty participants were unaware of the support available to them once in employment.

Not really, but I think it's because I haven't asked about it, because I always assumed that after education I am left on my own, sort of thing.

To be honest I've not really thought about it.

#### **4.4.2 How beneficial is guidance on the support available in employment perceived to be?**

Two participants recalled attending a talk by someone from Access to Work and finding it extremely beneficial.

We had a talk from someone who works for Access to Work or something, I think that's what they are called, and they how they help us, so that was quite helpful. A lot of the time they said to be really involved with contacting a company and show your skills, and then enquire if take on certain people because... I think someone told me if you contact HR department anonymously just to make sure they have taken on people of that nature and then apply after that, see if it helps your chances.

All of the participants who were aware of Access to Work were positive about what they had learned, apart from one participant who did not feel she understood sufficiently the type of support that they could provide:

...I didn't know what I could ask for. They didn't explain it to me what could help me.

**Table 20: Did the participants who had not previously received guidance on the support available in employment think it would have been beneficial?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	19	76%
No	6	24%
Total	25	100%

Those participants who had not received guidance on the support available in employment were asked whether it would have been beneficial to have received such information. Nineteen of the participants felt they would have benefited from such support, while six did not.

Yeah I never really knew anything about that side of stuff, I never really was told

Yes I don't know what support there is in the workplace.

The majority of those who did not think that the guidance would be beneficial explained that this was because they did not feel they needed support in the workplace. However one participant did state that his concern that applying for such support would have other negative consequences:

Yeah I think it would, but then they would probably restrict me from doing certain things which I don't want, so there's that as well. And the fact that it could be problematic.

## 5 ACCESSING INFORMATION

The participants were informed that we would like to ask them some questions about how well prepared they felt they were for accessing information once they had left compulsory education and how prepared they were to be able to use different methods to be able to independently access information.

### 5.1 ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

#### 5.1.1 Type of Assistive Technology used

**Table 21: Type of Assistive Technology the participants have used**

	<b>Total (N)</b>
Supernova (magnification and screen reader)	7
Jaws (screen reader)	5
Magnification/screen reader inbuilt into Windows/Apple operating system	5
Zoomtext (magnification)	4
Unspecified magnification software	2
Mouse with inbuilt magnification	2
CCTV	1

The table above summarises the type of assistive technology that the participants have been using. This was investigated previously in more depth in Hewett et al (2014). A further nine participants reported that they do not use any assistive technology and instead prefer to make basic adjustments to the computer, such as zooming in, changing the screen resolution and changing the font size.

Of interest is the number of participants who report that they have changed the assistive technology that they use over time. Nine participants stated that they changed the assistive technology that they were using as it was no longer fit for purpose. This includes participants who were allocated a particular software in school or university but later moved to a different software as they felt it was restricting them in their education and participants who were given magnification software which they found to be too pixelated for them to benefit from.

I have Jaws now but we started off with... have you ever heard of Supernova? But that kept crashing on me, but by the time I got to Sixth form they transferred me over to Jaws. I am glad it crashed

on me then rather than at university because I was able to say to the DSA people 'look I need Jaws please'. It's more expensive as well.

Researcher: What are you using at the moment, I know you had Zoomtext at uni.

Participant: I don't really use Zoomtext anymore. We attached a larger monitor to my laptop which makes things a bit easier, and I am going to get another one of those, I am going to get another enlarging mouse I think, that so far has been the most helpful thing.

One participant shared how she was no longer able to benefit from magnification as her vision had changed. However, she did not feel comfortable in using a screen reader as to her that was losing her independence:

No, no. I wouldn't use it. I have got the eyesight I can see it... my OT says to me about talking kettles and things. No. It's not my comfy spot. It's not something I would want to do, I prefer not to use adaptations if I can... I mean making things paper based and everything is making me as normal as everyone else. People don't get why I say it, but I feel that having Voiceover would take my independence away, because it's doing it for me, I don't have to read it. It's also my learning style. I have to read something for it to drill into head. If you're speaking, unless I am writing it down as you speak I haven't got a clue what you are on about. Even when I look back I haven't got a clue what I am on about. I have to read it for myself.

A further four participants reported that while they now use assistive technology at university, they did not have access to in when in school. For example, one participant was not introduced to magnification software until he moved to a new setting for A-levels:

Researcher: So how helpful did you find that time in [sixth form] in terms of getting used to Supernova, was that helpful to you?

Participant: It changed the way I do work. I don't think I could have got through A-levels properly not having that kind of support. Because all my subjects were essay based

One participant who did not learn to use a computer until she went to college viewed this process as her gaining her independence:

I have learnt my computer, I can use a computer now, I have learnt my independence.

Another participant who had been given a range of assistive technology for university shared how she was now struggling to apply these to her studies:

Participant: I have got Claro read, Dragon, Dolphin, Mind-mapping.

Researcher: Had you ever used any of those before coming to university, or anything similar?

Participant: No.

Researcher: Would that have been helpful to you in school do you think?

Participant: Yeah because it would be easier to do it now, I would be used to it where I am now finding the method I have been doing for years.

A further participant who no longer uses assistive technology shared that this was because the equipment that she had been given previously was outdated. She felt that the service supporting her were slow to respond to new technology:

I had training in using the assistive technology that I used at the primary school and early secondary school level, but at that time a lot of the technology that exists now, didn't exist, so a lot of that training is probably not useful anymore. That was how to use a CCTV magnifying thing, stuff like that which is completely outdated now... I think I kind of transitioned at a slightly difficult time where actually there was technology in general and different pieces of software was just starting to explode and you know what LAs are like, they are always two or three years behind on technology, so I think I probably just missed the boat in some ways.

Finally one participant reported that he had previously moved away from using assistive technology as he found it 'embarrassing', but now he was benefiting from using an Apple Mac computer with inbuilt magnification software.

### **5.1.2 Training in using assistive technology**

**Table 22: Did the participants receive training for using assistive technology when in school?**



	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	21	54%
No	18	46%
Total	39	100%

Just over half of the participants stated that they had received training for using assistive technology when in school. All twelve of the participants who reflected back on the helpfulness of the training received said that it had been of benefit to them. In particular one participant shared how she felt she benefited by learning to use assistive technology at a young age as she then was able to focus on her studies as she got older:

Well I started to use a computer when I was 5, and I started to touch type at age 5. I could read Grade 1 braille by the time I was 4, and I had finished grade 2 by the time I was 6. At 5 I was preparing to finish grade 2, so it was like 'ok technology time now'. So yeah, I don't really remember learning because it's been so long... it's been like forever... But I think that's a good thing, because so many blind students are 14 or 15 and they either don't know braille or they don't know how to use a computer. So at that age I had been doing it for years and years, so when school actually got important around GCSEs, I wasn't struggling with technology because I had been doing it for so long. I think it's definitely helped me, because I have never had to worry about it, because I learnt it from such a young age.

A further participant spoke of how whilst she had changed the screen reader that she was using, the training she received enabled her to learn the shortcuts she required to be able to use a range of screen readers.

### **5.1.3 Touch typing**

Twelve of the participants also identified touch typing as an important skill which they acquired through their time in school.

Oh touch typing, I always say to people who asked me it's the best thing I ever learned, it really is. I have astounded people before with at work, I can sit there, stare at them and type, it's the best thing I ever learned, it really is. I would put that up there as my number one most useful skill, it really is.

Participant: Yeah I had one woman in college and she taught me how to touch type without seeing the letters. I used to use magnifiers on it, but I couldn't stand it.

Researcher: How helpful was the touch typing?

Participant: That was pretty helpful, because there were some days I would go in and my eyes would be really bad at spending time on the computer would make them worse and I would get kind of blurry, so it came in handy at some times.

One participant described how he had regular touch typing lessons from a member of staff who came into the school:

Participant: Oh very helpful once I learned how to do it, it was great, a great help.

Researcher: Did you have someone teach you?

Participant: Someone used to come in every Friday about 1ish and spend a half hour teaching me.

A further participant who is now working in an office environment primarily using a computer attributed touch typing to his success in the role:

That was because of my VI, because I used a laptop at school, so instead of me sitting there with two fingers looking for the keys I could just type, because with everything I wanted to do I wanted to keep up... I don't think I would be in this sort of job if hadn't learnt to touch type.

### **5.1.4 Role of assistive technology in adult life**

The participants who use assistive technology were asked to reflect back on how helpful it has been to them now that they have left

compulsory education and moved to various new settings, such as employment, FE and HE.

Nine participants indicated in their responses that they viewed assistive technology as essential to enable them to work, whilst two participants recognised that assistive technology will be helpful to them on a day to day basis in the workplace and three further participants anticipated that it would be helpful to them for some specific tasks or types of work.

Very, very helpful. It would be very difficult to imagine life without it basically. It basically allows me to see, I wouldn't be able to see if I didn't have it.

It's definitely very important, because nowadays everyone uses...even now you are using a computer. You know everyone emails, reports whatever, everything is more technology now. Even universities if you want to get something you have to go on the internet, if the teacher wants to send you something, they won't send it on a piece of paper...Is it called Blackboard of something?...Yeah. So technology is definitely, especially ICT, I think everyone should be able to do when they are little, it's a big impact, especially nowadays.

Two participants stated that they would benefit from using their touch typing skills, while a further four participants said that they would make basic adjustments or use the computers own in built accessibility options:

In my work I can adjust things on my computer how I want them to be, so that's fine

One participant was open to the possibility of using assistive technology in the future, whilst another participant was still learning how to incorporate it into her work, having not used assistive technology prior to university:

I don't know, I would like to try it and see if it works, but I obviously don't know what will work and what won't work, it's kind of trial and error

However, four participants stated that they do not require assistive technology, whilst one participant responded that she was not interested

in using it (despite struggling to use computers). Instead she prefers to either use an iPad or to have enlarged paper based material

I mean making things paper based and everything is making me as normal as everyone else.

## 5.2 LOW VISION AIDS

The participant's experiences of using low vision aids has been previously covered in Hewett et al, 2014. This section focuses on those participants who had previously used low vision aids and specifically on the training that these participants received to use LVAs and if they viewed LVAs as having a role in their adult life.

### 5.2.1 Training in using LVAs

**Table 23: Did the participants receive training for using low vision aids when younger?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	10	56%
No	8	44%
Total	18	100%

Eighteen participants who had previously been given LVAs were asked if they had ever received training to use them. The responses were mixed, with ten participants stating that they had and eight that they had not.

The ten participants who had received training spoke of this positively:

It was quite helpful because they went through that I could change the colour, change how big it was

One participant felt that she had not had enough experience in using LVAs, but anticipated using them more in the future:

Relatively helpful, but like I said, I haven't really used them very often, I suspect they will become more useful later on when I trying to do more things independently.

Another participant questioned whether LVAs were becoming redundant because of alternative technologies:

Yeah it was good, and the LVAs were fine, but actually, I have actually surpassed the need for them by figuring out how to use an iPhone to do the same job. So it was fine for the time, the low tech time, but now moving into a more high-tech world, I think they've, if they have not already been surpassed, they are on the way.

None of the participants spoke negatively about not receiving training in using LVAs. We do however note that a small number of the participants received their LVAs second hand rather than through a specialist. Despite not having been given a LVA through a specialist they were regularly using these aids and finding them to be beneficial:

No, I just came home one day, and I knew that the grandparents had credit cards [magnifiers] that they had been using later on in life, and I knew we had a few so I just took one to work with me and started using it.

### 5.2.2 Role of LVAs in adult life

**Table 24: Do the participants anticipate using LVAs as they get older?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	8	42%
Would consider	4	21%
No	7	37%
Total	19	100%

The participants were asked whether they envisaged using LVAs once they were in employment and living independently. Eight participants thought that they would use LVAs, four were open to the possibility, while seven did not think they would use them.

Three participants stated that whilst they would use LVAs they anticipated they would use them more in their leisure time rather than in the workplace:

Working they are not that helpful because... I have never found an Optelec of CCTV camera fast enough to use, I just found them too slow. They are not that helpful in doing work, they are helpful in everyday life like reading a menu or something.

However, in all three cases they are still in HE, and it's possible that once in the workplace they will find situations where LVAs are helpful. This is true for one participant who uses the magnifier when working in a classroom:

When the kids ask me to look at their work, I say 'hold on a minute I will get my magnifier out and read it for you'.

A further participant explained how he is reluctant to use standalone LVAs, but will regularly use magnification apps on his phone:

The best low vision aids I am picking now are actually iPhone apps and they are so much better because they aren't just pieces of glass they are a full 12MP camera and they have got about as much focusing ability to out pass something like an Optelec or anything like that. So anytime I am at a restaurant now I get the Mageye app. It's just a lot more fluid for starters, because you are not having to carry around three or more devices...

One participant who had not been introduced to LVA in the past shared that there were times she struggled, and therefore she anticipated that they could be helpful for her. She was informed of how to obtain LVAs, including the existence of magnification apps.

Of the seven participants who stated that they would not use LVAs, three explained that they had used them previously but they had since become redundant:

I don't really know, I have a Kindle, so books aren't really a problem anymore. And now I have glasses they help me, so I don't think I really need them.

It will be interesting to see whether the young people change their view towards LVAs once they are in the workplace. Perhaps just as relevant is how the sector will redefine what is and is not a LVA with the overlapping of mainstream technology (e.g. phones, tablets), specialist digital technology (e.g. CCTVs) and 'low-tech' magnifiers.

## **5.3 BRAILLE**

### **5.3.1 Braille tuition**

Eleven participants who had previously been taught to read braille were asked to reflect back on this experience and how helpful it had been and what could have been improved.

Six participants reflected back on how helpful it had been that they started learning braille at an early age.

Participant: That was helpful, I started braille in nursery and finished that in year 2.

Researcher: So was that something that was particularly good starting early?

Participant: Yes because that's when sighted people start to learn to read print, it's a right I think, you should start braille at the same time. You learn it best when you are young anyway.

Negative experiences which were identified by the participants included not having the opportunity to apply braille skills, irregular lessons and lessons not being well structured.

I found it very helpful, but when I left [school] it stopped so I don't know a lot still.

I did learn my grade 2 and stuff, but it wasn't well structured and organised to be honest. Because the teachers didn't know what they were doing, so obviously we wouldn't know what we were doing either!

### **5.3.2 Training in refreshable braille devices**

Interviews with participants in HE have identified that refreshable braille devices are particularly helpful for students wishing to follow notes for their lectures. The participants were therefore asked whether they had had the opportunity to use refreshable braille devices when in school. Five participants stated that they had had access to refreshable braille devices in school, while a further four did not. One participant reported that she had been given a braille device but was not shown how to use it, so did not use it in lessons:

I have had a braille note since I was 8, but they never really taught me how to use it, so that basically went to waste.



One participant was offered a braille device but declined using it as she did not see braille as relevant to her long term:

Participant: I wasn't really interested because you could choose if you wanted to do it or not, but I wasn't really interested. I looked into it, but I wasn't really interested, but they do have that option there. They had note-takers, they had loads of different things, I was like what on earth is that! Oh no... but I wasn't really interested so I didn't want to do it really.

Researcher: So what was it that was putting you off?

Participant: I don't know, nothing was putting me off. I think I know my braille and I got my certificate in Level 2 and Level 3, but I don't think I will ever use it, and that's where the technology part of things comes in. Because most of, well 100%, everyone uses technology. So ICT is going up, whereas Braille is going down. So I wasn't interested, I was more interested in ICT and stuff. That sounds really bad, I should really carry on with braille, but I don't really see the point. I could teach braille really easily because I have been taught by professionals and I have got the certificates and the qualifications to be able to do it, but I think it's all about ICT these days...I hope I never forget it, I never forget braille, but I don't see myself using it really...

Another participant was able to use try out a friend's braille device which led to her asking for a braille device in school and eventually HE:

A braille-note because I used it in my last year. My friends had them so I knew how they worked.

A further participant who did not use a braille device until she got into HE struggled applying it to her working practice. In contrast another participant who did not use a braille device until HE concluded "I don't think they are particularly hard to get your head around really".

### **5.3.3 Role of Braille in adult life**

The participants were asked whether they saw braille as having a role in the adult lives, and primarily in employment. All of the participants who responded to this question stated that they would, although to varying degrees.

Six participants responded that it would depend on the task that they were performing, with three participants stating that in particular braille is helpful when trying to read information more deeply:

If I need to remember things I would probably use braille, because if a screen reader reads it I am like 'what... I won't remember that!' Having it literally written in front of me that's how I remember things. That's how I did my revision for exams.

Finally, four participants identified ways in which they would like to use braille more frequently in their everyday life:

I would actually really like to get back into using braille again because I think it would be very useful to learn it. Basically if I end up not being able to read something in print for some reason, more often than not there is a braille label on it. For example with medications and stuff, if you are buying something at the chemist, if I can't read the print on the box there is more often than not a braille label on the box, so it's useful for situations like that.

Researcher: So how helpful do you think braille will be to you once you have left education and are thinking more about employment?

Participant: I love braille, I will use it; start writing more in braille and stuff like that.

## 6 SELF-ADVOCACY AND SOCIAL SKILLS

The participants were asked how prepared they felt they were to self-advocate, and interact with other people. They were asked to think about the support they received whilst in school, and also of any support they may have received from family and friends.

### 6.1 EXPLAINING VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

#### 6.1.1 Preparation for explaining visual impairment

**Table 25: Did the participants receive any guidance during their time in education for how best to explain their visual impairment to others?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	1	3%
No	28	97%
Total	29	100%

The participants were asked whether they had received any guidance during their time in education for how best to explain their visual impairment to others. Only one participant said that they had received such guidance, while twenty eight participants had not.

**Table 26: How prepared did the participants feel to explain their visual impairment?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Prepared	20	59%
Not prepared	14	41%
Total	34	100%

The participants also spoke of how prepared they felt to explain their visual impairment. The responses were mixed with twenty participants stating that they felt prepared and fourteen that they did not. The question prompted one participant to ask the researcher whether they had any advice as it was something he was finding challenging:

Can I actually ask, with regards to that, I have been struggling with regards to this very recently... have you heard anything from other people as to how they deal with that?

The participant in question was later advised of a specialist service he could access to get further support with this.

One participant reflected back at his time starting in HE and the fact that explaining his visual impairment was harder than he had anticipated, whilst another participant reported that he felt unprepared once he started his apprenticeship:

No, and it was actually harder than I thought to explain to someone. Because I was so used to being in a college where everyone knew what a VI was. And now I am back into a place where no one really knows. I think it took a good couple of months for even just my flat mates to start realising the nature of my sight.

It was when I started my apprenticeship, I really didn't feel prepared, I felt like thrust into employment. Because I hadn't had any proper work experience, it's the first time I had been to work.

A further participant described how it was an ongoing struggle for her in knowing how to explain her visual impairment:

No, that's what I struggle with a lot, I have no idea how to explain how bad I am, or how good I am

One participant specifically identified her lack of preparation as a reason why she felt socially isolated when in school:

I think in [college] we didn't get that opportunity just because everyone was VI. Whereas in [school] I didn't really get any training let's call it, in how to tell my sighted peers what is wrong with me and how to act around me... That's probably why I didn't have many sighted friends at that point in [school]. Now [...] I've got mixed feelings about how to approach my blindness and sighted people, how to explain it to them...sometimes I actually stop and think 'how do I it, what if they don't accept me' because that's the kind of experience I got in secondary school.

Two participants stated that they had struggled in the past, but were now comfortable with explaining their visual impairment after getting older and having more experience of doing so:

My friends at school would ask me what was wrong with my eyes when I was like pre FE and I didn't really know what the answer

was. I remember going to the people in the SEN [department] and saying 'why do I need a laptop, everyone asks me why I need a laptop' and they would try and explain it, and I never really got a satisfying answer. And I partly wonder if that's because they didn't know... They knew I had bad eyesight and I had a statement, they knew I was associated with a hospital but they probably didn't know what my problem was, and they have a whole load of other students on their books

Two participants responded by saying that explaining their visual impairment to others was something that they did regularly:

I am constantly doing it, I am perfectly fine with that

In contrast, another participant felt that by informing others that she had a visual impairment, she was making herself more vulnerable to them:

I have always found as I got older, as soon as someone knows you instantly become vulnerable to someone, and I don't want to be that vulnerable person, I don't want to be made to feel vulnerable. So I would rather not say, and not have to cross that bridge.

One participant stated that while he felt confident in explaining his visual impairment, he would only do so if he felt he would otherwise be at a disadvantage, while another participant did not consider it necessary:

Yeah fine. I am absolutely... to be honest I wouldn't choose to mention it... I'd only choose to mention it if I felt it was holding me back and I needed to explain why

Several participants also stated that their confidence in explaining their visual impairment would differ according to whether they were speaking to someone in an official capacity (e.g. an employer or teacher) or explaining to a friend.

I find the workplace very easy. It's different chatting to your friends. My friends are aware of my visual impairment. The first thing people ask is 'why don't you drive'? And the second thing people ask is 'why don't you wear glasses', which really annoys me, I have had that for the past 22 years, well 15 years. At work it is easy enough because they will listen to you, whilst with friends

they just want to know what the hell's going on. It gets better over time.

### 6.1.2 Enablers and barriers for explaining visual impairment

Discussions with the participants who feel confident in explaining their visual impairment identified various enablers which appear to have led to them feeling prepared to explain their visual impairment, as well as a number of barriers.

**Table 27: Examples of enablers and barriers for explaining visual impairment?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>
Enabler – experiences which increase confidence	7
Enabler – comfortable to openly discuss VI	5
Enabler – understanding VI	3
Enabler – listening to explanations given by others when younger	3
Enabler – receiving advice	2
Barrier – concern it will create an uncomfortable situation	5
Barrier – limited opportunities in specialist setting	2
Barrier – worried will appear 'different'	1
Barrier – limited understanding of VI	1

Seven of the participants referred to experiences which have led to them feeling more confident in explaining their visual impairment:

No, but I am sort of got pretty good at explaining it naturally. Uni sort of taught me how to do it properly.

Responses from five participants indicated a link between the participant's confidence in explaining their visual impairment and an underlying comfort in talking to others about their disability:

No. It's not uncomfortable talking about being blind, it's just pretty normal. I never really needed any help with that, to me it's a normal thing for me to talk about, so I don't... I feel like other people, especially people who are going blind could benefit from it, but for me, I feel like... I am not uncomfortable with being blind, I don't feel like I am ashamed of it.

Three participants felt they benefited from their understanding of their visual impairment; this example illustrating how the participant has tried to navigate the issue over a long period:

When I was at school I struggled to explain it as I didn't know what the problem was, and no one really told me. But partly that might be because I am the kind of person that is not really satisfied with a simple answer, so I wanted to know the medical condition, the underlying...everything. So by the time I got to sixth form and I was doing biology A-level as well and I was starting to get an interest in medical stuff, I had googled it and I had figured out the exact genes that had gone faulty and had gone right down to really in depth detail level, so I kind of researched and found all about what it really was so that I could explain to people, in a way that...Because if you just say to people 'I have got bad eyesight', they are just like 'yeah me too, I also wear glasses, what prescription are you?'. And my prescription isn't actually ridiculously high, so I would say whatever it is, like 4 or whatever, and they would say 'well mine is 6, so I don't understand what your problem is' sort of thing. But I would be like 'yeah but I have got all these other things, like nystagmus' that were initially, but I didn't even know that it was called nystagmus until I googled it. I typed in 'wobbly eyes' into google, and I partly wonder if it wasn't really properly explained to me. I don't know whether it's because people thought I wouldn't understand. Or maybe they did tell me and I wasn't listening. Or they tried to tell me and I just genuinely didn't understand. I don't really remember.

Three participants benefited from listening to people (e.g. family members and teaching assistants) around them explaining their visual impairment on the young person's behalf, and being able to copy what they had said:

I didn't really have guidance as much, I just when I was growing up I listened to how my mum explained it, and then I have just added in my own view points, and that's how I have done it.

Finally, two participants received advice from others on how best to approach explaining their visual impairment:

Oh definitely more than prepared for it. In terms of guidance because my parents were fairly... they were open about it to people, they have not really held back in telling people that I am

blind, they have actually encouraged, openly told people to make things more accessible for me. So I have been able to touch things 'oh he is blind, can he feel this'... 'he is blind so he needs this'. That's taught me that it is the best thing you can say because it lets people know...hopefully how to treat you correctly. They have been completely open about it, so it's ok.

The main barrier as identified by five of the young people for explaining their visual impairment was a concern that it might create an uncomfortable situation:

I was more worried about what people would think of me rather than how I would describe it to them.

Similarly, one participant described how he is reluctant to explain to others his visual impairment as he is concerned it will make them look at him differently as a person:

If I explain the worst of my vision it's very off putting, from an employer's experience that's the case anyway, it's very off-putting to any employer.

Two participants felt restricted having been in a specialist VI setting, which they concluded limited their opportunity to speak to others about their visual impairment. Conversely, one participant who went from mainstream to a specialist setting described suddenly finding herself challenged in having to explain to those around her the extent of her visual impairment.

Finally, one participant felt restricted because she did not understand her visual impairment as her consultants had not been able to provide a diagnosis.



## 6.2 EXPLAINING SUPPORT NEEDED

### 6.2.1 Preparation for explaining support needs

The participants were asked whether they had received any guidance during their time in school in order to be able to explain the support they might need in new settings, such as higher education and employment.

**Table 28: Did the participants receive any guidance to prepare them to explain the support that they may need in new settings?**

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	12	32%
No	26	68%
Total	38	100%

Twelve participants reported that they had received such guidance, whilst 26 participants said that they had not. One participant questioned how appropriate it would be for educators to give such guidance:

The problem you have with some people is they assume that disability has a box and you can put everybody with a disability in that box, and everything that works for someone who is on the Aspergers, like on the spectrum, to physical disabilities to sensory disabilities and things like dyslexia, it's assumed that if one things works for one of them, it works for all of them. So sometimes I find having too much input from people sometimes is really annoying, because they try and put you in this box and they say 'this is what you should need', as opposed to what you want, or what you feel you need. Back to what I was saying at the beginning of the conversation, you need to ask a person, don't make any assumptions oh because they had this or this, you ask them.

The response of another participant provided a first-hand account of the type of problems the participant above identified:

But the complications come when people think they know better than what you know. You say 'I like working like this, and this is the best for me' and they say 'oh that sounds good, but we think it would work better like this'

Five of the participants recalled receiving guidance for requesting support in specific situations including moving into higher education (3),

starting a work placement (1), and explaining mobility support for a residential trip (1).

One participant responded by saying that he felt equipped for such situations having been informed of the responsibilities that others have towards people with disabilities.

Knowing about certain Acts are for Disabled including the Disability Discrimination and the Equality Act, we have made it work out through them pretty much.

**Table 29: Do the participants feel prepared to explain the support that they need?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Prepared	29	74%
Unprepared	10	36%
Total	39	100%

Twenty nine of the participants reported that they felt prepared for explaining their support needs (with varying degrees of confidence), and ten that they did not. It is worth noting that some of those participants who said that they would be prepared for explaining their support needs had not been in a position where it was necessary for them to do so, and therefore it will be interesting in future interviews to revisit this question. Additionally in many cases whilst they were explaining their support needs, they were doing so to people with some degree of specialist understanding (e.g. disability support officers and DSA needs assessors). Again it will be interesting to observe how prepared they are once out of an educational setting and into the labour market.

Definitely prepared... I was able to hit university guns blazing, knowing that I needed to do XYZ straight away. So much so that when I had a mentor I kind of knew everything that he could help me with, I had already done it, so that's how prepared I was.

Oh I was stressed, I panicked, I don't like telling people especially in a class full of people who don't know and I have got no other option but to tell you in front of everyone, it gets me a bit wound up.

One participant in particular identified that she needed some additional support in this area:

Yeah, I think so because sometimes I actually stop and think 'how do I do it, what if they don't accept me' because that's the kind of experience I got in secondary school. But with me what really annoys me is the way I act around people who can't tell I am blind. I am seeing this guy for quite a long time now, and he's still convinced I can see a little bit, and that gets frustrating because I don't know how to explain to him because then he says 'but how do you do this, and how do you do that'. For me it's normal, I don't know how to explain to someone how I do things, so I think it would have been a good lesson to have really

A further participant described being aware that she was not prepared for explaining her support needs at university as would be required and therefore requesting her DSA assessor (a specialist in visual impairment) to provide her with advice of what to say. After receiving this guidance she had the confidence to explain it independently to those she was working with at university:

Only from like my DSA assessor, I took a lot of guidance from her, because in the assessment I remember asking her 'what do I need to say to these people' because I didn't know either, because uni environment was going to be completely different. And that sort of guided me in then expressing what I needed for that placement before the summer, and for placements I have done since then, that's been my main sort of guidance really.

Finally, one participant reported that because he did not receive any guidance about explaining his support needs, he did not think to do this once at university and therefore did not receive any support for accessing his course:

I didn't get anyone guide me in where to go, so that's why I never had any support at all.

### **6.2.2 Enablers and barriers for explaining support needs**

When discussing how prepared they were to explain their support needs, the participants identified various factors which had acted as enablers towards them in explaining their needs, and also a number of barriers.

**Table 30: Enablers and barriers for explaining support needs**

	<b>Total (N)</b>
Enabler – experience of explaining support needs	12
Enabler – specialist advice	2
Enabler – encouraged to explain support needs	1
Enabler – conversations with family	1
Barrier – not understanding how to explain support needs	3
Barrier – being self-conscious	1
Barrier – lack of guidance	1
Barrier – lack of opportunity	1

The primary facilitator identified by twelve of the participants was having had previous opportunities to explain their support needs.

Yeah I think just over time you build up a bit of an arsenal of things I can say. That's through school and college I think.

I think I am confident about it because you know, it's 20 years of experience, so I had to learn my own way and had to learn it myself, but I know what I need and I know what I don't need, so I am happy, I am not stressed about it or nervous. I will just say this is what I need and this is what I don't need, but I had to learn it myself, I had figure it out myself, how to approach people about it in the first place.

Two participants highlighted the specialist advice that they had received. In particular, one young person benefited from being transferred to an adult consultant who spoke to her as an individual far more directly than she had experienced previously:

Very well, and I think that was also because when I turned 18 I stopped going to the [children's hospital] and moved to the [hospital]. At the [children's hospital] they always sort of talked to my Mum and Dad rather than me, because I didn't know too much about it. But with the [hospital] they now more talk to me rather than my parents, so I sort of have to know.

One participant benefited from being encouraged by those around her to self-advocate if she was struggling, and a further participant benefited from discussing the matter with his parents:

Yeah, I think that's something that I consistently got. If I would say I was struggling with something, or with seeing the board, I was consistently told that I needed to ask to sit at the front and stuff, so that's something that over the years I have become quite good at... Even in kind of situations with strangers I am still quite good at asking for help.

The main barrier identified by three of the participants was feeling like they did not understand how to explain their support needs:

I didn't feel very prepared, I didn't know how to explain what they needed to do. So it was a case that I went there and they asked me what I needed, and they could see I was a bit unsure of how to tell them.

One participant described being too self-conscious to ask for adjustments to be made:

Yeah. I am dreading going back to college to be honest because they on their whiteboard they use projectors and sometimes they don't line up the projectors properly, it's blurred to me... I can sit on the front row... but I won't say nothing at college, I just try and get on with it. It's annoying but I am in a class full of people I don't know, so I don't want to bring any attention to myself, and I know when I get home I have always got the online thing, the classroom is online again so I just watch that. I might just mention it to the teacher, but they don't really do anything about it, so there's no point.

One participant felt restricted having not received any guidance on how to approach explaining her visual impairment and a final participant felt that her lack of prior opportunity to self-advocate in such a way formed a considerable barrier:

I wasn't, I had no help explaining anything to anyone, and it makes it very difficult.

## 6.3 SELF-ADVOCATING WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

### 6.3.1 Preparation for self-advocating when things go wrong

**Table 31: Did the participants receive guidance on how to self-advocate in the event of things going wrong?**

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	1	3%
No	34	97%
Total	35	100%

The participants were asked whether they had received any guidance during their time in school to prepare them to be able to self-advocate in the event of things going wrong. For example this could be a lecturer consistently provided material in an inaccessible format, or if a work colleague failing to make necessary reasonable adjustments in the workplace. Only one participant reported receiving guidance of this nature, whilst 34 participants reported that they had not.

**Table 32: How prepared did the participants feel for self-advocating in the event of things going wrong?**

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Prepared	20	63%
Unprepared	12	38%
Total	32	100%

When asked how prepared the young people were for self-advocating in such a situation, the participants gave a variety of responses. Twenty participant's responses indicated that they would be confident in dealing with such a situation and twelve that they were not.

Yeah they are nice people, they are not... as most people would have us believe they are not superhuman beings, or aliens, or just anything remotely non-human. They are just normal people, and at the end of the day you just talk to them like normal people... kind of the same way I wish sighted people spoke to us.

Participant: Not very, I don't like causing trouble like that, you just get on with it you know.

Researcher: Did you have situations like that in school?

Participant: I had a few yeah. There was this one time I did walk out of a lesson because a teacher had a go at me about

something, so I just walked off and told one of my LSAs and she sorted it out.

### **6.3.2 How the participants would respond to difficult situations**

Ten participants discussed how they had independently learned to respond to such difficult situations, having not received any guidance from others. Their responses highlighted they viewed this as a situation which they needed to learn to manage independently.

I never really was given that guidance. But then I think that's one that I just had to figure out...

Two participants argued that it was not really possible to prepare for the types of situation they encountered:

I found it quite helpful, but I don't think, nothing can really prepare you for uni...

Three of the participants described how they had learned to interpret the situation to decide what cause of action was most appropriate:

No I just kind of figured it out in the sense that if it's something that makes me feel uncomfortable, but it's not damaging, then I can explain to someone. But then if it's actual discrimination I would challenge it more. I just worked it out myself when is a good time to challenge, and when is a time to educate rather than challenge.

While the majority of participants described how they would be open to the assistance of others to address any problems they were experiencing, the responses of two participants showed that they were more inward looking, seeking to solve the problem entirely independently:

Participant: I am used to it so I can get on with it in my own time without too much hassle.

Researcher: So you get on with it yourself then, is that what you are saying?

Participant: Yeah. It's quicker and easier in most cases.

In contrast, two of the participants described how they would expect to pass all responsibility onto another person. For example, when one participant was asked whether he had received any guidance from

people in school in how to self-advocate in the event of problems he responded:

Guidance? Well they are supposed to be the guidance as far as I was concerned, so I would go to them and say this is an issue, please sort it out.

Several participants described challenges that they had faced when advocating in such situations. Four participants described how they had been nervous when tackling the situation and four participants identified situations where they had tried to advocate but not being able to do so as they would have wished. One participant when reflecting back felt she would have benefited from some support to better prepare for such situations:

No, it would have been nice, because it would remind me that there are others out there who can help me, but obviously beggars can't be choosers so to speak.

While one participant felt confident to challenge others, this extra barrier meant he instead struggled to stay self-motivated at university which sometimes made it easier to ignore the difficult situation he was in:

If it was what I required, I chased up when I could, and kept trying to make contact when I needed to. I think one problem is when something like that happens... I mentioned earlier that I do have a problem that I procrastinate very easily. Suddenly when it is out of my control when I get to do any work, when I am waiting for something to happen before I can do my work, such as this time last year when my laptop was regularly breaking down and I had it sent away and there were days at a time where I couldn't work. I was chasing it up, but there was part of me that was like 'oh ok, I don't have to do any work!' Knowing that it was going to come back and bite me really hard later...It is one thing that is very hard, it meant that I had to force myself to ask people for help, you know... 'keep chasing up, keep chasing up, keep chasing up'... keep ringing the support and saying 'get it sorted, get it sorted, get it sorted'. There was part of me that was thinking 'no, take your time guys'.

A further participant seemed frustrated that she had lost some of her confidence for dealing with such situations:



Participant: When I first got to uni I was more confident doing it than I probably am now, which is interesting.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Participant: I have no idea. I go through stages.

Researcher: Have you had any bad experiences of doing that?

Participant: I have never had people be rude to me, but I have had no response to stuff.

Finally one participant reported that he would approach such problems by reminding the relevant parties of their legal responsibilities:

I explained to them that if they didn't do it, it could go to court and then they do pretty much... I've not had that problem yet... because most people don't like it when you refer to the Acts, they pretty much pick up then

### 6.3.3 Enablers for self-advocating when things go wrong

**Table 33: Examples of enablers for self-advocating when things go wrong**

	Total (N)
Underlying confidence	5
Encouraged to self-advocate when younger	5
Equipped through life experiences	5
Common sense	2
Able to develop positive working relations	2
Previous positive responses from others	1

The participants identified several examples of enablers in their responses which they felt had helped equip them for self-advocating in such situations.

Five participants identified the importance of an underlying confidence:

I think as I said before, I think it's all down to confidence, and if you are ready to tell folk

Similarly, five participants described how they had been encouraged when younger to speak up for themselves, and how that had boosted their confidence in tackling difficult situations as they have got older:

I was taught how to stand up for myself, I was taught how to assert myself, and I was taught to some extent what my rights were and that kind of thing, particularly at the school level. So that was fine, and I guess I just figured out how to extrapolate that.

Five participants reflected on how their life experiences had gradually equipped them for being able to confidently approach such situations now they are older, and two participants felt they benefited from having developed a good common sense:

Researcher: If you had gone straight from sixth form to university do you think you would have been prepared, or was it those years in between?

Participant: Sixth form, yeah, [school] no. Sixth form not completely, but yes, more so. I definitely think being older and having more experience helped.

A further enabler identified by two participants was being able to develop good relations with those around you, to make it easier to have such difficult conversations when required:

It can be a bit intimidating, but you kind of have to get past it, and if you have really good relationships with somebody it's ok.

Finally, one participant described how she had found self-advocating challenging at first, but had her confidence boosted having received such a positive response:

I feel comfortable around them, they are easy to tell when they have done something wrong, and they were quite friendly, so they knew if I had had a problem then I would tell them. But the first time I had to tell them I was shaky about it but after that when I realised they were ok about it I was better with it.

## 6.4 KNOWING ABOUT DISABILITY RELATED BENEFITS

### 6.4.1 Guidance received on disability related benefits

**Table 34: Have the participants received any guidance on disability related benefits?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	10	43%
No	13	57%
Total	23	100%

The participants were asked if they had received during their time in school any guidance on the disability related benefits that they may be entitled to. Ten of the participants recalled having received some form of guidance, and thirteen participants said that they had not.

Not yet, I suspect am going to get some support relating to that once I leave Higher Education.

The participants who had received guidance identified various sources of this:

- their specialist school/college (2)
- ILS teacher (2)
- social services (1)
- mobility officer (1)
- visiting QTVI (1)
- Connexions (1)
- Action for Blind People (1).

Participant: Yeah my mobility officer used to do all that for me. He helped me change from the DLA to...

Researcher: PIP?

Participant: Yeah, that's it!

During these discussions various types of disability related benefits were identified by the participants. These included PIP/DLA, employment benefits, housing benefits, DSA and free bus passes.

Five of the participants who said that they had not received any guidance also indicated that they tend to rely on family members to lead with such matters:

No my Mother deals a lot with my financial standing, so she is sorting out stuff.

Three of the participants also expressed some confusion over what benefits they were entitled to, including two who had spoken to friends who were receiving a type of benefit which they were not:

... mostly through friends. When I get back I will have to reapply for all the benefits and I didn't realise until last year that I was able to get ESA, I haven't been claiming that.

One participant had incorrectly assumed she would not be entitled to any support which had led to a delay in her applying for DSA and further uncertainty regarding other benefits which she may have been entitled to:

I guess because I didn't feel like my problems were disability in the classical sense. My eyes aren't quite bad enough to be as a full on disability...I didn't really think I was eligible to anything in terms of benefits. Then I got to uni and they said I was eligible for DSA... But I still don't know if I am eligible for any other benefits. I kind of assume I am not, but maybe I am, disabled allowance or whatever...I have my bus pass, I can't remember who told me about applying for that. I have got the bus pass. That has been a game changer, it's a massive help. I am just trying to remember, I think I might have just stumbled on that on my own. In hindsight that surprises me as it's such a massive thing, and it's something that would have been really... was eligible for it from I think age 15, I think quite young, and I spent two or three years paying full fare on buses where I didn't actually have to. And I don't think anyone at school or my advisors told me about that, which surprises me now as it's such a simple thing to apply for and it makes such a difference

Conversations with one participant highlighted tensions between him and his Mother who did not think it appropriate for him to be receiving benefits:

My Mother hates it to be fair to her, for example my DLA...she hates because I am working and stuff, she hates me having that and she argues about it. I am like 'Mum, I use it for transport', or I use it...you know, if I do need to get to work and I can't get to work because they are busy, they are out, they have their own lives...

So if I do get called into work and it's raining, tipping it down and I am having a bad day with my eyes and I don't want to walk I will get a taxi, and that's what I use it for.

A final participant indicated that benefit entitlements were not of particular concern to him:

No, not really. I just get on with working life day to day.

#### **6.4.2 How well equipped do the participants feel regarding disability related benefits?**

**Table 35: How prepared do the participants feel regarding disability related benefits?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Unprepared	9	69%
Prepared	4	31%
Total	13	100%

The participants were asked how well equipped they felt for knowing about disability related benefits for once they had left compulsory education and were living as independent adults. Nine participants stated that they did not feel prepared whilst four felt that they were.

I feel pretty prepared now, and I have clued up my mum as well, so she knows how things work.

No not very. I have been struggling with it actually. It's actually an issue which I haven't been able to... I have been wanting to find advice about it, and what I am entitled to and how to apply for it and stuff. It's difficult to find information about that.

Some additional observations were made by the participants. For example, one participant had particular concerns about inaccessible forms:

I suppose the one thing that has never been cleared up is form filling and things like that. That's still something that, I don't really know, they send you through print forms and you sit with this 24 page thing that you can't do anything with... Especially DLA, DLA is the worst, because they won't do that over the phone. But again I suppose it's something that doesn't bother me because I am quite

sort of able and my disability is what it is, I don't have psychological stuff going on, there's nothing unexpected that is going to come out of the form, I am quite happy to sort of sit with my printed friend and go to one of my friends and say 'have you an hour or so that you could help me write this in' I suppose if I had something sort of a bit more medically personal, I think that would be quite problematic, so I have got round it by not worrying about it really

Finally three participants highlighted a degree of uncertainty around benefits and what they might be entitled to due to hearing about cuts to welfare funding:

I don't really know, I have a feeling there is quite a lot I am probably entitled to, that I am not aware of. Obviously they are cutting everything now, so it's difficult to know where to look because everything is changing all the time, and it's harder and harder to get anything. So I wouldn't really know where to look.

## 7 MOBILITY AND ORIENTATION

The participants were asked some questions about how prepared they felt they were for getting around independently. These questions investigated:

- Their confidence getting around their local area
- Their confidence in learning new routes
- Their confidence in using public transport

### 7.1 MOBILITY/ORIENTATION AROUND YOUR LOCAL AREA

**Table 36: Did the participants ever receive any mobility support to help them get around independently in their local area?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Received	31	72%
Not received	12	28%
Total	43	100%

The participants were asked whether they had ever received any mobility support to help them in getting around independently in their local area during their time in school. Thirty one of the participants reported having received mobility support around their local area when in school, whilst twelve report that they did not.

**Table 37: How helpful was the mobility support the participants received in their local area?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Helpful	15	58%
Unhelpful	11	42%
Total	26	100%

Of those who received such mobility support, 15 of the participants viewed the support they had received as helpful, and 11 as unhelpful. These 'unhelpful' experiences were often attributed to the way in which the training had been delivered.

During the course of discussions with the participants they identified several ways in which the mobility support they received had been helpful to them. These are summarised in the table below.

**Table 38: Examples of how mobility support in local area proved helpful**

	<b>Total (N)</b>
Learned important routes	4
Built up mobility skills (e.g. cane techniques)	4
Boosted confidence	3
Support individually tailored	3
Received sufficient sessions	3
Boosted independence	2
Mobility support started at a young age	1
Given opportunity to practice mobility skills	1
Consistency with mobility officer	1

Four participants benefited from being able to learn important routes, for example being able to get from their home to school independently. Two participants felt their independence was improved as a consequence:

I did find it helpful when going from primary school to secondary school, like the walk to school, I found the best way to go and that was useful.

I would say very helpful, that mobility training that I had... I did bus mobility and learned my route to college so I could get there on my own

Four participants benefited from being able to build up their mobility skills including cane techniques:

Very much actually, because I learnt how to use my cane there which I needed, and I learned how to get around really.

Three participants reported that the mobility support they received boosted their confidence:

Yeah it was very helpful, it boosted my confidence, even now when I don't know where I am going I do feel more confident because I know I can do it if I concentrate.

Three participants felt that they benefited from having received individually tailored support and three participants viewed having regular mobility sessions as beneficial:



I think they get to know the way you navigate and remember things, and they make it how you would navigate, so they get used to you, and you get used to their way of teaching

When I went to [sixth form] I thought I was getting loads because there was a session every week but like a few weeks before starting [university] I had mobility like 3-4 hours each day running up to starting, and that was like even better, so I learnt so much in such a short space of time. Like I learnt the majority of the campus because I started and my routes from accommodation, all the places I needed to be within a few days and the shops within the area, and we are still working together to branch out into train stations and stuff now.

**Table 39: Examples of how mobility support in local area proved unhelpful**

	<b>Total (N)</b>
Support not individually tailored	4
Not sufficient sessions	3
Resistant to using a cane	5
Participant self-conscious	3
Pace of sessions too slow	2
Unhelpful structure to sessions	1
Sessions ineffective	1

The participants also identified several ways in which the mobility support they have received for their local area had been unhelpful. Four participants found it problematic that the support was not individually tailored to them. For example, one participant felt that the mobility officer did not take into account sufficiently the way in which his visual impairment affects him:

Well I suppose [specialist college] had their ways of doing things and they thought of me as quite hostile and difficult. And so they did what they could to... well I don't think their priority was to help me. In [local authority] the mobility office was very aware of me individually and my condition and how it affects me compared to other people, so he was more able to give me advice which is helpful.

Three participants did not feel they had received sufficient sessions during their time in compulsory education to experience any real benefit. All participants who made this observation had moved from mainstream

school (where they received minimal mobility support) to specialist settings (where they had access to more frequent sessions). In particular one participant reflected on how when she was younger she took advantage of the fact that the mobility officer supporting her was stretched to get out mobility sessions:

I had some mobility in school and around my local area. It wasn't very consistent... It was something that I was very reluctant to do, and it was something that I could very easily get out of doing... There should have been more sort of... I take responsibility in saying that I really didn't want to do it, so I pulled out all the stops in trying to not do it... But it was really easy to do, and it happened so rarely... And a lot of the time it got cancelled because there was one person covering the whole County or something, so I would have two or three sessions at school, and then more often than not it would get cancelled and rearranged, so it was never something very consistent and never something positive

Three participants were unhappy with the mobility sessions that they received as they did not want to use a cane which they deemed to be unnecessary:

Yeah like once or twice, and I wouldn't do it again. The reason they stopped doing it was because I wouldn't use blind stick, I didn't need it. They gave me a blind stick at the age of 13, why do I need it now. So yeah they stopped that because I wouldn't use a blind stick.

A further two participants described how they were resistant to mobility support as while they needed to use a cane, they were very self-conscious using it. One of these participants identified her mobility officer at university as being very important in helping her overcome this challenge as she helped her overcome some of her insecurities:

...when I was at home it was something that made me more different and made me stand out, because I never used my cane when I was at home, never ever, apart from when I had mobility. Then when I went to uni, I have told you before about the difficulties, when I did it it was something more positive because it was something quite essential in being able to be more independent. My rehab worker at [university] as well, she was visually impaired herself, and she sort of helped, she was relatable to me at that time when I had gone back into a mainstream setting

and felt that... it was nice to be able to relate to someone like that again. In all honesty... I don't know whether it's because she's VI herself, but she just seemed the best at teaching it. I learned a lot from her.

A further three participants reported feeling self-conscious when receiving their mobility training including one participant who declined it:

I think just because I didn't want to be seen getting help and also because I know the area anyway.

Other examples of unhelpful aspects of the mobility support which were identified included:

- slow pace to the mobility programme having
- unhelpful structure to the mobility programme
- mobility sessions being ineffective.

The mobility sessions were helpful, but they went in kind of a system where you would have to pass a certain route before you could go onto the next... Now that makes sense, except for the fact that every student is going to take a different amount of time to pass a particular route, which means that by the time you leave or by the time you get to a point where your mobility lessons no longer happen – i.e. sixth form – then they may not have learned every single skill that they could possibly learn.

## 7.2 LEARNING TO GET ABOUT IN NEW ENVIRONMENTS

**Table 40: Did the participants receive any mobility support to be prepared to get about in new areas?**

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	4	15%
No	23	85%
Total	27	100%

The participants were asked whether they had received any mobility support during their time in education to provide them with the necessary skills to learn to get about in areas that were new to them.

Only four participants felt that they had received training which was specifically designed to help them learn to navigate new places. One participant received this support privately:

Participant: I had training from [mobility officer] around the estate, he did a lot of work on if you get lost how to retrace your steps, teaching me echo location that really helped, getting a picture of your surroundings, knowing how to ask people, what to ask people, being able to ask people... having the confidence to do that.

Researcher: Was there a bit of a gap then that [mobility officer] filled in your mobility?

Participant: Oh definitely yeah. Rather than just doing set routes... transferrable skills.

**Table 41: How prepared were the participants for getting about in new areas?**

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Prepared	19	49%
Unprepared	20	51%
Total	39	100%

The participants were asked how prepared they felt by the time they left compulsory education to move to a new area and learn how to get around independently. The responses were mixed, with 19 participants reporting that they felt prepared and twenty participants that they did not.

Researcher: On reflection how prepared would you be for doing that? Say you wanted to, there was a job in a different town and you wanted to get there independently, how prepared...

Participant: I just wouldn't, I wouldn't put myself in that situation.

I think with the support that I got given over the past, I have seen how people obviously look around the area first and get to know their surroundings before... So I would say I would be prepared for going to new areas really.

**Table 42: Factors considered beneficial when learning to navigate new environments**

	<b>Total (N)</b>
Support to navigate new area	11
Online maps and GPS	5
Motivation to be independent	2
Previous experience	1

The participants identified several factors which they considered beneficial for learning to navigate new environments. Eleven participants reported that they would feel prepared, providing they had support to help to learn new routes in the area. Three participant's responses revealed they had previously received support of this nature from family members:

I can learn routes relatively well, so I was taught initial routes by my note-takers who were like my sighted guides when I first arrived. But after a few weeks in once I figured out to get to places myself I didn't need assistance anymore

I felt quite comfortable, because as soon as I got here and moved in, I had already visited twice, and my mum and me went around a few places just so I knew where the local things were.

Five participants identified GPS and internet maps as helpful tools which give them confidence in exploring new areas:

I think I would be alright. Technology now I have everything set on phone. Things like Google maps I will be able to find my work around. I am quite confident going around and having a wander anyway.

Two participants described how they motivated themselves to learn to get about in new areas because of their desire to be as independent as possible:

I would attribute quite a bit of that to the social scene at [specialist school]. It was a point of pride, it was a point of...yeah a point of pride, how you weren't going to let being blind stop you. You were going to keep going and... 'just deal with it man, just deal with it!' Yeah, that was it really, it was not being a wimp. Yeah that's it.

A final participant identified how her confidence had increased significantly during a gap year, and she was later able to transfer this new found confidence into her new university setting.

### 7.3 USING PUBLIC TRANSPORT

**Table 43: Did the participants receive any mobility training for using public transport independently?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Yes	20	65%
No	11	35%
Total	31	100%

The participants were asked whether they had received any training during their time in school to learn to use public transport independently. Twenty participants reported that they had received such support, while eleven participants stated that they had not. This support however often was restricted to the type of transport the participant required to get to and from their educational establishment.

Researcher: You say they were showing you using public transport as well, how helpful did you find that?

Participant: Very helpful yeah, I actually had difficulty using buses before I was shown mobility with it because I couldn't see schedules and just generally seeing the bus really. But after it I just got used to using it really, and using magnifiers to see schedules and seeing stuff from a distance.

Yeah, it was...I had to use public transport when I moved up to do my A-levels, it was the quickest option from house to school, I had to use public transport then, it was bus.

**Table 44: How prepared did the participants feel for using public transport independently?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Prepared	21	55%
Not prepared	17	45%
Total	38	100%

The participants were also asked if they had felt prepared to use public transport independently once they left compulsory education. Twenty one participants reported that they felt prepared and seventeen participants that they did not.

Trains are my best friend, I kind of have to use them an awful lot.

I used trains but I wouldn't feel confident doing it on my own.

The participants identified several examples of enablers which they considered to be significant in their preparation for using public transport.

**Table 45: Factors considered beneficial when learning to navigate new environments**

	<b>Total (N)</b>
Opportunity to practice	9
Support from family and friends	5
Preparatory research	3
Mobility support	2
Rail assistance	1

Nine participants identified the significance having had opportunities to experience using public transport independently. The more they had used public transport, the more confident they had become:

I think it was just a case of when I first got trains back and buses around everywhere, because now I get the bus everywhere it was just a case of the first few times someone came with me, and then once I got used to it then it was alright.

But I think that's just in practice, and getting used to travelling on trains, and getting used to where to go. I think everyone has that when they first start taking trains and buses, particularly in busy cities. I think everyone has that period when they are 16/17 or whatever age it is where they have to get used to how stations work and platforms and all that kind of stuff. But I think that was just practice.

Five participants benefited from the support of family and friends in boosting their confidence to use public transport independently:

I would do if someone told me which route I was going and that, I wouldn't otherwise.

Similarly three participants said they have benefited from researching into the journeys they intended to make:



If it were further afield say Bristol or something like that that I didn't know, as I say I would google maps it, and I would know exactly where I am going, I will have an idea in my head then, and I would just ask somebody if I needed it.

Two participants specifically identified the mobility support they had received as important in preparing for using public transport. One participant acknowledged the importance of rail assistance:

I have been able to travel independently on my own via public transport via train, but that was because of the information I was given about assistance services, like rail assistance.

Several examples of barriers were identified through the participant's statements:

**Table 46: Barriers identified for using public transport**

	<b>Total (N)</b>
Feeling anxious	3
Lack of knowledge	2
Infrequent mobility sessions	2
Lack of opportunity to practice	1
Feeling self-conscious	1
Lack of transferable skills	1

Three of the participants reported feeling anxious about using public transport and one participant said they had been restricted in the past due to feeling too self-conscious to ask for help:

Trains are something I have always been a lot more confident with than buses, the trains I did a lot of at [sixth form], buses not so much. And again, it's a case of something that I was anxious about, I didn't want to do it, so we just didn't...

You just need to ask... the other thing, the main part of it that I have progressed is that I have literally stopped caring about asking people.

Two participants felt they had been restricted due to infrequent mobility sessions meaning they were unable to develop the skills required, whilst two participants had been unaware of the services which could assist them:

I never because, we can get train assistants, you can book train assistants who put you on and off trains and no one ever told me that until I got to [specialist college], I don't know if people in [school] knew or not I was just never taught that. When I was in [specialist college] I even got the number and stuff, so that was pretty cool.

Finally one participant found that while she had received support in using local public transport, she did not feel confident enough to apply this to new situations:

Researcher: How much did they do on buses?

Participant: It was only the bus from area into town, my area is reasonably easy to do it.

Researcher: So what they did with you in that bus route, how helpful did you find that?

Participant: I did find it helpful at time for other situations I was dealing with, but for new situations I didn't feel all that prepared in finding places I needed to go and things like that.

## 8 INDEPENDENT LIVING

In the final section of the interview the participants were asked some questions about Independent Living Skills training that they may have received whilst in education. These questions investigated their experiences of:

- Cooking and preparing food independently
- Organisation and independent living skills in a home environment
- Shopping independently

For some of the young people these were complex questions as typical teenagers often have some difficulties in living independently due to a lack of experience. Therefore it was emphasised that the young person should consider their responses specifically in relation to their visual impairment.

### 8.1 COOKING AND PREPARING FOOD

The participants were asked whether they had received any specialist training during their time in compulsory education to prepare them for cooking and preparing food, and to overcome challenges that they may face in relation to their visual impairment.

**Table 47: Did the participants receive any specialist training for cooking and preparing food?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Received	12	32%
Not received	26	68%
Total	38	100%

Twelve participants reported receiving training specific to their visual impairment to help prepare them for cooking and preparing food and twenty six participants reported that they did not. Additionally four of the participants reported that they did not receive this support when in compulsory education within mainstream settings, but eventually received it in sixth form/FE college when they moved into specialist settings.

Researcher: When you were in mainstream did you have anything like that, in terms of ILS?

Participant: No nothing.

Researcher: Was it even acknowledged?

Participant: It was, it was always viewed as mobility first, and then ILS second, so it was always viewed as a long term thing rather than, you know.

Researcher: So I guess you got to the age where you could have been leaving school?

Participant: Definitely, I was 16 and I don't know, I could make myself a cup of tea and that was about it!

The participants were also asked whether they felt prepared to cook and prepare food independently once they had left compulsory education. Those participants who had moved from mainstream into specialist Sixth Form/FE settings were asked if they had been prepared both before moving and afterwards.

**Table 48: Did the participants feel prepared to cook and prepare food independently?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Prepared	20	63%
Not prepared	12	38%
Total	32	100%

Twenty participants reported feeling prepared to cook and prepare food independently once they left compulsory education, whilst twelve felt unprepared. Of the four participants who moved into specialist settings at age 16, only one felt prepared to cook and prepare food independently at that age, but all felt prepared once they completed Sixth Form/College having had independent living skills as part of the curriculum.

Researcher: How prepared?

Participant: Relatively well prepared, I had a bit of practice beforehand when I was at home, I got used to it through two years in sixth form, I felt I knew what I was doing.

Researcher: When you did move out how prepared did you feel?

Participant: I'd say like 10% because I knew I could buy microwave meals! That was it!

It frustrates me that I am 19 and I don't know how to cook or clean. I got to know the washing machine but that's because it's three buttons and I memorised which buttons to press.

Further themes were identified in the participant's responses, and these are summarised below.

Eight of the participants responded by saying that they have cooked regularly, and therefore from experience could confidently state that they were prepared for doing this independently.

Yeah I cook tea mostly every night for everybody

Five of the participants described how they had developed their own individual solutions to overcome the challenges they face with their visual impairment when cooking and preparing food:

Not such an issue, I quite enjoy doing it really. I always think, well funnily enough about an hour ago I was cooking tea... I put the pans the furthest away from me and I always memorise where the handles are. I have got quite big pans anyway, I think it's for that reason. It would take some force to knock over, but I always think where they are because I always imagine myself knocking them over and burning myself. I am constantly knocking things in the kitchen, it's personal habit really, but I always memorise where things are if I can

In contrast four of the participants who had been living independently reported being somewhat reliant on friends and family around them:

Probably not really prepared at all. Like I said, my family helped me with that mostly, and through university I had housemates that would offer a bit of help if I needed it.

Six participants described diverse attitudes of family members. Three participants recalled how they were encouraged by their family to cook independently:

Participant: Yeah I was fine.

Researcher: What would you attribute that to?

Participant: I think it's always having had to have done it. My Mum is sort of a big believer in kids should I guess earn their keep, so by the time I started I could sort of put washing into the washing machine and the tumble drier and I knew how to do the hoovering and fold things and make the bed. I think as well again, my mum, she is really into cooking, so I think a lot of that is just you know,

it's good to sort of get involved and we used to spend a lot of time in the kitchen, so I picked things up from there.

In contrast three participants felt restricted by their parents who were worried about their safety in the kitchen, and therefore did not provide them with such opportunities:

No, my parents were like you can't go near it, it's 'too hot'. I was like 'I am not stupid, I can do it'.

Several of the participants discussed the opportunities they had had to cook and prepare food independently. Eight felt that they had been limited in the opportunities received

I did but it was crappy to be honest. I had one session every two weeks. Then I had one teacher who was learning how to be an ILS teacher and was too scared to teach me and I ended up teaching myself mostly... They tried to teach me some meals and stuff but mostly it was just her doing things and expecting me to watch... So it wasn't very good.

Seven participants could only remember having food technology lessons as part of the standard school curriculum. One participant recalled feeling excluded in those classes:

Participant: Not very included, not until I got my helper anyway, I didn't feel very included... I felt completely left out and out of my depth, because I wasn't getting any individual help that I needed.  
Researcher: Did you ever have anything a bit more specialist in terms of cooking and preparing food?  
Participant: No I didn't get any of that through school

One participant who did receive specialist support was frustrated at the teacher's reliance on talking equipment as she did not think it realistic for her to have such a range of devices:

I think the only thing that I found a massive disadvantage in living skills lessons is that they used a lot of talking equipment, and in reality you won't have that option. Some of the teachers were actually very good and they would tell you what you would do if you didn't have that talking equipment, others weren't really good about it.

## 8.2 ORGANISATION AND INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS IN HOME ENVIRONMENT

The participants were asked whether they had received any specialist support to equip them with tasks around the home such as keeping their belongings organised and cleaning.

**Table 49: Did the participants receive any specialist training for organising and cleaning their home environment?**

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Received	9	41%
Not received	13	59%
Total	22	100%

Nine participants called receiving support of this nature with a further thirteen saying that they had not.

**Table 50: How prepared were the participants for organising and cleaning their home environment independently?**

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Prepared	14	70%
Not prepared	6	30%
Total	20	100%

Fourteen of the participants reported feeling prepared for organising their home environment, but six participants did not.

Yeah very prepared, I don't think I could be any more in terms of that side of stuff.

Apart from learning some things from my family, probably not much at all

Five participants who attended specialist schools and colleges reported they despite receiving some assistance, they did not receive the full extent of support they felt they should have had:

They did kind of do stuff concerning... because they had different areas in the ILS room, and we did do stuff like how to clean if you had onions on the cooker, that kind of thing, but I would say that was kind of limited, they could have done more on it organising your home.

Four participants highlighted the importance of additional support from family members:

Researcher: Do you think you were well prepared for that kind of thing, once you left education?

Participant: Yeah, again, it wasn't down to the school, it wasn't down to [specialist school], we didn't get any of that. I think my family.

In contrast one participant stated that he felt restricted by his family in developing such skills:

It's not my favourite area, but in all seriously it's something that I would desperately want to improve, and I make no jest on that. I am desperately trying to... parents being like they are



### 8.3 SHOPPING INDEPENDENTLY

Finally the participants were asked whether they had received any specialist support for shopping independently prior to leaving compulsory education.

**Table 51: Did the participants receive any specialist training for shopping independently?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Received	9	36%
Not received	16	64%
Total	25	100%

Nine participants reported that they had received such support, and sixteen that they had not. Three of these participants later received support once they moved into specialist settings.

**Table 52: How prepared were the participants for shopping independently?**

	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Prepared	15	63%
Not prepared	9	38%
Total	24	100%

Fifteen participants felt they were prepared for shopping independently, whilst nine participants did not.

Researcher: How about shopping?

Participant: Ah, that's where it becomes a problem. Like literally finding stuff on shelves is an absolute nightmare. When I am older and stuff I will get round that by doing online shopping.

Researcher: Did you know that when you go into a supermarket and if you go to customer services they should give someone to go around and help you identify things, has anyone told you about that?

Participant: No!

Five participants reported that they feel restricted by not being able to read the small writing on packaging, and three participants reported never shopping for clothes independently.

As far as shopping goes, unless I know what I looking at, finding the labels and finding what's what can be difficult sometimes, especially with medication and stuff.

Four participants said that they had learned to ask for assistance when required, usually from the customer service desk in a supermarket:

Generally speaking now I will ask in assistance where something is and they will find it for me, unless it's really obvious something like pasta or something like that.

Three participants described how they often overcome the challenge of navigating a shop by using online shopping instead:

I mainly do a lot of my shopping online because that's much easier for me to access than to physically go around the shops.

Three participants have benefited from support from their family to help build up their confidence for shopping independently, and three improved their confidence through mobility support:

I would say I was prepared, it was down to my family that supported me on those things, they have been able to provide me with that.

...when I was doing guide dog training, my dog trainer would get me to go into shops and ask for things as part of the dog training... I guess that kind of helped me, I really used to hate talking to people in shops, I hated going in and having to ask, but now I just walk in and... she made me do that which was really good. It wasn't a case of not being able to do it, it was a case of trying to avoid doing it!

Other examples of experiences which had benefited the participants for shopping independently included:

- a participant reporting that her confidence increased for shopping independently during a gap year abroad
- a participant describing using low vision aids to read small writing on packaging
- a participant describing how he chooses to go to shops when he knows they will be quieter and therefore easier to navigate

I tend to go at fairly unsociable hours only because the supermarket that I have got gets very busy and if you go after work on a Monday it's heaving. So I tend to go when it's quieter as people walk right in front of you and I don't particularly want that. I am finding it alright.

## **9 PROJECT OUTCOMES AND FUTURE PLANS**

This publication is part of a series of reports from the Longitudinal Transitions Study, which is following the transition experiences of over 80 young people with visual impairments. The project commenced in autumn 2009, and we have working alongside the young people since 2010. Funding has been received in three phases:

- Phase 1: 2009-2011 - Royal National Institute of Blind People
- Phase 2: 2012-2015 - Nuffield Foundation
- Phase 3: 2015 onwards - Thomas Pocklington Trust

The study aims to track the experiences of the participants as they continue their transition towards the labour market. Over 60 of young people remain active participants in the project.

We continue to apply our research findings in more practical ways, such as by developing resources to help both young people with visual impairment navigating various transitions and those professionals supporting them.

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