

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

Technical report of findings to November 2017

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GLOSSARY

DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
RNIB	Royal National Institute of Blind People
SEN	Special Educational Needs
VI	Vision Impairment
VICTAR	Vision 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 Vision 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 technical 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 vision impairment. Phase 3 commenced in November 2015 is being funded by Thomas Pocklington Trust until 2019.

This report focuses upon data collected between February and November 2017 when the young people were aged between 21 and 24 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 Year 2 of Phase 3 (February-November 2017).

Interviews with participants in Year 2 of Phase 3 of the project took place between February and November 2017. These interviews covered the following topics:

- What the participants were currently doing (including details of transitions made and planned)
- Employment readiness of the participants using questions taken from UK Labour Force Survey and ENABLER assessment toolkit

- How prepared the participants are to self-advocate in the workplace
- Locus of control and wellbeing

It was possible to interview 48 of the participants in the first round of interviews. Contact was made with a further three participants who still wished to remain involved in the project but were unavailable for interview during 2017 with basic information being collected from these participants about their current setting. Whilst it was not possible to contact four participants directly, we spoke to family members who indicated the participant did still wish to continue in the project. Finally, two participants no longer wanted to take part and formally requested to withdraw from the study and one participant reported that he was experiencing personal problems and did not feel he could continue with the project at present. It was agreed that the researcher would contact him after a year to re-establish contact.

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

- A small number of participants had experienced complex and challenging transitions, and therefore more time was devoted to exploring this than with the average participant which meant that some parts of the interview schedule were not covered.
- Several participants, and particularly those in the last year of higher education or studying/working overseas, were only available to complete part of the interview due to pressures on their time.
- Several participants who have been in continuous employment over a number of years and therefore were not asked all the questions on work-readiness as these were repeated from previous interview schedules.

Participants were also contacted in autumn 2017 to ascertain whether they had made a significant transition since the previous interview. This led to follow-up interviews with ten of the participants.

Reporting of findings

One of the key objectives of this report is to understand the different settings of the participants and their experiences within these settings. When reading the report it is important to note that many of the

participants reported their experience of being in more than one setting. For example, some participants shared their experiences of both being NEET, and also being in the workplace once they had found employment. Distinction is made in the report between the final reported setting of the participants, and the number of participants who had experienced being in a particular setting at some time during the previous 12 months.

Current settings and plans for the future

Current settings were established for fifty-two of the participants. At the time of last interview, the majority were either in employment (16) or higher education (17). Other settings including being NEET (9), on a HE placement year (3), volunteering (2), in further education (1) and on a gap year (3). We note that a large proportion of the participants were not engaged in employment or some type of work activity at the time of last interview. The proportion of participants who are either NEET or in voluntary work has increased slightly from 17% to 21%. Thirty-four of the participants had made some form of transition, whilst 18 continued with what they were doing the previous year. Eighteen of the participants experienced some form of deviation from their intended pathway, as reported during the 2016 interviews. In some cases this was because of their own decision, but in other cases it was due to external factors, such as not being successful in finding employment after leaving higher education. Around half of the participants (28) intended to be in the labour market during the 2017-18 academic year and the majority (88%) are expected to have entered the labour market by summer 2020.

Further Education

At the time of the 2016 interviews, four of the participants were still in further education. They were all studying BTEC Level 3 courses and in their final year and have since completed their courses successfully, although the positivity of their experiences varied. All four of the participants had left FE by the time of the 2017 interviews and were pursuing a range of pathways including higher education, and a gap year. Two participants who had intended to go into employment were NEET.

One participant had returned to further education having withdrawn from a different college in the previous academic year due to challenges in accessing the curriculum.

In the 2014 technical report we noted 'churning' amongst the participants, where several of the young people had repeatedly taken

educational courses at the same qualification level (or even lower levels) but not appeared to progress forward, thus being 'held up' in the system. We note that the four participants who have recently left FE were all aged 20-21 upon completion of their courses, whilst the participant who has just started again in FE was aged 22 upon entry. Nevertheless, we note that all but one of the participants have now left FE and therefore the majority have now progressed onto settings closer to the labour market.

Higher Education

Nineteen participants who had been in higher education since the time of the last data collected completed this years' interview. These participants were studying courses at various levels, including foundation year and masters, with the majority studying undergraduate courses. The majority expected to have completed their courses by 2019. Interestingly, over half had chosen to take courses which included a year abroad or in industry. Three participants had completed undergraduate degrees and gone on to take a masters level qualification. None of the participants had withdrawn from HE since the time of last interview, although one participant had gone on leave of absence and was due to return the following academic year. Almost half of the participants in HE stated that they were interested in undertaking further study and therefore it could potentially be several years until they would enter the labour market.

The participants in HE were asked whether they had made contact with their institutions careers service. The responses given were mixed, with seven participants reporting that they had made contact and ten that they had not. Whether or not they had made contact with the careers service was not necessarily associated with whether the student was due to graduate from HE imminently, as only two of the seven participants who had made contact were preparing to graduate at the end of that academic year. Only four participants in HE reported that they had applied for a job since their last interview.

The participants were asked whether they had had the opportunity during the previous academic year to take part in any activities that may enhance their CV. Four had engaged in voluntary work, four in part time work, three in a placement/work experience, three in a sports activity, two had roles on committees and four had not undertaken any such activities.

The participants in HE were also asked about their experiences during the previous year and in particular how accessible they found their course to be. Several themes were identified in their responses:

- Access to learning material. Accessible online/electronic material, was identified by many participants as an important inclusive enabler to facilitate them to access their course. Several participants expressed challenges in obtaining accessible copies of textbooks in a timely manner, while a small number of participants highlighted the advantages of having access to accessible electronic books.
- Adjustments. A consistent finding of the study has been the importance of institutions making appropriate anticipatory and individual adjustments in order to promote as inclusive and accessible learning experience as possible. The valuable role of assistive technology was discussed by a number of participants, as well as the value of accessible mainstream technology (as discussed in previous reports)
- The learner. A number of the participants referred to challenges they faced specifically due to their vision impairment and their preparation for higher education. Several participants identified examples of situations where they felt they worked at a slower pace than their peers. This was often linked to experiencing fatigue when they were required to do a lot of reading. Two participants identified ways in which they felt they were not fully prepared with the study skills required for higher education. One participant who had experienced considerable challenges shared how important it was for him to be able to advocate for his support needs.

Employment, voluntary work and job seeking

Twenty-five participants had had a primary setting of the labour market at some point during the previous 12 months. In addition, three participants in HE were in part-time employment. Thirteen of the participants were in long-term roles, nine in shorter-term positions and three in part time voluntary work. In previous reports we have noted a skew towards a greater number of participants with less severe VI in the labour market, while participants with severe VI have tended to continue in HE, and therefore not entered the labour market. In 2017 there has been a larger proportion of participants with severe VI in the labour market. This has been reflected in multiple applications for funding through Access to Work.

Two of the participants who have been in the labour market for several years have found it challenging to find a long-term secure position. Instead, they have relied on short-term contracts and casual work.

Three participants were engaged in long-term voluntary work which they did not anticipate leading directly to paid employment. Two of these participants were searching for paid employment opportunities alongside volunteering, while the third participant was enjoying volunteering as an activity, but did not feel prepared to enter paid employment at this stage.

Ten of the participants have been in long-term paid employment. This is significant as the aim of this project has been to track the experiences of young people from compulsory education through to participation in the labour market. Due to the length of time that these participants have maintained employed, we would judge that they have successfully navigated the transition into employment.

The most common methods for the participants to get to and from work were by walking or by using public transport, including bus, train, tube and train. One participant reported that he travelled to work using a taxi provided by Access to Work. Several of the participants described long and complex journeys which they took in order to get to work, which would have been far shorter if they had been able to drive.

All participants in a form of paid employment and voluntary work were asked about any challenges that they faced in their role in relation to their VI and about any adjustments which were made to overcome these. Themes identified in their responses included:

- Declaring vision impairment and advocacy. Nineteen of the participant's report that they decided to declare their VI to their manager, while two participants with less severe vision impairment actively decided against it.
- Adjustments made by the employer. A small number of participants identified specific adjustments which were made by the employer to help them undertake their role. Adjustments included being provided with access technology, being assigned a mentor, and managers anticipating their needs in advance of meetings.
- Adjustments made by the employee. It was more common for the participants to identify ways in which they personally made adjustments, rather than their employer. Seven spoke of ways in which they used technology to access information, two said that

they used handheld magnifiers, two had developed strategies for specific challenges.

- Health and safety and employee welfare. Five of the participants identified issues relating to health and safety or their welfare, such as safety in a catering environment with knives.

Two of the participants went through the process of applying for Access to Work before starting in their new roles. They had mixed experiences of this and inconsistent outcomes in spite of similar circumstances (e.g. one participant received funding for a taxi, while the other had this request declined). One participant in particular had problems regarding the long timescales which Access to Work carried out assessments and made decisions, but needing to have equipment in place quickly as they rely on assistive technology. There were several cases identified where the participants reported facing challenges in accessing an aspect of their job, but they had not requested an Access to Work assessment.

Transition to the labour market

Eighteen participants were seeking employment at some point during 2017. Twelve were either NEET or in a temporary role and seeking something longer term, two had recently graduated and looking for graduate roles, two were in long term employment but hoping to change jobs, one was seeking a paid placement year as part of his degree course and one was seeking a part-time job alongside full-time studies.

Of the 18 participants who shared their experiences of applying for jobs, six were successful in finding a job, three had chosen to take alternative pathways and nine at the time of last interview had not been successful in securing a position.

The participants received support from a variety of sources when applying for jobs, including VI voluntary organisations (5), Job Centre (3), organisations linked to a Job Centre (3), university careers service (2), careers advisor (1), careers event (1), employment agency (1), and their work experience provider (1).

Despite it being discussed in several previous rounds of interviews, several of the participants were still unsure about what the Access to Work scheme is and the type of support which it can provide.

Not in Employment Education or Training

Twenty of the participants who took part in the 2017 interviews had been NEET at some point during the previous 12 months. When comparing

key characteristics of participants who had been NEET to the overall sample, there appears to be a slight bias towards participants who have a severe VI, although it is important to consider the small sample size.

A small number of participants had actively decided not to pursue employment, instead preferring to undertake voluntary work. Positively one participant who had been NEET for over four years was successful in securing her first job. She partly attributed this to having one-to-one support through a voluntary organisation who helped her identify and apply for jobs.

The participants who had been NEET were asked how they had used the time that they had available to them. The most common response was from seven participants who said that they had done some form of voluntary work. Five participants said that they had spent a lot of time applying for jobs. Four reported that they had spent the time dealing with personal circumstances (in three cases this was due to them needing to find somewhere new to live). Three participants did some casual work whilst applying for more stable longer-term jobs, two participants went travelling, two participants engaged in hobbies and one participant invested time in researching possible pathways.

Two participants reported that they were receiving Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and eight that they were receiving Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Six participants reported that they had not applied for any benefits at all – three who were in casual employment, one who was on leave of absence from HE and one who had been NEET for several months. Three of the participants who are receiving ESA reported that they do not have contact with the Job Centre.

Four participants who had contact with their local Job Centre had been referred to specialist employment programmes and had mixed experiences. Two further participants were connected with their local Job Centre, and spoke broadly negatively about the experience.

UK Labour Force Survey

The participants were asked a series of questions taken from the UK Labour Force Survey to ascertain whether they would have been identified through this survey as someone who is long term disabled, with a seeing difficulty. Based on the responses given, 31 participants would have met the criteria for having a 'current long-term disability' and 10 would have not.

A number of interesting observations were made regarding the ways in which the participants responded to the different questions:

- The first question asks whether the respondent has any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses expecting to last 12 months or more. There was something confusion from the participants about whether vision impairment is considered a physical condition or not.
- The second question asked the participants if their disability substantially limits their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. A number of participants responded 'no' to this question because, whilst they do face daily challenges, they have developed strategies to overcome these challenges (e.g. using a long-cane or GPS on a mobile phone).

This suggest that analyses which draw upon the Labour Force Survey may exclude some people with vision impairments, and this may have implications for the relative confidence given to this figures.

ENABLER Employment Assessment Toolkit

Questions were taken from the ENABLER employment assessment toolkit: an assessment tool to establish how far individuals are from being able to participant in the labour market (RNIB, 2013). Thirty-three participants took part in this part of the questionnaire, none of whom were in long term employment. The questions covered topics such as access to information, computer skills, independent travel and self-advocacy.

Whilst most of the participants are confident in accessing information using a range of approaches, several identified examples of additional skills which they believe they need to be more competitive in the labour market. One participant however stated that she would not be able to use a computer for work, and that she would openly declare this to a potential employer.

The most significant challenge identified by the participants was independent travel to unfamiliar places, with several participants rating their level of confidence as 'very low' and 14 of the 33 participants believing that they would benefit from developing additional skills.

Ten participants who were searching for work were asked how important it was for them to be in voluntary or paid work (where 6 is 'very important' and 1 is 'not at all important'). The responses given were mixed, ranging from 2 to 6, but the majority gave a response of 5 or 6.

Wellbeing and locus of control

Several measures of wellbeing were taken. These had been used in previous surveys, allowing for future comparisons.

The short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, which was completed by 37 participants, found a mean score of 25.7 with a standard deviation of 3.65. This reflects an average mental wellbeing for our participants, in keeping with the national average.

Locus of control questions were taken from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE). We note a very similar pattern of response from our participants in comparison to the responses given by 11,000 participants in the LSYPE survey. However, one notable difference is the higher proportion of participants who 'strongly agree' that 'if you work hard at something you'll usually succeed'. The majority of participants have either a moderate internal or moderate external locus of control. However, three participants gave responses which would suggest a strong external locus of control and six a strong internal locus of control.

The participants were also asked how dissatisfied or satisfied they are with the way their lives have turned out so far. The responses given by our participants are similar to the distribution of responses given by the LSYPE participants. Eighty-five per cent of the study participants reported being either 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' in comparison to 79% of those from the LSYPE survey. One participant who was 'fairly dissatisfied' had been in higher education, but had been asked to withdrawal from her course after failing to meet the criteria for continuation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The research project “A longitudinal study of blind and partially sighted young people in the UK” was designed in 2009 by a team from RNIB and the Vision 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 onto 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. The 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 vision impairment. Phase 3 has been funded by Thomas Pocklington Trust and commenced in November 2015.

This report focuses upon data collected between February to November 2017 through semi-structured telephone interviews. This wave of interviews explored:

- What the participants were currently doing (including details of transitions made and planned)
- Employment readiness of the participants using questions taken from UK Labour Force Survey and ENABLER assessment toolkit
- How prepared the participants are to self-advocate in the workplace
- Locus of control and wellbeing

This report is part of a series of technical reports which present all findings in the project since 2010. The nature of this report (focussing upon the transitions the young people have made) means that we also drawn upon data collected in previous rounds of interviews, therefore exploiting the longitudinal nature of the project.

SECTION A: PROJECT PARTICIPANTS – CURRENT SETTINGS

2 CURRENT SETTING AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Section 1 presents an overview of the pathways that the 52 participants who participated in the 2017 interviews were following. It provides an overview of:

- what the participants were doing at the time of the previous interviews which took place during in 2016
- what the participants were doing in 2017 (and more specifically at the time of last interview)
- what transitions had been made since autumn 2016
- what deviations had been made from the participants' intended plans as reported in autumn spring 2016
- what the participants hoped to do next.

When reading the report it is important to note that many of the participants reported their experience of being in more than one setting. For example, some participants shared their experiences of both being NEET, and also being in the workplace once they had found employment. Distinction is made in the report between the final reported setting of the participants, and the number of participants who had experienced being in a particular setting at some time during the previous 12 months. A more thorough overview of the participants' experiences is provided in Section B: Individual transition pathways.

2.1 OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN 2017 INTERVIEWS

Table 1: Summary of communication made and data collected from participants in 2017 (N=59)

	Total (N)
Tracking interviews only	38
Tracking interview and follow-up interview	10
Basic overview	4
Spoke with family member only	4
Request to withdrawal	2
Decline to participate in 2017	1

Table 1 provides a summary of the type of communication which was made with the 59 participants who remained in the longitudinal transitions study. It was possible to interview 48 of the participants in the first round of interviews. Contact was made with a further three participants who still wished to remain involved in the project but were unavailable for interview during 2017 - basic information was collected from these participants about their current setting. Whilst it was not possible to contact four participants directly, we spoke to family members who indicated the participant did still wish to continue in the project. Finally two participants no longer wanted to take part and formally requested to withdraw from the study and one participant reported that he was experiencing personal problems and did not feel he could continue with the project at present. It was agreed that the researcher would contact him after a year to re-establish contact.

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

- A small number of participants had experienced complex and challenging transitions, and therefore more time was devoted to exploring this than with the average participant which meant that some parts of the interview schedule were not covered.
- Several participants, and particularly those in the last year of higher education or studying/working overseas, were only available to complete part of the interview due to pressures on their time.
- Several participants who have been in continuous employment over a number of years and therefore were not asked all questions on work-readiness.

Participants were also contacted in autumn 2017 to ascertain whether they had made a significant transition since the previous interview. This led to follow-up interviews with ten of the participants.

Table 2: Characteristics of participants who took part in the 2017 interviews (N=52)

Characteristic	Total (N)	Total (%)	Original sample (%)
Gender			
Male	25	48%	45%
Female	27	52%	55%
Cohort originally recruited into			
Year 9	19	37%	37%
Year 10	5	10%	7%
Year 11	28	54%	56%
Registration type			
Registered blind	18	35%	27%
Registered partially sighted	18	35%	28%
Registered – category unknown	1	2%	21%
Not registered/unsure	15	29%	24%
Reading format			
Braille/electronic user	11	21%	17%
Large print user (point 16+)	24	46%	38%
Standard print user	17	33%	44%
Highest qualification level			
Degree or above	18	35%	*
A-level or below degree	27	52%	*
GCSE level and other	7	14%	*
No qualification	0	0%	*

*= information not available

Table 2 provides an overview of some of the key characteristics of participants who took part in the 2017 interviews, and provides a comparison of the remaining participants with the original recruited sample. We note that a higher proportion of participants with more severe vision impairment (who are registered blind and are braille/electronic users) have remained in the project. This bias could be anticipated, as it is likely that those with severe vision impairment would find the research questions to be of more relevance to them than those who do not require such as significant adjustments.

2.2 WHAT WERE THE PARTICIPANTS DOING AT TIME OF LAST INTERVIEW IN 2016?

Table 3 Setting of participants in 2016 (N=52)

Setting	Total (N)	Total (%)
Higher Education	22	42%
Employment	12	23%
NEET	6	12%
Further Education	4	8%
Volunteering	3	6%
Gap year	2	4%
Placement year from HE	2	4%
Leave of absence from HE	1	2%
Total	52	100%

The table above presents a summary of what the 52 participants interviewed were doing the last time we had spoken to them in 2016. The majority (42%) were in higher education, while just under a third (33%) were engaged in employment or voluntary work or in casual employment while on a gap year.

2.3 WHAT ARE THE PARTICIPANTS DOING ONE YEAR LATER?

Table 4 Setting of participants in 2017 (N=52)

Setting	Total (N)	Total (%)
Higher Education	17	33%
Employment	16	31%
NEET	9	17%
Placement year from HE	3	6%
Gap year	3	6%
Volunteering	2	4%
Leave of absence from HE	1	2%
Further Education	1	2%
Total	52	100%

The table above looks at the settings of 52 participants who reported their current setting during 2017. Where participants made a transition during 2017, their setting at the time of last interview has been given, although several participants were in multiple settings during the course of the year. A larger proportion of the participants are now engaged in

employment or some type of work activity (40%). The proportion of participants who are either NEET or in voluntary work has increased slightly from 17% to 21%.

2.4 WHAT TRANSITIONS HAVE THE YOUNG PEOPLE MADE?

Table 5 Primary transitions that the young people have made since 2016 interviews

	Total (N)
Transitions	
FE/Sixth form to HE	3
HE to Year in Industry/Year abroad	3
HE to Masters/Postgraduate qualification	5
HE to Employment	1
HE to NEET	6
HE to Leave of absence	1
Changed employment	6
Fluctuating employment	2
Employment to employment and part time study	1
Volunteering to Employment	1
NEET to Paid work experience	1
NEET to Employment	2
NEET to FE	1
NEET to training	1
Total	34
No Transition	
No transition – continuing on University/HE course	8
No transition – continuing in same employment	5
No transition – still NEET	4
No transition – continuing gap year travelling abroad	1
Total	18

The table above provides an overview of the primary transitions made by the young people since they were last interviewed in 2016. Thirty-four of the 52 participants interviewed have made some form of transition, whilst 18 have continued with what they were doing the previous year.

Nineteen of the participants had been registered in higher education, although studying at various levels, with eleven of the participants having made some form of transition:

- Three participants moved from FE/sixth form into higher education
- Three participants are on placement years – one studying abroad, one working abroad and one working in a different UK city
- Five participants have started a new Masters/Postgraduate qualification

The primary setting for 18 of the participants is employment, with 13 of the participants having made some form of transition:

- Six participants changed employment
- Two participants have fluctuated between different casual contracts
- Two participants went from being NEET to employment
- One participant has started a part time degree course alongside full time employment
- One participant went from volunteering to employment
- One participant went from HE to employment

Thirteen of the participants made the transition from higher education, taking a range of pathways:

- Five participants have progressed onto Masters/Postgraduate courses
- Six participants have become NEET
- One participant has progressed into employment

Five participants successfully moved away from being NEET, but four participants had remained NEET over the course of the year.

2.5 WHAT DEVIATIONS HAVE THE PARTICIPANTS MADE FROM THEIR INTENDED PLANS?

Eighteen of the participants experienced some form of deviation from their intended pathway as reported during the 2016 interviews. In some cases this was the result of their own decision, but in other cases it was due to external factors. A description of these deviations is as follows:

- Eight participants either became NEET, or continue to be NEET, who had intended to find employment during the last 12 months.
- One participant took a leave of absence from HE after struggling in the first year of degree course.

- One participant intended to return to HE after a leave of absence, but this request was turned down by their institution.
- One participant intended to change HE course but became NEET.
- One participant started on a vocational postgraduate course but left the course and became NEET.
- One participant had to retake a year in HE after failing their second year, having struggled to manage their workload.
- One participant changed jobs internally to a role which required less use of a computer, partly because she was experiencing eye strain.
- One participant intended to return to HE to study a postgraduate qualification, but decided to remain in employment.
- One participant lost his job and now is in temporary employment.
- One participant transitioned from voluntary work to employment, but not in the type of role she hoped for.
- One participant who is in voluntary work unexpectedly was offered the opportunity to take a training course by the organisation she is working with.

2.6 WHAT DID THE PARTICIPANTS INTEND TO DO NEXT?

Table 6: What do the participants intend to in 2017-18 (primary destination)?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Continue in employment (same role)	13	25%
Move from temporary to longer term employment	3	6%
Change jobs	2	4%
Find employment	10	19%
Find voluntary work	2	4%
Continue in HE (undergraduate)	9	17%
Continue in HE (undergraduate placement year)	3	6%
Start in HE (undergraduate)	3	6%
Start in HE (postgraduate)	5	10%
Start in FE	1	2%
Continue in gap year	1	2%
Total	52	100%

The table above gives an overview of what the participants reported they intended to do during the academic year 2017-18. We note that twenty-

eight (or half) of the participants intend to be in the labour market (both in employment and seeking employment) during this time.

2.7 FUTURE PROJECTIONS FOR THE LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

Table 7: Projected entry date into the labour market following 2018 interviews

Date expected to enter labour market	Total (N)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative percentage (%)
Already in employment	28	54%	54%
Ready to enter labour market (by expected year of entry)			
2018	7	13%	67%
2019	6	12%	79%
2020	5	10%	88%
2021	1	2%	90%
Unknown at present	5	10%	100%
Total	52	100%	

The table above shows our projections for when the participants who took part in the latest interviews are likely to (exclusively) enter the labour market. The majority (88%) expect to have entered the labour market by summer 2020 although it is important to note that the participant's plans continuously fluctuate. For example, in the previous technical report we noted that 88% of the participants expected to be in the labour market by 2019. In the case of five participants their projected entry dates are more complex as at the time of interview they were still considering various options available to them.

SECTION B: PROJECT PARTICIPANTS – INDIVIDUAL TRANSITION PATHWAYS

In the first section of the interview, the participants were requested to provide an overview of what they had been doing since they were last interviewed in 2016. An overview of these responses data is presented in Section A of the report. During this initial dialogue, the researcher identified which other sections of the interview schedule were relevant to that young person. Their responses to these questions are presented in Sections 3-8. In some cases, the participants were asked questions from more than one section of the schedule, having pursued more than one pathway during the previous year. The data presented here has been drawn from 48 participants who took part in the later sections of the 2017 interviews.

3 FURTHER EDUCATION

3.1 PARTICIPANTS WHO WERE PREVIOUSLY IN FURTHER EDUCATION

At the time of the 2016 interviews, four of the participants were still in further education (FE). They were all studying BTEC Level 3 courses and in the final year of their course. All four participants have since completed their courses successfully, although their experiences in the last year of FE varied.

In the previous technical report, we identified that one of the participants faced challenges in accessing their course, and had reported that the FE college they were attending had not made the reasonable adjustments they considered necessary. In their 2017 interview, the participant reported that these problems continued into the final year of the course:

“...they were taking my support off me and giving it me back, taking it off me, giving it me back. Telling me my grades were crap. There was no support whatsoever there.”

All four of the participants had left FE by the time of the 2017 interviews and were pursuing a range of pathways:

- One participant continued into higher education as they originally intended.
- One participant had intended to go straight into employment, but after a period of being NEET had instead applied for higher

education and were due to start in the following academic year (2017/18).

- One participant was NEET, but had been undertaking some voluntary work.
- One participant was taking a gap year as originally intended, and was spending the time doing voluntary work and some casual work. He had a place confirmed in higher education for the following year.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS WHO HAVE TRANSITIONED INTO FURTHER EDUCATION

In the previous technical report, we also shared the case study of “Matthew”, a participant who had experienced a complex transition into FE. To facilitate this transition, Matthew applied for an Education Health and Care Plan, and was to receive tailored support from the FE College. However, due to reported delays in the support being put in place, Matthew ended up withdrawing from the course.

In follow up interviews, Matthew expressed that he was very resistant to go back into FE due to the challenges he had faced. His long-term goal had been to go to university, but the experience had left him disillusioned about how well he would be supported if he were to do so. Matthew continued to work with a careers advisor who encouraged him to visit other possible colleges and to keep an open mind.

He decided to apply for a FE college to keep his options open, but had problems with the application process, reporting that the website was not accessible:

“Well my careers advisor had to apply because the website is not very accessible. Yeah terrible. She had problems with it actually.”

Eventually he accepted a place on a course at a local college, and met with staff before starting to discuss support arrangements which would be put in place. This time the transition into college went somewhat smoother, with a support worker being put in place from the start and reasonable adjustments being made where appropriate. Matthew noted some concern, however, at how close to the start of the course it got before discussions were held about the adjustments required, and there was some delay in the provision of a laptop computer.

3.3 CHURNING AND PROGRESSION FROM FURTHER EDUCATION

In the 2014 report we noted 'churning' amongst the participants, where several of the young people had repeatedly taken educational courses at the same qualification level (or even lower levels) but not appeared to progress forwards, thus being 'held up' in the system. We note that the four participants who have recently left FE were all aged 20-21 upon completion of their courses, whilst the participant who has just started again in FE (after previously withdrawing from a college having experienced problems with accessing the course) was aged 22 upon entry. Nevertheless, we note that all but one of the participants have now left FE and therefore the majority have now progressed onto settings closer to the labour market.

4 HIGHER EDUCATION

The experiences of the participants in Higher Education have been explored thoroughly in Hewett et al, 2015. This section provides an overview of the experiences of the participants in HE over the past twelve months – particularly with regards to their future plans and the support available to facilitate these.

4.1 PARTICIPANTS WHO HAVE CONTINUED IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Nineteen participants who had been in higher education since the time of last data collection completed this year's interview. Key characteristics of these participants are presented in the table below. We note that a large number of participants in the older cohort were still in higher education.

Table 8: Characteristics of participants who were in higher education (N=19)

Characteristic	Total (N)
Gender	
Male	9
Female	10
Cohort originally recruited into	
Year 9	8
Year 10	3
Year 11	8
Registration type	
Registered blind	8
Registered partially sighted	5
Registered – category unknown	0
Not registered/unsure	6
Reading format	
Braille/electronic user	6
Large print user (point 16+)	9
Standard print user	4

The table below provides a summary of the type of course which the participants were studying.

Table 9: Type of HE course participants are on

	Total (N)
Undergraduate	5
Undergraduate with foundation year	3
Undergraduate with year abroad	6
Undergraduate with placement year	1
Undergraduate (part time)	1
Masters	3
Total	19

The majority of the participants were studying undergraduate courses. Interestingly over half had chosen to take courses which required a year abroad or in industry. Three participants had completed undergraduate degrees and gone on to take a masters level qualification.

Table 10: Planned date of graduation

	Total (N)
2017	7
2018	5
2019	3
2020	2
Unknown	2
Total	19

The table above shows the year in which the participants in higher education anticipated graduating. The majority expected to have completed their courses by 2019. None of the participants had withdrawn from HE since the time of last year, although one participant had gone on a leave of absence and was due to return the following academic year.

4.2 PLANS FOR AFTER COMPLETING HIGHER EDUCATION

Table 11: Plans for after completing university

	Total (N)
Postgraduate course	8
Employment	10
N/A – already in employment	1
Total	19

The table above gives a breakdown of the plans the participants had for once they graduated. Almost half stated that they were interested in undertaking further study - therefore it could be potentially several years until they will enter the labour market. One participant was already in employment and studying a part time degree alongside full time work.

4.3 CONTACT WITH CAREERS SERVICE

Table 12: Contact made with careers service

	Total (N)
Yes – graduating that academic year	2
Yes – not graduating that academic year	5
No – graduating that academic year	4
No – not graduating that academic year	6
Total	17

The participants in higher education were asked whether they had made contact with their institutions careers service. The responses given were mixed with seven participants reporting that they had made contact and ten that they had not. Whether or not they had made contact with the careers service was not necessarily associated with whether the student was due to graduate from higher education imminently, with only two of the participants the seven participants who had made contact preparing to graduate at the end of the academic year.

Three participants who made contact with the careers service to help them prepare for a specific transition all spoke positively about the experience.

“I was briefly in contact with them leading up to applying. We get a year in industry officer who we meet up with, and they give you help with your CV and interview practice and stuff like that. I am still in contact with her at the moment actually.”

Two participants shared that they had had quite extensive contact with their careers service, despite not intending to leave higher education for another two years. In both cases they had developed a strategy for using the careers service in the future:

“I have been doing a couple of extra-curricular activities run by the careers service at the end of my first year and second year. They are careers workshops designed to focus in on employability and a

few other things. But I need to get better contact with the careers service and I think I am going to do that during my final year, or maybe the Masters year because you are able to get in touch with them even after you have left.”

One participant shared that events were arranged through her careers service as part of the standard timetable for the institution. At this stage she was at least two years from graduation:

“Yeah I mean right now we are doing an actual careers week, so we get lectures all week, we are having careers sessions and stuff. I mean we do get plenty of advice.”

A further participant reported that he intended to make contact with the careers service once he got back from a placement year abroad:

“No, not yet, I will probably start especially when I get back [from placement year], because it would be good to get into an internship over the summer.”

Of the participants who had not contacted the careers service, two shared that they did not anticipate that the service would be helpful to them:

“No, I have just done my own research, I find that to be better.”

“No I haven’t. I’ve seen, because sometimes they advertise fayres and things like that, but I wouldn’t want to go into a career as such. It would be better being self-employed.”

Finally, one participant who had a further two years before graduating did not believe that the careers service was of use to her at that point in time.

Only four participants in higher education reported that they had applied for a job since their last interview. One participant had applied for a job as part of a year in industry, one had applied for a graduate scheme, one had applied for a funded doctoral programme and one had applied for auditions in the performing arts.

4.4 ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE CV

The participants were asked whether they had had the opportunity during the previous academic year to take part in any activities that may enhance their CV. Their responses are summarised in the table below:

Table 13: Activities undertaken by participants in HE to enhance their CV

	Total (N)
Voluntary work	4
Part time job	4
Placement/work experience	3
Sport	3
Committee member	2
None	4

The participants were engaged in a wide range of activities which they believed would enhance the quality of their CV. The most common activity identified was voluntary work. All four participants who had done some voluntary work spoke very positively about the opportunities they had had.

“...it is a university helpline, a bit like the Samaritans where people would call in, it would be students who had emotional difficulties and wanted someone to talk to and chat, and you would be there to listen, you would pick up the phone. You wouldn't be able to give advice...I really enjoyed that.”

Four of the participants had part time jobs. One participant had been working in a bar, one as a waitress, one in a shop and one taught private music lessons.

“I have been doing quite a lot of music teaching. I do some teaching for the City Council on Saturday's and then I have a number of private students”

Three participants had undertaken some form of placement or work experience as part of their course. One participant noted that she had specifically arranged a final year project which would look impressive on her CV. A further participant studying a Performing Arts course had taken the opportunity to perform in a number of shows. The third participant had independently arranged work experience at a local hospital:

“I have been voluntary at [local hospital] since February, so I am there two hours a week, it’s been six or seven months now... It’s amazing, I have really enjoyed it. I like the fact that I have got the opportunity to do it. It’s only two hours a week.”

Three participants were very engaged with different sport activities run by their universities and two participants were members of university committees.

Four participants stated that they had not done anything to boost their CV. One of these participants intended to find a part time job, having previously worked for a year prior to starting in higher education.

4.5 EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION OVER PREVIOUS YEAR

The participants in higher education were asked about their experiences at university during the previous year, and in particular how accessible they had found their course to be. Their responses have been grouped into various themes, as discussed below.

4.5.1 Access to learning material

An important focus of the study has been the experiences of students with vision impairment when accessing learning material in higher education. A key enabler here has been accessible online/electronic material, with many participants identifying this as an important, inclusive facilitator for them in accessing their courses.

“Yeah we have got an online thing and they put all the PowerPoints up on that, so I have my laptop in with me and then I can have it up on my laptop screen, or I just sit near the front. So that’s never an issue. And they are really good with things like that so they always have the lectures, and the same with seminars as well, so you can view before you get there so it’s really easy to copy down things... for people who have a visual impairment, it’s a life saver”.

One participant who had benefited from accessible online material previously expressed her frustration that some lecturers were not making the material available in advance:

“The only thing that has been a little bit more difficult this year which I hadn’t really encountered before. I am not quite sure why because there’s no reason why it would happen in the final year, is some of my lecturers aren’t podcasting their lecture this time round. When it came to the actual lectures the slides that they had given us would have bits missing and we were expected to make those notes in the lecture...But obviously I couldn’t keep up because I rely on having the slides in front of me to be able to keep up.”

Several participants expressed challenges in accessing accessible copies of textbooks in a timely manner.

“There were a few issues at the time getting hold of the text, mainly because a lot of my modules are literature. I struggled with that.”

In contrast, a small number of participants highlighted the advantages of having access to accessible electronic books:

“The university has e-books in the library and they are all accessible, the whole e-books catalogue and journals are accessible. But also every department has a subject librarian, so for the [department] we have a librarian assigned to use, so if I ever have problems I can just email her and she will help me find things I like”.

4.5.2 Adjustments

A further important finding of the study has been the importance of institutions making appropriate anticipatory and individual adjustments in order to promote as inclusive a learning experience as possible.

One participant who had challenges in accessing his course expressed his previous frustration at a lack of anticipatory adjustments:

“At the start of this year I kind of had a massive rant to my department...Because it takes me ages to find books in my particular format, it was just useful when they let me know maybe a week in advance what topics they would be studying that I might need to be reading for an assignment, so that I can prepare.”

A further participant identified ways in which he had benefited from individual adjustments:

“The only thing is sometimes I try to get the lecturers to explain if they are going to show any clips and stuff like that. Because sometimes they would show videos and stuff like that and that would be a bit difficult to follow.”

The role of assistive technology was discussed by a number of participants. For example, one participant shared that she experienced fatigue due to the volume of reading required by her course, but that she had benefited from the use of a specialist software.

“Yeah I find it quite useful listening to things. I have got on my laptop as part of my DSA they downloaded some sort of programme and it means it can read out things to me as well. And that is really useful...I think it's called Claro read or something like that.”

Another participant shared how useful she had found it having access to specialist technology in the library, but they had since moved the CCTV she was using to a different location and to a noisier location, which she struggled to work in.

A further important finding of the project has been how beneficial mainstream technology is for people with vision impairment as a mechanism for overcoming barriers in accessing information. One participant who had to attend teaching placements as part of her course shared how she used an app on her phone to help her in using buses:

“I don't really need to read that many timetables because I have got an app. It's a First Bus app and basically you can find which bus stop you are going from and it will tell you what time your bus will be there which is like really useful because it can tell me 'right it's five minutes away', then I don't need to worry about reading timetables and things.”

4.5.3 The learner

Finally, a number of the participants referred to specific challenges they faced in terms of either their vision impairment, or in terms of their preparation for higher education.

Several participants identified examples of situations where, because of their vision impairment they worked more slowly than their peers. This

was often linked to experiencing fatigue when they were required to do a lot of reading.

“I mean in terms of doing coursework, looking at a computer screen for a long time I start to get headaches and very tired and the same with reading books as well, it makes me really tired. It just means it takes me a bit longer to do things.”

Two of the participants identified ways in which they found they were not fully prepared with the study skills required for higher education. In particular, one participant was required to re-sit the year after running out of time to complete essays.

One participant who had experienced a lot of challenges shared how important it was for him to advocate for his support needs and to make clear to staff what he needed them to do.

“At the start of this year I kind of had a massive rant to my department. I had a meeting with eight members of staff from different places, from disability, [department] and welfare and stuff like that. I just listed all the things I wasn't happy with, and things have been a lot better since then to be fair.”

In contrast, another participant experienced challenges with accessing his course, as she was nervous about raising the problems that she faced with her lecturers.

“I was a bit scared to [raise issue]. The guy who is the lecturer, he is the guy that would be doing my reference. I was hesitant to be honest.”

5 EMPLOYMENT, VOLUNTARY WORK AND JOB SEEKING

5.1 OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Table 14: Type of position that the participants were in: primary setting

	Total (N)
Long term paid employment	11
Temporary paid employment	5
Voluntary work	3
Contract – paid employment	2
Self-employed	2
Paid position as part of HE placement year	2
Total	25

The table above presents an overview of the primary employment status of the twenty-five participants whose primary setting had been in the workplace during the previous 12 months. Thirteen of the participants were in long-term roles (11 as employees and 2 self-employed). Nine of the participants were in shorter-term positions (5 in temporary roles, 2 in contract work and 2 on yearlong paid placements as part of their degree course). Finally, three of the participants were in part-time voluntary work.

5.2 PARTICIPANTS IN PAID EMPLOYMENT

5.2.1 Overview of participants whose primary setting is paid employment

Table 15: Characteristics of participants whose primary setting was paid employment (N=22)

Characteristic	Total (N)	Total (%)	All participants who took part in data collection (%)
Gender			

Male	14	64%	45%
Female	8	36%	55%
Cohort originally recruited into			
Year 9	7	32%	37%
Year 10	1	5%	7%
Year 11	14	64%	56%
Registration type			
Registered blind	4	18%	27%
Registered partially sighted	9	41%	28%
Registered – category unknown	6	27%	21%
Not registered/unsure	3	14%	24%
Reading format			
Braille/electronic user	2	9%	17%
Large print user (point 16+)	10	45%	38%
Standard print user	10	45%	44%
Highest qualification level			
Degree or above	7	32%	35%
A-level or below degree	10	46%	52%
GCSE level and other	5	23%	14%
No qualification	0	0%	0%

The table above shows some key characteristics of the 22 participants who have been in paid employment. In previous reports, we have noted a skew towards a greater number of participants with less severe VI in the labour market, while participants with severe VI have tended to continue in higher education, and therefore had not been looking for employment. In 2017 there has been a larger proportion of participants with a severe vision impairment in the labour market. This has been reflected in multiple applications for Access to Work.

Table 16: Types of sector the participants were working in

	Total (N)
Accounting and Finance	3
Retail	2
Customer service	2
Marketing and communication	2
Administration	2
Performing arts	2

IT	2
Media	1
Mechanics	1
Teaching	1
Horticulture	1
Sales	1
Childcare	1
Construction	1

The table above provides a summary of the sectors in which the 22 participants in paid employment were working. These participants had been working in a broad range of sectors and settings, including office based roles (e.g. accounting and finance and IT) and practical roles (e.g. retail and performing arts).

5.2.2 Participants in part time employment alongside full time study

The participants who were in higher education were asked about ways in which they had been able to boost their CV with voluntary or paid employment. Through this question, a further three participants were identified who were working part time alongside their full time courses. All three were working in roles typically filled by students – one participant worked in a bar, one in a shop and one as a waitress.

One participant reflected on how important it was for him as a young person with vision impairment to have paid work experience:

“Being partially sighted, my friends and I all say that it’s very difficult to find part time work as someone who is partially sighted. It’s always something I have wanted to do, but it’s very difficult.”

He managed to find employment in a bar – a role that he was unsure at first he would be able to carry out independently, but he was keen to try out different possible adjustments:

“I wanted to see whether I could do it basically, because I would never have known if I could do it or not if I hadn’t of tried. My philosophy is do it, see if you can do it, and if you can’t then, you know. So I tried it and I did manage it, very difficult though because I had to find ways around things, because I couldn’t see the till, so I had to explain to the people I was working with that I couldn’t see it. So we worked a way around it.”

5.2.3 Participants in unsecure paid employment

Two of the participants who have been in the labour market for a long period of time (one for over three years, and the other for over five years) have found it challenging to find a long-term secure position. Instead, they have relied on short-term contracts and casual work. During this time, they have not had the opportunity to progress in a particular type of role. Two further participants were working short-term contracts, but they noted that this was typical for the industry in which they were working. One participant had been employed on a short-term paid work placement, aimed specifically at young graduates with disabilities. A final participant, who had undertaken voluntary work to gain more work experience, was offered a paid temporary contract by the company they had been volunteering for.

5.3 PARTICIPANTS IN VOLUNTARY WORK

Table 17: Characteristics of participants whose primary setting was voluntary work (N=3)

Characteristic	Total (N)
Gender	
Male	0
Female	3
Cohort originally recruited into	
Year 9	1
Year 10	0
Year 11	2
Registration type	
Registered blind	1
Registered partially sighted	2
Registered – category unknown	0
Not registered/unsure	0
Reading format	
Braille/electronic user	0
Large print user (point 16+)	3
Standard print user	0
Highest qualification level	

Degree or above	1
A-level or below degree	1
GCSE level and other	1
No qualification	0

Three participants were engaged in long-term voluntary work which they did not anticipate leading directly to paid employment. Two of these participants were registered as blind and one as partially sighted, all requiring the use of assistive technology to be able to use a computer, and very large print to read printed materials.

Two of these participants were searching for paid employment opportunities alongside volunteering while the third participant was enjoying volunteering as a way of an activity, but did not feel prepared to enter paid employment at this stage.

The participants who were in higher education were asked whether they had engaged in any activities to boost their CV. In response, five of the participants reported that they had taken part in some form of voluntary work.

- Two of the participants had undertaken voluntary work specific to the type of career which they were interested in
- One participant had taken on a committee role for one of the societies he was part of
- One participant had joined in with some charity work at his university
- One participant had taken on various roles based on the broad theme of promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities

All of the participants spoke positively about the opportunities that they had taken, and viewed them as a significant contribution to their CV.

5.4 EXPERIENCES IN EMPLOYMENT AND VOLUNTARY WORK

5.4.1 Length of time in current role

Table 18: Length of time in current role/with current employer: employment primary setting

Duration	Total (N)
Less than 6 months	8
6 months to 1 year	3
1 year +	10
Total	21

The table above shows the length of time that the participants had been with their current employer. Almost half had been in their current role or with their current employer for over one year.

We note that ten of the participants have been in long-term paid employment. This is significant as the aim of this project has been to track the experiences of the young people from compulsory education through to participation in the labour market. Due to the length of time that these participants have maintained employment, we would judge that these ten young people have successfully navigated the transition into employment. However, as we monitor the cohort, we will continue to assess the experiences of these participants, and whether they remain in, and progress in their roles.

5.4.2 Travel to the workplace

Those participants whose primary setting for 2017 was employment were asked how they normally travelled to and from their workplace.

Table 19: Main method used for getting to and from work

	Total (N)
Walk	7
Public transport	11
Private car	4
Lift from family member	1
Taxi	1
Total	24

The most common methods for the participants to use to get to and from work were walking or public transport (including bus, train, tube and tram). One participant reported that he travelled to work using a taxi provided by Access to Work.

Several of the participants described long and complex journeys which they took in order to get to work, which would have been far shorter if they had been able to drive. For example, one participant stated that her journey to work required two buses and one tram, whilst another participant who faces a one hour journey requiring two buses reported that this would be a ten minute journey if he were able to go directly by car.

5.4.3 Challenges faced in their work/voluntary role in relation to vision impairment

The participants in paid employment and voluntary work were asked about any challenges they faced in their role in relation to their vision impairment and about any adjustments which were made to overcome these. The open responses that they gave were analysed and several themes identified, which are presented below.

5.4.3.1 Declaring vision impairment and advocacy

Nineteen of the participants report making the decision to declare their vision impairment to their manager, while two participants actively decided against declaring to their employer. One of participant decided not to declare their vision impairment initially and instead to wait and see if they faced any challenges.

“No I didn’t. I was contemplating telling them, but I just thought it doesn’t interfere too much with what I am doing. But if it does become an issue I definitely will.” (Sight impaired, part-time worker alongside degree course)

In contrast, another participant shared his resistance to declare his vision impairment to anyone who he worked with, in case others viewed him differently.

“To be honest most of my colleagues don’t know I am visually impaired. I hate saying about it, and think about it as a crutch if people know, and I don’t want a crutch.” (Sight impaired, in full-time employment)

One participant shared that she would confidently ask for further adjustments:

“We moved offices and where I was before was really bright, and I said I was really struggling, and they just moved me no problem at all”.

In contrast, another participant shared that whilst she had declared her vision impairment, she was reluctant to raise further specific issues that she faced in using an office computer:

Researcher: How do you find it?

Participant: Sometimes I have to do training on it, and I do find it hard to see some of the print on it sometimes.

Researcher: Are you able to get by, or does it affect the way that you do the training?

Participant: I just get on with it. At work I don't really like to say anything, I know I could, but I don't really. (Sight impaired, in full-time employment)

Two participants who had declared their vision impairment to their employer shared examples of ways in which they still encountered problems with colleagues and customers.

The first participant identified the challenges of being in the workplace, as opposed to in school when staff would speak on your behalf:

“The only thing is with colleagues, it's the first job I have had, it's the first job I have had, it's not like with school that before you go in a class you are told about the kid with the bad eyes, so no one really knows... I don't think people know how bad it is because I can walk round and look normal. I think people think I am blanking them sometimes, or like, when I don't say hello because I don't see it's them.” (Sight impaired)

The second participant, who works in retail, shared that they sometimes have problems with the customers and other staff not understanding their vision impairment:

“There's been a couple of times when I have been on the shop floor and I will be doing something and I have had a couple of customers be a bit rude, because they have sussed out I have got a problem with my eyes but they think I am just refusing to wear

glasses. Sometimes I try to explain but they don't get it. And sometimes I may have a problem with another volunteer not thinking I can do anything and constantly getting in the way." (Sight impaired)

5.4.3.2 Adjustments made by employer

A small number of the participants identified specific adjustments made by their employer, to help them undertake their role. One participant who had been employed at their organisation for a number of years, and had benefited in the past with adjustments such as enlarged menus in the canteen and a company policy of a minimum font size, noted again how positive her experience had been:

"They pride themselves on supporting the needs of everyone in the building, and they are actually amazing on that."

Three participants benefited from their employers providing them with technology which enabled them to access information, including a CCTV for reading small print, a larger monitor and a screen-reader which had been recommended by Access to Work.

One participant shared that he had been assigned a mentor who was helping him identify ways in which he could overcome challenges in accessing information. Having a mentor was a standard part of the programme which he was on, but it also provided opportunities to address challenges specific to his vision impairment.

One participant advised that she was able to overcome most of the challenges that she faced by using a computer, but on the occasions where she needed further assistance, other members of staff would provide assistance.

One participant identified ways in which his employer sought to anticipate his needs and ask him in advance of any adjustments which might be required:

"It's one of those cases where you take it day to day. Say if there is training or something they will come to me and ask what would be best for me which is good."

Finally, one participant had advised his employers that he was not able to work full time, due to the fatigue that he would otherwise experience from using a computer five days a week. The employer made

accommodation for this by allowing him to take on the role for four days a week instead of five.

5.4.3.3 Adjustments made by employee

It was more common for the participants to identify ways in which they personally made adjustments to undertake their role, rather than their employer.

Seven participants identified ways in which they would use technology in order to access information. This included magnification software (2), making adjustments on their computer such as zooming in on details within a document (3), using a CCTV (1) and using a free screen-reader (until they were able to access their preferred screen-reader through Access to Work).

“In the meantime I used NVDA on the office computer because it’s free to download, but it’s a bit dodgy and it’s not the best really. But I could do all the basic stuff, check my emails, do MS Word and all that stuff, so at least I could do something.”

Researcher: So what do you use at work?

Participant: Just a laptop with enlargement software on it. If I have got to do a meeting I can get sent stuff, any PowerPoints I can adjust them.

Two participants reported using a magnifier in order to access small print. In the case of one of these participants, they had been using a magnifier regularly throughout their time in education. The other participant, however, had not used a magnifier for a long time and therefore decided to source one himself.

“I am prepared to move out of this place if I can because I can’t see the invoices properly. But I have ordered something off Amazon, it’s a magnifier. It will come in handy at this place as well as others.”

Some participants identified ways in which they had developed strategies to overcome the challenges that they faced. One participant who had to use a till in a shop spent time memorising the buttons on the till she was using.

“I take a magnifier in and basically when it’s quite I can sit and memorise.”

The second participant had committed to learning various keyboard shortcuts and formulas to enable him to use Microsoft Excel more efficiently.

“Yeah, keyboard shortcuts, and there are customisable ones as well, so I use different keys to do different things... There are shortcuts that I had never heard of like highlighting an entire row without having to drag it. Stuff like that makes it so much quicker... I have been making a conscious effort to learn different formulas so it saves me time in the long run. You learn new things every day, ways to speed up.”

5.4.3.4 Health and safety and employee welfare

Five of the participants identified issues relating to health and safety or their welfare. Two participants reported having problems because of hazards that they had to navigate:

“I cut my finger the other day because they are constantly chucking knives into the washing up bowl, which I know and everyone else knows is the worst thing you can do.”

In contrast, one participant shared how her employer would ensure that any trip hazards were removed from the shop floor.

“They make sure spaces are clear so I can get through before I go. Usually they are ready for me being there.”

Similarly, a further participant reported that her employer noticed that she was experiencing problems with the lighting in the office and suggested moving her to a different part of the office.

“We moved offices and where I was before was really bright, and I said I was really struggling, and they just moved me no problem at all. They are the ones who said to me ‘are you sure you are ok here because it looks like you are constantly battling’”.

Two participants identified ways in which they struggled with either the amount or type of work that they were undertaking. In one case the employer accommodated by allowing them to work a shorter number of hours. In the second case, the participant decided to move into a different role within the organisation, which required less time using a computer, which had been causing them to experience fatigue.

“I do definitely think not staring at spreadsheets all day everyday will help, I will get a lot more breaks with it being paper based.”

5.4.3.5 Other barriers faced

A small number of participants identified other barriers which they faced in the workplace which limited upon their independence. One participant who uses magnification software found that the software he uses was not compatible on his employer’s computer system. Most of the time he was able to get around this by using a different laptop, but for certain tasks he had to rely on someone else helping him.

A further participant who required adjustments such as a larger monitor found that his company were reluctant to provide this, attributing it directly to the fact that he was employed on a temporary contract.

A final participant identified a number of tasks which they were not able to perform independently in the workplace. Whilst they spoke positively about the broader role that they had, they expressed some frustration at being able to work as independently as they would have liked.

“I would like to do it myself because I feel like I am losing independence, but if it’s what I have got to do, it’s what I have got to do.”

5.4.4 Access to Work

Two of the participants went through the process of applying for Access to Work before starting in their new roles. This section compares and contrasts their experiences.

Both participants started the process of applying for Access to Work before starting in their new role. One of the participants noted that he found the form frustrating and felt that it was not very appropriate to his circumstances:

“The form was set out in a weird way, it asks you questions assuming that you are already in work and that your disability is a new thing, as if you are already working and something happened and you need to adjust the way you are currently working. So it’s kind of hard to fill in the application because I didn’t know everything I would be doing, so it was a bit weird to predict what kind of help I would need.”

The second participant had a very different experience. Instead of contacting Access to Work independently, she spoke with the person who would act as her line manager. They discussed the type of technology that she normally used and together identified ways of accessing the role.

“I told the business really everything I needed, and then they contacted Access to Work for me, which was nice. So I had contact with Access to Work as well, but the business was really involved, so that really nice. So they kind of understood my needs, which I think is a good way to go about it. Because I think if I went to Access to Work first and told them all the stuff that I needed, when it got installed and stuff, my line manager wouldn't know if it was the right stuff and if it worked.”

Despite starting the application process as early, both participants experienced a delay in receiving the equipment they required.

“I didn't get the equipment for three days, but that wasn't too bad in the grand scheme of things because of all the induction stuff really in the first week.”

In the case of one participant, the delays which he experienced can be partly attributed to their original application not being processed correctly.

“You were supposed to get a reply within a certain amount of days, I can't remember how many it was, maybe say it was 5 working days. And when I got in touch with them after that, they didn't have a record of it so I had to start all over again, which was annoying because it was a wasted week. It wouldn't have been such a big deal if I didn't have such a short turnaround to get everything sorted.”

In both cases, the participants described having to present the type of equipment and adjustments they have benefited from before, emphasising the importance of prior experiences which they could draw upon, and a good knowledge of the range of equipment and adjustments possible.

“Luckily because it was all stuff that I have used before, Zoomtext and a large monitor. I don’t use a lot of different stuff, it’s literally just the software and a bigger monitor, that is pretty much it.”

Both participants requested a taxi through Access to Work, but there were apparent inconsistencies in whether or not this was approved. One of the participants reported that she received funding for a taxi, despite the fact that there were public transport options available. The other participant, who had a very long commute by train, reported that they requested taxi provision to get from the train station to their office, but this was not approved.

Finally, one of the participants noted how challenging it was to anticipate in advance all the equipment which she might require.

“As the job has gone on, there are little things that I realised I need.”

There were several cases where the participants faced challenges in accessing aspects of their job, but had not requested an Access to Work assessment. For example, one participant changed jobs and another participant chose to work reduced hours, because they were experiencing fatigue in using a computer. It is possible that an Access to Work assessor would have been able to identify an alternative solution which would have minimised the fatigue that they were experiencing. Two participants identified problems accessing written material which they were not able to overcome with their own adjustments, instead choosing to rely on other people.

5.4.5 Progression within their organisation

Finally, those participants who were established in their roles were asked if they had looked at the possibility of promotion within their current company. This question was not relevant for 18 participants. This was due to a variety of reasons, including being in voluntary work, being in a short-term role, or the participant having made plans to leave the organisation where they were based to return to education.

Six participants noted that they had already been promoted, including one participant who had gone from a temporary role to a more established permanent role, and one participant who had progressed from retail assistant to supervisor and now manager in the store where he worked.

Four participants specifically stated that they were not looking for opportunities to progress where they currently were. In one case the participant was not working in the field which they were interested in and they were hoping to change roles soon. In another case the participant attributed this decision directly to their eye condition and the fact that she needed to work part-time hours to work around her medical appointments.

5.5 A CASE STUDY: MAKING THE TRANSITION INTO THE WORKPLACE

During 2016-2017 we have followed in detail the transition experience of one participant as he made the transition from higher education into employment

“Ryan” graduated from university in October 2016. After a brief time spent moving house and travelling, he decided to start looking for employment opportunities.

During this time Ryan drew upon a range of services, and had a quite mixed experience. These are explored in turn.

When considering graduate roles he contacted the organisation ‘Blind in Business’ and went for a meeting with them to learn about various graduate schemes. While he did not identify any particular opportunities that he was interested in, he found the overall experience to be very positive.

“I found them very helpful actually. I went to see them in London and I had a chat with two of their members. They were really helpful from start to finish. They came and picked me up from the tube station and took me to their offices. We had a really long chat about what grad options were, if they thought it would be beneficial to me, like all the different options, what it involved, the application process and what you got out of it.”

When he started applying for roles, Ryan connected with the local job centre, where he reports not having a very positive experience.

“...the person at the job centre, I can’t remember what her job title was, but she worked for the job centre and she was a disability something, but she wasn’t very helpful... I got the impression she wasn’t sure what to do with me because I had

never worked. If I had worked before and lost my sight she would have been alright because she kept asking me when I lost my sight and when I had worked before, and blah blah blah.”

More positively, the job centre referred him to a specialist organisation to help him with his job search who, as well as providing advice, practically assisted him in completing application forms. While it was a positive experience in the end he reports being apprehensive about going at first, because of the experience he had had through the job centre.

“...they helped me job search and they helped me actually fill in the applications as well, I find them really helpful... My advisor is visually impaired as well, I don't know if that makes any difference. I generally feel they are a supportive team... all advisors have a disability themselves, I don't know if that makes a difference”.

“...they are helping me update my CV and they are going to keep my CV on file. They also help you job search.”

Having support for completing applications proved to be important as he found that some of the application forms were not accessible.

“I found that really varies. Some of the applications I can do pretty easy if they are on the website or something. A lot of the time with job applications they will be in Word but they will be in tables and I don't find those easy to navigate, so it becomes quite a long winded process. I have to go through the questions and put them in a separate document and write the answers in that document and then get someone else to put them back in and check that I haven't messed up the format or anything. So it's quite an arduous process and I do have to get help most of the time.”

Other sources of support for Ryan were the careers service at the university which he attended and Action for Blind.

“I spoke to someone from Action for a couple of weeks when I first was looking. They set me up with websites for job searches. They had information on Access to Work that I already knew. There wasn't a whole lot I could get from them apart from the places for job search, that was good. I had a meeting with the

careers department at my uni, because you can use them for up to three years after I had graduated. So I have had a couple of meetings with them, but now I mainly just go to [specialist organisation]”

Ryan was open to relocating to different cities in the UK, and prioritised the type of work that he was interested in over location. This also illustrates the confidence that he had in his skills for getting around independently, especially since having a guide dog. After several months of job searching he was successful in securing a place on an internship scheme.

The role which he was offered was based in a large city which he had not lived in before, and therefore he had to find accommodation before starting the role. This proved to be challenging with a guide dog.

“I tried a few different things, I tried not mentioning the dog at all which I didn’t feel that comfortable about, but legally I am not required to tell them about the dog when enquiring... So I tried not telling them at all...I said I am visually impaired, so do you mind waiting for me outside the door to make sure I am going in the right house. Then I got a weird excuse like ‘I don’t think this is suitable’ or whatever. Then I tried being completely open...it was a mixed reaction really, either I noticeably got a lot less interest in me when I approached other people, it was a lot more immediate because they could see a picture of me and the dog and they came back straight away and said no, you know, you are not suitable, we not interested. Or you had the other end of the spectrum where people were more enthusiastic about the dog than you actually living there!”

Due to the short amount of time available before he started the role, Ryan ended up living with a family member and making a long commute each day to get to the office. Whilst it was challenging finding accommodation with a guide dog, Ryan also found that it would have been very difficult getting mobility support in time without the services attached to having a guide dog. However, through Guide Dogs he was able to receive the mobility support he required in time to start the new role:

“I arranged to have mobility with the Guide Dogs team to learn my route to work. I did that I think one or two weeks before I started, I had two or three days where I went into [city] and we

did the routes two or three times during the day and then my guide dog had to be trained to use escalators as well because she didn't use them before. That was all pretty straight forward.”

Once he started the internship, Ryan had a broadly positive experience, having been able to access specialist equipment through Access to Work (his experiences of which are captured in Section 4.4.4.

5.6 THE TRANSITION TO ENTERING THE LABOUR MARKET

This section explores the experiences of 18 participants who shared their experience of having made or preparing to make some form of transition in the labour market.

Table 20: Reason participant was seeking employment

	Total (N)
Currently NEET/in temporary work	12
Looking for employment after graduation	2
Looking to change jobs	2
Looking for job as part of placement year from HE	1
Looking for a part time job alongside full time HE	1
Total	18

The 18 participants who were seeking employment during 2017 provided a range of explanations for this:

- Twelve participants were either NEET and therefore looking to find employment, or were in a temporary role and were seeking something longer term
- Two participants had recently graduated and were looking at graduate roles
- Two participants were already in long term employment, but were hoping to change jobs
- One participant was seeking a paid placement year as part of his degree course
- One participant was seeking a part-time job alongside their full time studies

Table 21: Characteristics of participants who had been looking for employment opportunities (N=18)

Characteristic	Total (N=18)	Total (%)	Total (All participants)
Gender			
Male	10	56%	48%
Female	8	44%	52%
Cohort originally recruited into			

Year 9	8	44%	37%
Year 10	1	6%	10%
Year 11	9	50%	54%
Registration type			
Registered blind	5	28%	35%
Registered partially sighted	9	50%	35%
Registered – category unknown	1	6%	2%
Not registered/unsure	3	17%	29%
Reading format			
Braille/electronic user	2	11%	21%
Large print user (point 16+)	10	56%	46%
Standard print user	6	33%	33%
Highest qualification level			
Degree or above	7	39%	35%
A-level or below degree	6	33%	52%
GCSE level and other	5	27%	14%
No qualification	0	0%	0%

The table above provides a summary of key characteristics of the participants who were seeking to transition into and within the labour market, noting that this group of participants is broadly representative of the overall sample.

5.6.1 Type of job sought

Table 22: Sectors the participants wanted to work in (N=18)

Sector	Total (N)
Open	5
Health care	2
Retail	2
Performing arts	2
Financial	2
Administration	1
Photography	1
Communications/PR	1
Waitress	1
Armed forces	1

The participants were interested in pursuing roles in a wide range of sectors. These are summarised in the table above. The most common response given by the participants was that they were not sure which type of job they wanted to apply in and therefore were applying for a broad range of jobs.

One participant said that this was because he was limited to applying for jobs within his local area because of not being able to drive:

“Just random things, anything in my area basically because I can’t drive.”

Another participant reported that he was looking for a job related to the area of his BTEC studies, but was keeping a very open mind:

“Basically I am trying to look for some work in the area of what I am doing... but it’s whatever I can get really. It’s looking over time to see what’s about really.”

Similarly, another participant was open to a range of possible options, but wanted to draw upon his previous roles when working as a student:

“I am looking at things like customer service, things like that. Also things that match my skills that I have in previous roles, so I have applied for admin jobs as well, I did quite a lot of that in teaching. Just anything that I have got some experience of.”

The response from one participant highlighted that her vision impairment was an important factor for her when considering possible career options:

“To be honest I don’t actually know. Anything really that will give me a chance in. There’s lots of things I would like to do like drive a car. There’s also things like I’d like to be carer but that’s just not going to happen”

Finally, one participant expressed that she was open to a range of opportunities, but found that she did not have the necessary experience for some of the roles she had identified.

5.6.2 The job search

Of the 18 participants who shared their experiences of applying for jobs, six were successful in finding a job, three had chosen to take alternative

pathways and nine at the time of last interview had not been successful in securing a position.

A number of common themes were identified in the responses given by the participants. Firstly four of the participants identified their vision as a specific or possible barrier to them getting job.

“I didn’t even get to interviews for anything. I don’t know if that’s because...I put about my eyes on all my applications, and I don’t know...I didn’t get shit grades at school, when I was applying for jobs I was thinking ‘why aren’t you giving me an interview.’”

“Some of them, they were saying it quite nicely, but it was the impression that I couldn’t do the job because of my eyes, pretty much, which I didn’t fault them for.”

Five participants noted that they were either not having much success in getting interviews, or that while they had interviews for various roles, they found that the process was very competitive.

“I started looking for jobs at the start of the uni year and I just went around and handed CVs in. When nothing came of that I looked on Indeed and there was another site I used but I can’t remember the name of it, but Indeed was the big one. Then I applied for quite a few jobs on that but didn’t hear anything back.”

“I have had quite a few interviews for what I want to do. I have had interviews, and with that feedback they have always said that I haven’t got the job but I was second. I have been so close!”

Two of the participants reported that they had conducted online assessments or had had to undertake tests as part of the assessment process. Whilst one of the participants provided positive examples of adjustments that some organisations had made, they both noted having problems with some employers.

“When I applied I got through the first stage and then they sent me their test and then I asked for extra doing the test but the test didn’t work on my screen with the magnifier. I was trying to say to them that it’s not working, and they wanted me to move onto a different PC. I said to them I can’t really do that because my normal medium of work is working on my laptop with this certain software and then that didn’t really register with them and it was really hard

getting in contact with the person who was responsible for making the adjustments and stuff and it got really tedious. So I ended up leaving it.”

More positive accounts included one organisation who tried to anticipate in advance the adjustments that the young person might need.

“They have an automated interview on their site which they did with a real person which was helpful and they asked me from the offset ‘would it be easier if we did this, if we did that’ so they came up with the suggestion rather than me having to lead everything. Because I have never applied for professional jobs before it was like a first for me, so I didn’t know the best way to go about things. So it was nice they came up with suggestions.”

Finally, one participant who after his GCSEs went straight into an apprenticeship noted his frustration that after several years of working in an administrative role he would like to change the type of job that he was working in, but that he does not have the necessary qualifications to do so.

“I would like to do IT eventually, but the problem is I don’t have the experience or qualifications.”

5.6.3 Support received when applying for jobs

Table 23: Sources of support when applying for jobs

Source	Total (N)
VI voluntary organisation	5
Organisation linked to job centre	3
Job centre	3
University careers service	2
Careers advisor	1
Careers event	1
Employment agency	1
Work experience provider	1

The table above outlines the different sources from which the participants received support when applying for jobs.

Five of the participants said that they received support through voluntary organisations that specialise in vision impairment. In some cases they

received support from more than one organisation and in all five cases, they received one-to-one tailored support, which often led to them being referred on to other services. All of the participants spoke positively about the support that they received.

“The RNIB are helping me find some sort of work as well and I have talked to them about it as well. They put me on a job skills course which was over 2 days with other visually impaired students. They were mentioning things like going to an interview, how to bring up your disability, how to ask for various support which might be needed in the workplace and stuff like that...It was quite helpful to be honest.”

Three of the participants were referred to organisations through the Job Centre they attended. In two cases they attended Work Programmes, while in the third case this appears to have been a voluntary organisation linked to the Job Centre. One participant spoke very positively about the support which they received from the Work Programme they attended (see the case study in Section 5.5) but the other participant described it as a negatively:

“Not very helpful to be honest because they don’t really know a lot. They can help people who are mentally handicapped get into a supermarket and things but when it comes to me when I need extra help, you know”.

The participant who received support through the voluntary organisation connected to the Job Centre emphasised how important the organisation was in helping her securing a job:

“I know they worked alongside the Job Centre because it was those who put me in touch with her at the end.... I would meet with her every fortnight and she would help me go through my CV, see what I needed to improve with, and if there were any jobs that were online that I couldn’t find myself...because [partner] was really helping me look online and everything. She’d let me know straight away and say ‘this is available’, so she was a great help and support.”

Two participants who had been in higher education used their university careers service, although in both cases this was primarily for general support in applying for jobs, rather than for support related to their vision impairment:

“I was briefly in contact with them leading up to applying. We get a year in industry officer who we meet up with, and they give you help with your CV and interview practice and stuff like that. I am still in contact with her at the moment actually. She was good initially in preparing and giving me help in how to go about finding a placement and how to present myself.”

5.6.4 Support once in employment

The participants were asked whether they had thought about the type of support which might be available to them once in employment. This is a topic which had been discussed during several previous data collections, although interestingly not all of the participants recalled hearing about Access to Work or fully understanding what it entails.

Sixteen participants responded to this question and gave a variety of responses. Two of the participants had applied for Access to Work after securing their jobs and one participant had used Access to Work previously, so they were confident about the type of support available. Eight participants were aware of Access to Work but had never applied for it. One of these young people had taken the initiative to contact Access to Work to find out more information about it when they were considering a job which would require a lot of travelling. A further two participants, while they reported knowing about Access to Work, gave responses which indicated that they had an incomplete understanding of it. For example, one participant expressed their frustration at not being able to apply for a number of jobs because they would not be able to get there without a car – demonstrating that they were unaware that Access to Work can help remove this barrier. In contrast, a second participant was aware that Access to Work funded transport, but unaware that they could use it access equipment.

Participant: No, I wouldn't have thought I could have support at work, because obviously I am working, it's not school.

Researcher: Have you heard of Access to Work before?

Participant: I have heard about them. It was about picking you up from your house and taking you to work if you haven't got a mode of transport and things.

Two of the participants said that they recalled talking about Access to Work before, but that they were not intending to look into it until they were ready to start a job.

“I have heard of Access to Work and obviously that’s what the Job Centre is supposed to talk to me about when I do get there eventually...I haven’t looked into it right now to be honest. I have heard of it.”

Four participants were aware of Access to Work, but were not interested in applying for it at this stage.

6 NOT IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION OR TRAINING (NEET)

Twenty participants who took part in the 2017 interviews had been NEET at some point during the previous 12 months. Their experiences are investigated in this section.

6.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS WHO HAVE BEEN NEET

Table 24: Characteristics of participants who have been NEET (N=20)

Characteristic	Total (N)	Total (%)	Total all participants (%)
Gender			
Male	10	50%	48%
Female	10	50%	52%
Cohort originally recruited into			
Year 9	9	45%	37%
Year 10	2	10%	10%
Year 11	9	45%	54%
Registration type			
Registered blind	9	45%	35%
Registered partially sighted	8	40%	35%
Registered – type unknown	1	5%	2%
Not registered/unsure	2	10%	29%
Reading format			
Braille/electronic user	4	20%	21%
Large print user (point 16+)	12	60%	46%
Standard print user	4	20%	33%
Highest qualification level			
Degree or above	7	35%	35%
A-level or below degree	9	45%	52%
GCSE level or other	4	20%	14%
No qualification	0	0%	0%

The table above presents some key characteristics of the participants who were NEET during the 2017 interviews. We note when comparing the participants who have been NEET against key characteristics of all the participants who have taken part in the study that there appears to be a slight bias towards participants who have a severe vision impairment:

- 85% of the participants who were NEET at some point during the past year were registered as blind or partially sighted, compared to 70% of the overall sample
- 80% of the participants who were NEET at some point during the past year had a preferred reading format of braille/electronic or large print, compared to 67% of the overall sample.

When making these comparisons, however, it is important to remember the small sample size.

6.1.1 Length of time participants have been NEET

The participants were asked the approximate length of time that they had not been working, in education or training (or if they were now in employment, how long they were NEET for). This information is important as it can be anticipated that many young people will become NEET after completing their courses and before finding their first job simply due to the length of time the application process can take. The key question, therefore, is how does this translate into the length of time that they have remained NEET.

Table 25: Length of time participant has been/was NEET

	Total (N)
Less than 3 months	2
3-6 months	4
6-12 months	5
Over 1 year	8
Total	19

The table above shows that the length of time the participants had been NEET varied considerably, but significantly, eight had been NEET for over one year.

To explore further the reasons why the participants became NEET, the experiences of those who have been NEET for a short time (less than 6 months) are contrasted with those who have been NEET for a longer time (over 1 year). These accounts are presented in the two tables

below, including information about some of their key characteristics, what they were doing before coming NEET, and whether they have since successfully transitioned into employment, education or training.

The different accounts demonstrate that there has been a lot of movement made by the participants in the labour market. While some young people were only NEET for a short time, in several cases this is because they have moved on to casual contracts.

We note a small number of participants who actively decided not to pursue employment, instead preferring to undertake voluntary work. Of particular concern is one participant who is not engaged in any activities which might help him in progressing towards the labour market since leaving FE college (e.g. voluntary work, training, receiving careers advice). Positively one participant who had been NEET for over four years was successful in securing her first job during 2017. She partly attributed this success to having one-to-one support through a voluntary organisation who helped her identify and apply for jobs.

Table 26: Overview of participants who had been NEET for 6 months or less (up to time of last interview)

	Registration type	Preferred format	Details	Setting by time of most recent interview
1	Not registered	Standard print	Participant no. 1 has followed a variety of possible career options since completing his A-level studies. He was unsuccessful in following one pathway following a medical assessment which concluded that his visual acuity did not meet requirements for the role. He undertook an apprenticeship but after not enjoying the placement he decided to leave and look for job opportunities instead. He spent a brief period NEET after leaving this position. At the time of interview he was in temporary work whilst also applying for longer term posts.	Temporary employment (looking for permanent work)
2	Blind	Braille/ electronic	Participant no. 2 continued into higher education after completing A-levels. She found the transition challenging and experienced some difficulties with anxiety. This led to her taking a leave of absence from her course and eventually to her withdrawing from university. At this point she became NEET and had been NEET up until the time of most recent interview.	NEET (looking for voluntary work)
3	Blind	Braille/ electronic	Participant no. 3 had previously been in further education, but withdrew from the course having faced some challenges in accessing the course. Once she had left the course she was undecided about what to do next and considered options such as further study or going into self-employment. After spending several months NEET she	FE

			eventually returned to further education at a different college.	
4	Blind	Braille electronic	Participant no. 4 completed a degree and then started to look for graduate roles. She spent a number of months NEET whilst applying for different roles before eventually being successful in getting a graduate internship.	Internship (looking for permanent work)
5	Partially sighted	Standard print	Participant no. 5 has been in a variety of roles since completing an apprenticeship after his GCSEs. He was previously made redundant from a permanent post, and since then had been seeking a new job. After a brief period NEET, by the time of interview he was in a temporary role but looking for longer-term positions.	Temporary employment (looking for work)
6	Partially sighted	Large print	Participant no. 6 completed a degree. He was unsure what type of work he wanted to go into, but after several months volunteering at a school decided to apply to be a teacher. He was accepted onto the course, but withdrew after a short time on the course. Since then he has been NEET and has applied for a range of jobs, but by the time of interview had not been successful in securing a position.	NEET (applying for jobs)

Table 27: Overview of participants who have been NEET for one year or more (up to time of last interview)

	Registration type	Preferred format	Details	Setting by time of most recent interview
1	Blind	Large print	Participant no. 1 previously studied in further education. She successfully completed her course but was NEET for several months afterwards. After deciding between employment and further study she eventually decided to apply for higher education and was due to start a degree course 15 months after completing her A-levels.	Higher Education
2	Blind	Large print	Participant no. 2 had been studying in further education. She successfully completed her course but had experienced a number of personal challenges and therefore did not start looking for employment opportunities as originally intended. At the time of interview she had recently started volunteering, and was starting to consider looking for employment.	NEET (Voluntary, not applying for jobs)
3	Blind	Very large print	Participant no. 3 had been NEET since leaving college over 4 years ago. She had undertaken a lot of voluntary work and had been regularly applying for jobs. She had previously been successful in finding a job, but this offer was later withdrawn, reportedly due to challenges associated with her vision impairment. At the time of interview she was still in voluntary work and applying for a range of employment opportunities within her local area.	NEET (Voluntary, applying for jobs)

4	Partially sighted	Large print	Participant no. 4 had been in higher education. He had found the first year very challenging and had decided to take a leave of absence to spend time developing his academic writing skills before returning the following year. At the time of interview, he had been NEET for several months but was intending to return to higher education for the following academic year.	NEET (Leave of absence from HE)
5	Partially sighted	Large print	Participant no. 5 had been NEET for a number of years after leaving school. She had undertaken some voluntary work but had not pursued employment opportunities during this time. Due to a change in personal circumstance she started to look for work opportunities with the assistance of a volunteer at a local charity. After a number of applications she was successful in securing a part-time job.	Employment
6	Blind	Large print	Participant no. 6 had been NEET since completing a degree course the previous academic year. She had been in voluntary work and also applying for a variety of jobs, but had not been successful in securing a job. At the time of interview she was still volunteering and seeking paid employment.	NEET (Voluntary, applying for jobs)
7	Blind	Large print	Participant no. 7 had been NEET since completing FE college four years previously. During this time he had not undertaken any voluntary work or applied for any employment opportunities.	NEET (Not applying for jobs)

8	Partially sighted	Large print	Participant no. 8 had been NEET for almost all the time since graduating from university in the previous academic year. She did have a paid job for a short time, but the role was made redundant. She had been volunteering at an organisation linked to the field she was interested in working in. After several months volunteering at the organisation they offered her a temporary paid opportunity. At the time of last interview she was still in this role, but was searching or a longer term position.	Employment (Temporary, applying for permanent jobs)
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6.2 USE OF TIME

The participants who had been NEET were asked how they had used the time that they had available to them. Their responses are summarised in the table below.

Table 28: How have the participants filled their time whilst NEET?

	Total (N)
Volunteering	7
Applying for jobs	5
Dealing with personal circumstances	4
Casual work	3
Travelling/social activities	2
Pursuing hobbies	2
Researching options	1

The most common response given by seven participants who said they used their free time to do some form of voluntary work. Voluntary work experiences have been addressed previously in section 5.4.

Interestingly, one participant who said that he tended to spend his spare time pursuing hobbies noted that he was no longer interested in undertaking voluntary work, having done so previously:

“I have done loads yeah, but I don’t really feel it’s helped me”

Five participants reported that they spent a lot of time applying for jobs. One participant who had previously been in employment said that he had a lot of response from agencies when he first started looking for a job after being made redundant from a previous post.

“I applied for a few, but I kind of went through a crazy period where I had a dozen calls in the space of two days, different agencies saying ‘we are advertising this position would you like to apply for it’. I ended up applying, although not applying if that makes sense.”

In contrast, another participant who spent a lot of time applying for jobs, having not worked before, received very little response:

“No, I didn’t even get to interviews for anything. I don’t know if that’s because... I put about my eyes on all my applications, and I don’t know... I didn’t get shit grades at school, when I was

applying for jobs I was thinking ‘why aren’t you giving me an interview’. I don’t know if that’s to do with it or not.”

Four participants reported that a considerable amount of their time was spent dealing with personal circumstances, and in the three cases this related to them needing to find somewhere else to live. Two of these participants had challenges in finding new accommodation partly because of finding somewhere that would accommodate them having a guide dog.

Three participants undertook some casual work whilst applying for more stable, longer-term jobs. In two cases they were able to find casual work related to their previous job, and therefore able to draw upon some existing skills.

Finally, two participants who had been in higher education decided to spend some time travelling after graduation, two participants who had been NEET for over a year had found some hobbies they enjoyed and one participant who was deciding between multiple pathways spent a lot of time researching their decision.

6.3 SUPPORT RECEIVED WHILST NEET

The support received by participants when searching for jobs has previously been covered in section 5.6. However, the participants who had been NEET were asked additional specific questions about their experience with the local job centre, including whether they were claiming employment related benefits and also if they ever engaged with the job centre.

6.3.1 Employment related benefits

The participants were asked whether they were receiving any form of employment-related benefit. Two participants reported that they were receiving Job Seekers Allowance and eight participants reported that they were receiving Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Five participants reported that they had not applied for any benefits at all – three who were in casual employment, one who was on leave of absence from higher education and one who had been NEET for several months.

6.3.2 Support received through Job Centre

Three of the participants who are receiving ESA reported that they do not have contact with the Job Centre. Two of these participants were dismissive about the support available through the Job Centre.

Participant: I don't have contact or anything, they just pay you, that's literally it.

Researcher: Have they told you about the type of support that could be available when you are looking for work?

Participant: Oh, I will just go to the RNIB... Yeah they are just job people aren't they, ESA, they have no ideas about special requirements.

"Our nearest one has just closed, it will be a case of travelling in. To be honest the likelihood of them doing anything that I can't do myself is very slim. There is not much that they can really do is there."

Four participants who had contact with their local Job Centre had been referred to specialist employment programmes. The participants had very mixed experiences of attending their respective programmes. One participant spoke very highly of her experience (which is summarised in Section 5.5). In contrast, another participant worked with the same organisation, but in a different location. He spoke very negatively about his experience:

"They last time they fobbed me off to someone else, not useful at all, impressed was just a waste of time... I went and seen them and they just basically said we can't really do anything, go to the RNIB, they didn't really help me to be honest."

Two further participants were connected to their local Job Centre. One had been referred to receive support from 'Access to Business' regarding setting up their own business and had found the support helpful. The other reported that they went for regular appointments, but had not received any additional support.

"I think the general impression I get nearly every time I go is they are happy I am volunteering and they just want to kind of leave it at that."

Those participants who attended appointments at their local job centre spoke broadly negatively about the experience.

Researcher: What's your experience been like of the job centre?

Participant: Well 50:50 really. They chat a lot, but when it comes to action... Before ESA I was on job seekers allowance for three months and I didn't find them very helpful at all to be honest. I had to go there every other week for signing and stuff, but when it came to finding actual work or a job or whatever, they weren't very helpful. They just talked too much!"

7 EMPLOYMENT READINESS

7.1 UK LABOUR FORCE SURVEY

The UK Labour Force Survey is a quarterly survey run by the UK government with the objective of obtaining key employment statistics for the population. This parallels similar surveys which are conducted in other European countries.

Meager and Carta (2008) devised a procedure for identifying individuals in the survey who identify as having a vision impairment. This involved taking the responses from a number of variables on health problems and disabilities. This method was later adopted by the project team (e.g. see Hewett and Keil, 2016) and refined to take account of new variables being used in the survey.

As part of 2017 interviews, the participants were asked the following questions from the UK Labour Force Survey to ascertain whether the survey would have identified the individual as a disabled person with a vision impairment. A summary of the questions posed are as follows:

1. Do you have any health problems or disabilities that you expect will last more than a year?

If the answer to this was yes, the researcher then moved on to a number of follow up questions.

2. Those who answered 'yes' were asked what type of health problem they had. They were able to choose from a list of 17 categories, one of which was 'difficulty in seeing (while wearing spectacles or contact lenses)'. This was the question used to ascertain whether respondents had seeing difficulties.
3. Respondents who had answered 'yes' for question 1 were also asked if they could identify their main health problem, of which 'difficulty in seeing (while wearing spectacles or contact lenses)' was an option. This is the question which was used in the analysis to ascertain those responses whose main health problem was seeing difficulties.
4. Respondents were then asked if these health problem(s) or disability(ies) (when taken singly or together) substantially limited their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. If the respondent answered yes to this question and/or they had already identified that they had one or more specific health problem(s),

then they were recorded as having a **current disability** as defined by the **Disability Discrimination Act**.

5. Finally the respondents were asked ‘Does this health problem affect the KIND of work you might do?...or the AMOUNT of paid work that you might do?’ If the respondent fulfilled either (or both) of these criteria they were defined as having a **‘work-limiting disability’**.
6. Those people who met the criteria for having current DDA or work-limiting definitions of disability were defined as having a **‘current long-term disability’**.

The following tables and discussion outline the ways in which the participants responded to these questions, including their interpretation of the first question. Their responses are analysed in the context of their level of vision impairment, current setting and experiences in the workplace.

Table 29: Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more?

Response	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	33	80%
No	8	20%
Total	41	100%

Eight participants reported that they do not have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expecting to last for 12 months or more, in contrast with 33 participants who said that they did. More information about the eight participants who responded ‘no’ to this question is presented in the table below.

Table 30: Characteristics of participants who did not identify as having a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more

Characteristic	Total (N)	Total (%)	All participants who took part in data collection (%)
Gender			
Male	3	38%	45%
Female	5	63%	55%
Cohort originally recruited into			
Year 9	3	38%	37%
Year 10	0	0%	7%
Year 11	5	63%	56%
Registration type			
Registered blind	2	25%	27%
Registered partially sighted	4	50%	28%
Registered – category unknown	0	0%	21%
Not registered/unsure	2	25%	24%
Reading format			
Braille/electronic user	1	13%	17%
Large print user (point 16+)	2	25%	38%
Standard print user	5	63%	44%
Highest qualification level			
Degree or above	3	38%	*
A-level or below degree	3	38%	*
GCSE level and other	2	25%	*
No qualification	0	0%	*
Setting at time of interview			
Higher Education	1	13%	42%
Employment	6	75%	27%
NEET	1	13%	15%
Further Education	0	0%	8%
Volunteering	0	0%	4%
Gap year	0	0%	2%
Placement year	0	0%	2%

We note that six of the participants who said that they did not identify as having a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expecting to last for 12 months or more are registered as either blind or partially sighted.

The objective of these questions is to identify individuals who have a disability which can impact upon their experience in the labour market. Despite responding 'no' to this question, we note that five of the participants had previously identified ways in which they have faced challenges in the workplace, specifically in relation to their vision impairment. Examples included identifying ways in which they struggled to access information, or requiring sighted assistance to perform their role.

Across all the participants, there were several examples of individuals who were uncertain about how they should answer the question, due to the way in which it was phrased. This was because they were unclear about whether a vision impairment would be classified as a "physical or mental health condition or illness". Some examples of the responses they provided are presented below.

"I would say yes because...I am not sure if visual impairment classes as a physical... it's a bit difficult because is disability a health condition...health could be, I don't know...if later on it asks about disability I would probably say yes, but my instinct is that a disability isn't a health condition, but I am not sure about that."

Does that count being blind...is blindness a physical condition? Is it?! Oh ok, I didn't know that. I never would have thought of it."

One participant who thought of Aspergers ahead of his vision impairment responded that whilst he knew it was classified as a disability, he did not view it that way.

"I am not sure how to answer that, Aspergers is classed as a disability, but I don't see it as a disability."

Following this question, it was clarified with the participants who were unsure about how to respond to this question that vision impairment is regarded in the survey as a physical condition. Further questions were then asked to ascertain whether the participants viewed themselves as having a current disability as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act

and/or if they believed they met the criteria of having a ‘work-limiting disability’.

Table 31: Based on responses given, would the participant meet the criteria for having a ‘current disability’ as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	32	78%
No	9	22%
Total	41	100%

The participants were asked if their health problem (s) or disability (ies) substantially limit their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. A person who answered ‘yes’ to this question, as well as having previously identified that they have one or more specific health problem is recorded as having a ‘current disability’ as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act. Thirty-three of the participants met this criteria through their responses, while nine participants did not. The table below provides an overview of some key characteristics of those people who did not believe that their health problem or disability substantially limits their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Table 32: Characteristics of participants who did not identify as having a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more

Characteristic	Total (N)	Total (%)	All participants who took part in data collection (%)
Gender			
Male	2	22%	45%
Female	7	78%	55%
Cohort originally recruited into			
Year 9	4	44%	37%
Year 10	1	11%	7%
Year 11	4	44%	56%
Registration type			
Registered blind	5	55%	27%
Registered partially sighted	3	33%	28%

Registered – category unknown	0	0%	21%
Not registered/unsure	1	11%	24%
Reading format			
Braille/electronic user	4	44%	17%
Large print user (point 16+)	1	11%	38%
Standard print user	4	44%	44%
Highest qualification level			
Degree or above	1	11%	*
A-level or below degree	7	77%	*
GCSE level and other	1	11%	*
No qualification	0	0%	*
Setting at time of interview			
Higher Education	4	44%	42%
Employment	4	44%	27%
NEET	1	11%	15%
Further Education	0	0%	8%
Volunteering	0	0%	4%
Gap year	0	0%	2%
Placement year	0	0%	2%

We note that all but one of the participants who would not have met the criteria for having a ‘current disability’, as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act, are registered as Blind or Partially Sighted. Responses from some of these young people highlighted that whilst they did face challenges in their day-to-day life because of their vision impairment, because of the strategies that they had developed to overcome these strategies, they personally believed they were not limited by their vision impairment. For example, one participant responded:

“It makes things more difficult, but it doesn’t stop me actually doing them, so I would probably say no. It does make it more difficult.”

Table 33: Based on responses given, would the participant meet the criteria for having a ‘work limiting disability’?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	33	80%
No	8	20%
Total	41	100%

The participants were asked the questions ‘Does this health problem affect the *kind* of paid work you might do’ and ‘Does this health problem affect the *amount* of paid work you might do’. To qualify as having a ‘work-limiting disability’ it was necessary for the participants to have answered ‘yes’ to one of these questions. Thirty-three participants responded in such a way that they would be classified as having a work-limiting disability, while eight participants would not be classified.

Table 34 : Based on responses given, would the participant meet the criteria for having a ‘current long-term disability’?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	31	76%
No	10	24%
Total	41	100%

Finally, in order to be classified as having a ‘current long term disability’, it was necessary for the participants to have been recorded as having *either* a work limiting disability *or* a current disability as defined by DDA. Taking into account the initial response which the participants gave to the first question of ‘Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more’, thirty-two of the participants responded in such a way that they would have been recorded as having a current long-term disability. However, following further explanation of what is regarded by the survey as a physical condition, several of the participants refined their answer. If we were to take into account these refined answers, a further 8 participants would have been identified as having a ‘current long-term disability’.

7.2 ENABLER EMPLOYMENT ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

The following questions were taken from an Employment Assessment Toolkit which was used by Action for Blind People, and later RNIB, when working alongside people with vision impairment to establish how prepared they are for employment and to identify if there are any areas where they may require targeted support. The following sections outline the responses given by the participants to a selection of these questions. This set of questions were asked to participants whose primary setting was not already employment.

7.2.1 Employment activity

Table 35: What is the respondent currently engaged in? (Primary setting)

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Full time education	19	58%
Full time employment (temporary)	1	3%
Part time employment	2	6%
Gap year	1	3%
Voluntary work	1	3%
NEET - seeking work	4	12%
NEET – not seeking work	5	15%
Total	33	100%

The table above provides a summary of the primary setting for the 33 participants who contributed to this part of the interview. Over half of the participants were still in full time education. The one participant who was in full time employment was in a temporary role.

Table 36: When was the last time you were in paid employment?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
0 to 3 months ago	12	38%
4 to 6 months ago	0	0%
7 to 12 months ago	1	3%
13 to 24 months ago	2	6%
25 months or more	2	6%
Never worked	15	47%
Total	32	100%

The participants were asked how long it has been since they were last in some form of paid employment. Just under half of the participants reported that they did not have any experience of paid employment,

while a further 12% had not had any paid employment for over twelve months.

7.2.2 Current job search activity

Table 37: Have they done any job search activity in the last three months?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	11	33%
No	22	67%
Total	33	100%

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.

7.2.3 Access to information

Table 38: Can you read print from a printed page (with or without a low vision aid)?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	23	70%
No	10	30%
Total	33	100%

Table 39: Can you use a computer (with or without assistive technology)?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	32	97%
No	1	3%
Total	33	100%

Table 40: Can you read braille?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	13	40%
No	20	60%
Total	33	100%

The three tables above summarise how the participants are able to access information. The majority (70%) are able to read print (with or

without a magnifier), while 40% are able to read braille. Only one participant reported that they cannot use a computer (with or without assistive technology).

7.2.4 Computer skills

Table 41: How confident are you writing a document with a word processor on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is ‘very confident’ and 1 is ‘not at all confident’?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
1	1	3%
2	1	3%
3	0	0%
4	1	3%
5	9	27%
6	21	64%
Total	33	100%

Table 42: How frequently do you write a document using a word processor on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is ‘very frequently’ and 1 is ‘not at all’?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
1	1	3%
2	3	9%
3	1	3%
4	8	24%
5	8	24%
6	12	36%
Total	33	100%

The participants were asked to rate how confident they are in writing a document using a word processor, on a scale of 1 to 6, where 6 is ‘very confident’. All but three of the participants rated their confidence as 5 or above. The frequency with which the participants write documents using a word processor was more varied, with 13 participants rating their level of use as 4 or below. Several participants who do not use word processors very frequently linked this to not being in education anymore.

Table 43: How confident are you using email on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is ‘very confident’ and 1 is ‘not at all confident’?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
1	3	9%

2	0	0%
3	1	3%
4	0	0%
5	7	21%
6	22	67%
Total	33	100%

Table 44: How frequently do you use email on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is 'very frequently' and 1 is 'not at all'?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
1	1	3
2	0	0
3	3	9
4	4	12%
5	3	9%
6	22	67%
Total	33	100%

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 as '1' or 'not at all confident'.

Table 45: How confident are you using the internet on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is 'very confident' and 1 is 'not at all confident'?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
1	1	3%
2	0	0%
3	2	6%
4	1	3%
5	7	21%
6	22	67%
Total	33	100%

Table 46: How frequently do you use the internet on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is 'very frequently' and 1 is 'not at all'?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
1	1	3%
2	0	0%
3	1	3%
4	0	0%
5	0	0%

6	31	94%
Total	33	100%

Similar responses were given to the next 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.

Table 47: When considering computer skills in a work based context, do you think you could benefit from any additional skills?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	15	45%
No	17	52%
Unsure	1	3%
Total	33	100%

To conclude this section the participants were asked whether they thought they could benefit from any additional computer skills for use in a work-based context. Almost half (45%) of the participants felt that they would benefit from additional computer skills for use in the workplace. The specific skills which they identified are summarised in the table below.

Table 48: What additional skills could be the participants benefit from?

	Total (N)
MS Excel	4
Screen reader	2
Internet skills	2
MS PowerPoint	2
Operating system	2
General skills	2
Keyboard shortcuts	1

The most common example given by the participants was better MS Excel skills, while a further two participants wanted to be able to use MS PowerPoint.

“Yeah I think I could benefit from training with Excel, that’s the only thing I don’t know how to use. That comes up a lot in personal specifications and job descriptions.”

Three participants wanted to broaden their use of assistive technology:

“I probably need to learn how to use assistive technology with Microsoft with Supernova or Zoomtext or Jaws more confidently because I probably can’t use them as far as I can use my Mac.”

Two participants highlighted limited internet skills:

“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.”

Two participants felt that they would benefit from being able to cross over to different operating systems and to be able to use different software on these alternative systems. Two participants did not identify anything in particular, simply noting that they were not confident in using a computer:

“I am not very computer literate. I hate computers. I mean I tried to do it in my previous college, so some qualifications and stuff, but I just don’t have the patience. I wouldn’t be very comfortable on reception jobs and stuff because that involves computers and stuff”

One participant thought that he would benefit from having a better knowledge of possible keyboard shortcuts:

“Maybe knowing some of the really specific keyboard shortcuts. Sometimes that proves to be a bit of a problem. I am talking about something like aligning writing or to make it bold. Obviously that could be done with a cursor, but I presume there’s shortcuts for that.”

Finally, one of the participants who said ‘no’ to more computer skills appeared to have dismissed being able to use a computer altogether.

“To be honest I would probably say to them 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.”

7.2.5 Independent travel

Table 49: How confident are you travelling independently from home to a familiar place in the daylight on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is 'very confident' and 1 is 'not at all confident'?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
1	0	0%
2	0	0%
3	2	6%
4	12	36%
5	10	30%
6	9	27%
Total	33	100%

The participants were asked how confident they are in travelling independently from home to a familiar place in the daylight. The majority of participants were confident with doing this, with 57% of participants rating their confidence as 5 or 6. However, we note that two of the participants rated their confidence as low as 3.

Table 50: How often do you travel independently from home to a familiar place in the daylight on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is 'everyday' and 1 is 'never'?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
1	0	0%
2	2	6%
3	3	9%
4	5	15%
5	7	21%
6	16	48%
Total	33	100%

The participants were then asked how often they travel independently from home to a familiar place in the daylight, where 6 is 'everyday' and 1 is 'never'. The responses were mixed, but the majority of participants reported that they regularly travel independently to a familiar place.

Table 51: How confident are you travelling independently from home to an unfamiliar place in the daylight on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is 'very confident' and 1 is 'not at all confident'?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
1	4	12%
2	5	15%
3	9	27%

4	8	24%
5	5	15%
6	2	6%
Total	33	100%

The participants were also asked how confident they are traveling independently from home to an unfamiliar place. The participants were less positive than with the previous questions, with only 21% of the participants rating their confidence as 5 or 6 and 12% of participants rating their confidence as low as 1.

Table 52: When considering independently travel, do you think you could benefit from any additional skills?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	14	42%
No	19	58%
Total	33	100%

The participants were then asked whether they thought they could benefit from any additional skills for independently travel. Their responses are summarised in the table above. Fourteen of the participants felt that they could benefit from additional independent travel skills, while nineteen did not. It could be expected that there would be an association between the response given by the participants and their reported level of confidence in getting around independently. This is investigated further in the table below.

Table 53: Confidence in travelling independently to an unfamiliar place in the daylight on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is ‘very confident’ and 1 is ‘not at all confident’? By whether they believe they would benefit from additional skills for independent travel

	Yes (N)	No (N)
1	2	2
2	2	3
3	6	3
4	2	6
5	2	3
6	0	2
Total	14	19

The table above shows that there was not as clear an association between perceived level of confidence and whether the participant felt that they could benefit from additional skills for independent travel as might have been anticipated. For example, eight of the participants who rated their confidence as 3 or under did not believe they would benefit from any additional skills.

The participants were encouraged to explain the responses which they gave, with a number of themes emerging.

Five participants described how in general they needed to improve their overall confidence in getting around independently. One participant shared that whilst he was cautious about independent travel, he still was able to motivate himself to do it.

“I am quite apprehensive, but I would still do it if I had to.”

In contrast, another participant reported that she felt very unsure in unfamiliar environments and so tended to travel with others.

“I would say 1. 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”

A further participant shared that whilst she felt she had the necessary skills to go somewhere independently, she had lost confidence in doing so:

“I seem to have a problem with travelling a lot. I think I need to go to the doctor because I get really anxious. For no reason, nothing

kicked it off or anything. I just feel really anxious about getting public transport for no reason...I have got the skills for it, it's just doing it regularly is my problem. So a lack of confidence, but I have got the skills for it."

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."

In contrast, one participant shared how he felt confident in applying his skills for using public transport to new settings:

"...it's a bit like London in that it has an underground network which helps a lot in getting around if visually impaired... Because I know how to use the London underground, it's pretty transferrable."

Two participants discussed their use of technology for independent travel. In one case the participant had benefited a lot from being able to use technology to enable him to get around independently, while in the other case they wanted to develop additional skills to be able to use such technology.

"Getting around any city on my own if I don't know it, my phone is a life saver completely with google maps, I wouldn't be able to get anywhere without it! Technology in that sense has just really really helped."

"Probably for using technology to help me to navigate areas, using google maps, or using a VI accessible version of that."

Two participants who had previously lacked confidence in getting around independently highlighted how important it had been to them to be matched with a Guide Dog.

Researcher: How confident are you travelling independently from home to an unfamiliar place in the daylight on a scale of 1 to 6, if 6 is 'very confident' and 1 is 'not at all confident'?

Participant: 6

Researcher: What do you think you would have said to that before you had [guide dog]

Participant: 1!

In reflecting back this participant concluded that if she had had the opportunity to start using a long cane earlier, she would have been more confident in general for getting around.

“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.”

Another participant when reflecting back on the mobility support he had received in school felt that he would have benefited from long-cane training:

“Maybe in hindsight I should have had long cane techniques but at the time I never really used to use it.”

Two participants shared that they did not require any additional skills, but would instead require some investment of time to help them learn new routes and one participant felt that he could benefit from having someone help him planning routes.

One participant who rated her confidence as '3' felt that she could benefit from some additional skills, but was not familiar with the type of skills which can be taught. A further participant who rated her confidence as 2 felt that she was too old now to receive mobility training.

“Yeah, I wouldn’t know what skills they were, but I could benefit from additional skills.”

“No, now I am a bit older, no.”

Finally, two participants expressed their frustration at not being able to drive.

7.2.6 Vision and independence in the workplace

Table 54 : 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'?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
1	0	0%
2	0	0%
3	2	6%
4	5	15%
5	11	33%
6	15	45%
Total	33	100%

The 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'" Their responses are summarised in the table above. The majority of participants indicated that they would feel confident in responding to this question, with 78% participants responding with either 5 or 6, and only two participants (6%) responding with '3', which was the lowest response given.

The participants had an opportunity to expand upon the response they gave, as well as to provide an explanation for the level of confidence they had in dealing with such situations. Their responses were analysed and several themes identified, as discussed below.

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."

"I am a realist in that I will admit stuff I can't do. I know people who have disabilities who have that attitude 'oh you can do anything'. No, not really."

A common way in which the participants suggested challenging the attitude of employers was by providing evidence of times where they had previously worked.

“Well it depends on what I was going to do. If it were part time employment obviously I would refer back to the time in the summer working. If it were more serious employment I would refer back to my time back here in [placement year].”

Been able to draw upon previous experience was an important enabler for many of the participants in having the confidence to challenge such perceptions.

“I think it’s just being able to look back at the stuff I have already done, and that hasn’t really stopped me from doing it, just getting to university and looking at past achievements. I feel pretty confident in what I have got to offer.”

Similarly, the participants also benefited from having had previous experience of talking to others about their vision impairment in the past.

“I had to develop my confidence in being able to advocate for myself at uni. So having to do that, I have a better awareness now.”

A further important enabler identified was having been encouraged by others to have confidence in himself or herself, and to challenge such perceptions where necessary.

“I think upbringing is important, that I have always been raised to believe that I can do whatever I want to do. My parents have never assumed any less of me.”

Several participants responded by saying that they would seek to directly challenge the perceptions of the employer.

“I would just explain, obviously politely, not these words, that it was their ignorance, people aren’t incapable.”

“I would tell them they are wrong. I would tell them that they are making some assumptions because they don’t understand that...The reason that they think that is because they wouldn’t be

able to do a certain thing if they had no sight. What they don't take into account is the fact that I have been blind since I was 5, and I am bloody good at being blind! It's something that I do every day!"

A further important way in which the participants would challenge the perceptions of employers is by explaining to them the adjustments which they would make in order to work-related tasks.

"I think I would sit and explain how screen-readers work and what the various resources are."

"I probably would maybe ask for some specific examples and basically say what ways I have to overcome those issues."

One participant explained how important they believed it was for them to have accepted their disability, to be able to deal with such situations.

"I have had it that long now that I can't not be alright with it."

Finally, one participant shared how she would take offence at such a question from a potential employer.

"I'd tell them that they cannot make assumptions...to do so is discrimination, I will not stand for it, and they have to give me a chance to prove my own worth instead of making judgements."

7.2.7 Target job

Table 55: [For those searching for work] 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'?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
1	0	0%
2	1	10%
3	1	10%
4	1	10%
5	3	30%
6	4	40%
Total	10	100%

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 given by ten participants are given in the table above. Their responses were mixed, ranging from 2 to 6, but the majority (seven or 70%) gave a response of 5 or 6.

8 WELLBEING AND LOCUS OF CONTROL

8.1 WELLBEING

8.1.1 What is Wellbeing?

The theme of Wellbeing has been investigated in previous technical reports, most notably Hewett, Douglas and Keil (2015). In their report, Chanfreau et al (2013) define Wellbeing as follows:

“Subjective wellbeing is generally regarded as consisting of at least two factors. Broadly there are ‘hedonic’ wellbeing (happiness, pleasure, enjoyment) and ‘eudemonic’ wellbeing (purpose, meaning, fulfilment).”

Drawing upon this report we investigated two important measures of Wellbeing

- Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale which NatCen identifies to be the principle scale for measuring subjective wellbeing
- Locus of Control which was taken from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England and measures the extent to which individuals believe they have control over events in their lives

8.1.2 Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale is described as a “validated measure of mental wellbeing that has been used nationally, regionally and locally and seen as an effective tool” (ChAMPS, 2015). For the purpose of this research we used the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, which is made up of seven statements. The participants are invited to rate their feelings and thoughts over the previous two weeks, using a five item Likert scale. The seven statements are:

- I’ve been feeling optimistic about the future
- I’ve been feeling useful
- I’ve been feeling relaxed
- I’ve been dealing with problems well
- I’ve been thinking clearly
- I’ve been feeling close to other people
- I’ve been able to make up my own mind about things

The five item Likert scale given is:

- None of the time (1)
- Rarely (2)
- Some of the time (3)
- Often (4)
- All of the time (5)

The tool has been developed to investigate whether the mental wellbeing of a specific **population** (e.g. in the case of this research, young people who have a vision impairment). Therefore, it is not appropriate to use the tool to look at the mental wellbeing of individuals. The responses given by the participants are summed up, giving a possible score range of 7 to 35, with higher scores indicating higher levels of wellbeing (Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2011).

A national mental wellbeing score has previously been calculated which can be used to compare the mental wellbeing of our sample, against the national average (ChaMPS, 2015). The Understanding Society survey (Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2011) found an average national score of 25.3 with a standard deviation of 4.4. A summary of the responses provided by the participants are given in the following seven tables.

Table 56: I've been feeling optimistic about the future

	Total (N)	Total (%)
None of the time	0	0%
Rarely	1	3%
Some of the time	17	46%
Often	14	38%
All of the time	5	14%
Total	37	100%

Table 57: I've been feeling useful

	Total (N)	Total (%)
None of the time	0	0%
Rarely	4	11%
Some of the time	13	35%
Often	15	41%
All of the time	5	14%
Total	37	100%

Table 58: I've been feeling relaxed

	Total (N)	Total (%)
None of the time	0	0%
Rarely	9	24%
Some of the time	13	35%
Often	10	27%
All of the time	5	14%
Total	37	100%

Table 59: I've been dealing with problems well

	Total (N)	Total (%)
None of the time	1	3%
Rarely	2	5%
Some of the time	11	30%
Often	18	49%
All of the time	5	14%
Total	37	100%

Table 60: I've been thinking clearly

	Total (N)	Total (%)
None of the time	0	0%
Rarely	2	5%
Some of the time	10	27%
Often	18	49%
All of the time	7	19%
Total	37	100%

Table 61: I've been feeling close to other people

	Total (N)	Total (%)
None of the time	1	3%
Rarely	1	3%
Some of the time	13	35%
Often	16	43%
All of the time	6	16%
Total	37	100%

Table 62: I've been able to make up my own mind about things

	Total (N)	Total (%)
None of the time	0	0%
Rarely	2	5%
Some of the time	6	16%
Often	16	43%

All of the time	13	35%
Total	37	100%

Thirty-seven participants participated in completing the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing survey. The mean score was 25.7 with a standard deviation of 3.65. This reflects an average mental wellbeing for our participants, which is in keeping with the national average. According to the guidance given by Tennant et al (2007), this means that our sample have average psychological wellbeing.

8.2 LOCUS OF CONTROL

“Locus of control refers to assumed internal states that explain why certain people actively, resiliently, and willingly try to deal with difficult circumstances, whilst others succumb to a range of negative emotions” (Lefcourt, 1991)

By investigating Locus of Control, we were investigating the extent to which participants believe that they have control over events in their lives. For the purpose of this research we adopted a tool used in the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England. They asked the following questions:

How much do you agree or disagree that:

- If someone is not a success in life, it is usually their own fault
- I can pretty much decide what will happen in my life
- How well you get on in this world is mostly a matter of luck
- If you work hard at something you’ll usually succeed

The possible responses available to the participants were:

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Disagree (3)
- Strongly disagree (4)

For question 1, 2 and 4, if the participant were to ‘strongly agree’ their response would indicate an internal locus of control, whilst to ‘strongly disagree’ would indicate an external locus of control, whilst the opposite is true for question 3. The tables below summarise the responses given by the participants. The responses given to each statement are presented in turn, along with the responses given by the participants of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England. This data was gathered in 2010 when the participants were aged 20/21, and over

11,000 young people were surveyed. Comparison between the responses given by the longitudinal study participants and the LSYPE participants should be made with caution, due to the small numbers involved.

Table 63: How much do you agree or disagree that if someone is not a success in life, it is usually their own fault?

	Total (N)	Total (%)	LSYPE (%)
Strongly agree	2	5	7%
Agree	11	28	36%
Disagree	19	49	45%
Strongly disagree	5	13	7%
Don't know	2	5	5%
Total	39	100%	100%

Table 64: How much do you agree or disagree that I can pretty much decide what will happen in my life?

	Total (N)	Total (%)	LSYPE (%)
Strongly agree	2	5%	10%
Agree	25	64%	52%
Disagree	10	26%	30%
Strongly disagree	2	5%	5%
Don't know	0	0%	3%
Total	39	100%	100%

Table 65: How much do you agree or disagree that how well you get on in this world is mostly a matter of luck?

	Total (N)	Total (%)	LSYPE (%)
Strongly agree	0	0%	3%
Agree	10	26%	36%
Disagree	22	56%	58%
Strongly disagree	4	10%	9%
Don't know	3	8%	4%
Total	39	100%	100%

Table 66: How much do you agree or disagree that if you work hard at something you'll usually succeed?

	Total (N)	Total (%)	LSYPE (%)

Strongly agree	15	39	29%
Agree	20	51	65%
Disagree	4	10	4%
Strongly disagree	0	0	1%
Don't know	0	0	1%
Total	39	100%	100%

We note a very similar pattern of response from our participants in comparison to the responses given by the participants in the LSYPE survey. However, as previously noted in Hewett, Douglas and Keil (2015), one notable difference is the proportion of participants who responded that they “strongly agree” that ‘if you work hard at something you’ll usually succeed’ (39% in the Transitions study, compared with 29% in the LSYPE study).

Table 67: Overall Locus of Control

Total score	Total (N)	Total (%)
4-7	6	15%
8-11	30	77%
12-16	3	8%
Total	39	100%

To obtain an overall impression of the participants’ Locus of Control, the responses the participants had given were summed together. For questions 1, 2 and 4, responses of ‘strongly agree’ were assigned a value of ‘1’, through to ‘strongly disagree’ which was assigned a value of ‘4’. To reflect the direction of question 3, responses of ‘strongly agree’ were assigned a value of 4, through to ‘strongly disagree’ which was assigned a value of 1. A low value reflects an internal locus of control, with a possible range of 4 to 16. The mean score of the 39 participants was 9.10, and the majority of participants had a score of between 8 and 11. This suggests that the majority of participants have either a moderate internal or moderate external locus of control.

We note however that three participants gave a response which suggests a strong external locus of control. These responses are possibly reflective of the challenging circumstances that all three had been in:

- One participant had been in Higher Education, but had withdrawn as he had found the course was not accessible to him. He then spent a period of time NEET.

- One participant had been in Higher Education, but had not met the necessary criteria to continue on their course, despite an appeal to the institution.
- One participant had been in Higher Education, and after a challenging first year had agreed with the institution to study the remaining years part time.

In contrast, 15% of the participants display a strong internal locus of control. These participants had followed a wide range of pathways, including:

- Higher Education (on placement year abroad)
- Higher Education x 3
- Employment x 2

8.3 SATISFACTION

Finally the young people were asked “How dissatisfied or satisfied are you about the way your life has turned out so far”? This question was taken from the LSYPE survey, and the responses from that larger survey are given for comparison.

Table 68: How dissatisfied or satisfied are you about the way your life has turned out so far?

	Total (N)	Total (%)	LSYPE (%)
Very satisfied	9	23%	28%
Fairly satisfied	24	62%	51%
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	5	13%	13%
Fairly dissatisfied	1	3%	6%
Very dissatisfied	0	0%	3%
Don't know	0	0%	1%
Total	39	100%	100%

The responses given by our participants are similar to those given by the LSYPE participations. Eighty-five percent of the Transitions study participants reported being either ‘very satisfied’ or ‘fairly satisfied’ with the way their life had turned out so far, in comparison to 79% of those from the LSYPE survey.

The participant who reported being ‘fairly dissatisfied’ had been in higher education, but had been asked to withdrawal from her course after failing to meet the criteria for continuing into the second year. The nine

participants who were 'very satisfied' were following a range of pathways, including:

- Employment x 3
- Higher Education x 4
- NEET x 2

9 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 vision impairment. 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 55 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 vision impairment navigating various transitions and those professionals supporting them.

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