Lost in Transition?

The post-school experiences of young people with vision impairment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Longitudinal Transition Study is a unique piece of research that has followed the experiences of 82 young people with vision impairment for 11 years as they completed their compulsory education and followed various pathways. This included further education, higher education and employment.

Drawing upon almost 1,000 interviews with the young people, this report provides an overview of the key research findings as well as final outcomes for 53 participants who were still involved at the end of the study. This includes the identification of a number of enablers and barriers which impact upon the inclusion of young people with vision impairment within education, employment and society generally. In particular, we note the significance of preparation, the role of self-advocacy and the importance of mobility training for facilitating independence. The study also identified a number of 'pinch points' in the journeys of the young people as they transitioned into adulthood and employment. These included evidence of particularly complex transitions into higher education, a lack of support for accessing the labour market, and evidence of 'churning' – that is, taking the same level (or lower level) educational courses without appearing to make positive progress.

Whilst 66% of participants were in some form of employment by the end of the study, 17% were NEET ('not in employment, education or training'), including seven young people who by the age of 25 had never experienced paid employment.

In response to these findings, a number of recommendations are made for policy-makers and professionals supporting children and young people with vision impairment, as well as identifying priorities for further research.

INTRODUCTION

The Longitudinal Transition Study commenced in 2010 with the aim of gaining a better understanding of why young people with vision impairment are so at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). We were particularly interested in understanding the pathways followed by this population once they left school, and in identifying the key enablers and barriers which affected their eventual outcomes. We sought to observe whether the young people would be able to secure paid employment, establish careers and achieve their goals in life.

Over 80 young people from England and Wales took part in the study. The research applied a longitudinal qualitative design, with the same participants being interviewed by telephone at regular intervals along their transition journeys.

Approaching 1,000 interviews have been conducted over the course of this 11-year project, which took place between January 2010 and March 2021. This gives a unique evidence-base in the field of vision impairment education, as well as a privileged insight into these young people's lives.

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS

Throughout this report, we focus on evidence of the enablers and barriers which affected the outcomes of the participants as they transitioned into employment and adulthood. In the first half of the report, we focus on the outcomes of the participants in a variety of settings, while in the second half, we explore some of the key factors identified as having an impact upon the young peoples' experiences.

At the heart of our findings sits the importance of the preparation of young people with vision impairment for life after school. As noted by Douglas *et al* (2019), transition should not be viewed as a single moment in time. Rather, *transition is an ongoing process* through which the young person is facilitated to develop the skills and experiences they need to be successful as they move from one setting to the next.

This is widely recognised in the vision impairment education field through the implementation of 'additional' or 'expanded' educational curricula which need to be taught to children and young people with vision impairment. Examples include mobility and orientation, technology, and independent living skills. These skills are developed with the support of many people, including specialist professionals such as Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVI) and Habilitation specialists (RQHS).

This focus on preparation aligns with objectives for supporting learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in England outlined in the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2015), which calls for 'preparing for adulthood from the earliest years' (p120). McLinden *et al* (2016) outline a dual model of access through which this process might be conceptualised.

Within this dual model, learning is organised so that (i) the child/young person's learning environment is such that it facilitates their education (*access to learning*) and (ii) the child/young person is supported to develop skills to become independent learners (*learning to access*). The model asserts that, over time, focus should increase upon the young person being taught the skills they need to become as independent as possible.

OVERVIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Eighty-six participants were recruited into the project, with over 50 participants still involved at the end of the study. The young people's commitment to the study over a period of 11 years demonstrates the importance that they placed on the focus of the research.

The participants were recruited through local authorities and special schools in Wales and Midlands area of England, when they were aged 14–16.

The sample was broadly a good representation of the overall population of young people with vision impairment who do not have additional learning disabilities.

The participants were found to be a high achieving cohort, achieving GCSE grades comparable with the overall national average. Baseline questionnaires also found that the participants seemed more supported by their families in comparison with national norms for young people. This is common in research of this nature, but it is important to interpret the findings with this in mind.

The research project also included reference to, and analysis of secondary data sources – most notably the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey (the *Longitudinal Study of Young People in England/ Next Steps Survey* and the *UK Labour Force Survey.*

PATHWAYS FOLLOWED BY THE YOUNG PEOPLE AFTER SCHOOL

Sixth Form and Further Education

The participants followed a number of different pathways after completing their GCSEs. For the majority (over 90%), this included further study in a sixth form or further education (FE) college as a first step. Whilst the majority of participants spoke positively of their experience in these settings, a small number of participants who went into FE college noted challenges with accessing their courses.

This included not being provided with essential equipment by the start of the academic year and learning material not being made available in an accessible format. These findings align with more recent research evidence, which identified concerns from QTVIs that FE students with vision impairment are not being able to access the specialist support they need.

Case study:

Andrea is severely sight impaired and accesses information using either speech software on a computer or braille. She planned to study a course in further education that would enable her to go to university to study a vocational course and provide a clear pathway to employment. She engaged with the college several months ahead of starting, but there was a delay in processing her application. When she did start on the course, they did not have the necessary technology in place. This meant that she was not able to participate fully in lessons and complete her assignments. Andrea found that she was getting further and further behind. After a period of seeking the support she needed, she decided to withdraw from the course. Since then she has become long-term NEET and is not engaged in any activities which will help her move closer to the labour market.

Over the course of the research, we identified evidence of 'churning', particularly amongst participants in the FE sector. Churning is characterised by the young people repeating years in college, or repeatedly taking courses at the same level (or even lower levels) and appearing not to make a positive progression. Similar findings were noted by researchers studying other SEND groups.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships were a popular route for some participants who did not wish to continue onto A levels or higher education. Six participants successfully secured apprenticeships, in a range of sectors, including customer service and IT. Positively, five of these participants used their apprenticeship as a route into employment, with the majority staying on with the same employee.

However, one participant was unable to complete the apprenticeship after the organisation asked them to leave the position a few weeks after starting.

This was attributed to delays in receiving assistive technology through Access to Work, which meant the young person was unable to maintain the expected volume of work. Several other participants intended to pursue apprenticeships but were unable to find positions of interest within their local area. This posed challenges as their transition plan had assumed they would secure an apprenticeship, and no alternative arrangements had been put in place.

Higher Education

Higher education (HE) was a popular option for the participants with half the participants choosing this route. Between them, participants studied at 27 different higher education institutions. They studied a wide range of subjects, ranging from traditional subjects at prestigious universities which require high grades for entry, to courses at smaller institutions offering more vocational courses. Several participants continued in higher education after graduating from their first degree, with six participants studying at Masters or Doctoral level. HE proved to be one of the most complex settings for the participants, and this subsequently became a particular focus of the study. Their experiences in HE are explored later in the report within a dedicated section.

Placement years, working gap years and study years abroad

Gap years away from their higher education studies were a particularly successful option followed by eight of the participants. This included four participants who undertook paid placements as part of their degree course, two students who worked for a year prior to starting their studies, and two students who studied overseas as part of their degree course. All eight participants identified this as an extremely valuable experience, providing them opportunities to develop their independence further and obtain important experiences to draw upon after graduation.

'The year [abroad] was amazing. Really helped, but I needed to do it especially as I didn't take a gap year. I've kind of been in education since... well, since I was five! Because actually, if you think about it... because there's primary school and then secondary school and then straight on to university. So yeah, the opportunity to go and work was really, really valuable. [Peter] '

Similarly, three participants completed graduate internships prior to finding full-time paid employment, including two participants who took part on schemes specifically for graduates with disabilities. These internships formed a helpful stepping stone between education and long-term employment.

ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION

Applications for higher education (HE)

As should be the case, no single participant questioned whether HE was a viable option for a student with vision impairment. Nevertheless, 13 participants did identify ways in which they believed their choice of institution was restricted due to their disability.

For example, some felt restricted because of limited understanding of vision impairment by staff at institutions at the time of application.

A significant barrier during the application process was the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), with 13 participants reporting that they had difficulties with the accessibility of the system.

Accessing learning in higher education

Of the 40 participants who initially entered higher education (HE), six left before completing their courses, in five cases linking this directly to their vision impairment.

In general, the participants who studied in HE identified various ways in which their HE institution made reasonable adjustments to support them with their learning, such as providing lecture notes in advance, digitalising books and allowing extra time for exams. However, the findings also demonstrated an over-reliance on individualised adjustments, which affected the ability of the students to work independently and to be fully included along with their peers.

It was also found that it can take students with vision impairment longer to complete their degrees, often due to not having the necessary support in place in time. This has obvious financial implications for the student, including the additional living expenses for the extra time spent at university, and potential lost earnings if delayed in moving into employment. A particular problem which has been observed through the research is a failure from institutions to put agreed reasonable adjustments for exams and assessments into place, leading to unnecessary stress for the students and sometimes requiring them to resit their exams at a later date. Overall, the findings have highlighted concerns that there is a lack of expertise across the sector of how to make HE accessible to students with vision impairment.

'They gave me the wrong paper in picture PDF form. And I had a bit of a meltdown because I was so nervous. It was so frustrating because I have been there for two years now, and it's such a basic thing.'
[Martha]

Disabled Students' Allowance

The Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is a government-funded grant which enables students with disabilities to access the support that they need to access higher education (HE). Many of the young people viewed DSA as vital to their participation on their courses; particularly as it enabled them to obtain essential equipment and specialist software which they would not have been able to afford otherwise. However, the research has also highlighted a number of shortcomings with the DSA offer for students with vision impairment. This includes DSA assessors not having the necessary expertise to assess students with vision impairment, delays in the processing of assessments, delays in the delivery of allocated support and equipment being provided that did not meet the needs of the students.

'My laptop kept on getting taken back to DSA to get fixed, and then I was left with nothing, so fortunately I had my iPad. For like six weeks I would have been able to do absolutely nothing.' [Louise]

Progressing from higher education

Secondary data analysis of the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey reveals that graduates with vision impairment are less likely to be in full-time work and less likely to be on a permanent or open-ended contracted compared to non-disabled graduates (Hewett *et al*, 2021). Less than half of the participants (12 of the 26) who successfully graduated from their courses by the end of the study were in paid employment within six months of graduation. Of the rest, many continued onto alternative options including eight who went onto further study or professional training.

Notably, three made the decision to apply for voluntary work instead of paid employment, as they did not believe their CVs to be competitive enough due to limited work experience.

Only a third of the participants had engaged with the university careers service prior to graduation, with several identifying the pressures of maintaining their studying workload as a barrier. Further, only one participant recalled receiving disability-specific guidance for employment, highlighting that students with vision impairment are often not receiving tailored guidance to prepare them for navigating the labour market as a graduate with a disability.

Unfortunately, three participants who withdrew from HE part-way through their studies became long-term NEET and since then have not actively sought alternative education or employment.

OUTCOMES IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Participants who have successfully secured paid employment

At the end of the research project, there are several participants who are still studying in higher education.

However, at the point of final interview, 35 participants (66%) were in either long-term employment, casual employment or self-employment. When interpreting these outcomes, it is important to also consider the nature of employment outcomes and how they compare to those of their participants' non-disabled peers. For example, only four participants were successful in securing jobs that were targeted specifically as graduates and notably a third of graduates were in roles specifically aimed at people with disabilities. By the end of the study, nine participants (17%) were NEET (not in education, employment or training), including seven young people who have never had experience of paid employment.

Long term NEET

Eleven participants experienced periods of being long-term NEET, defined as not in education, employment or training for a period of 12 months or more. Nine of these participants were registered as severely sight impaired (blind), and in the majority of cases their highest qualifications were A levels or below. Of particular concern were that high proportions of those who were long-term NEET were not actively engaged in seeking employment. The most common reasons given for this were not having relevant qualifications, not having previous work experience, a lack of suitable jobs, and not being able to work due to a health condition or disability.

Nature of jobs

Those participants who have experienced employment have been employed in a range of sectors, including finance, retail, customer service, marketing and communication, administration, performing arts, IT, and childcare.

This demonstrates how important it is that employment services and Access to Work cater to support disabled workers in a broad range of roles, especially as our findings demonstrate that often there is an over-emphasis upon supporting disabled workers within office environments.

Accessing their job roles – enablers and barriers

Since the participants first started to transition into the workplace, they were regularly asked to identify enablers and barriers which impacted on their ability to undertake their job role. The research highlighted a reluctance of many of the young people to declare their vision impairment in the workplace, instead choosing to manage their own adaptations. For some, this choice seemed closely linked to an uneasy concern about communication with others and how disability might be interpreted or understood.

'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. '
[Brett]

Commonly identified barriers in the workplace included inaccessible company systems, not being able to access information and poor attitudes of colleagues. In contrast, positive enablers in the workplace included access to appropriate technology, good lighting and understanding colleagues. From the young people's perspective, more positive experiences can be linked to having good self-advocacy skills, problem-solving skills and being able to draw upon a variety of approaches for accessing information.

ACCESSING THE LABOUR MARKET

Job search

The participants have used a wide range of methods for searching for jobs, including recruitment agencies, employer's websites and their personal networks. Of concern, 25% of participants reported that they did not feel they had the skills to search for job opportunities online. This finding is supported by secondary data from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey, which show that whilst 17% of employed graduates without a disability identified their job through an employer's website, this is only true for 11.7% of employed graduates with vision impairment.

The participants also noted barriers in applying for jobs online. In particular, some participants who applied for graduate roles described significant barriers during the application process. This resulted in them not being able to apply for jobs they were interested in or not being able to complete assessments that formed part of a multi-stage recruitment process.

'But that's the most prohibiting factor about the recruitment process – the online tests. Especially the ones that have graphs and charts and stuff, because it is difficult to see. A lot of them don't work with speech so the text [is] not interactive, it's just like a picture. '
[Akash]

Accessing the Job Centre

Twenty of the participants reported attending Job Centres, although only ten recalled declaring their vision impairment, highlighting that disabilities are not always identified by Job Centre staff. Seven of the participants were referred to specialist support in relation to their disability. Several highlighted negative experiences at Job Centres. This included systems that were inaccessible to them and participants who were advised that the Job Centre felt unable to help people with a vision impairment. Some participants were told when they inquired about support for work that this was unnecessary as they did not need to work due to their disability.

'They told me there's not much they can do for me, which didn't help me at all. Do you see why it's become hard for me? They didn't know what to do because of my visual impairment. I got there and they were like 'we don't know what we can offer you.'
[Stephanie]

'He turned round and was like 'what you are doing is great, you don't have to look for work with the benefits you are on'... I wasn't really happy because I have heard it before. It's not what I was there to achieve.
[Janek]
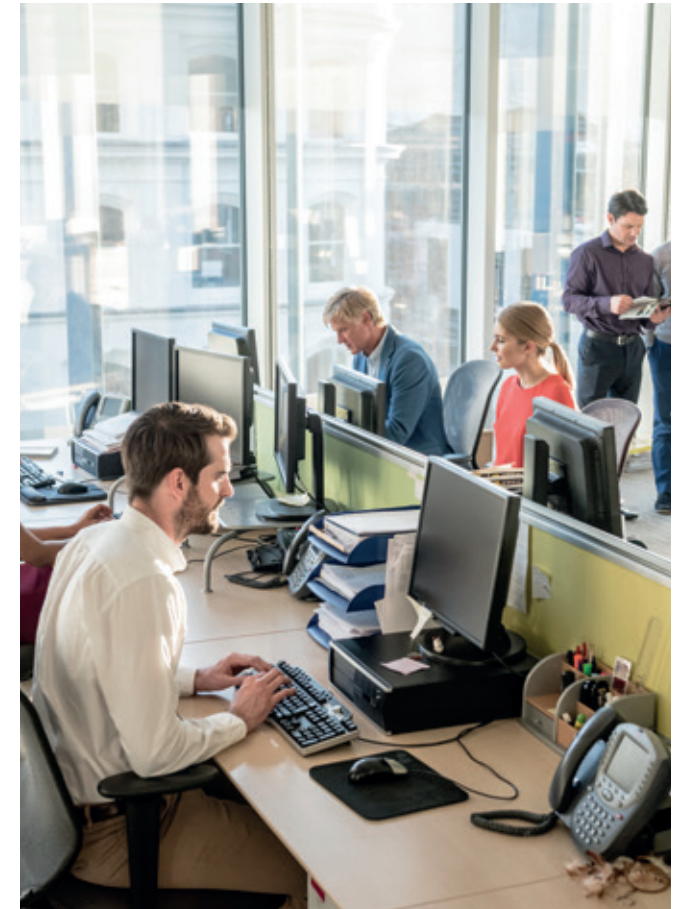
Access to Work

Access to Work is a government-funded grant which supports individuals with disabilities in the workplace. Whilst the majority of young people who went into higher education (HE) drew upon the similar DSA scheme, there seems to be a disconnect between young people with vision impairment and Access to Work. Rather, many of the young people preferred to either make their own adjustments or rely on support from their employers.

For example, in 2019, less than a quarter of those participants who were in employment were drawing upon the scheme. Whilst those who drew upon Access to Work recognised its value, a number of challenges were identified, including: the length of time for applications to be processed, inaccessible processes, and a rigidness of the scheme which seemed to be designed to cater for a particular type of job role.

'Like Access to Work – filling in my transport forms was an absolute nightmare. There must be a better way for these organisations to do these things... I had to print out the forms, fill them in and then post them. I don't handwrite anything; I can barely see to sign my own name. I asked if I could do it electronically and they were just not having it.'
[Zaira]

Accessing specialist services

A small number of the participants were referred to specialist services who provide targeted support for individuals with disabilities to help support them in finding employment. The participants' experiences were very mixed, as can be illustrated through two contrasting examples.

Positively, one participant was assigned a support worker who also had a disability, and who they felt they could relate to well.

Through the service, the young person received one-to-one support, including assistance in completing inaccessible job application forms.

In contrast, a second participant was referred to an employment service which supported people with a wide range of disabilities. The participant was left frustrated at how little support they received and felt that the staff did not understand how to support job seekers with vision impairment. The overall experience affected their confidence and left them questioning whether they could realistically find paid employment.

Case study:

Eva studied a vocational course in college. Since leaving college and trying to find a job in that field, Eva has been advised by employers that she would not be suitable due to the health and safety implications of her vision impairment. In the six years that followed, Eva has consistently kept applying for job opportunities, and has been successful in getting interviews, and even job offers, but these offers have later been retracted with reasons associated with her vision impairment given as explanation.

'I have been for a couple of interviews... I got to one of them and they actually sent me away again because I was VI. They said that there wouldn't be anything they could do for me, yet they didn't even let me try. And I also started another job which they also sent me away from.'

Eva has attempted to access support from the Job Centre and from specialist services but reported that they have not identified any steps that can be put in place to help her move closer to the labour market.

'I went to this one group and [I said to the lady] "have you got any ideas from VI people about getting jobs". And she said, "I have sort of drawn a line for VI people getting jobs, I think it's impossible". I was like "oh ok – thanks."'

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH VISION IMPAIRMENT

Self-advocacy

One of the most important factors identified through the research was self-advocacy. It was observed that the participants needed to self-advocate in several ways, such as: negotiating adjustments, explaining their vision impairment and how it impacts upon them, and challenging if things go wrong. For those who were less confident or skilled in self-advocacy, this often formed a significant barrier to their progression and participation. This included struggling to address barriers to access in higher education and being unable to explain the adjustments they needed when at interview.

Several enablers have been identified in equipping the young people to be able to self-advocate. These include having had opportunities to self-advocate when younger (for example, explaining adjustments to class teachers in school or college); having a good understanding of their vision impairment and how it affects them, and having a good knowledge and understanding of available specialist equipment and support.

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

Access to information

A further significant factor identified is the extent to which young people with vision impairment are able to access information independently. An early finding of the study was that young people with vision impairment prefer to avoid using specialist software and equipment and instead opt to make their own adjustments to mainstream devices using standard functions.

To a certain extent, this has served the young people well, with problem-solving skills being seen as an important enabler for positive outcomes. However, in some cases, the young people were limited by this approach, and in particular, where they were unable to make adjustments to enable them to access company systems. In these situations, while the young people were restricted by the poorly designed systems which were beyond their control, they were often further restricted by their limited knowledge of other solutions, such as magnification software and low-vision aids. The most positive accounts came from those young people who had developed a range of skills for accessing information, which allowed them to tailor their approach, applying different strategies according to the task they were undertaking.

‘There were presentations sometimes which were a bit difficult to do, especially doing my first one or two. So that was a new dynamic of giving a presentation on a projector. I managed to find ways of getting around that, for instance, having a second laptop so that I could zoom in my screen while keeping the projector screen at the same size for other people reading it. Little things like that. I think going forward, when I am in a permanent role, I would have an iPad instead. It would be a bit more mobile and easier to move things around. ’
[Elijah]

Mobility and orientation skills

Mobility and orientation skills are important enablers for young people with vision impairment to ensure that they are able to get around independently and safely. At the start of the study, this was not identified as a significant challenge for the young people, as they were largely confident in getting about in their local area and with the support of others. However, as the young people started to move to new environments, such as college or university, limited confidence in getting around independently was increasingly identified as a barrier.

For some young people, this restricted their search radius for employment as they were not confident in travelling to unfamiliar areas, having not been sufficiently supported to apply their mobility and orientation skills to new contexts.

This finding aligns with recent research from Thomas Pocklington Trust and Guide Dogs, which found that a high proportion of children and young people with vision impairment are not receiving this type of support through local authority specialist services. Indeed, within the study, we observed a small number of participants who appealed to be able to study at specialist schools, due to concerns they were not receiving this support whilst attending a mainstream setting. More positively, GPS functions on mobile phones have proved a valuable enabler for many young people in the project, particularly for using public transport.

Opportunities

An extremely significant theme has been the importance of young people having opportunities to practise the skills they have learned and to develop their independence in less formal environments. For example, undertaking work experience placements at school gave the young people the opportunity to practise using their technology in a work context and to apply their mobility and orientation skills in travelling to work and navigating the workplace environment. Likewise, being encouraged to advocate for the adjustments they needed whilst in school helped to raise students' expectations once they were in higher education and ensured that they had developed strategies for approaching this with staff.

School work experience was viewed very positively, and for some this was their only opportunity to experience the workplace

before applying for jobs, as the typical casual jobs undertaken by students like retail and bar work can be inaccessible to young people with vision impairment (and/or such jobs may be difficult to sustain when access to studying takes additional time). A small number of the participants had not been able to access work experience during school, which was later identified as a barrier by them.

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

Changing sight conditions

Several participants in the study have sight conditions which meant that their level of vision changed over the course of the research. For some, these changes were quite significant, including two participants who were registered as sight impaired at the start of the research and are now eligible to be registered as blind (or severely sight impaired).

Both participants were in education at the time that their sight deteriorated, and found that both they and their respective colleges struggled to adapt to their changing needs. This poses an ongoing challenge for young people with vision impairment as they find that strategies and adjustments that they successfully applied in the past are no longer appropriate.

Inclusive environments

Without an inclusive social and physical environment, many of the skills and experiences developed by young people with vision impairment through formal and informal education will count for very little. At almost every stage, the research identified aspects of the participants' lives which would have been easier, more positive, fairer, and less excluding if some aspect of broader society had been more inclusive or if adjustments had been anticipated.

This includes accessible institutional IT systems, appropriate processes and forms (eg, Access to Work, job recruitment), and accessible transport systems and shops. Perhaps of key importance is the attitude of others. Repeatedly, the barriers experienced by young people were intertwined with other people's negative attitudes and ignorance.

Similarly, enablers were commonly scaffolded by the positive attitudes of others and a willingness to ask 'what can we do to be more inclusive.'

'The reason that they think that is because they put themselves in my position and think that 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 five, and I am bloody good at being blind! It's something that I do every day.'
[Ryan]

CONCLUSIONS

Many positive stories have emerged through the longitudinal study, which highlight the importance of the specialist support that young people with vision impairment receive in their early years and during compulsory education.

This includes the opportunities that the young people were given to develop the key skills and experiences that they needed to be successful in whichever pathways they followed after school.

The findings emphasise how important it is to ensure that sufficient opportunity is given for children and young people to develop these skills alongside the day-to-day academic curriculum, in line with the dual model of access. Importantly, the research has shown that the focus must be upon not just the skills needed to succeed in education, but upon the broader skills and experiences the young person will need in adult life.

Of particular concern, therefore, is consistent evidence that it is becoming increasingly more difficult for children and young people with vision impairment to access support through specialist educational services. For example, RNIB have noted cuts in funds for vision impairment services and the presence of a postcode lottery, whilst Thomas Pocklington Trust and Guide Dogs have found that many children are not being referred to the habilitation support they need.

Following the experiences of the young people as they progressed from school through to the labour market has highlighted what a complex journey this can be for young people with vision impairment, and how important it is to look at the overall experience rather than just focus upon final outcomes.

Whilst over half of the participants have successfully secured employment, many of the young people faced challenges in accessing the labour market which lengthened the time it took them to do so. This included having to undertake further work experience or voluntary work in order to enhance their CV and be competitive in the labour market, having to receive support to apply for jobs due to inaccessible application and recruitment processes, and having to take extended periods of time to learn how best to approach declaring their vision impairment and discuss their disability with employers.

One consistent theme which emerged through the research is the fatigue which young people with vision impairment experience in continually having to overcome the various barriers which have been outlined throughout this report.

This was particularly the case when the young people moved from setting to setting, as they were faced with addressing new and often inaccessible systems and processes, as well as having to explain their vision impairment and adjustments they needed within the new environment. What proved particularly draining to the young people was feeling like they had to repeatedly demonstrate their capabilities to people when they moved onto a new setting. Whilst they might have demonstrated previously that they had the knowledge, skills and confidence to advocate for themselves in this way, their energy and resilience to do so reduced over time.

Of particular concern are the proportion of young people who became long-term NEET and lack of drivers to direct them towards the labour market. We especially note consistent findings of low aspirations from Job Centre Plus staff, and the tendency for young people with vision impairment to be directed towards benefits rather than towards support to help them access the labour market. We also observed that the majority of those young people who ended long-term NEET were those who had achieved lower qualifications, suggesting that more research is needed on how best to support this sub-group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from this study demonstrate that more must be done to ensure that young people with vision impairment have an equitable educational experience and that they are supported to reach their potential in life. In response, we make the following recommendations:

1. For all children and young people with vision impairment to have access to specialist vision impairment services to ensure educational inclusion. This support must be made available throughout school, further and higher education settings.

2. For all children and young people with vision impairment to have access to the support they require to gain the broad range of skills they need to live and work independently in adulthood.

3. For young people with vision impairment to be supported to access work experience opportunities as part of the curriculum. Appropriate funding should be put in place to enable young people with vision impairment to access the equipment and adjustments they require to participate in work experience and voluntary placements, ensuring that they are not at a disadvantage when compared to their peers.

4. For further research to be undertaken into how to prevent young people with vision impairment becoming long-term NEET (not in education, employment or training) after leaving education. This should include investigating the use of supported internships, and delivery of tailored careers guidance.

5. For the government to address gaps in provision for students with vision impairment in further education, including exploring the possibility of extending the DSA scheme to cover further education settings.

6. For the government to take into consideration the needs of children and young people with SEND in ongoing policy developments such as the 'Skills for Jobs' White Paper and the National Strategy for Disabled People.

7. For the DSA and Access to Work processes to be simplified so that young people with vision impairment can more easily and effectively access the vital support that they require to support their studies and access employment.

8. For the government to explore how to improve awareness and uptake of the Access to Work scheme. This should include investigating the possibility of introducing an Adjustment Passport for young people with disabilities. This passport would travel with the young person as they leave school and help to improve continuity of support as they move between settings.

9. For an awareness campaign to be run amongst Job Centre Plus staff on vision impairment. This should focus on raising aspirations of staff for their vision impaired clients and on educating staff in ways in which individuals with vision impairment might be supported into the labour market.

NEXT STEPS

The Longitudinal Transitions Study has provided a unique oversight of the real-life experiences of young people with vision impairment growing up in England and Wales. Over the next years, we will continue to investigate this data further, focusing in particular on some of the key themes which have been highlighted within the report. Whilst we have met our objective of tracking the participants into young adulthood, in the future, we intend to return to them and learn from them further. There are still many questions we would like to explore, such as how well they are able to progress within their careers, how equipped they are to live independently, as well as their experiences of family life.

IMPACT OF THE LONGITUDINAL TRANSITIONS STUDY

A priority of the research team has been to utilise the research findings in informing policy and practice. This has included developing resources for professionals and young people which draw directly upon the research evidence, campaigning for changes to policy and responding to parliamentary inquiries. These outputs and further information on our campaign activities can be accessed via the project impact page.

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