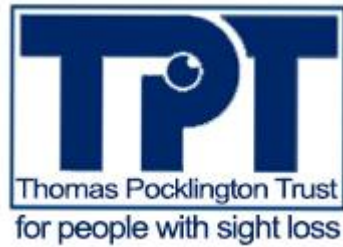


UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



The Transition Experiences of Young People with Vision Impairment aged 21 to 24

Briefing two of findings to November 2017

Employment readiness: Briefing Two

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Readiness for employment

This is the second briefing reporting on the latest findings of the University of Birmingham Longitudinal Transition Study, looking specifically at the experiences in education, the workplace, voluntary work, and those who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). It focuses on how 'work ready' the young people involved in the study were aged 21-24.

A number of key barriers for the young people involved in the study from 'work ready' include:

- A lack of mobility skills impacted on the confidence and ability for participants to get around independently in new areas, and sometimes limited them in their job search
- A reliance on public transport meant that some had to navigate complex and longer routes to get to the workplace
- Some displayed a lack of confidence and knowledge in the IT skills that they might need in the workplace.

About the research

The University of Birmingham Longitudinal Transition Study began in 2009 and initially followed the journey of approximately 80 young people with vision impairment, from education into employment. This briefing reports on the latest findings.

The latest stage of the research interviewed in total 48 of the original participants. The participants were interviewed over the phone, and they were asked the most relevant sets of the questions to their circumstances, therefore not all answers total 48.

UK Labour Force Survey: identifying as disabled

The participants were asked a series of questions from the UK Labour Force Survey to ascertain whether young people identified themselves as having a disability.

Of the **41** participants who answered:

- 80 per cent (**33**) identified as having a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more
- **Eight** participants identified that they did not, despite being registered as vision impaired or severe vision impaired. Despite responding 'no' to this question, **five** of the

participants had previously identified ways in which they faced challenges in the workplace, specifically in relation to their vision impairment.

Enabler employment assessment toolkit

Questions were taken from an Employment Assessment Toolkit to establish how prepared young adults with vision impairment are for employment and to identify areas where targeted support may be required.

Key findings from the assessment

- **Eleven** of the participants reported that they had undertaken some job search activities in the previous three months before interview. **Five** of these participants were NEET, **one** in voluntary work, four in full-time education and **one** in temporary employment. Of these eleven participants, **six** were successful in finding employment.

Use of computers

- The level of confidence and frequency in using email varied across the participants. Two-thirds reported that they were 'very confident', but three participants rated their confidence as low or 'not at all confident'
- Similar responses were given to the questions of 'how confident are you using the internet?' and 'how frequently do you use the internet?' While all but two of the participants stated that they use the internet 'very frequently', not all were fully confident in doing so.

“To be honest I would probably say to them [employer] like I can't use a PC, if it is part of the job description. I totally understand, but I would be up front with them and say there are going to be times where if a computer is needed I am not going to be able to do it.”

“Internet research and things like that, trawling through loads of websites is something I struggle with... I had help at school. I am better than I used to be.”

Independent travel

- The participants were asked how confident they are in travelling independently from home to a familiar place in the daylight, rating

from 'very confident' to 'not at all confident'. Most participants were confident with doing this, with 57 per cent of participants rating their confidence high. However, **two** rated their confidence as low

- The participants were then asked how often they travel independently from home to a familiar place in the daylight, from 'everyday' to 'never'. The responses were mixed, but most participants reported that they regularly travel independently to a familiar place
- The participants were also asked how confident they are traveling independently from home to an unfamiliar place, from 'very confident' to 'not at all confident'. The participants were less positive than with the previous questions, with only 21 per cent of the participants rating their confidence as high and 12 per cent of participants rating their confidence as very low
- They were then asked whether they thought they could benefit from additional skills for independent travel. **Fourteen** of the participants felt that they could benefit from additional independent travel skills, while **nineteen** did not.

"I would say 1 [confidence level]. If I am not familiar with the place I would start to panic. I probably could be at the moment I don't tend to travel to places I don't know, or if I do I always have someone there to help."

Seven of the participants specifically mentioned public transport. Primarily this was because they believed they needed to improve their skills in using public transport.

"Probably buses I am not very good with."

"I can't really get a bus to a place on my own."

"Just to make sure I am safe. Because with trains you have got gaps and I don't feel safe with them."

"Starting using the cane earlier, or if it's just getting used to it earlier, rather than introducing it in the middle, when I only just lost my sight and was dealing with other stuff anyway... And I just didn't want to stand out with the cane and it makes you stand out."

Vision and independence in the workplace

Participants were asked to respond to the following question: “Evidence suggests many employers assume blind and partially sighted people cannot perform certain tasks because of their sight loss. How confident do you feel discussing your skills with potential employers on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is ‘very confident’ and 1 is ‘not at all confident’?”. Most participants indicated that they would feel confident in responding to this question, with 78 per cent participants responding with either 5 or 6, and only two participants (6 per cent) responding with ‘3’, which was the lowest response given.

The participants had an opportunity to expand upon their response and to provide an explanation for the level of confidence they had in dealing with such situations.

Several participants highlighted in their response that they thought it was important to be honest with potential employers about their vision impairment and how it could impact upon them in the workplace.

“There’s no point in lying is there...I would tell them how I can do it, I would say this is what I can do, I would say it honestly.”

Strategies and enablers for challenging employer’s perceptions

Enablers:

- Underlying confidence
- Benefiting from previous experiences to drawn upon
- Upbringing and self-belief.

Strategies:

- Not telling the employer that they are wrong, but demonstrating that being blind is not a barrier
- Explaining to the employer how screen readers and other assistive equipment works
- Challenging the employer about any misjudgements they might have.

Importance of paid or voluntary work

Finally, the participants who were searching for work were asked “How important is being in work (voluntary or paid) to you at this moment on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is ‘very important’ and 1 is ‘not at all important’?”.

The responses were mixed, ranging from 2 to 6, but the majority (seven or 70 per cent) gave a response of 5 or 6.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

Whilst confidence levels are high amongst some of the participants, the findings show that there are some common barriers in place including limited computer skills and independence skills.

There is a need for mobility training to be available throughout a young person's life. A broad perspective must be taken and the skills the young person needs at the time and once they leave compulsory education and go into adulthood.

About the research

The study was designed in 2009 by a team from RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) and the Vision Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR) at the University of Birmingham.

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
- Identify the roles of professionals involved
- Identify the factors that improve or reduce a young person's chance of gaining employment.

This is a briefing of the full technical report from the findings of the first half of stage three of the study. It looks at the transitions of young people from Higher Education, and NEETs into employment. Phase three commenced in November 2015 and is funded by Thomas Pocklington Trust until 2019. Previous stages have been funded by RNIB and The Nuffield Foundation.

Technical reports and briefings are available from these stages.

The research findings continue to be applied in practical ways, including developing resources to help young people with vision impairment navigate various transitions and ensuring that there are professionals supporting them.

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