

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

**Young people's progress and views of
independence aged 16-19: Post-14
transitions support**

Technical report of findings to December 2012

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The Nuffield Foundation

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Glossary

ASDAN	Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network
DfE	Department for Education
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
DSO	Disability Support Office
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
ILS	Independent Living Skills
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
QTVI	Qualified teacher of visually impaired children
RNIB	Royal National Institute of Blind People
SEN	Special Educational Needs
Statement	Statement of Special Educational Needs
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
VI	Visual Impairment
VICTAR	Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research
VTS	Visiting Teacher Service
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

This research project was designed in 2009 by a team from RNIB and VICTAR (Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research at the University of Birmingham) in response to the Research Brief prepared by RNIB Corporate Research Team: “Longitudinal study from age 14 of blind and partially sighted young people in the UK”.

The key objectives of the project are:

1. To track the process of transition for blind and partially sighted young people from age 14 for five years
2. To identify the roles of professionals involved
3. To identify the factors that improve or reduce a young person’s chance of gaining employment

The project includes the following key phases:

1. Recruit and survey visual impairment services
2. Through these services, recruit and survey a sample of Year 9 and 11 students with visual impairment
3. Follow-up surveys of the sample of students with visual impairment

The first stage of the study took place between Autumn 2009 – March 2012, and was funded by RNIB, resulting in a number of outsets (e.g. Hewett and Douglas, 2011a; Hewett and Douglas, 2011b, Hewett, R., Douglas, G., Ramli, A., and Keil, S., 2012).

The second phase of the study is funded by the Nuffield Foundation, and centres around follow-up surveys of the sample of students with visual impairment, as described above.

This report focuses on data collection conducted in Easter 2012 (short catch-up interviews which partly served as an opportunity to establish if participants were willing to take part in the second phase of the project) and more extensive recorded telephone interviews in Autumn 2012. The primary focus of these interviews were to explore the idea of independence (e.g. in terms of mobility, self-advocacy and access to information) – factors which research evidence show to be important for a successful transition into employment for blind and partially sighted students.

This is a technical report which presents all findings so far. It will be followed by a series of focussed reports that aim to explore key themes, and will particularly make use of the longitudinal nature of the data.

In Phase One, participants were recruited from Year 9 and Year 11 across the English Midlands and Wales to take part in the longitudinal project. By June 2011, 81 young people had been recruited into the project. Due to loss of contact with some participants, and others saying that they wished to withdraw from the project, this number reduced to 75 in Easter 2012.

During the Easter 2012 interviews, it was found that a number of the Year 11 cohort were intending to repeat their current school year, giving us three distinct groups:

- Year 9 cohort (moving up to Year 12)
- Year 11 cohort (repeating Year 13)
- Year 11 cohort (finishing higher education).

The decision was made to go back to the services from which the original cohorts were recruited and top-up the sample from those who would have been in Year 10 at the time (hence referred to as the Year 10 cohort), and now moving into Year 13, thus joining a group with those in the Year 11 cohort who were repeating Year 13. Over summer 2012 an additional 7 participants were recruited, meaning a total of 80 participants within the project. Of these 80, 70 took part in the autumn 2012 interviews.

SECTION A: Longitudinal Study

Setting in Easter 2012 and plans for the future

At the time of the Easter 2012 interviews, all of the Year 9 cohort had moved onto Year 11 and were taking their GCSEs, with the vast majority taking traditional GCSE options. The Year 11 cohort had chosen a variety of pathways including:

- taking A-levels/BTEC courses (in some cases this was over three years, rather than the traditional two)
- employment
- apprenticeships

Some of the participants were undecided about what they wanted to do the following year, but possible destinations included:

- further FE courses
- university
- employment
- apprenticeships
- voluntary work

The majority were happy with the plans that they had, although one participant was struggling because they could not decide what they wanted to do at college, and two participants were unhappy with the uncertainty about where they would be moving onto next.

Educational outcomes

Of the 25 Year 9 students who were spoken to in Autumn 2012, 60% achieved 5 GCSE grades at A*-C, which was in line with the national average of 59.4%.

All 26 of the Year 11 cohort who were intending to complete their studies in Summer 2012 successfully completed their courses, with a wide range of grades achieved. It was noted that some of the young people did not achieve as highly as they had hoped to, although all but one were able to go to university as intended.

It has been necessary for ten of the Year 11 cohort to take their FE courses over 3 or more years. Whilst in many cases there are personal explanations for this, it is worth noting that these tended to be participants with more severe visual impairments.

Exams experience

Fifty-one of the 69 participants interviewed who were still in education took exams. Of these, almost three-quarters (37) reported that all exam arrangements were satisfactory, whilst over a quarter (14) said that they had had at least some form of minor problem. Five of those with problems said that in their view that the arrangements negatively affected their results in some way. Problems identified included:

- lack of provision of needs
- papers being too large
- difficulties in using modified diagrams (braille users)
- length of exams as a result of extra time
- being distracted by readers
- not receiving modified papers that had been expected due to an oversight in the exams office

Destination of students in Autumn 2012

By Autumn 2012 the Year 11:

- 17 young people in the Year 11 cohort had continued onto university
- 10 were continuing in further education
- 2 were in employment
- 3 were in apprenticeships
- 6 were looking for employment or apprenticeships
- one was in voluntary work.

There had been varying levels of success from the young people in searching for work, with some choosing to take on work placements to help gain valuable employment experience. All of the young people who were recruited in Summer 2012 and some of the Year 10 cohort were still in education, whilst all of the Year 9 cohort had continued into further education, with the exception of one who had started on an apprenticeship.

Applications to universities/higher education institutions

Twenty of the Year 11 cohort made some form of application to a higher education institute. For 17 this meant going through the standard process of applying to universities through UCAS, whilst two applied directly to the institutions they were hoping to attend (due to them not being part of the UCAS system), and one applied through clearing. The young people made applications for a wide variety of courses, ranging from traditional subjects like English to more practical subjects like Performing Arts. When deciding which course and institution to apply for, the majority based their decision on factors typical of their fully sighted peers, such as location, reputation and appeal of the course. Two however, did give consideration to the standard of support provided by the universities disability support office.

When applying to universities, four of the participants had some problems when completing their applications. These problems included inaccessibility of the UCAS website when using their magnification software and appearance of the UCAS (e.g. colours and size of font).

Proposed support from Universities/Higher Education Institutions

Of the 17 young people who started at university in autumn 2012, eight had spoken in advance to their department about the support they would be provided with. In some cases this came about at the time of a routine interview for a place on the course.

It was more common for the young people to receive communication in relation to support directly from the disability support office. Eleven of the young people had had at least some contact from disability office, although in some cases this was simply to advise them to complete a form for disabled students' allowance (DSA). There had been communication with 8 of the young people to discuss the support that would be provided for them.

Ten of the young had completed their DSA applications, and know that they are eligible for support, whilst a further four were waiting to hear back from their applications. Opinions on the application process for DSA were quite mixed, with some finding it demanding, whilst others found it more straightforward.

Future Plans: University

Twenty-four of the 41 young people still in further education would like to go to university, whilst a further 9 are still unsure. Several have decided not to go to university due to a variety of reasons including:

- not being interested
- fees being too expensive
- wanting to see what their grades are like first
- needing to give consideration to finances
- concluding that they are not of the required standard for university

Future Plans: Careers and Career Advice

The majority of the young people had some idea of the type of career that they would like to do, with confidence being higher amongst the older cohort. Only 16 of 67 young people said that they had received careers advice specifically in relation to their visual impairment. There was a division amongst them about whether they needed specific career advice or not, with some quite strong responses, ranging from those who had reacted negatively to specialist advice received or the offer of such advice, to those who felt they had suffered as a result of not receiving such advice.

Future Plans: Confidence

The vast majority of the participants were at least 'quite happy' with the plans that they had in place for the next academic year. There were five who were unhappy with their plans for a variety of reasons, including:

- uncertainty whilst waiting to see if they were successful in getting a particular job

- feeling held back in their chosen career as a result of their visual impairment
- being on a FE course that they were not interested in
- worrying about the prospect of having difficulties in getting a paid job after completing a work placement
- feeling overwhelmed having started at university.

SECTION B: Independence

What do the young people consider independence to mean?

A number of broad definitions were given to the question 'What is independence'. These included:

- looking after yourself
- looking after yourself – but asking for help when necessary
- making own decisions – having freedom
- valuing independence
- being 'normal' (being like sighted peers)
- dealing with new situations.

Within their responses defining independence for them, the young people also gave some specific examples of independence. These included:

- specific examples linked to their visual impairment
- knowing when or how to ask for help
- independence skills as a term
- examples of independence in their current setting
- tools they use to gain independence

Travel and mobility: Travel to and from school/college/workplace

The majority of the young people travel to school or college independently, in most cases by either walking or catching the bus. In twelve cases they use transport provided by the council, although there was evidence that this was not always needed. In two cases the young person was unable to travel to school/college independently, and had to rely on assistance from their families.

Fifteen of the young people attend residential school, and so did not have to travel to school, instead they walk the short distance from their accommodation to the main school building. All 15 were able to do this independently.

All but two were able to confidently get around independently during the school/college/working day. These were the same two who were unable to travel to school/college independently.

Travel and mobility: Independent travel outside of school

The majority of the young people felt able to travel independently, although in many cases their level of confidence in doing this depended on whether they had to travel to somewhere which was familiar or unfamiliar to them. In some cases they believed that their visual impairment did not affect their ability to get around independently, whilst there were five young people who did not go out independently and so were reliant on others.

A wide range of method of transport were used, with many being confident in using public transport (although less likely to a place which was unfamiliar to them, when they would prefer to travel with a family member or friend).

Five distinct sets of challenges for getting around independently were identified. These were:

- general restrictions as a result of their visual impairment
- difficulty in reading signs or important information on boards (such as notices at train stations or timetables at bus stops)
- people around them (such as protective family, or conversely, members of the public who may not be willing to help)
- not having the necessary mobility skills (some were still learning to use public transport or to use mobility aids, or generally found mobility a struggle)
- struggling with their underlying confidence (e.g. they may be self-conscious when asking for help or using mobility aids, have had bad experiences, or be concerned about getting lost)

Similarly, four types of enabler for getting around independently were identified through the interviews. These were:

- mobility skills that the young person had gained (e.g. confidence through the mobility skills they had and the opportunity to practice their mobility skills)
- positive influences from people around them (e.g. benefiting from assistance when learning to navigate an unfamiliar place for the first time)
- services available on public transport (e.g. rail assistance or on board announcements); and,

- their underlying confidence (e.g. having the confidence to put themselves in unfamiliar and challenging situations or a desire to be independent).

Access to information and ICT: Provisions at School/College

The young people spoke of many different types of adjustments that they received whilst in school or college. The most common adjustments were paper-based, including:

- enlarged copies of course materials
- print copies of slides/teachers notes
- enlarged textbooks or different colour hand outs.

A number of the young people spoke of how they had the opportunity to have lesson material in multiple formats, which they appreciated.

Access to information and ICT: Adjustments/equipment the young people use to access information

The young people described using a number of approaches they take in accessing information in paper format. The most common was through use of a magnifier or another type of low vision aid (30), along with scanning the text using optical recognition software, or personally sourcing large print copies of books. Eight also mentioned the use of reading glasses.

An extensive number of examples were given of how the young people access information electronically. It was particularly interesting to find out how the young people are choosing to access information electronically by taking mainstream technology, and using options within it to make material accessible to them. Examples of this include: using inbuilt accessibility options such as magnification options available on internet browsers; taking electronic documents and modifying them into their preferred format; using inbuilt accessibility software on products such as Apple iPad or iPhone. Some of the young people have also benefited from recent developments in IT within schools where it is now common for schools and colleges to have their own virtual learning environment or college network where it is possible for teachers to upload copies of notes and slides from lessons. The most common way that the young people access electronic information is through email. For many, this is something which is part of their everyday life.

Many of the young people use more specialist equipment to access information. This included using assistive software, braille note, or using a special mouse which has magnification software in it.

Access to information and ICT: Other ways of accessing information

Other ways that the young people access information in a lesson context included positioning themselves in the classroom for the best place for them to see the whiteboard, or receiving assistance from friends.

Access to information and ICT: Preferred way of accessing information

The majority of the young people said that they were happy with the way in which they were currently receiving information (with many having negotiated this with their teachers). There were 13 who said that they would like to see some changes, and in the majority of the cases they wished to receive material more often in electronic formats. Nine said that they would prefer to receive the material in more than one format, with this being a practice that they have become accustomed to at school.

Access to information and ICT: Difficulties the young people are facing in accessing information

A number of difficulties were identified by the young people that they face when accessing information. These include:

- not always being able to access information independently (e.g. not having material provided in a medium they can use)
- inaccessible websites
- lack of IT skills
- eye strain
- having difficulties in using magnifiers
- deteriorating eyesight
- a desire to appear 'normal' amongst their peers

Self-advocacy: Scenario 1 – Self advocacy in the classroom

Almost all of the young people either agreed or strongly agreed that they would be able to explain to a teacher or lecturer the support that they need in the classroom.

When discussing how they would approach this situation, the most common suggestions from the young people were that they would either explain how their visual impairments affects them, or explain what adjustments they need to function in the classroom (and in a number of cases they suggested that they would do both). Others said that they would choose to deal with each situation as it arises. There were those who did not feel confident in dealing with the proposed hypothetical

scenario, with four who thought that they would be nervous in having to speak about their visual impairment. Some who were shy about speaking in front of others suggested that they would seek an opportunity to speak to the teacher or lecturer in private.

The young people identified a number of factors which they felt may have helped them in dealing with such situations. These factors included:

- having practice by dealing with similar situations in the past
- generally being confident to speak for themselves
- having an inner sense of responsibility to resolve any problems independently

They also identified a number of challenges in being able to deal with this type of situation. This included:

- a lack of practice in dealing with similar situations
- prior bad experiences
- finding that the nature of their eye condition was difficult for people to understand
- being restricted by a desire to fit in with their peers and not wanting it made obvious that they are visually impaired.

Self-advocacy: Scenario 2 – Self advocacy in the workplace – accessing computers

Almost all of the young people felt that they would be able to explain the modifications that they would need in order to access a computer in the workplace.

The most frequently mentioned modification that the young person said that they would need was the provision of assistive software/some specialist equipment. Other suggestions were:

- using inbuilt accessibility options available on a standard PC
- making adjustments using the standard features available on programmes to make material accessible for them
- having a large monitor
- taking breaks
- having a support worker

The responses by the young people on occasions gave an insight into their perceptions of who should take responsibility in such a situation. Several had the attitude that it was their problem to resolve (e.g. by making adjustments to the computer themselves), and others showed

they believed it to be the employer's responsibility to ensure that they had the adjustments needed.

The young people identified a number of barriers that they perceived they may face when making arrangements for accessing a computer in the workplace. These were:

- lack of IT skills
- concern about being rejected from posts if they were to disclose their need for specialist equipment
- concerns about whether the employer would be able to get the equipment that they need.

Examples shared of what may have enabled the young people to deal with such situations included:

- having had prior relevant experience
- regular practice at making computers accessible to them
- generally having good IT skills.

Self-advocacy: Scenario 3 – Self advocacy in the workplace – accessing written information

With the exception of three of the young people, all felt confident that they would be able to discuss with an employer the modifications that they would need to have made to written information.

The most commonly mentioned modifications that the young people suggested were requesting to have material enlarged or requesting to have information prepared for them in their preferred format (including preferred font size, preferred font and on a particular colour paper). Several suggested that it would be best to send material to them in an electronic format, and if the material were not originally available electronically, they could scan it using optical recognition software. Other suggestions included needing support to access the material, Braille copies, and requesting material in advance.

The young people also suggested some modifications that they personally could do to help them in accessing the written material. Examples included:

- enlarging material on a photocopier
- scanning in documents to convert to electronic format
- using low vision aids
- modifying electronic material into their preferred format

The most common barrier that the young people felt they might face was not knowing what to say to the employer. Other barriers identified were:

- a lack of practice
- people's attitudes towards providing adjustments
- concerns about appearing too demanding
- a lack of understanding from others about the adjustments they need
- a personal lack of IT skills to modify electronic documents
- struggling with having too much text to read.

Self-advocacy: Scenario 4 – Self advocacy in the workplace – forgotten modifications

The responses given for this question which asked the young people how they would deal with a situation where the employer forgets to provide discussed modifications, can be divided into two categories. Firstly, the young people gave details of the *type of response* that they would give, and secondly, they gave an *explanation* for this type of response.

The most common type of response given was a 'relaxed' one, where the young people acknowledged situations like this are likely to happen. Other responses included (in order of frequency):

- proactive (showing ideas of what they could do to help themselves)
- defensive (feeling it's necessary to defend themselves/perceiving they are 'hard done by')
- delaying (would delay dealing with the issue at first)
- conflict (would take an aggressive stance)
- give up (would give up trying to resolve the situation)
- high expectations after receiving a high level of support in school/college
- insecure (concerned about losing the job)

The most frequently given explanation for the young people's response was that they had prior practice in similar situations, so their past experiences had given them confidence. Other responses included (again in order of frequency):

- a learnt necessity (see it as something that is part of their independence)
- personal characteristics (identified something about their personality type or background which influences their response):

- maturity (able to deal with situations better as they have got older)
- role models (watched others handling similar situations)
- familiarity (feel more comfortable around people they know well)
- support of others (confidence as a result of others around them)
- have benefited from increased independence and as a result now more confident in self-advocacy

Self-advocacy: Scenario 5 – Self advocacy in the workplace – interviews

The responses given for this question which asked the young people how they would approach discussions with an employer regarding functioning with a visual impairment in the workplace, can be divided into two categories. Firstly, the young people gave details of the *type of response* that they would give, and secondly, they gave an *explanation* for this type of response.

The most common type of response given was that they would discuss adjustments, and would explain the methods they would use to adapt in the workplace. Other types of responses included:

- having a discussion (they would engage in discussion with the employer, e.g. about how their visual impairment affects them)
- challenge (they would challenge the employers perceptions about visually impaired people in the workplace, rather than challenging the employers perception of them specifically)
- stating that their visual impairment has no impact on how they would perform in the job
- acknowledging their limitations (recognise that there will be some things that they are unable to do)
- giving examples of how they have adapted in the past
- reporting that they are not confident in dealing with the such situations
- showing a lack of understanding in their response (response shows an element of naivety in what job seeking will be like)
- giving a passive response (would not instigate discussions with an employer – instead would wait for them to raise the issue; and discussing demonstrating (they would show how they able to perform particular tasks)

The most frequently given explanation for the young people's response were their personal characteristics, where they identified something about their personality type which they felt would influence their reaction to the situation. Other explanations for responses included:

- having confidence in their ability
- having confidence as a result of prior practice
- being irritated (their response will partly come out of irritation)
- knowing their legal rights
- having anxiety about the job outcome (feeling concerned that their visual impairment may restrict them in being successful)
- having attended a workshop which looked at similar scenarios
- the support of others around them
- their prior experience of being in the workplace (feeling confident as a result of positive experiences, or less confident because of lack of prior experience or bad experiences in the past)

Experience of work – Paid work and Voluntary work

Just under a third of the young people have had some paid work at some point, whilst just over a fifth reported that they currently have some form of paid work. The most common type of work the young people have had is working as a waitress/waiter or general work within the catering sector.

Many of the young people who are not currently working said that they would like a part time job. A number of suggestions were given for why they do not currently have paid work, and these included:

- focussing on education
- a lack of time
- that they were looking for work but had not been successful
- being restricted by their visual impairment
- not having seriously considered looking for work
- a lack of jobs
- it not being possible because they are at residential school

Two-thirds of the young people have done some form of voluntary work in the past. The most common type was charity work, or helping out at a club that they have been involved with in the past. Those who were interested in finding voluntary work but had not done so gave several explanations for this, including:

- having limited time
- having some voluntary work scheduled but not started
- being restricted by their visual impairment

- not having seriously considered looking for voluntary work

Experience of work – Work experience placements

Just under half of the participants have undertaken work experience placements in addition to the ones arranged through school. Over two-thirds of the young people who had not done an additional work placement said that they would be interested in getting further experience this way.

When asked what they thought were the benefits are of getting work experience, the most common responses were:

- looking good on a CV
- having experience of work
- getting an insight into work.

Other responses included:

- getting experience in a particular field
- helping to get a job
- helping to make decisions for the future
- helping build confidence
- work experience acts as a positive signal to employers
- can help in developing people skills

Only a quarter of the young people were confident that they were aware of any organisations that are available to assist them in their transition into employment. A few when prompted remembered that they had heard of Access to Work, whilst 60.9% said that they had never heard of the scheme.

Independence summing up: Skills the young people have

The majority of young people report being confident in travelling independently outside of school, whilst of all the proposed examples of independence, they feel least confident in travelling to a place which is unfamiliar to them. Several of the young people reported that magnifiers were not relevant to them (even though in some cases it would be possible that magnifiers could be of benefit to them), instead confidence is higher in accessing information electronically through computers.

Independence summing up: Support the young person has been given

On the whole the young people were positive about the support that they have received whilst in school/college, although there were six who did

not agree that they have been well equipped with the additional life skills that they will need, five who do not believe that the specialist support has helped them to become as independent as possible, and six who do not think that the teachers and services supporting them have helped them to maximise their academic attainment.

Independence – Views of Independence: Access to Information

All but one of the participants agreed that it is essential to provide material to visually impaired young people in their preferred format, and many also believed it was important to be taught how to access technology. There was less agreement that the young people should be seeking to learn to access information independently in school (for example in learning to use magnifiers and learning to access a range of formats).

Independence – Views of Independence: Priorities

The majority of students agreed with the suggestion that it was the priority of teachers and support services to support visually impaired students to achieve the highest possible grades, and many considered it a priority to teach visually impaired young people to travel independently around their school.

There was a belief amongst some that it is important to be prepared to live independently, with 20 who disagreed with the suggestion that as much as possible should be done to meet individual needs, even if the 'real world' might not be like that.

1 Background of the RNIB Transitions Project

1.1.1 Project Overview

This is a technical report in relation to post-16 transitions from school to further and higher education, training, and employment of blind and partially sighted students. This report focuses on data collection conducted in Easter and Autumn 2012.

The research project was designed in 2009 by a team from RNIB and VICTAR (Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research at the University of Birmingham) in response to the Research Brief prepared by RNIB Corporate Research Team: “Longitudinal study from age 14 of blind and partially sighted young people in the UK”. The research started in May 2009 and is being carried out in three stages of work:

Phase 1 – Recruitment and survey of educational services (Autumn 2009);

Phase 2 – Survey of young people with visual impairment (Summer 2010);

Phase 3 – Longitudinal case studies (Autumn 2010 onwards).

This report presents data in relation to the third phase of work. The survey was particularly concerned with the concept of independence, and evaluating how well prepared the young people were at this point of their lives (aged 16-19) for making the transition from compulsory education, into the next phase of their lives. This is a technical report which presents findings from the Easter and Autumn 2012 interviews. It will be followed by a series of focussed reports that aim to explore key themes, and will particularly make use of the longitudinal nature of the data.

1.1.2 Recruitment

Young people were recruited into the project through the 18 local authorities, 2 resource bases and 1 special school that had been recruited in Phase 1 of the project. At the time they were asked to identify all the Year 9 and Year 11 students with a visual impairment that they were supporting. Each service provider was asked to complete a short questionnaire identifying the students:

- initials

- gender
- ethnic group
- preferred reading format
- whether they had additional disabilities
- whether the student could independently complete a questionnaire
- details of anything else which could affect the student's potential involvement

Being able to 'independently complete a questionnaire' was used as the project inclusion criteria for the study. All those students who met the criteria were invited to take part through pre-prepared information packs. Those who consented to take part were consenting to be involved in the longitudinal project (with the freedom to request to withdrawal at any time). By March 2013, consent forms have been received from 88 young people, although not all have taken part in every stage of the data collection process.

Table 1: Participant Levels of each cohort during each data collection period

	Year 11	Year 10	Year 9
Summer 2010	47	N/A	31
Autumn 2010	46	N/A	N/A
Spring 2011	47	N/A	28
Summer 2011	41	N/A	27
Easter 2012	40	N/A	28
Autumn 2012	39	6	25

There have been six stages of data collection so far:

- Summer 2010 - questionnaires either on paper, online or via telephone interviews. This data collection related to Phase 2 of the project - surveying young people with a visual impairment;
- Autumn 2010 - phase 3 commenced with follow up telephone interviews of the Year 11 group, ascertaining how they had done in their GCSE examinations and what they had gone on to do next;
- Spring 2011- telephone interviews with both the Year 9 and Year 11 cohorts to review their transition experiences (Year 9 cohort moving onto GCSEs and Year 11 cohort moving into further education, and apprenticeships);
- Summer 2011 – telephone interviews with both the Year 9 and Year 11 cohorts, focussing on their use of social networking sites and mobile phones;

- Easter 2012 – short follow up interviews with Year 9 and Year 11 cohorts to see if participants were still happy to take part in the project, and to see what their plans were for the next academic year;
- Autumn 2012 – longer interviews with Year 9, 11 cohorts and the new Year 10 cohort, which focussed on independence and the additional curriculum.

This report relates to data collected in the two most recent surveys during Easter 2012 and Autumn 2012.

1.2 Easter 2012 Catch up interviews

The Easter 2012 interviews were conducted with the young people over the Easter holidays. This consisted of short telephone interviews which allowed the participants to confirm that they would be happy to take part in the second phase of the project. The questionnaire covered the following topics:

1. What you are currently doing?
2. What you are planning on doing next (including specific sections according to destination: work; apprenticeship; further courses; university; NEET)?
3. General reflections

The Easter 2012 survey was completed by 40 participants from the Year 11 cohort and 28 participants from the Year 9 cohort.

1.3 Autumn 2012 Independence interviews

The Autumn 2012 survey was completed through a telephone interview with the Year 9, 10 and 11 cohorts. This was a longer, semi structured interview. Due to the length of the interview, and the more open nature of the questions, all interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The interviews covered the following topics:

Covered in Section A: Current setting and plans for the future

1. Educational outcomes
2. Exams experience
3. Destination of students
4. Employment
5. Apprenticeships
6. NEETs and 'Other'

7. University applications
8. Future plans

Covered in Section B: Assessment of independence and 'readiness' for transition

1. What is independence to you?
2. Travel and mobility
3. Access to information and ICT
4. Self-advocacy
5. Experience of work
6. Independence: summing up

The Autumn 2012 survey was completed by 70 participants (25 of Year 9 cohort, 6 of Year 10 cohort and 39 of Year 11 cohort).

2 Sample demographics and representativeness

A detailed analysis of the sample demographics and representativeness was provided in Hewett, Douglas and Williams (2011). At the time, the following key points were noted:

1. There is an underrepresentation of Asian or Asian British young people
2. There is an overrepresentation of those with additional special needs, Statements of Special Educational Needs, Braille users and young people from Wales

The small sample size must be taken into account when assessing the representativeness of our sample to the population. However, overall the sample does appear to be a good representation of the population.

For a more thorough breakdown of the representativeness, please refer to the 2011 report. Tables presenting the demographic data of the 70 young people who took part in this stage of the project may be found in the appendix.

3 Analysis and Reporting

3.1 Data management

Data collected in the Easter 2012 interviews was recorded on pre-prepared interview schedules, before being entered into the project database, within IBM Statistics SPSS 20 programme, whilst the data

collected in the Autumn 2012 interviews was audio recorded, transcribed into Microsoft Word, prior to being entered into IBM Statistics SPSS 20.

3.2 Analysis of questions and reporting style

The responses to closed questions were analysed through simple summary statistics using IBM Statistics SPSS 20. These are presented in table format with both counts and percentages (where appropriate).

Shorter open questions were themed and coded into IBM Statistics SPSS 20. The results from this analysis are either presented in tables, or described, in accordance to what was most appropriate. Any themes are illustrated using quotes.

More substantial open questions were analysed through NVivo. This involved a three step process:

1. A researcher worked through individual questions to identify key themes within the data
2. The researcher then looked through the key themes identified and rearranging them into broader categories (whilst the individual questions were analysed separately, common themes across these questions were identified and kept consistent throughout)
3. The researcher then joined with a further researcher working on the project to evaluate whether the themes identified could be understood and were consistent with the data.
4. These themes were created as nodes in NVivo, where the researcher then went through the responses to these questions and coded the data.

Throughout the report, quotes are presented to illustrate the themes identified. The number of times that each theme was coded is presented in brackets, and consistent language is used in reporting ('many' refers to over 20 participants, 'some' refers to less than 20 participants, otherwise exact numbers are used).

SECTION A: Longitudinal Study

4 Current setting and plans for the future

4.1 Setting and plans: Easter 2012

In Easter 2012 all of the Year 9 cohort had all moved onto Year 11 and were taking their GCSEs. They were all taking traditional GCSE options, with the exception of one who was taking ASDAN support. The current setting of the Year 11 cohort was more complex, with the students having chosen a variety of transition routes. Those who had followed the more traditional pathway through education were in Year 13 and preparing to complete their A-level courses.

Table 2 Current pathway of Year 11 cohort (Easter 2012)

Current Setting	Total (N)	Total (%)
Year 13 - A-levels/BTEC Level 2/3	29	72.5%
Year 12 – Taking A-levels/BTEC Level 3 over three years	4	10.0%
Taking BTEC Level 1/2 and planning on continuing in education	3	7.5%
Employment	1	2.5%
Apprenticeship	1	2.5%
Other	2	5.0%
Total	40	100%

Almost three quarters of the students were completing their A-level or BTEC courses in Summer 2012. Four students had chosen to take their A-levels over 3 years. In one case this was due to personal difficulties that had affected the young person's education the previous year, whilst the other three had struggled in their first year of A-levels and decided it was best to repeat Year 12 before proceeding to their final year of studies.

Table 3: Primary planned destination of Year 9 and Year 11 cohort (Easter 2012)

	Y11 cohort Total (N)	Y11 cohort Total (%)	Y9 cohort Total (N)	Y9 cohort Total (%)
Further or continuing with FE courses	8	20.0%	25	89.3%
University	18	45.0%	0	0.0%
Employment	5	12.5%	2	7.1%
Apprenticeship	6	15.0%	1	3.6%
Other	3	7.5%	0	0.0%
Total	40	100.0%	28	100.0%

Some of the participants were still undecided about what they wanted to do following that academic year, with several having a backup plan (or in the case of some of the Year 11 cohort, plans). One person from the Year 9 cohort who was intending to go to sixth form was also considering an apprenticeship.

Five of the Year 11 cohort who had said that they wanted to go to university had alternative plans as they were not certain they wanted to go to university, with two considering employment, two apprenticeships and one continuing in further education. A further 8 participants were still deciding between employment, continuing in further education or apprenticeships.

Table 4 How sure are you that your plans for next year will happen (Easter 2012)?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 11 cohort	Total	Total (%)
Very sure	9	12.5*	21.5*	33.6%
Sure	11	12*	23*	35.9%
Quite sure	6	8.5*	14.5*	22.7%
Quite unsure	1	3	4	6.3%
Unsure	0	0	0	0.0%
Very unsure	1	0	1	1.6%
Total	28	36	64	100.0%

(*several participants gave 'in between' responses - e.g. very sure/sure, hence why not all counts are whole numbers)

The majority (92.2%) of participants were at least 'quite sure' that their plans for the next year would happen. Of those who were less sure:

- One participant was struggling to find a suitable college course that could cater for their needs (not linked to their visual impairment)
- One participant was applying for jobs and although they knew what they wanted to do, were concerned about the shortage of jobs during the recession;
- One participant wanted to continue with a Level 3 qualification, but wasn't sure if they would be able to do so without GCSE Maths;
- One participant wanted to apply for a particular course, but they acknowledged it was competitive;
- One participant had applied for a particular job, so their plans rested on the results of that application.

To conclude the short interviews, the participants were asked to summarise how happy they were with their plans for the next academic year, by rating on a scale of 1 to 6, where '1 is very happy' and '6 is very unhappy', and also how confident they were that their plans would happen.

Table 5: How happy are you with the plans that you have in place for the next academic year on a scale of 1 to 6, if '1 is very happy' and '6 is very unhappy' (Easter 2012)

	Year 9 cohort	Year 11 cohort	Total	Total (%)
Very happy	12	16	28	44.4%
Happy	12	13	25	39.7%
Quite happy	2	5	7	11.1%
A bit unhappy	1	1	2	22.2%
Unhappy	1	0	1	11.1%
Very unhappy	0	0	0	0.0%
Total	28	35	63	100.0%

Almost all (95.2%) of the participants said were at least quite happy with the plans that they had for autumn 2012 onwards. Of those who were less happy, the main reason seems to have been uncertainty about the future:

- One participant was struggling with not knowing what they wanted to do at college;
- Two participants were unhappy with the uncertainty of where they would be moving onto next.

4.2 Educational outcomes: Autumn 2012

Table 6: Year 9 participants achieving 5 A*-C in GCSEs including Maths and English

Achieved 5 A*-C in GCSEs, including Maths and English?	Total (N)	Total (%)
Yes	15	60.0%
No	10	40.0%
Total	25	100.0%

Of the 25 Year 9 students in the autumn 2012 interviews, 60.0% achieved 5 GCSE grades at A*-C. This is in line with the national results, where 59.4% of students achieved this level. (DfE, 2013). A similar finding was made for the Year 11 cohort where 60.9% had achieved 5 A*-C including English and Maths, although in 2009/10 the national average was lower at 53.1%. This is a reminder that we have a high achieving sample, and can anticipate many of these young people going on to university.

Table 7: UCAS points of Year 11 cohort who have completed Higher Education

UCAS Points	Total (N)	Total (%)
400+	6	27.3%
300-399	3	13.6%
200-299	6	27.3%
100-199	7	31.8%
Total	22	100.0%

It is very difficult, and inappropriate, to make comparison with national statistics, due to the wide range of type of course that were taken by the participants. However, it is positive that all but one student who had wished to go to university were able to do so, and one student who performed better in A-levels than expected, and hadn't originally thought his grades would be sufficient for university, after receiving his results obtained an offer for a university course through clearing. The student who was unable to go to university made the decision to go back to college to strengthen their grades, with the intention of applying for entry in either 2013 or 2014.

Of the 16 who were in the Year 10 or Year 11 cohorts and continuing in further education the following year (2013), 15 were positive about the results that they had achieved. Unfortunately one person was less positive, and has decided to start again with their first year of A-level studies at a different college. Their decision to change to a college was partly due to them being unhappy about the support that they had received at school.

4.3 Exams experience: Autumn 2012

In the Autumn 2012 interviews, the young people were asked questions about their exams experience, relating to examinations taken in the previous academic year. They were asked to tell the researcher about their exams experience, with several prompts including:

- Details of special arrangements;
- Whether the arrangements were as they wanted them;
- If they thought that the exam arrangements or problems encountered affected their results.

Table 8: Evaluation of Examination Access Arrangements

Response	Year 9	Year 10/11	Year 11	Total (N)	Total (%)
Good	18	8	11	37	53.6%
Overall good but some minor problems	1	2	2	5	7.2%
Problems	6	3	0	9	13.0%
No exams	0	3	15	18	26.1%
Total	25	16	28	69	100.0%

Table 8 shows that 51 of the 69 participants who were still in education at this time took exams. Of these, almost three-quarters reported that all arrangements were fine and as expected, whilst over a quarter said that they had had at least some form of minor problem. Included in this group were some who related *past* negative experiences and for whom the more positive, most recent experiences had enabled them to reflect back to what had gone less well in the past. Of the 51 young people who took exams, 5 of them thought that the arrangements negatively affected their results in some way.

4.3.1 Problems with examination arrangements

Lack of provision of needs

One participant felt that they needed a scribe in their exams, but until this point the school had not established whether they were eligible for one or not. They were hoping to receive one for their next exams:

“It’s been seen whether it’s possible for me to have a scribe for the exams, because of the time it takes me to get through the exam, it’s really restrictive.”

“I think it helps me. I would rather have the arrangements that they are now than not have them at all. I went to a school, for my GCSEs that I didn’t get any arrangements like that, so it’s good that I can get what I am entitled to, and it helps me out a lot, especially with science”

Large size of papers

Participant: “I get the option of having enlarged papers, but I don’t necessary use them.” Researcher: “Why would you not use them, is there any particular reason?” Participant: “Mainly they are there just in case. And sometimes, I use them, say I will write on, it depends on the paper, sometimes I will write on one, and use the other one to look at a question. I won’t necessarily use the whole thing.” Researcher: “Is that because it gets a bit big on the table?” Participant: “Yeah”.

“Maths paper was way too big, but they wouldn't do it any smaller”

Participant: “I had extra time, and I had the option to use modified papers, but I didn’t use them”. Researcher: “Is there any reason for that?” Participant: “I have never liked them, they are annoying.” Researcher: “Is that the size?” Participant: “Yeah”.

Diagrams (braille users)

“The one thing I would say though, this might just be me, but with the tactile diagrams, sometimes making them tactile actually makes them harder to interpret and harder to read, because, for example, if you are looking at a line graph, raised lines for the rest of the graph, actually make it harder to read the one you are trying to read, so it does make it a bit harder to understand, but I don’t think it affected the results massively.”

“I would say that it’s some of the exams, especially in say something like maths, I would say that diagram questions compromise with my result, I would say. Because for me personally and I guess this might apply to other totals as well, the

diagrams, a lot of the diagrams are extremely visual I find, and it's something that ultimately slows you down, which means that it's an area you really struggle with. That's the key issue with me with maths."

"Sometimes the exam boards can produce horrible diagrams, they can be really hard to interpret, so they are not always that good, because they can be really visual at times. It's like they try to see if from a blind persons point of view, but it doesn't seem to have consulted with blind people sometimes."

Participant: "I had double time, and modified papers, but the diagrams were bad, you couldn't really tell what they were going to ask you". Researcher: "Was that in maths and science?" Participant: "Yeah." Researcher: "What format were the papers in?" Participant: "Braille." Researcher: "So how did they do the diagrams?" Participant: "They put it through some machine which raises it, but they didn't really modify it, they just made the diagram that sighted people use so you could touch it, but it wasn't really helpful". Researcher: "Did you have anyone who could explain the diagram?" Participant: "Yeah, but they can't do much because it's an exam, and they would consider it as cheating. In science they could help more."

Extra time

"I was just thinking that they were too long, but I did actually need that time"

"The extended time may have been a bit much...I think I got very exhausted by the time I was finishing, they weren't as good as they could have been."

Other

"I think that they should have, they could have split the room into the two who are using readers, because sometimes it got a bit confusing, there were people talking, but that would have been good, but I don't know how they would have done that"

Participant: "Well I was supposed to have modified papers, there was a bit of a mix up in the exams office, so I didn't get them in the end. I got a, they wrote a letter of consideration, but I am supposed to be getting them, and I have got them ordered for these next exams." Researcher: "Was that a massive hindrance would you

say?” Participant: “It wasn’t a massive hindrance, but it just prevents eye strain.”

Positive accounts

Whilst many gave positive accounts of their exams experience, two participants in particular described how positive the support was, and how they believed the special arrangements they received were justifiable:

“I think if I had the standard amount of time, I think I would have struggled to get through the amount of material that a fully sighted person would have easily been able to get through, and perform just as well I think. I think my performance would have been really hindered if I didn’t get a reader or a scribe, or enlarged print. If I didn’t get enlarged print, it would have been totally impossible for me to do the exam.”

“...allowed me to get what I should be getting really. It put me on a level playing field with everyone else. I don't think it gave me an advantage, it put me on a level playing field.”

4.3.2 Exam arrangements made

Tables 9 and 10 give further details of the special arrangements received. The most common arrangement (70.6%) was to receive modified papers (either enlarged, on a different colour sheet or in Braille). Table 10 shows a cross-tabulation of participants preferred format against the amount of extra time that was received. On the whole, we see that as expected, the amount of extra time allocated increases as the young person’s severity of visual impairment increases.

Table 9: Details of arrangements made for exams

Arrangement	Total (N=51)	Total (%)
Had a laptop	17	33.3%
Had a reader/and or scribe	21	58.3%
Had (or were intended to have) modified papers	36	70.6%

Table 10: Cross-tabulation of extra time allowed for exams against participants preferred format

	Normal to large print (12 to 17 point)	Large print (18-27 point)	Very large print (≥ 28 point)	Braille
No extra time	4	0	0	0
25% extra time	7	5	0	0
50% extra time	2	4	0	2
75% extra time	0	0	0	1
100% extra time	0	7	1	7

4.4 Destination of students: Autumn 2012

Section 4.1 looked at the plans of the young people in Easter 2012, before they had taken their examinations. This section continues by looking at their destination, following receiving their exam results. As will be seen, in the majority of cases, the young people were able to continue to their initial plans.

Table 11: Destination of Year 10 and 11 cohort (September 2012)

Setting	Planned pathway Easter 2012: Total (N)	Planned pathway Easter 2012: Total (%)	Actual pathway autumn 2012: Total (N)	Actual pathway autumn 2012: Total (%)
Continuing in further education	14	30.4%	16	35.6%
University	18	39.1%	17	37.8%
Employment	5	10.9%	2	6.7%
Apprenticeship	6	13.0%	3	6.7%
Looking for employment/ apprenticeships	-	-	6	11.1%
Other	3	6.5%	1	2.2%
Total	46	100.0%	45	100.0%

Of the 16 participants who are continuing in further education, this includes ten of the original Year 11 cohort who have chosen to take their courses over more than two years. In three cases they are progressing from level 2 qualifications up to level 3. In the other seven cases they

have decided to take longer over their studies in order to ensure that they have the necessary qualifications to go to university (i.e. taking two-year courses over three years).

Originally 18 students intended to go to university. One of the original 18 did not achieve the A-level results they had hoped, and so have had to continue in further education with the view of improving on their grades. Another student decided to take a gap year before going to university as an opportunity to earn some money. However, one of the students who had planned to continue at college achieved better results than expected, and so applied to go to university instead, using the clearing system.

A detailed account of those in employment, apprenticeships, voluntary work, and seeking employment/apprenticeships is given in Sections 4.5-4.6.

Table 12: Destination of Year 9 cohort (September 2012)

Current Setting	Total (N)	Total (%)
Further Education	24	96.0%
Apprenticeship	1	4.0%
Total	25	100.0%

All but one of the Year 9 cohort have continued with further education, with one participant instead deciding to take an apprenticeship (discussed further in Section 4.6).

4.5 Employment

As presented in Table 11, two of the participants interviewed are currently in employment. A detailed account of their experience so far is presented in the boxes below.

Participant in Employment 1

Participant 1 completed a Higher BTEC in summer 2012. They are currently working in retail, an area they have developed significant experience in previously, having volunteered in a shop for 3-4 hours a week over a 15 month period. At the time of interview they were currently in two part-time posts at different companies, but were confident about being able to secure a full-time role at one of the companies.

One of the posts was obtained by handing in a CV into the store on spec, whilst the other they applied for online in response to an

advertised vacancy. In order to access the recruitment website, and also search for other opportunities on the government 'Job Centre' website, they used accessibility software, and did not experience any problems.

Participant in Employment 2

Participant 2 completed a BTEC Level 3 extended diploma in summer 2012. They have been working as a casual labourer since summer 2012. Prior to this they had paid work experience, working in retail. Any work they get is through an employment agency who the participant registered with after an online web search for possible agencies (it was not necessary for them to use any accessibility software, simply to use reading glasses when looking at the screen). Prior to starting working on building sites, it was necessary for the participant to take an industry standard health and safety test.

It is interesting to note that both of the young people who have been successful in getting employment have prior work experience. Whilst Participant 2's level of visual impairment obviously does not cause as much difficulty as for others within the project, the participant did describe some minor challenges faced as a result of their visual impairment (such as reading information on a whiteboard and in certain colours) and acknowledged that they were likely unable to be able to apply for some jobs as a result of it (e.g. within the police force).

4.6 Apprenticeships

As presented in Table 11, three of the participants interviewed are currently in employment. A detailed account of their experience so far is presented in the boxes below.

Participant in Apprenticeship 1

Participant 1 has been in an apprenticeship within the financial sector since Autumn 2010 and is training for a professional qualification. Their work involves using a computer throughout the day, which can cause some challenges through eye strain. The position wasn't advertised, instead they emailed round multiple places with their CV to see if any employers would be willing to take them on for an apprenticeship. They disclosed their eye condition at the interview, but felt that it wouldn't impact them very much in the workplace. They take breaks when needed, and can follow official procedures to let the employers know of any difficulties they are facing. They are able to get to work independently using public transport.

Participant in Apprenticeship 2

Participant 2 has been in a customer service based apprenticeship since Autumn 2012, and prior to that had been NEET for a year. Participant was helped by a Connexions advisor in finding a position. The advisor made contact with the young person when they found positions which they thought might be suitable for them, and had arranged an interview for the participant's current role. The participant travels into work each day using a public bus service, and is confident in doing this, using landmarks and other signs to help identify where they are. They disclosed their visual impairment to their employer, but according to the young person the employer didn't understand what the young person was saying about their visual impairment, and instead they said they would inform the employer if any problems were to arise. Having the apprenticeship has really boosted their confidence in speaking to others and self-advocating. Although they are enjoying the apprenticeship, they have some concerns about what they will do once it has finished as it isn't guaranteed to lead to a permanent job with this employer.

Participant in Apprenticeship 3

Participant 3 has been in a retail based apprenticeship since Autumn 2012. They received help from Connexions in identifying the apprenticeship, and also in completing the application form. They go into college once a week, but the rest of the week is spent on placement, which they get to by travelling on public bus. When in college the lecturers had the majority of the time been forgetting to produce modified material, although the young person reported they reminded them each time this happened. They did not seem concerned that this was having an impact on their work. The participant feels that eventually they would like to do a college course in a different type of course, but they report they were advised by Connexions that an apprenticeship would be better for them than a normal college course.

4.7 NEETs and 'Other'

Six of the participants are currently looking for employment/apprenticeships (including two who are currently in voluntary work or part time work, but wanting full-time paid employment). A seventh participant is currently in voluntary work, and hoping to next year continue with their education.

NEET 1

This participant left education in Summer 2012 after completing Level 2 BTEC in Childcare. They are looking to an apprenticeship or employment in a nursery, and are currently volunteering at the same nursery they had their college placement at as they “don’t just like sitting around all day”. They have been looking for apprenticeships via their college website, but haven’t found anything suitable, speaking of their frustration that a friend with no relevant qualifications managed to secure an apprenticeship in a school nursery. Until the participant manages to secure a childcare position, they are applying for other unrelated work that can be done alongside the voluntary placement.

NEET 2

This participant left education in Summer 2012 after passing BTEC Level 2 qualifications, and was looking for apprenticeships or employment in either cookery or childcare. They had made some applications for apprenticeships, but at the time of the interviews hadn’t heard anything back. They had received advice from Connexions before making applications, but haven’t received any advice specifically in relation to their visual impairment. They found completing the application forms for the apprenticeships ‘easy’, and made simple modifications by enlarging the text on the screen. They haven’t found any jobs yet to apply for. Their time is currently spent looking for suitable positions and socialising with friends. They have not had any prior work experience (either paid or voluntary).

NEET 3

This participant left education in Summer 2012, after passive BTEC Level 3 qualifications with high grades. They are hoping long term to work with animals, but in the meantime are looking for relevant apprenticeships or retail work. They have had some prior work experience, and are currently volunteering for 30 hours a week at a charity shop, which was something suggested by the person supporting them at the Job Centre. They found registering for apprenticeships straight forward “easy, easy to navigate, the print was fine and everything”. The participant is finding the support they are receiving at the Job Centre very helpful.

NEET 4

This participant left education in Summer 2010 for personal reasons, and is hoping to go back eventually to complete a BTEC Level 3 qualification. In the meantime they are hoping to get into employment,

and have been applying for positions – in particular temporary retail positions that were available over Christmas. They have never had any prior paid employment, but did do a placement as part of the first year of the Level 3 BTEC. They have received support from their partner in applying for jobs online, which they relied upon as they are not very confident in using computers to access the internet. One particular barrier this participant will face is that they do not like going out independently.

Other 1

This young person left education in Summer 2012 having successfully completed a Level 3 BTEC. They currently have a casual job working as a waitress, but really want to get into fulltime work in customer service. To help with this, the participant has done some relevant voluntary work and is also on a 24 week training scheme which helps prepare people for work (which includes a placement in the type of work they are interested in). The participant was finding the course very helpful, but was concerned about whether the work placement would lead to the offer of a job or not.

Other 2

This young person completed a Level 2 BTEC in Summer 2012. They wanted to continue with the Level 3 qualification, but were unable to do so as they did not have GCSE Maths. Despite having help from a Careers Wales advisor, they have been unable to find a college with a place available for them to retake GCSE Maths over the next academic year, and instead are taking a gap year from studies to hopefully continue with GCSE Maths in Autumn 2013. They are currently volunteering at a local school, and intend to continue doing this for the next year, with no plans to look for employment.

Other 3

This participant left education in Summer 2012, after completing a BTEC Level 3 qualification. They had intended to go straight to university, but instead decided to take a gap year to get some work experience and some money. They are not looking for any particular type of work, although they would like full-time work (currently they are working part-time at the nursery where they had their college placement).

4.8 University applications

Twenty of the Year 11 cohort made some form of application to a higher education institution in 2012. For 17, this meant going through the standard process of applying to universities through UCAS, whilst two applied directly to the colleges they hoped to attend (these were for specialist courses at HE institutions not connected to UCAS), and one entered the UCAS system at clearing.

Questions were asked about their experience of the application process during both the Easter 2012 and Autumn 2012 interviews. These covered the following topic areas:

- University and course they were applying for, and why
- How accessible in relation to their visual impairment they found the application process
- Support received in applying for university
- Whether they declared their visual impairment on the application form
- Whether the universities/institutions made any provision in the application and visiting process in relation to their visual impairment
- Whether they had spoken to anyone from their chosen department/disability support office about their visual impairment and the support that would be made available to them
- Whether they had applied for disabled student allowance, their experiences of this, and if they knew whether or not they were eligible

4.8.1 Universities and courses

The young people made applications for a wide variety of courses, ranging from more traditional subjects like English, History and Politics, to more practical subjects such as Performing Arts, Photography and Film Production.

A number of reasons were given for the young person choosing to apply for a particular course or university. A summary of these are presented in Table 13. The overwhelming majority gave answers typical to those you would expect from their sighted peers, although the response given by two of the twenty showed that their visual impairment had been a consideration when making their decision.

Table 13: What attracted you to that university/course?

Reason given	Total (N=20)	Total (%)
Location	8	40.0%
Reputation of the course/university	7	35.0%
Good impression	4	20.0%
Course content	2	10.0%
Disability support	2	10.0%
Facilities	2	10.0%
Other	7	35.0%

Location

The most common reason given was location. Some were attracted to the university because it was local, which would mean they could stay at home and save. For one participant the fact that the university was far away was seen as a positive, and another thought that being located in London would be an advantage due to the industry they wanted to get into:

“It was closer to home”

“The university is close to home, because I was a bit late to sort out student housing, so I am able to commute...”

“I like the fact that it’s in London because there’s more here, and I think that could possibly end up being more valuable if I did things outside, and learning as well.”

“I felt it was going to be somewhere where I am able to get on with my studies and not be distracted, but still have a social life as well.”

Reputation of the university

Several were attracted to the department and/or university after hearing that they have a good reputation:

“Because the music course that they offer is one of the best in the country, it’s comparable to a music college...”

“...reputation has soared in the last few years – it has gone up massively...”

Good course

Another common response was that they thought the course looked good, or had heard positive things from others about the course, and would suit them well:

“Because all the other uni’s didn’t do dance or singing, they just did acting, so it wasn’t really performing arts. So when I saw... they did plenty of each, I was pleased.”

Good impression

Some were attracted by the university itself, seeing it as a ‘friendly’ place to be, or simply getting an overall nice impression:

“I think it’s just because it’s quite a friendly place...”

“...it was mainly it seemed like a really nice place.”

Disability support

Two of the participants gave consideration to the support that they would receive whilst at university.

“...they were willing to cater to my needs.”

“...the disability centre is support to be good... we looked up on the internet I think at different people’s opinions.”

Facilities

Some of those taking more practical courses were attracted by the facilities available:

“The facilities they had seemed amazing.”

“Facilities and the reputation has soared in the last few years.”

Other

Other types of responses that were given included:

- selecting the university as it was the only institution that made them an offer
- being influenced by other people
- being impressed at an open day
- attracted by their research centre.

4.8.2 Experience of the application process

The following three sections (4.8.2-4.8.4) refer to the experiences of the seventeen young people who continued on to university in September 2012.

Table 14: Participants' experience of applying to university

Response	Total (N)	Total (%)
No problems relating to visual impairment	10	58.8%
Some problems	4	23.5%
N/A Applied through institution's own system – but had problems	1	5.9%
N/A Applied through institution's own system –had no problems	1	5.9%
N/A Applied through clearing	1	5.9%
Total	17	100.0%

Of the 17 participants who spoke about their experiences of the application process, ten didn't have any problems, two applied directly to their institutions and did not have any problems (although in one of these cases the young person was a braille reader, and relied fully on her parents in helping to complete the paper based form), and one person applied through clearing, and so did not complete the full UCAS application. There were four participants who identified problems that they had had when making their applications. One person had difficulties with their magnification software ("I don't know if it was just the way my computer was set, but when you were using the magnification software, some of the things seemed a bit distant from each other, and it was hard to keep track of sometimes"), whilst the other three had struggled with the appearance of the website ("Difficult using UCAS website due to colours and size of the font, making it hard to navigate").

Table 15: Source of support in completing university applications

Response	Total (N=12)
School/College	10
Parents/Carers	2
VTS	2

The young people were asked whether they had received any support in applying for university. Of sixteen responses, twelve said that they had, whilst four hadn't (reasons given included them feeling they didn't need support, and that they had applied for university after leaving college so were too late to get the support normally available to students moving from school or FE to HE). The support given came from three main sources, as shown in Table 15, and in the majority of cases, this came from school/college. The participant who did not decide until receiving their results that they wanted to go to university did not receive any support in their application, and applied through the clearing route. It is interesting to note how few received guidance from their visual impairment support services in making their applications, suggesting that this is not something that the services are getting involved in.

The young people were also asked if they had declared their visual impairment in any way as part of the application process. Fifteen of the 17 said that they had made a declaration when applying (primarily by ticking a box on the UCAS form). One person made the decision not to disclose his visual impairment, believing that their school would pass on details of any support that may be required (it is unsure whether this as a result of a lack of advice, or a lack of understanding) whilst another said that they did not have an opportunity to do so as part of the clearing procedure.

Finally, the participants were asked if the universities made any provision for them, in relation to their visual impairment, during the application and visiting process.

4.8.3 Proposed support

Communication from chosen department

Of the 17 young people who started at university in autumn 2012, eight had spoken directly to their department about the support they would be provided with. This communication took the following forms:

- two participants spoke to their lecturers in person about the support they would need once they had arrived at university
- three participants took advantage of a meeting with their department before starting to discuss their visual impairment
- three participants received contact from their department before starting, specifically in relation to support.

Discussions with chosen department

For five participants of the 6 who had contact prior to starting their course, the main objective appears to have been for their departments to provide reassurance that they would be providing the support that the universities' disability support office had indicated would be required. In one case, the institution the young person was going to was a very small one without a dedicated disability support office – instead the academic staff discussed with the participant beforehand what support she would require, assuring her that they would provide, “whatever she wants”.

Communication from Disability Support Office

It was far more common for the young people to receive communication in relation to support directly from the disability support office. In total, eleven of the young people had had at least some contact from the disability office (even if this was simply to advise them to complete a form for DSA).

Eight had had communication with the disability support office about the type of support that would be provided to them. This varied, and included the following:

- Arranged a formal meeting with the DSO before the start of the course;
- Arranged for young person to arrive earlier than the other students for orientation/meetings, etc.;
- Sent young person a questionnaire to complete to detail support needed;
- Arranged for the young person to make contact with the DSO on their arrival at university.

Six reported that they had had no contact from the disability support office. In two cases this was because the institutions were too small to have a dedicated department, but they had been reassured by lecturers that they would be well supported. A third person felt that they didn't need support, and instead had prioritised speaking to the accommodation services to ensure he would be in the same accommodation as a friend who would provide support:

“I only really spoke to the accommodation lady...We mainly requested that I could be in the same dorm as my friend who has been with me through high school and things. That was mainly because he knows what I need in a sense, he could help me with those”.

A fourth person had not had any contact presumably because they had not disclosed their visual impairment on the UCAS form – instead they planned to speak to their lecturers personally:

“Once I found out who my lecturers were, I would speak to them personally”.

The remaining two had only recently secured their places, and although they were soon to be starting on their courses, they had not yet had an opportunity to make contact with the disability support office, although in one case where they had applied through clearing, this could have been because they had had no opportunity to declare their visual impairment, and so the disability support office would have been unaware of them. The reality of the support that was received by the young people once they started at university will be investigated in subsequent reports.

4.8.4 Application for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

Ten of the young people reported that they had completed their DSA, and had confirmation that they are eligible, whilst a further four are waiting to hear back from their applications. Three have not applied yet for a variety of reasons. Of these, one simply was not interested in applying (although they did not necessarily think they would be rejected), another had assumed they wouldn't be eligible and so had not applied but now has been advised otherwise, and the third did not declare their visual impairment at time of application and so has not received any notification of how and why to apply.

Of the 14 who have completed applications, 10 received support in this, ranging from simple advice on where to access the form, to someone completely filling in the form on their behalf. The sources of support identified were: parents/carers; special school; visual impairment support services and the university disability support office. Whilst many of the participants have received support in making their applications, there appears to be evidence of a gap of a professional lead in ensuring that the young people understanding what DSA is and the importance of it for them.

Opinions on the application process for DSA were quite mixed, with some finding it demanding, whilst others found it far more straightforward:

“It was a bit overwhelming about it. Lots of different sections. Particularly with things like disability support and so many things

you have to send off, and a lot of it is reliant to the university replying to you, which they don't always do very quickly. So it's all very complicated."

"I found it easy, it was definitely easy"

"It wasn't too bad, it was quite lengthy, but I was expecting it to be."

4.9 Future plans

4.9.1 University

The young people were asked about their future plans – including for those who were still in education, whether they wanted to continue onto university.

Table 16: Does the young person want to go to university?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 continuing in FE	Total	Total (%)
Yes	11	13	24	58.5%
No	6	2	8	19.5%
Unsure	8	1	9	22.0%
Total	25	16	41	100.0%

Twenty four of the 41 young people still in further education would like to go to university, whilst a further 9 are still unsure. A variety of reasons were given by those who had decided against applying for university, or were still undecided. These included:

- Simply not being interested
- Fees being too expensive
- University was their backup plan in the event of other plans not succeeding
- They thought they may consider it in the future, but not for now
- Wanting to see what their grades were like
- Needing to give consideration to finances
- Concluding that they were not the required academic standard for university

4.9.2 Careers and Career Advice

Table 17: Does the young person know what job they want to do?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 cohort continuing in FE	Year 11 cohort left FE	Total	Total (%)
Yes	16	11	26	52	76.5%
Unsure	9	5	2	16	23.5%
Total	25	16	28	68	100.0%

The majority (76.5%) of the young people had some idea of the type of career that they would like to follow. This is a similar proportion found in summer 2010 (74.3%). The Year 11 students who had left further education had the highest proportion of participants who had some idea of the type of work they wanted to do (92.9%). This is not too surprising as they are further along their transition process.

One important consideration is what type or level of support might be needed for the young person to pursue their chosen career. We asked them if they had received any careers guidance specifically in relation to their visual impairment, giving an example of discussion around any careers that may or may not be practical for them.

Table 18: Has the young person had any career advice, specifically in relation to their visual impairment?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 cohort continuing in FE	Year 11 cohort left FE	Total	Total (%)
Yes	4	5	8	17	25.4%
Unsure	21	11	18	50	74.6%
Total	25	16	26	67	100.0%

Only 16 of the 67 who answered this question said that they had received careers advice specifically in relation to their visual impairment. As a probe to this question, the researcher asked those who reported not receiving any specific advice whether they thought that they needed it, and who was best placed to give that advice.

Table 19: Do you think you need or would benefit from career advice specifically in relation to your visual impairment?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 cohort continuing in FE	Year 11 cohort left FE	Total	Total (%)
Yes	9	6	8	23	50.0%
No	10	4	9	23	50.0%
Total	19	10	17	46	

As shown in Table 19: there was a real division between the young people about whether they needed specific careers advice or not, with some quite strong responses.

Do not need specific careers advice

One person had firmly rejected the offer of such advice:

“They tried, but I said no! They are from Connexions, and I am like, Connexions sort of advise everyone, they don’t know anything about my visual impairment and like they are probably just going to go onto Google and do some research that I could do in my spare time. I didn’t feel that I needed help either, I know what I want to do, I know how to apply to university, I know what the UCAS application is, and I get support anyway from my tutor, so I didn’t really see the point.”

Another had received advice, but spoke quite negatively of it:

“Yes, it was joyful! It was just boring. They don’t really know about it really, they aren’t in your shoes.”

Do need specific careers advice

Two people who felt they were still in need of advice, felt quite let down by the quality, or lack of, advice that they had received so far:

“The last person I spoke to, they didn’t know anything about me, and they kept saying to me ‘yeah you can do that job’ and if a blind person, a half blind person did that, they could kill themselves.”

“I don’t understand why I haven’t had it yet, but I hope by next year, because I will be leaving then.”

A further person who had actively sought specific careers advice after feeling confused about the direction she should be taking spoke of their frustrations at an apparent lack of advice:

“I have tried but it’s just not there.”

Others felt that they would need advice at some point, but it had to be at the right time:

“I did have one back in Wales. She was ok, but I wasn’t sure at the time what I wanted to do, and they can’t really do nothing unless I’ve got an idea.”

“It’s probably something that once I am at university, before I am about to go into the job market place, things like when to disclose your disability, that kind of conversation. Careers advice will be more helpful when I am actually looking for a job.”

Several of those who spoke of the advice they had been given spoke of how careers advisors had given them particularly focussed advice.

“I have been told by Connexions that I could teach people Braille and stuff. They said if I went to [school] and learnt a lot of stuff with IT, then I could possible do that too.”

Participant: “I haven’t really had that yet. Most career talks just skirts around my visual impairment, but there was the one that said ‘oh actually the police would help you. They have things set up, they have set ups so you can get enlarged screens’.” Researcher: “Is that why you are thinking of working with the police?” Participant: “Yeah.”

In these two examples it appears that the young people have ‘latched’ onto the particular jobs that have been suggested by the career advisors. Their responses suggest that they had a degree of uncertainty over what careers would be appropriate for them with their visual impairment, and so they have focussed in on the limited range of jobs which have been proposed to them, and in some cases the advice does not seem to be well informed.

Finally, the young people who said that they felt they could benefit from some advice were asked if they knew where to go to get it. Five said that

they would approach someone from Connexions, whilst one person would speak to their teacher. However, 11 of the young people said that they were not sure where they would be able to get such advice. At the time, the researcher informed these students of the employment services provided by Action for Blind People.

4.9.3 Confidence in plans

To conclude the interviews, the young people were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 6, how happy they were with the plans that they had in place for the next twelve months.

Table 20: How happy are you with the plans that you have in place for the next academic year on a scale of 1 to 6, if ‘1 is very happy’ and ‘6 is very unhappy’

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 continuing in FE	Year 11 – leaving further education	Year 11 – Employed	Total	Total (%)
Very happy	10	3.5	14.5	0	28	40.6%
Happy	9	9.5	10.5	1	30	43.5%
Quite happy	4	1	1	0	6	8.7%
A bit unhappy	1	1	1.5	0	3.5	5.1%
Unhappy	0	0.5	0.5	0	1	1.4%
Very unhappy	0	0.5	0	0	0.5	0.7%
Total	24	16	28	1	69	100.0 %

The vast majority of the participants were at least ‘quite happy’ with the plans that they had in place for the next academic year. The five who were unhappy with their plans gave a variety of reasons:

- They were applying for sixth form, but would were also awaiting the outcome of an application for a specific job, which was they would prefer to going into sixth form
- They want to do a particular line of work but were feeling held back as a result of their visual impairment
- They were on a course that they weren’t particularly interested in, but had been actively encouraged into by their college

- They were on a work placement but unsure whether it will lead to a job or not
- They had just started at university and were feeling a bit overwhelmed

SECTION B: INDEPENDENCE

5 Assessment of independence and ‘readiness’ for transition

5.1 What is independence to you?

To introduce the section on independence, the participants were asked to describe what they feel “being independent” means. As a prompt they were asked in what way they think independence links with their visual impairment. They were also encouraged in their responses by stating that there were no right or wrong answers to the question.

The responses were taken and analysed using the method described in Section 3.2. Two overlapping types of response were observed. First were responses which involved giving a broad definition of what the young person believed independence to be (a more philosophical response). The second types of response gave involved the young person giving a specific example of what independence was to them (a more practical response). Many of the responses given would be typical of the average teenager (as would be expected), although in several cases there were specific references to their visual impairment, prior to prompting.

5.1.1 Broad definitions of independence

Table 21: Broad definitions given by participants in response to the question ‘What is independence’

Definition	Total (N)	Total (%)
Self sufficiency	34	48.6%
Being self sufficient – but asking for help when necessary	11	15.7%
Making own decisions – freedom	12	17.1%
Values independence	10	14.3%
Being normal	9	12.9%
Dealing with new situations	3	4.3%

Table 21 summaries the different types of broad definition given by the participants.

Self sufficiency

Many (34) of the young people explained that their definition of independence was being able to look after yourself without assistance or doing things on your own.

“I think independence means being able to do things for yourself, like in terms of visual impairment, not having to have someone help you cross the road, or having to have someone help you read your work, really. So independence is about doing things for yourself and at the same time knowing that you can do things for you, say.”

“Being independent is being able to do things without the help of others.”

“I guess it just means that you do things on your own. You have your own initiative, you don't wait for people to tell you what to do, type thing, you sort of just get on with your day to day.”

Being self sufficient – but asking for help when necessary

Similarly to the broad definition of looking after yourself, several (11) explained that they thought independence was looking after themselves, but recognising that at times it would be necessary to ask for help.

“I suppose it's being able to have the key skills in life, and being less reliant on other people. I mean you always need some help to some extent, but I think the overall meaning is that you are going to be less reliant on other people.”

“I feel independence means having the ability to function in the world, in a sighted world, with adaptations, with minimal help. However, having said that, I do feel that sometimes asking for help is part of being independent, and it's having the confidence and skills and knowledge to know that 'I'm stuck, I need help here', and then knowing who to go to for help.”

“I suppose it's really being able to handle yourself in a sense, so what you can do on your own without help, or also having the responsibility to ask if you need help, so being able to go to up to a stranger and ask them for help. It would be how I cope with different tasks, so, what I can do to work around different problems

or, knowing who I can ask if I really do have a problem, and being able to approach them”

Making own decisions – freedom

Several (12) saw the ability to make their own decisions as part of independence.

“It gives you a certain kind of freedom, the fact that you have to depend on yourself, and you have to figure out all your like problems and solve them yourselves, and think on your feet and everything. I like doing that, I like being able to do something really quickly, like getting my brain working.”

“Being free to make your own decisions, doing what you want, when you want. And nothing getting in the way. That’s really what I think it would mean.”

Values independence

Several (10) explained how their independence is something of value to them.

“...it makes me feel better because I have got a visual impairment and being independent, I feel better in myself, I feel good for myself that I’ve got independence...”

“Independence means a lot to me, I like my independence. I do get quite a bit of independence. I like the feeling of being independent, being on a train, walking somewhere and being trusted to walk back as well.”

“And knowing that you can have independence I think is one of the most important things of being independent, if that makes sense.”

Being normal

The idea of ‘being like everyone else’ was mentioned by a number (9) of the participants.

“Well I am quite independent, so like I got out on my own and things. I think it’s just like having a normal life really.”

“Yeah, it’s, in terms of, with a visual impairment, its being able to adapt to do what every other person would do. So if that means using a bit of technology, or doing things differently, but it’s just managing it.”

“I think independence means you are able to cope with new situations without being alarmed, and you can generally deal with the outside world of life, know how to interact with sighted people, and be as ‘normal’ as you can, and do everything you want to achieve in life.”

Dealing with new situations

A few (3) felt that independence was being able to deal with new situations when they arose - a part of growing older and more mature.

“Independence basically means, to me, that you have got a lot more responsibility, and these responsibilities have to be dealt with in a much more better manner than I am usually used to. It's basically a step towards the future.”

5.1.2 Specific examples of independence

Table 22: Specific examples of independence given by participants in response to the question ‘What is independence’

Definition	Total (N)	Total (%)
Specific examples linked to visual impairment	27	38.6%
Knowing when or how to ask for help	5	7.1%
Independence skills as a term	5	7.1%
Current examples of independence	4	5.7%
Tools for independence	4	5.7%

Specific examples linked to visual impairment

Many (27) gave examples of particular tasks that they considered to be relevant to their independence. These were often linked (explicitly or implicitly) to their visual impairment, and in some cases linked to additional curriculum areas.

“The ability to do stuff on your own I guess... I think... get my politicians hat on. I believe independence is good, is certainly a very useful thing to have. It’s best if you are in a visual impaired person’s shoes, but it’s not wrong to rely on other people at certain points. There are times, there are limits. In the pitch black for example, I couldn’t get anywhere at all if I didn’t have anybody next to me. If I was not independent, I wouldn’t have been able to get to any of my concerts at all. I managed to make my own way to

the theatre, although I did do that in the taxi. It's about going out and having the guts to do something."

"Well, at the moment, I am travelling to university on my own, and I am doing my course on my own... well there are other people, but I having no sort of support apart from the note takers and things like that. I have always had someone there really."

"Being visually impaired does have an impact on your independence, because you feel you can't do as much as what everybody else can do that has normal vision. Cooking is a biggy. That's about it."

Knowing when or how to ask for help

A few (5) suggested that one part of independence is knowing when it is appropriate to ask for help.

"If there were, for example, a bit of print which I couldn't read, I would obviously have to get someone to read it for me. And in a way that's not being independent, but it's something that I can't help, which is an eyesight thing. I think I am fairly independent, I don't ask many people to do many things for me. If it's something completely out of my hands, I will get help."

Independence skills as a term

In some (5) cases the young people made reference to 'independence skills' as a topic, or curriculum area. This was typical of those at special school where it's seen as an identifiable aspect of their school day.

"I think it's especially important for visually impaired people to learn it, because you often have to do things in a different way, so I think I have been lucky going to a boarding school, so I have been forced to be independent. So I think I have been lucky."

"I would say, if you wanted to ask about how independent I feel at school, I would say the school has helped me achieve some levels of independence, because we have independence skills lessons, which are basically teaching you how to do things like cook or wash, or things like that, which might have been harder for a visually impaired person to do, that's helped me quite a lot actually. And also, considering it's a boarding school, and considering I am in the 6th form, the 6th formers are expected to

do things for themselves anyway on a regular basis. The ILS does help, and I get a chance to practice that.”

Current examples of independence

A few (4) gave examples of how they have gained and learned independence as the result of being in a new setting, particularly in terms of being responsible to get themselves there:

“I am lucky enough that I don’t need a guide or anything like that, like a more severely visually impaired person might. Being in London is making it much easier because there are so many signs around telling you where to go.”

“I get the bus to work, I think that’s a good amount of independence. I get the bus to work, I find my own way, no one is guiding me in how to do that, it’s just my initiative.”

Tools for independence

Finally, (4) spoke of specific tools that they use to help aid them in their independence.

“You need to have the right equipment. In your kitchen for instance you need to have a talking microwave and scales, something that will tell you when it’s done its job, it will tell you how long something has been in to cook.”

“Yeah, it’s, in terms of, with a visual impairment, its being able to adapt to do what every other person would do. So if that means using a bit of technology, or doing things differently, but it’s just managing it.”

5.2 Travel and mobility

The young people were asked four questions relating to travel and mobility:

1. Could you describe how you would have typically got around on a school/college day? (a) Firstly, how would you travel to and from school/college? (b) What about between lessons and at break times? (Prompts: mobility aids, mobility training, sighted guide).
2. Could you describe how you typically get around outside of school, for example, if you were to meet up with one of your friends? (Prompts: mobility aids, mobility training, parental support)
3. Could you tell me what you think has helped to give you confidence in travelling independently? Do you have any examples you could share?
4. Could you tell me what you think prevents you from being more confident in travelling independently? Do you have any examples you could share?

5.2.1 Travel to and from school / college / workplace

Table 23: Does the young person travel to and from school / college / workplace independently?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 continuing in FE	Year 11 – leaving further education	Year 11 – Employed	Total	Total (%)
Always travels independently	13	4	19	1	37	53.6 %
Sometimes travels independently	0	1	1	0	2	2.9%
Transport provided by council	7	2	3	0	12	17.4 %
Given assistance in travelling to school / college	0	1	2	0	3	4.3%
N/A as at residential school	5	8	2	0	15	21.7 %
Total	25	16	27	1	69	100.0%

The majority (53.6%) of the young people travel to school or college independently, in most cases by either walking or catching the bus. Two sometimes travel independently, but at times they have a lift to school/college for as it can be cheaper and more convenient.

In twelve cases they use transport provided by the council. Two of the young people explained how beneficial this was, due to the amount of equipment that they have to carry each day (“I am not able to get on the bus on my own because I carry a laptop and much equipment. I am not confident enough to do that.”). Five people, despite getting a taxi provided to take them to college, felt confident enough to get home independently, whilst two others were progressing to regularly using public transport. One person preferred getting public transport, but at times they have been having particular difficulties with their eyes and unable to wear contact lenses, would get a taxi provided.

There were mixed reports on the services received, for example, one person spoke of how the taxi would conveniently work around their schedule (e.g. if they were only in college half a day), whilst another had problems of the taxi turning up when they were still in lessons.

Three of the young people received assistance from another person in getting to school or college, and in two cases this was because they would be unable to get there independently:

“I get the bus, my Mum used to walk me up there every morning just to make sure I got the right one, and then I’d meet a friend on there, and then we’d kind of get off together, and I would go around with her for the day.”

“My father will take me to and from college, and then if I have got a problem with my sight in college, I have got to rely on others.”

Finally, 15 of the young people attend residential school, and so did not have to travel to school, instead they walk the short distance from their accommodation to the main school building. All 15 were able to do this independently.

All but two were able to confidently get around independently during the school/college/working day. These were the same two who were unable to travel to school/college independently. One felt that there should be more assistance provided in college, and although they had friends who could help support them, they could not fully rely on them.

“My father will take me to and from college, and then if I have got a problem with my sight in college, I have got to rely on others. Places like schools and colleges, universities straight across, should have a course in sighted guide... I have got a few friends there, but they don't truly realise what I live with and go through. They are still very young and care free, and unaware of the trials that some people go through.”

Researcher: “You were saying that between lessons you go around with a friend. Is that just walking around just normally as you would do with a friend, or would they also act as a sighted guide?” Participant: “Sometimes yes, and sometimes no. If we were on the ground level I would be alright, but if we were going up and down steps, then I'd grab onto their arm or something, just to make sure I didn't fall.” Researcher: “Did you ever have days where your friend wouldn't go on the bus, she was off sick or something? What would you do on a day like that?” Participant: “I wouldn't go as much as struggle, but I would find it a little bit difficult going around. So, I'd be like a little lost sheep following everyone else, watching what they are doing.”

5.2.2 Independent Travel

Questions 2-4 gave opportunity to explore whether the young person felt equipped to travel independently. Discussions centred around the following broad themes: whether they felt able to travel independently; modes of transport used; the different challenges they face; and what they feel has enabled them to travel independently.

Do the young people feel able to travel independently?

The majority of the young people felt able to travel independently, although in many cases their level in confidence in doing this depended on whether they had to travel to somewhere which was familiar or unfamiliar (24):

“At this stage, maybe if I was going to go somewhere I hadn't been before, it would be useful to go there with someone else to get my bearings. I think later on in the future it would come with confidence, as I grow older and get more confident, it will be easier, I won't be reliant on people showing me the route.”

“It depends on how familiar I am with the area. If I am really familiar, I will be very confident.”

There were some (10) cases where the young people felt that their visual impairment did not affect their ability to get around independently. Given variation in the nature and severity of visual impairment this is not surprising, although in some extreme cases participants appeared to have little loss in visual function, including some who reported being eligible to drive. In one case this was due to the young person having an operation which had improved their eyesight, whilst for three others the young people had less severe visual impairments, but were still being supported by sensory support services due to challenges they face in accessing print. In the next phase of interviewing the research team will clarify some aspects of the participants’ visual function, particularly given the changing nature of vision some have experienced.

“My eyesight has really changed, it’s really improved, but today I had to wear my glasses because the font was small, but I only need to wear my glasses for short sighted things. Oh, I would be able to drive when I am older. This is because the operation kind of made my eyes better, so I will be able to see.”

Five young people described how they did not go out independently, and so were reliant on others:

Participant: “My mum and dad would take me to meet a friend, so they would take me in a car, and they’d walk me up to meet my friend, and pass me over so I have got someone, and I would just stay with them all day.” Researcher: “And you were saying that you tend to avoid buses and things?” Participant: “Yeah, it’s not that I avoid them, it’s just that I don’t really feel comfortable, I don’t need to do it because my Mum and Dad drop me off everywhere.”

Modes of transport used

Through the three questions, the young people identified several ways in which they travel. The most common (42) was to use public transport to travel around their local area:

“I tend to use the bus, because there’s a bus stop right at the top of my road, I bus it whenever I am going, from there”

“I can use trains independently, I can use coaches and stuff like independently, yeah, I can get around pretty independently.”

If getting around their immediate area, many (24) of the young people would walk:

“It depends. If it’s close, I would usually walk.”

“I have got a couple of friends who live within walking distance, so I walk to see them, sometimes.”

Whilst some (15) would look for lifts from parents/carers or friends:

“Most of my friends drive...If we go to town, because they live close, they pick me up and then we go.”

Challenges

In their responses, the young people referred to a number of challenges that they face in their ability to get around independently. Within this theme, four distinct areas of challenges were identified.

Challenge 1: their eyesight

The first set of challenges was specifically in relation to their eyesight, and the problems that this can create, with some (11) acknowledging that they would be able to get around independently far more easily if they did not have a visual impairment:

“I think it’s my eyesight again, I don’t have the confidence because I think I will get lost, not be able to see public transport stuff.”

“I have never been particularly confident in mobility. I don’t want to say my sight loss, because that seems like I am using it as an excuse, but I wonder if I had more sight I would be better at it, and more confident. But yeah, possibly that. I don’t know, I have just never found it easy.”

A few (10) spoke of how getting around independently was challenging because their eyesight prevented them from being able to read signs or important information:

Researcher: “And how do you find using public transport?”

Participant: “I don’t use it...There isn’t a lot of it, and I honestly

couldn't tell you when it was, because I can't even see what time the bus is supposed to travel for starters."

Challenge 2: influence of other people and the world around them

A further set of challenges that the young people referred to was the influence of other people and the world around them. Firstly, there were those who felt that they were restricted by people around them in being able to travel independently:

"My mum's pretty protective. So she doesn't have much confidence in me...I convince her that I am confident enough, and my mobility officer quite often sides with me and says yeah, she's fine to do that, she's quite confident with that. She trusts me the first time, and then she will be more relaxed."

Others (2) felt restricted by the attitudes of those around them, and their concern that some people may not be so willing to help them.

"I think it's people sort of being kind and being willing to help. Because if people aren't willing to help, you sort of think you don't want to be a burden on people, and so you are left willing to go on your own, but if people are willing to help, that encourages you to travel on your own I would say."

Challenge 3: mobility skills

The third types of challenge identified related to the young person's mobility skills. Several (7) said that they found public transport difficult, or were still learning to use public transport and not able to travel independently on it yet (8).

Researcher: "Would you be happy using public transport?"

Participant: "Trains, yes. But not buses. I have very little confidence with buses... they are just not very reliable, because you have no real way of knowing where you are, without mapping it in your head, that can't be very reliable sometimes, because when you are in traffic and stuff you can get disorientated, and you can't rely on the general public to help you."

Researcher: "Would you ever use public transport on your own?"

Participant: "Not really. I have started to at college, but I haven't done that at home."

Others described how they struggled with mobility in general, either through lack of mobility training (2), still being in the process of learning to use mobility aids (1), challenges of changes to built up areas (1) or simply finding mobility in general difficult (1):

“I think it’s the way certain, the general environment, I mean I can give you an example. I have, the way that I have to get to a bus stop locally, is that I have to go the long way round, so I have cross a pelican crossing and go back on myself. There’s a shorter way of getting to this bus stop, so I wrote to my local councillor and said can you install a pelican crossing here, because it’s a really busy junction, and they wrote back and said ‘well, no we can’t’. I have to go past all these shop doorways, and all these flat doorways, and there’s steps sticking, they slow me down, there’s A signs, they are difficult”

“I think it was just the lack of training that I had...but I think with the training I am getting at college, it will help me much more”

Challenge 4: underlying lack of confidence

The final type of challenge that the young people said they faced were in relation to their underlying lack of confidence. There were those who said that they felt self-conscious when getting around independently (4) (for example, in asking members of the public for help and using mobility aids).

“A bit embarrassing I guess, asking people about where stuff is and whatever.”

“This might sound really arrogant, and it’s not meant to, but some people’s attitudes to your cane. I used to feel exposed if I had my cane. Getting weird looks and things, it sounds really stupid, it used to affect my confidence, I didn’t want to go out with it.”

Others had had bad experiences (3) which made them more reluctant to go out independently:

“Bad experiences play a part because bad experiences I have had in the past, it makes it a lot harder to overcome barriers like travelling on buses and things, because you have already had that bad experience you are not enthusiastic about trying it again. I don’t know, it’s just pretty scary when you are used to being

around someone and then you have to attempt it by yourself, it's a bit daunting sometimes.”

Finally, whilst the young people might not have had bad experiences in the past, there is still an underlying concern that they may get lost (2), or end up in a situation which leaves them feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable (4).

Enablers

Similarly, in their responses the young people referred to a number of enablers that have helped them in their ability to get around independently. Within this theme, four distinct areas of enablers were identified.

Enabler 1: mobility skills

The most common type of enabler, as could be anticipated, was the mobility skills that the young person had gained. The young people found confidence either through the general mobility skills they had (17) or in the mobility aids that they had learned to use (21).

“If it was a place where I was familiar, I wouldn't use any mobility aids, but if I were going to somewhere like London that is very busy and very crowded, and I wasn't too sure where I was going and what I was doing, I would probably use a symbol cane, just for the benefits it brings.”

“I guess that would be the mobility training really. And just generally... as long as I know what I am really, I am fine. I guess the only thing really helped me get confidence is that training”.

“Yeah, I use a cane outside all the time, unless it's at school, and I am on an activity there, that's different because we get guided, but at any other time, even if I am being guided and I am outside school, all the time my cane would be with me, and I would always be using it.”

“And symbol cane is very helpful. I definitely rely on it in the dark.”

Another enabler for some of the young people (18) was the opportunity to practice their mobility skills.

“Well, practice, by actually doing it, I think that’s reassured me that I can do it.”

“I think the best way really to gain confidence is just to do it over and over again. Yeah, just repetition, and obviously my mobility teacher showing the best way which works for me I guess.”

“I think it’s knowing that I can do it. So if I walked to a friend’s house, I think it was only two weeks ago that I walked to a friend’s house at night which is something that I don’t normally do, I was like ‘oh this is easy’. I think it’s once I’ve done it once, it’s so much easier for me, which I think has really, really helped me.”

The young people also spoke of particular mobility skills that they had acquired over time, for example, learning to prepare before starting on a journey (5), learning to adapt to situations (4) and a learned caution (1):

“Knowing where you are going is one. Because it really helps, and most people will say that as well. Organise the right time as well, I know you have to book in with all the assistance as well”

“Try and plan where I am going, so I know ‘right, I am getting a bus at this time’, and then. If I have to catch a few buses I plan it, so I know ‘ah, I just get from this bus to this bus’. Then I ask people, ‘where’s the [bus] stop or something like that”

“Yeah, I’ve had to learn to be more careful in crossing, I’ve always had to be more careful in crossing roads than my mates. Just being a bit more wary and stuff, and not being embarrassed about asking people what the bus number is and stuff.”

Enabler 2: positive influence of other people around them

A further type of enabler identified by the young people was the positive influence of other people around them. Many (33) spoke of how they would benefit from some form of assistance, at least at first when learning to navigate an unfamiliar place:

“At this stage, maybe if I was going to go somewhere I hadn’t been before, it would be useful to go there with someone else to get my bearings. I think later on in the future it would come with confidence, as I grow older and get more confident, it will be easier, I won’t be reliant on people showing me the route.”

“It depends where we are. If it’s somewhere I know like my home town, or the next town over, wherever, then I rely mainly on myself, I know the layout of the town and everything. But if we were going go to one of the bigger towns, I would rely on them a lot more because I am not so familiar with my surroundings. If it’s somewhere I am not familiar on at all, I rely on them heavily, because I am very much out of my comfort zone then.”

“There are times when I just turn up on the day and hope for the best. That’s always fun. ‘Excuse me, could you help me to platform 10?!’ If it’s a random passing stranger, it’s 50:50 whether they are dangerous or not. You’ve got to take those risks sometimes, but that’s only if I have been so busy, I haven’t booked my rail assistance.”

In some cases they would benefit from having others there, not by having direct assistance, but simply in feeling more comfortable that they are not on their own:

“My friends mainly. Because although they are there with me, they don’t mollycoddle. They leave me to do things on my own, and if I am going to do something I shouldn’t be doing, then they know I shouldn’t do, then they are there, and they lead me to it, so I know it’s something I shouldn’t be doing. They are there so can I realise myself my own mistakes. But then if it’s something like waltzing across the road in front of a car then they keep me back. If they know I am going to injure myself severely, they keep me back, but if it’s something minor, like walking too close to a wall, they leave me to do it so I realise that I do walk too close.”

A number of the young people prefer to either have their friends come to them, or are dropped off at their friend's house, before starting on a journey:

Researcher: “Do you ever get trains or anything like that?”

Participant: “Yeah, but my friends always come to the house first.”

“Either they would come down to my house, because they all seem to come down to mine, and pick me up, also sometimes, basically we just walk around. That's about it”

The young people also spoke of how they benefited from support they received from their families or people around them (8), either through

them being encouraged to be more independent, or through knowing that they will be there to help them if anything should go wrong:

“I think my family probably have a lot to do with it, because they let me just get on with it, so I do. It helps”

“I am not sure about the answer to that question. I’ve always got my parents available to give me lifts and things, so that’s a bit of a safety blanket. If I end up in an area I don’t recognise then the parents will always find me or say you are in this area, walk to this station or whatever. So they will always be there to help me.”

Enabler 3: services available on public transport

A third type of enabler for the young people are the services available on public transport which can assist them in getting around independently. This could be either through announcements on public transport which give added confidence about getting off at the right stop (3), or through using rail assistance services (4).

“Most trains have got announcements on them, so if you are not sure, you can make sure that you are on the right train, and it’s the right stop and everything.”

“It was the first time I did it independently. I had to get off at Birmingham and then switch trains. I had some help, some people who met me off the train and put me on the right train, but even when I was on the train, I had to pay attention to what stop we are on now, when do I actually get off. I think that was the opportunity that opened the door to my independence.”

Enabler 4: underlying confidence

A final type of enabler identified by the young people was their underlying confidence. For some (11) this gave them the necessary confidence to put themselves in unfamiliar and challenging situations, some spoke of how their maturity had helped (4), whilst others explained how their desire to be independent was a driving force:

“I just said like one day I am ready to learn this. It’s when you are ready to do everything.”

“Practice really, and a kind of acceptance that you just have to do it. So, I used to be very reluctant to use a cane because I feel it draws attention to you and makes people notice you, makes

people see that you are different and stuff. But in the end you just have to accept that, otherwise you are just going to walk into things and tripping over people. It is helping you, and it's helping other people to realise as well."

"I think it's just I have always wanted to be independent, I have always wanted not to have to rely on someone else to survive, and so I have really sort of pushed myself as hard as I could."

5.3 Access to information and ICT

The young people were asked several questions about how they would access information in school/college, at home and amongst their friends.

1. Could you tell me about how you would normally go about accessing information in a lesson/lecture? (Prompt: use of computers, visual access to print)
2. Could you tell me how you would *ideally* like to access information in a lesson/lecture? (Key concept to ascertain – the use of technology vs pre-prepared hard copy by others).
3. What about outside of school, for example if a friend wanted to share some written information with you, how would you typically access it? [Prompt: use of mobile technology/phones]
4. Is there anything else you would like to say about how you access information and use access technology? (Prompt: reading books at home)

In their responses, the young people spoke of provisions that would be made by the school/college that they attend, adjustments that they personally would make, their preferences for accessing information and particular challenges that they face when trying to access information.

5.3.1 What provisions are put in place for the young people accessing information in lessons or lectures?

The young people spoke of many different types of adjustments that they received whilst in school or college. The most common adjustments were paper-based, including enlarged copies (27), printing powerpoints or the teachers notes (5), enlarged textbooks (2) or different colour handouts (1).

“Sometimes it will be normal paper, but it will be larger, and they give me a choice if I want to use the big font or the small.”

“They just make my stuff bigger, the font size, about 18.”

“Yeah, or sometimes they might just print off a paper copy so I can have it in front of me. Save me to have to keep readjusting by looking at the board, just I have got one in front of me.”

Other common modifications were providing lesson material electronically (18), in braille, through 3D models or giving priority to delivering lessons verbally (4) (this tended to be in a special school where there were a lot of braille users).

“In class... if they have powerpoint or any worksheets or anything like that, I always have it brailled out.”

“Usually I got through to electronic, but sometimes I go for Braille to keep my Braille reading skills in check.”

“Because I am doing a sport course, so a lot of diagrams and models, so what we do is most of the diagrams are adapted into tactile, but for ones which are too hard, like say a whole diagram of a skeleton, you are not going to get all the detail, so what college have done, the sports staff have basically dug out all the models and stuff they can find, so they’ve got me a toddler sized skeleton that I have got to use when I am studying anatomy, and then I have also got some models of joints and stuff which show how they work and stuff, so I use them as well.”

A number of the young people (10) spoke of how they had the opportunity to have lesson material in multiple formats:

“I would say all ways. I like having it electronically, but sometimes I do like to have paper copies in my hand to go through, because they are easy to make notes on. So I think having the option to have both ways is good.”

“Yeah, I do have enlarged copies of the worksheets as well. In general with the course I am doing, I keep it on the laptop, but I am giving enlarged copies as well.”

5.3.2 What adjustments/equipment would the young person use in accessing information?

Adjustments for accessing paper copies

The young people described a number of approaches they would take in accessing information in paper format. The most common was through a magnifier or another type of low vision aid (30), scanning the text using optical recognition software, or them personally sourcing large print copies of books (2). Eight young people also spoke of using reading glasses to help them access written information.

Participant: “If I have books, I scan it in.” Researcher: “Is that optical recognition software or something?” Participant: “It’s called Pearl, and you use open book and you scan it in.”

“If I can’t read it, I will probably use a magnifying glass, something like that.”

“I do have magnifiers and pieces with me, I carry around a light magnifier that I use for stuff like the phone for example, or small pieces of writing, so I am generally fine with accessing stuff.”

Adjustments/Methods for accessing Electronic information

An extensive number of examples were given of how the young people access information electronically. These are presented in Table 24, along with the frequency in which they were referred to.

Table 24: Adjustments/Methods for accessing Electronic information

Type of adjustment/way of access	Total (N)
Email	33
Accessibility software	23
Laptop	19
Using inbuilt accessibility options	12
Audio books	11
Modifying documents into their preferred format	11
Facebook	9
Virtual learning environment or college network	9
E-reader	8
iPad or iPhone	8
Text message	4
Braille note	3
Mouse with inbuilt accessibly software	3
Voice recorder	2
Mobile phone	1
Using short cuts on a computer keyboard	1

A particular theme that was identified through the Autumn 2012 interviews, and through interviews conducted in Summer 2011 (see Hewett et al 2012), was how the young people are choosing to access information electronically by taking mainstream technology, and using options within it to make material accessible to them.

Firstly, they may do this by using inbuilt accessibility options such as magnification options available on internet browsers:

Researcher: "Would you ever use low vision aids?" Participant: "Like a magnifier? I have been showed it. I zoom in (on the computer), but not really. I just make the pages bigger, that's about it. That's just more for ease. Like quickness, it's quicker to read it in bigger writing than it is in smaller."

Researcher: "If you were to use a computer, would you need to make any adjustments on the computer? Sometimes if I am on google chrome, I will zoom in, so the text is a lot bigger, sometimes I will turn the brightness up on my computer if it's too dark, so I kind of make just little adjustments to what I need."

"The internet would be perfect because you can enlarge everything. I would like to do everything electronically, because it's so easy to modify."

They may also take electronic documents and modify them into their preferred format:

"I would say if they could email it to me, if they email it you, then you can change the font colour, or you can enlarge it can't you to how you want it, that's what I will probably do."

Researcher: "When you use computers, do you ever use any accessibility software?" Participant: "Not specific software, but I do, say I've got a word document that I need to use, I sort of enlarge it or change the colour a bit so it's easier to see." Researcher: "So you just use the standard options which are already on the computer?" Participant: "Yeah."

Whilst for some with more severe visual impairments, simply using standard options in Microsoft Word or on internet browsers would be insufficient for them to access documents, there are also examples of how the young people have been using inbuilt accessibility software on technology such as Apple iPad or iPhone to access electronic information. One particularly useful feature available in the Apple products is VoiceOver, which is an inbuilt screen reader, whilst e-readers such as Amazon Kindle have the option to modify the font size of the book which is being read.

“I recently got an iPad with the school, so if the teacher does a powerpoint they can send me the powerpoint on the iPad and I can look at that, or if they are writing something on the board, I can take a picture and look at it that way.”

“I do have an iPhone actually, I read sometimes e-book on my iPhone and I will connect my braille note to it.”

“One thing that’s quite helpful, speaking of phones, is the fact that my phone has speech software built into it. It’s an iPhone, so I am able to, it really helps me when I could to looking up things for research, if I use the speech on that, because sometimes it can be a bit easier to use than my computers speech software, but that’s just the way that is really.”

Participant: “I’ve got a Kindle.” Researcher: “And how do you find that?” Participant: “It’s quite helpful, because it’s like a book but it can have different size fonts, and it’s quite easy to read and useful.”

It is also interesting to see how recent developments in IT within schools are benefiting blind and partially sighted students. It is now common for schools and colleges to have their own virtual learning environment or college network where it is possible for teachers to upload copies of notes and powerpoints from lessons. Whilst an advantage to students in general, some of the young people in this project have found it particularly useful as a way of accessing information:

“If we use powerpoint. In college we have got something called Moodle, and I always request the tutors put it on Moodle, or give me a copy of it, so I have access to the information.”

“I mean with the whole thing like laptops and that sort of thing, that would be the ideal thing if there was the infrastructure in place to make it useful. So like, although it’s a bit ahead, for example in uni when you have a lecture and you have a powerpoint slide, to have a computer there, and to be able to look at the slides for yourself and read it up close, will be so useful. But because you have not got that infrastructure in place, we do have a VLE (virtual learning environment), but it’s rubbish, and it’s like, where there’s the infrastructure in place to access it quickly, easily and efficiently, then it’s ideal, but otherwise it’s just not.”

The most common way that the young people access electronic information is through email. For many, this is something which is part of their everyday life. They may access material which their teacher has sent to them through their school/college email system, or they may receive emails from their friends:

“She usually gives us like in a textbook form, or case studies to read, or she just emails us all the work, so it depends what the work is really. And in maths, it’s usually powerpoint and stuff like that.”

“If we are revising, then it could be anything from discussions to send each other notes. A lot of it could be verbal. We are all on the email system, school email system, so it’s very easy for us to send notes that we have created.”

“Possibly on the computer, because very few friends know Braille! And it’s probably just easier for them to put it on the computer and email it to me, and that works. I mean if it’s just something quick, just to read it to me, but if it’s like quite long, then preferably on the computer.”

Other ways that the young people may communicate with their friends include through Facebook and text message on their mobile phone (as found in Hewett et al 2012):

“We usually just text each other or go on Facebook, send an email to one another.”

“I like message people on Facebook or something.”

“I would probably get them to send it to me by email, or text it to me or something.”

Many of the young people described how they use more specialist equipment to access information. This included using accessibility software, braille note, or using a special mouse which has magnification software in it.

Researcher: “When you are using the laptop, would you use any accessibility software on it?” Participant: “Yes, the laptop does have supernova on there, which is a magnification software.”

“And sometimes depending on if we had been researching or what, because you have to use the internet sometimes, we use a screen reader that gives us access to get onto the internet and have a look around.”

“On my laptop I have zoomtext software, which I use to zoom the text basically.”

“Actually I use a mouse that when you put it into the computer it has enlarging software”

Other ways of accessing information

Finally, other ways that the young people would access information would, in a lesson context, include simply positioning themselves in the classroom for the best place for them to see the whiteboard (15), or (both in and out of school) looking to friends for assistance:

“If she is writing on the board, then I will copy it off my friends paper. Or I sit near the front and make sure I can see what she’s writing.”

“I generally try to sit at the front of the classroom. If there’s no one there, I’m not going to lie, I don’t go and sit on my own at the front. I would rather sit at the back and copy my friends notes. And if I can’t see something, most people I sit next to know I can’t see things, so if I say can you read that, what does that say, then they are happy to say.”

“Or if they couldn’t enlarge them, my mate would sit next to me, and she would read it out to me, and then I’d tell her what I wanted and she would write it down.”

“They do know I can’t see very well, so they probably would, maybe if I really can’t see it they would probably read it to me or something.”

5.3.3 What access arrangements would the young people like to have?

Table 25: Would the young person like to change the access arrangements they receive?

What access arrangements would they like to receive?	Total (N=70)
Same access arrangements as already being received	40
Different access arrangements to what currently receiving	13

Table 26: What access arrangements would the young person like to have?

What access arrangements would they like to receive?	Total (N=70)
Prefer to receive electronically	23
Prefer to receive in more than one format	9
Prefer to receive paper-based	15
Prefer to look at information on a whiteboard	2
Prefer to receive information in Braille	1

Tables 25 and 26 show the preferred access arrangements for the young people. Over half said that they would prefer to stick to the arrangements that they already receive, whilst 13 said that they would prefer to have different access arrangements. In the majority of cases these were young people who would prefer to have the option to work electronically:

“Ideally I’d like to be able to use a laptop fully, use full electronic versions.”

“I prefer things electronically really, because braille hard copies are always good to have as a backup, electronic copies are easier to save, get round quicker to access as well.”

Some of the young people spoke of how they prefer to receive material in more than one format, and in most cases this was something that they had become accustomed to:

“I would say all ways. I like having it electronically, but sometimes I do like to have paper copies in my hand to go through, because they are easy to make notes on. So I think having the option to have both ways is good.”

5.3.4 What difficulties are the young people facing in accessing information?

Through the four questions on access to information, a number of difficulties were identified by the young people that they can face when they are in these situations.

Not always able to access information independently

In a few cases (6) the young people described situations where they were not always able to access information independently and instead had to rely on others for help. In some cases this could be due to their lack of skills, or because the information was not available for them in an accessible format.

“If they don’t have it in Braille, the support teacher reads it.”

Participant: “I wouldn’t access any information, my mate who I sit by, or the tutor, they would get everything ready for me, and I’d like try to login, it would take me a while! But I would login. And then they’d get everything set up for me. They’d get like Word up, or the internet up, and everything like that.” Researcher: “Would that be specifically in a lesson where everybody is using computers, or is that just your way of writing and stuff in a lesson?” Participant: “No, that would just be in like lessons with computers and stuff.”

Inaccessible websites

Some of the young people said that they struggle with inaccessible websites, particularly in lessons where they have to conduct independent research on the internet, although in some cases they raised concerns over their skills in using accessibility software:

Participant: “I think the only real problem comes when a teacher asks me to research something on the internet. I can just about do stuff on the internet, but again, it’s always one of those things that has been a challenge for me. So I always dread it.” Researcher: “Do you think that’s because you haven’t got the skills, or is it down to the accessibility of the sites?” Participant: “I think it’s always partly down to the site accessibility, I can access certain sites, so it depends. I would like some more skills on the internet,

because I know there are some people at my school who don't have any sight, and they are better than me. So I think it's a mixture of the two."

"There isn't anything major, but I think what does need to be improved is websites, the major websites that I use, say the newspaper websites and things. They need to be more accessible."

Lack of IT skills

In some cases the young people are limited by their lack of IT skills:

"I'm not good at that because the school never taught me to use a computer or ICT. I got my own laptop, and I messed around with it, so I can do it myself."

Participant: "I suppose either there was a text book and the teacher is talking, I would be reading through to follow in a sense. I haven't actually used computers that much yet, because they can be quite slow. I am still learning to catch up in a sense."

Researcher: "The computers themselves can be slow, or are you saying you struggle with them?" Participant: "Sometimes they can slow. Sometimes I can struggle a little in keeping up."

Eye strain

Some (6) described how they would get eyestrain if trying to look at written information for too long:

"I prefer just to avoid the laptop on the whole...after looking at the screen for a while, my eyes start hurting."

"I did use a laptop for a while, but I found it was really difficult because I was straining my eyes most of the time to try and see the computer screen."

Difficulty using magnifiers

Two of the young people said that they particularly struggled using handheld magnifiers:

"I did try and use a magnifier for a while, but I couldn't get along with it."

“I have got them. I don’t always use them because they are not very effective.”

Deteriorating eyesight

One person described how they were struggling with their eyesight worsening, and having concerns about how they would be able to access written information in the future:

“There are some amazing books I have got, that I don’t know how much longer I will be able to read, that are reference books which I love. If you can tell me a reference book that you can buy on audio, I will be surprised.”

Desire to be normal

Finally, four of the young people for their responses showed how they had a desire to appear ‘normal’ amongst their peers, with not wishing to the access arrangements they used to make them stand out in any way.

“Probably just handouts from everyone else using things like, I have been offered electronic magnifiers, binoculars that you can zoom in, I wouldn't want to do it like that, I mean, I know it slightly contradicts what I said earlier about being confident, but you still don't like to stand out, nevertheless.”

“I think people forget that there is a social element to school, it is quite important to take that into account when you are trying to shove these different policies onto the kids, they just look like idiots in front of their classmates, being different.”

5.4 Self-advocacy

The young people were presented with several scenarios to explore how well equipped they are in self-advocacy. These five scenarios centred around their self-advocacy at school and within the workplace.

5.4.1 Scenario 1: Self advocacy in the classroom

Scenario 1 asked the participants the following question: How much do you agree with this statement: “If I had a new teacher or lecturer, I would be able to confidently explain to them about my visual impairment and the support that I need in the classroom”.

Table 27: If had a new teacher or lecturer, I would be able to confidently explain to them about my visual impairment and the support that I need in the classroom?

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Strongly agree	27	40.9%
Agree	33	50.0%
Disagree	4	6.1%
Strongly disagree	1	1.5%
Not applicable	1	1.5%
Total	66	100.0%

Table 27 shows how confident the young person feels they would be in explaining to a teacher or lecturer the support that they need in the classroom. The vast majority reported that they either agree or strongly agree that they would be able to do this (although in some cases when prompted further, they were unable to explain in any detail exactly what they would say).

How would the young people deal with the situation?

When discussing how they would approach the situation, the most common suggestions from the young person were that they would either explain how their visual impairment affects them (37), or explain what adjustments they need to function in the classroom (43) (and in a number of cases they suggested that they would do both).

“I would explain that I have light perception, that it isn’t particularly useful my vision, and I mainly work through Braille or electronic format. So when they are writing stuff on the board if they could read out what they are writing and then I will copy it down, and for

any hand outs if they could give them to the learning support staff a few days in advance of the lesson, then it means that I can have them in class.”

“It’s a necessity. You need to. I’d explain to them what I could see, but it’s very hard, it’s extremely hard. So I could confidently explain to them, it would just take a long time. And as for the technology that’s required, I could certainly explain that to them.”

“I think I’d tell them that I have a visual impairment which means I am unable to access print copies of anything, so I’d ideally like them either in braille format, or electronically, and if electronically, not in PDF form.”

“I’d just like, go up to them and say can I talk to you a second, and then say that I have a visual impairment, and just explain what I have got, and just say look I need a bit of help, that the worksheets are a bit small, or just to go slower on the board. And make sure they have the right colours and stuff, just to inform them so they knew what to do, just in case.”

Others (4) said that they would choose to deal with situations as they arise (although some may pre-warn the lecturer that they may do this on a reactive basis):

“I wouldn’t go up to someone and say by the way, I’ve got a visual impairment, because it’s not really... if they were doing something and I couldn’t see, say there was a slide and I couldn’t see the text, I’d say oh sorry, I can’t see that, can you make it bigger. So it’s more in the situation, rather than kind of going up and giving them pre-warning.”

“I have actually warned all my teachers before and said I might need to have it bigger or something, but I will put my hand up if I do need it.”

Some of the young people shared how they would not be so confident in dealing with the proposed scenario. In a few cases (4) they thought they would be nervous in having to speak about their visual impairment:

“It’s not that I wouldn’t be able to explain, I just prefer not to. I am not as confident going up and speaking to someone about it.”

In other cases they believed they would be able to deal with the situation, but would choose to do so privately (3).

“I think what I would do is probably stay behind until everyone else went. There are a few people in my class who are aware of my visual impairment, so I wouldn’t mind talking in front of them, but I do talk to some of those about my eyesight. But I think generally I would wait for everybody to leave first, maybe a more of a private situation, and I just, I have this problem, I can read this, etc, Is there anything you can do to help me with that?”

What has helped the young people in dealing with such situations?

The young people were also invited to give examples of where they may have dealt with a similar situation, and asked what they thought may have helped them to be able to deal with such scenarios. The main response was that they had had practice by dealing with similar situations in the past (27), but also that they were generally confident so in a well placed to deal with the situation (3), or that they felt an inner sense of responsibility to resolve any problems independently.

“If you come across a new teacher, for example with Psychology the teacher was new, so they didn’t know how I worked, so I had to explain to them that I worked in this medium and I prefer to take notes in this medium.”

“I haven’t had to do it much at university, but when I was at college I did have to do a lot of explaining and asking ‘can I have this, can I have that’. So that’s how I would just do it, I would say you know I need this, can I, alright ok.”

“I would just explain what I need and why I need it. But I would have been more hesitant when I was younger, but I think I am more confident now, just coming out with it.”

“It’s important because if you don’t say that to your teacher, they aren’t able to support you, and you aren’t able to learn. And at the end of the day it’s really going to be your fault if you fail, if you haven’t explained it properly.”

What challenges do the young people have?

Finally, the young people shared some challenges that they may face when dealing with such a scenario as the proposed one.

The primary challenge was a lack of practice in dealing with similar situations(10) (although it is worth noting that some who said that they had had no prior experience still gave comprehensive suggestions of what they would say):

Participant: “Disagree. I think it’s just because most of the teachers I have, know about my vision.” Researcher: “So have you not had to do it before then?” Participant: “No.” Researcher: “Have you any idea what you would say if you were in that situation at all?” Participant: “I don’t know really.”

Participant: “Strongly agree. It’s important because if you don’t say that to your teacher, they aren’t able to support you, and you aren’t able to learn. And at the end of the day it’s really going to be your fault if you fail, if you haven’t explained it properly.” Researcher: “Is that something you’ve done in the past?” Participant: “No because at primary school it was always explained to my teachers, and obviously at New College everybody is blind.” Researcher: “But you feel confident doing it?” “Yeah, I hate being blind, but I’m not ashamed of it.”

Other challenges were prior bad experiences or finding some lecturers difficult to approach (5), finding that the nature of their eye condition was difficult for people to understand (3), and being restricted by a desire to fit in with their peers and not want it made obvious that they are visually impaired:

“I think I would be in the middle, because with some of the tutors, I kind of felt really intimidated by them. I don’t know why – I was really scared of them. I was like, oh, I don’t know about that.”

Participant: “Disagree... because you wouldn’t know how they would react to that.” Researcher: “Do you think you have had bad experiences in the past?” Participant: “Yeah.”

“College don’t know my sight really. I have my off days, so it’s hard to explain it sort of thing. My eyesight is really variable... My eyes get tired quickly, so I can see in the morning, and if I am looking at screens all day, I’d have to say ‘can you enlarge it’ by the afternoon.”

5.4.2 Scenario 2: Self-advocacy in the workplace – accessing computers

Scenarios 2-5 asked the young person to imagine themselves in the workplace, and proposed different situations that they may encounter.

Scenario 2 asked: Imagine you are in a situation where you to spend some time working in an office – either as part of your school work experience or as a part time job. Imagine that as part of the responsibilities of the job you needed to use a computer. How much do you agree with this statement: “I am confident that I would be able to discuss any adjustments that I may require in order to be able to access the computer.”

Table 28: I am confident that I would be able to discuss any adjustments

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Strongly agree	34	50.7%
Agree	30	44.8%
Disagree	3	4.5%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%
Not applicable	0	0.0%
Total	67	100.0%

Table 28 shows how confident the young person feels they would be in explaining the modifications they would need to access a computer in the workplace. The vast majority reported that they either agree or strongly agree that they would be able to do this, although there were 3 who disagreed.

The responses given by the participants to this question can be broken up into four broad categories: the modifications that they would request; their approach to the problem; barriers that they face; and enablers that they identify.

Modifications that they would request

The most frequently mentioned modification that the young person said that they would need was the provision of accessibility software/some specialist equipment (20):

“I’d tell them that I need a software on the computer which is a screen reading software, so that I can access it as I am visually

impaired and unable to read the screen. The software would read out what is on the screen for me, and the best software is called Jaws, so I'd need that."

"I'd say I need this computer programme, and I would go into detail about how you can get free ones, because you can get NVDA and that's free, so I would just ask if they could put it on there. Young person's approach to the problem."

Others said that the adjustments that they would require would simply be using the inbuilt accessibility options available on a standard PC (3) or making adjustments using the standard features available on programmes to make material accessible for them (13):

"All Microsoft computers have on screen magnifiers, even if it's not supernova, or like Jaws, and I could use that. A lot of the time I use the control and the scroll bar to zoom in and out."

"[Would say] 'Can I just use this zoom feature built in', really if I needed to use anything large or anything. Or I would copy and paste the written work and make the font bigger"

Other modifications that the young people suggested included having a large monitor (3), taking breaks (2) and having a support worker.

"Same sort of thing, like, oh, if I'd been given like a netbook with a tiny screen, 'can I have a computer with a bigger screen, I have an eye condition'"

"Probably that. I don't know, sometimes I can get a bit tired from concentrating on a computer monitor for a long period of time, so I benefit from having short breaks."

Young person's attitude to the problem

The responses by the young people on occasions gave an insight into their perception of responsibility in such a situation (although in some cases this was quite subtle).

Several had the attitude that it was their problem to resolve (11), for example by making the adjustments to the computer themselves, or finding their own solutions, whilst one young person considered that it was their responsibility to ensure they could access the computer:

“I’d just, to be fair I would probably just get the laptop off them and do it myself. It’s actually not that hard, you just go to accessibility options. So I’d just explain to them that I just need it to be, I don’t even know how to explain it, I need to change the resolution, how big the icons can be, and the font. I would just sit and do it myself.”

“It would depend on what I needed, if it costed I would agree to pay for it. It depends what it was.”

Three people’s responses showed that they believed it to be the employer’s responsibility to ensure that they have the adjustments needed:

“I would say strongly agree, because I think whenever you go to say to work in an organisation, I think yes you do have a responsibility to try and be flexible, but I think the organisation has a responsibility or an obligation to ensure that whatever tasks they set you are accessible. Because there is no point in setting in a task which you can’t access information for.”

Barriers that the young person faces

The main barrier that some of the young people identified was their lack of IT skills (6), and having to rely on others in the past to make adjustments for them:

“I’m not the best computer whizz ever. I can do certain amounts with the computer that I have been given. But from experience, I’ve tried in the past, there was a speech programme put on my family computer, but then when I tried to use it, I realised that quite a few bits of the software on the computer were so different, I couldn’t use it with the speech. I think I need more practice with computers with different layouts, to work out what sort of layout I need.”

Other barriers included being concerned about being rejected from posts if they were to disclose their need for specialist equipment (2) and concerns about whether the employer would be able to get the equipment that they need (2).

“Yeah... I am worried about telling people because I am scared of rejection.”

“The reason I said agree to that and not strongly agree, is because I don’t know whether the employer in question would actually have that software, so it depends.”

Enablers that the young person identifies

The most commonly referred to enabler was having had prior relevant experience (6):

“Strongly agree. It is something I have already done really.”

“They used to ask me in mainstream all the time, how I used my laptop, it’s basically what I said. New teachers who came to school. If I got my laptop open, I’d just show people.”

Other enablers identified were having regular practice at making computers accessible to them (e.g. in computer clusters at college) (2) or generally having good IT skills (2):

“Oh yeah I do it all time on school computers.”

5.4.3 Scenario 3: Self-advocacy in the workplace – accessing written information

Scenario 3 asked: Imagine that as part of the responsibilities of the job you needed to read through some written material. How much do you agree with this statement? “I am confident that I would be able to discuss any adjustments that I may require in order to access this written material.”

Table 29: I am confident that I would be able to discuss any adjustments that I may require in order to access this written material.

	Total (N)	Total (%)
Strongly agree	29	43.3%
Agree	34	50.7%
Disagree	3	4.5%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%
Not applicable	1	1.5%
Total	67	100.0%

The young people expressed a similar level of confidence in dealing with scenario 3 to the previous two scenarios, with the majority saying they either strongly agreed or agreed that they would be confident in dealing

with the situation, and only 3 saying that they disagree. However, similarly to scenario 1, there were many who said that they agreed with the statement, but when probed further to see what they would say, had difficulty thinking of what adjustments they would suggest.

The responses given by the participants to this question can be broken up into four broad categories: the modifications that they would request; modifications that they would make themselves; other things that the young person might do; and barriers that the young person may face.

Modification that they would request

The most commonly mentioned modification that the young people suggested was requesting to have material enlarged (29). Similarly, there were also those who spoke more in terms of discussing with employers about their preferred format (for example, minimum font size, type of font and colour contrast):

“I would just say that I need it in font 18, and if I don’t have it in font 18, I can’t actually read it”

“Depending on the size of the print, I would say that I needed it in 24 minimum, bold, that’s pretty much it [...] Not on A3 paper, I hate it.”

Several (10) suggested that it would be best to send material to them in an electronic format, and if the material were not originally available electronically, they could scan it using optical recognition software:

“Yeah, yeah that’s fine, I strongly agree, I can do that. I’d just explain that it would be easier if it were electronic. I can scan it in, or that it can be basically emailed to me or something.”

“Don’t print it, and email it to me!”

Other suggestions included needing support to access the material (5), having the written document converted to Braille (3), and requesting material in advance (1).

“I’d ask them if in the future they could provide any written things in large, and if not for that certain one, if they could just read what was important.”

“I’d need it the night, not even the night before, if it was really long, I would need to look over it the weekend before, so I would need to make that clear. If it were just a page document, if it were a little document, perhaps two nights before. But the earlier the better really, so the earlier they could provide any material which I would need to read through, that would be the best option.”

Modifications that they would make themselves

The young people also suggested some modifications that they personally could do to help them in accessing the written material.

Some (5) suggested that they could make any amendments to the material, such as using a photocopier to enlarge documents themselves. A further five suggested that they could be responsible for scanning documents in to make them available electronically:

“If it was like a situation where it was on A5 paper, I would just be like can I photocopy this, blow it up and make it a bit bigger.”

“Or just pass me a scanner, and I will scan it in myself. If it’s been printed and sent in through the post, then scanners, I would just ask for a scanner.”

Others (5) suggested that they could use low vision aids, or other types of assistive tools to help them access the written material:

“I’d just say I can’t quite see this, or something if I couldn’t see it, if it were quite small. I’d say I will just use my magnifying glass to read it, yeah I think that would be quite easy for me to say, because I would have it with me, so they wouldn’t to do anything.”

Finally, two of the young people spoke of how they would modify electronic material into their preferred format:

“Just because you can do whatever you want. You can stretch it, you can change colour, make it bigger. Just practical reasons really.”

Other suggestions

There were some suggestions from the young people which did not fit appropriately into the categories above. These included discussing their visual impairment with the employer (2), feeling that they have a personal responsibility to instigate discussions about adjustments they will need (1) and handing out a form which was prepared by their visual

impairment support service which explains their visual impairment and support that they require.

Barriers that the young person identified

The most common barrier that was suggested by the young people was not knowing what to say to their employer (3):

“If it was written, I’d be able to explain why I wouldn’t be able to read, but I am not sure how I would explain how they would change it.”

Other barriers (each of which were identified by individual participants), included: a lack of practice in this type of situation; people’s attitudes towards providing adjustments; concerns about appearing too demanding; lack of understanding from others about the adjustments they need; lack of IT skills to modify electronic documents; and struggling with having too much text to read.

“I think provided that you’ve got people who are willing to make those adjustments, then you should be able to produce that material, or to get that material. But I think that if, as I say, if you don’t have people who are willing then that’s when you will be in trouble.”

5.4.4 Scenario 4: Self-advocacy in the workplace – forgotten modifications

Scenario 4 asked: If you went in the following day and they had forgotten about the modifications that you needed, could you tell me how you think you would deal with this? Again, if applicable please share examples from past experiences. [If confident] What do you feel has given you the confidence to deal with situations like this? [If not confident] What do you think could be done to give you more confidence in situations like this?

The responses given for this question can be divided into two categories. Firstly the young people gave details of the type of response that they would give, and then secondly, they gave an explanation for this type of response.

Type of Response

Table 30: Type of response given for Scenario 4

Type of response	Total (N=70)
Relaxed – acknowledge situations like this are likely to happen	28
Proactive – show ideas of what they could do to help themselves	14
Defensive – feel it’s necessary to defend themselves/hard done by	7
Delaying – would delay dealing with issue at first	7
Conflict – take an aggressive stance	6
Give up – would give up trying to resolve the situation	2
High expectations after receiving high level of support	1
Insecure – concerned about losing job	1

As Table 30 shows, a variety of responses were given to this scenario, ranging from ignoring the problem, to taking an aggressive stance in dealing with it.

The most common response was quite a relaxed one, with the young people showing that they felt that situations such as this are inevitable:

“You would sort of just say, for example, casual reminder. You wouldn’t make something massive out of it. I don’t think it’s the way to go about it.”

“I would take into account that they probably might not have planned helping me into their day, so I would probably ask somebody to do it if they were working. I would certainly bring it up again, I wouldn’t struggle.”

Taking this further, there are those who suggested a proactive approach for dealing with the problem:

“Well, I would tell them to sit down and work it out with me, rather than just leaving it. I would tell them to do something about it, otherwise I wouldn’t be able to do what I am supposed to do if I haven’t got it.”

In contrast, there were those who indicated they would be less understanding about the lack of modifications they had previously requested. Included in this group there are those who would be

defensive, take a confrontational stance, and have high expectations of the employer, to ensure that they are able to get the job done as required.

“I think I would strongly consider if I wanted to work for them, because if they had forgotten about it over a day, that would clearly mean that they weren’t really that bothered, it had just gone over their head, they hadn’t been taking it in, so I’d probably think of possibly even pulling out of that place and going to find somewhere else, I wouldn’t be happy if they had forgotten.”

“I would certainly be interested to know why they had forgotten. I’d say well you know, why have you forgotten, has something happened. If they gave a valid reason, then I would say ok fair enough, so yes, in answer to your question, I would be open to negotiation, I would talk to them.”

Finally, three indicated they would be less likely to approach the problem, but would delay dealing with it, give up or expressed concern that if they were to say anything, they might lose the job.

“Going back up to them again and explaining this is what I need, rather than just saying ‘in that case I will leave’, if you get me? Sometimes they still don’t listen, so I give up with them.”

“I think I would probably give it a few hours, maybe before lunch, something like that, if nothing had occurred, I would happily go over to my manager or my reviewer, or anything like that, and just say ‘is this possible today’, ‘has anything been done’, ‘has an email been chased up’, that sort of thing.”

“I’d just explain that it’s something that needs to be done, otherwise I can’t do the work. At which point I would probably get fired!”

Explanation for Response

Table 31: Explanation for response given for Scenario 4

Type of response	Total (N=70)
Practice – confident due to past experiences	27
Learnt necessity – see it as something that is part of their independence	13
Personal characteristics – identify something about their personality type which influences their response	8
Maturity – able to deal with situations better as got older	7
Role models – watched others handling similar situations	4
Familiarity – feel comfortable around people they know well	4
Support of others – confidence as a result of others around them	3
Rights – know they have legal rights	1
Benefited from increased independence – now more confident in self-advocacy	1

Table 31 shows explanations for the responses given. The most common explanation was that they felt equipped to deal with the situation because they had had practice in the past:

“There’s been so many of them, I have just come to expect it now. I know what to say.”

“Actually having the situations. Being put in the situation where you need it changed, and you actually can’t do it yourself and you need help to do it. Being put in the situation gives you the confidence to actually sort the situation out as well.”

Some explained how for them it was a learnt necessity – they were not entirely comfortable dealing with the situation, but knew that it was important for their independence.

“Just the fact that I know it needs to be done, therefore... if no one else does it for me, then I need to do it for myself. If no one else stands up for me, then I need to stand up for myself. There’s not always going to be someone to stand up for me, so I need to be ready for when that day comes. I tend to stand up for myself anyway.”

Others identified something about their personality which would influence how they would deal with the situation, along with a gained maturity.

“I am not worried talking about my visual impairment. I think that’s mainly it, that I just, I don’t think anything necessarily, I haven’t had training or something to give me confidence, I just, it just doesn’t bother me, so then I don’t make it an issue.”

“I think mainly experience, I wasn’t too good at that at school, but come college I think I started to do that a bit more. I think I just got away from the childish not wanting to tell anyone. Got to the point if you don’t tell anyone it doesn’t get done. I think just maturing really.”

Several benefit from those around them, either through seeing role models, having the support of others, being trusted with more independence, or by becoming comfortable speaking to people they have built up relations with:

“I don’t know. I suppose it helps to see other people do it, some people are more confident than other people. You can take that away and use it to your own self.”

“I think my confidence, the way that I have been brought up I think that gives me confidence”

Finally, there was one person who felt reassured by their legal rights:

“Possibly knowing that I am within my own right to ask to ask the employer”

5.4.5 Scenario 5 - Self-advocacy in the workplace – interviews

Scenario 5 asked: Evidence suggests many employers assume blind and partially sighted people cannot perform certain tasks because of their sight loss. Do you feel confident discussing with a potential employer the skills you have which challenge these views? What would you like to say in response to this? Do you think you would have the confidence to do this? [If confident] What do you feel has given you the confidence to deal with situations like this? [If not confident] What do you think could be done to give you more confidence in situations like this?

Type of response

Table 32: Type of response given for Scenario 5

Type of response	Total (N=70)
Adjustment – would explain methods they would use to adapt in the workplace	27
Discussion – would engage in discussion with employer, e.g. how visual impairment affects them	20
Challenge – would challenge employers perceptions about visually impaired people in the workplace.	17
VI has no impact – person does not feel that visual impairment causes any limitation in their ability to perform in the workplace	11
Acknowledges limitations – recognises will be some things that they are unable to do	8
Defensive – defensive about being questioned about what they can and can't do	8
Examples – would share examples of how they have adapted in the past	4
Not confident – unsure how they would approach the situation	2
Naivety – response shows an element of naivety in what job seeking will be like	2
Passive – would not instigate discussions with an employer – instead would wait for them to raise the issue	1
Demonstrate – would show they how they are able to perform tasks	1

Table 32 shows the type of responses that were given for scenario 5. The most common response given was that the young people would suggest adjustments that could be made for them, or that they personally could make:

“Depending on what it was, I would say, if I had this in place to help me, I would be quite capable of doing the job, the same as everybody else, it’s just I do need that kind of support from either way, do you know what I mean. As you say, I will do it, and I will do it to the best of my ability, but I will need slight adjustments, slight support in this area, or something like that.”

“You would talk about how you have all the equipment and stuff, and how you can make everything accessible if they help you.”

Many (20) suggested a similar approach, but in the form of a more active discussion between the young person and the employer, in helping the employer understand about their visual impairment and how they would be able to go about functioning within the workplace:

“Yeah, I think I would try and explain the situation as best as I could, explain the way my eyesight is, and see if we could find alternatives to it. You can’t really do much else, just explain it to them.”

“I would feel confident again. I would just tell them my problem, and I would tell them honestly how it is for me, because obviously if they are not visually impaired, or if they don’t understand, they will think ‘this is how it is for that person.’ So I will just be honest and say how it affects me.”

Others said that they would share examples of how they have adapted in the past, or would offer to demonstrate to the employer how they can perform tasks, as a form of evidence:

“I’d do my best to point out stuff on my CV, and say I have managed to do this, I have managed to do that, this is evidence I am able to do... and I would do my best to try and encourage to actually see that I wouldn’t be a hindrance to their company if they employed me.”

“I think I would see if I could show them or something.”

Several of the young people gave responses which showed that they would be more likely to approach the question by challenging the perceptions of the employer they were speaking to:

“I do challenge that actually! Because then it makes them think that, is that right, is that wrong, can we adjust it, can we not. I just get them thinking – maybe we should think about the adjustments.”

“Yes, I strongly agree, I can definitely fight my corner. I’d just say, there’s nothing that stops me doing something that someone else can do. And my condition is one of those eye conditions where unless I told you I was visually impaired, you wouldn’t actually notice that I was, because I am just that well adapted to it because I have had to be, because it’s been since birth, my eyesight hasn’t really deteriorated over time, it’s kind of the stayed the same, so

I've learnt to adapt it. It doesn't stop me doing anything anyone else can do, it's just stuff that other people do like enlarging stuff that stops me doing something."

There would also be those who would take a defensive stance (8):

"I don't know if it's confidence, but I think it's inevitable because when I go for interviews and things I imagine... I'd find it difficult not to get annoyed with them and be like 'for goodness sake, or course I can do that'. I have to explain things, it's something I have to get used to. It would irritate me, but it's the way of life I suppose."

"Definitely. If they can prove to me with 100% certainty that I cannot do it, then fair enough. I will not lay down and accept it, I will challenge them. If someone said to me, you can't go out to do so and so, you can't see to do it, I will say 'ok, watch me do it and we will see who is right'. If you are right, I will yield and I will do as I am told. If I can do it, then you allow me to do so. I don't see why my sight should be held against me."

The response of two of the young people showed a degree of naivety of how it will be once they are in the workplace "I would say that, depending on what line of work I am doing, but I'd just saying I am amazing, I am great at whatever I am applying for, and they should ignore my visual impairment", whilst two would not be confident in dealing with the situation and one would choose not to raise the issue.

Finally, there was a contrast of some (11) who said that such a scenario was not of particular relevance to them because they did not think that their visual impairment would impact on them when in the workplace, and those who acknowledged that even with adjustments, they would be limited (8):

"I probably wouldn't have that problem because, my eyesight is improved with glasses, and I can perform most tasks, I can use the computer fine, I can read text fine it can be enlarged if I just ask for it. I don't really think that I need to challenge those views."

"Yeah, I would discuss it. Obviously there are certain things that a blind person could never do, like drive a car, but if it was something I felt I could do, and I wanted to do, then I would discuss it yeah, and I would put my view forward. Again, if you

don't try, you don't get. I guess you just have to ask in life. We are blind, we are to a certain extent at a slight disadvantage.”

Explanation for Response

Table 33: Explanation for response given for Scenario 5

Type of response	Total (N=70)
Personal characteristics – person identifies something about their personality type which influences their reaction to the situation	9
Confidence in ability – feel so confident in their ability it helps them feel confident in discussions	7
Practice – confident in dealing with the situation due to past experiences	4
No experience – not been in a similar situation to know how they would deal with it	3
Irritated - way they respond will partly come out of irritation	2
Bad experiences – lacking in confidence due to bad experiences in the past	2
Legal rights – confidence knowing there are legal rights supporting them	2
Anxiety about job outcome - concerned that their visual impairment may restrict them in being successful	1
Workshop – benefited from a workshop which looked at these kind of scenarios	1
Support of others – confidence as a result of others around them	1
Experience in the workplace – person has had prior experience of being in the workplace	1

Table 33 shows the explanations that were given by the young people for the types of response that they would give to Scenario 5.

The most common explanation given related in some way to the young person's personality, for example, that they consider themselves to be a naturally confident person, or that they have an underlying confidence in their ability:

“I usually am, yeah. Most cases I am. People always say I am big gobbed, so people say I can speak for myself and I do speak for myself.”

“I don’t know. I just think I have always been quite confident in my independence, even before my eye sight started going. I just think that my character itself is quite outgoing.”

“I think it’s important to prove to an employer that you are capable. But the key thing is not to over emphasise your visual impairment because it’s not the most important thing about you. I think ultimately matters is your ability and not your disability.”

Others gave explanations of why they might respond less positively to such a situation, sharing how in the past they had had bad experiences or how they would be concerned that their visual impairment might impact on their chances of getting the job:

“A lot of places where I tried to get work experience, they were like she might not be able to help us because of her sight.”

“I don’t think I would feel comfortable doing it, because I think it might jeopardise the opportunity. Even though they are not allowed to do it, they could still find a way. So I think that I wouldn’t feel comfortable doing that.”

There was a contrast in responses according to whether the young person had had prior experience in speaking to others (either previously in a work environment, or in a different environment which has given them transferrable skills):

“Just that I have had to do it in the past, so I know what to do.”

“When I was a lot younger, I wouldn’t have been able to speak to customers, or speak to anybody that I didn’t know. But now when somebody comes into our showroom, I am able to speak to them confidently.”

“I don’t think so. I think it’s just me, I think after more job interviews I think I would become more confident, but at the minute, I’m not very.”

Finally, there were some explanations which showed that the young people had benefited from people around them, either in receiving support, through attending a specialist workshop, or being informed by others of their legal rights.

“I went on a transitions weekend conducted by RNIB at the start of September, and we had a workshop on how to approach employers about our disability, and they gave us examples of how to explain to people who don’t know, how our disability affects us and how we can overcome obstacles.”

“It’s all been from when I have been little, because from throughout my life I have always been told never to let my blindness get in the way, obviously being realistic about it, and I have always been encouraged to get involved, and do practical activities. And that has given me the confidence, and I’ve been taught organisational skills from a young age and I have not been allowed to you know, get away with anything because of my blindness, unless it’s been within reason.”

“But I have got some confidence, I was speaking to someone and they were saying that employers aren’t allowed to mark you down in a way if you are visually impaired, which gives me a bit more confidence.”

5.5 Experience of work

The following questions were asked about the young people's experience of work, covering paid work, voluntary work and work experience. The combination of questions asked was adjusted according to the responses given to preceding questions.

1. Have you ever had any paid work? Do you have any form of paid work at the moment? What type of paid work do/did you do? How many hours per week do/did you normally work? Would you like a part time job? What are the reasons why you don't have a part time job?
2. Do you do any voluntary work at the moment or have you done any voluntary work in the past? What type of voluntary work do/did you do? How many hours per week do you normally do this/did you normally do? Would you like to do some voluntary work? What are the reasons why you don't do any voluntary work at the moment?
3. Have you undertaken any work experience placements, other than the ones arranged through school? What do you think the benefits are of work experience like this? Do you think it would help you to get some form of work experience, either through paid work, voluntary work, or a work experience placement? Are you aware of any assistance, in relation to your visual impairment, that may be available to you when you make the transition into employment? Prompt: have you heard of Access to Work? Have you any other comments that you would like to make about your experience of paid work/voluntary work?

5.5.1 Paid work experience

Table 34: Have you ever had any paid work?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 continuing in FE	Year 11 – leaving further education	Year 11 – Employed	Total	Total (%)
Yes	8	3	10	1	22	31.9%
No	17	13	17	0	47	68.1%
Total	25	16	27	1	69	100.0 %

Table 35: Do you have any form of paid work at the moment?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 continuing in FE	Year 11 – leaving further education	Year 11 – Employed	Total	Total (%)
Yes	6	2	6	1	15	21.4%
No	19	14	22	0	55	78.6%
Total	25	16	28	1	70	100.0 %

Just under a third of the young people had had some paid work at some time, whilst just over a fifth reported that they currently have some form of paid work.

Table 36: What type of work did/do you do?

Type of work	Total (N)	Total (%)
Waitress/waiter / catering	8	36.4%
Sales assistant	2	9.1%
Music tuition	2	9.1%
Paper round	2	9.1%
Other	8	36.4%
Total	22	100.0%

The most common type of work the young people have is working as a waitress/waiter or in the catering sector. 'Other' jobs included gardening, hairdressing, babysitting and a paid summer internship.

Table 37: Would you like a part time job?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 continuing in FE	Year 11 – leaving further education	Year 11 – Employed	Total	Total (%)
Yes	9	8	12	0	29	43.9%
No	7	5	6	0	18	27.3%
Unsure	3	1	0	0	4	6.1%
Not applicable	6	2	6	1	15	22.7%
Total	25	16	24	1	66	100.0 %

Many (29 of the 51 who were not currently working) of the young people said that they would like to have a part time job, whilst 18 said that they wouldn't Table 38 shows the main reasons why some of the young people felt they didn't have a part time job.

Table 38: What is the main reason why you don't have a part time job?

Type of work	Total (N)	Total (%)
Focussing on education	7	18.9%
Lack of time	7	18.9%
Looking for work but unable to find anything to apply for	6	16.2%
Restricted by visual impairment	5	13.5%
Applied but not been successful	4	10.8%
Not looked	4	10.8%
Lack of jobs	3	8.1%
Not possible because at residential school	2	5.4%
Total	37	100.0%

Over a third (37.8%) were restricted by time (either in general or specifically because of their education) and so had not been looking for paid work. Many (35.1%) were actively looking for work, but in some cases had made unsuccessful applications or were unable to find jobs to apply for. Specific to their visual impairment, 5 of the young people felt they were not able to get work due to be restricted by their visual impairment, whilst two who attend residential school said that it was impractical for them to get work.

Participant: "Not many people are willing to employ visually impaired people, especially if you are under 18." Researcher: "Is it something you have looked into at all?" Participant: "Yeah. And a lot of part time jobs are shops jobs, that are difficult to access with a severe visual impairment, and if you are under 18 people just aren't willing to kind of modify things to suit you, when they could just get someone else who could just do it."

"I think as a visually impaired person, the kind of part time jobs I can access are limited, because anyone my age now will have jobs such as paper rounds, those kind of things, and they are paid work jobs, work in a café or something. With me being blind, that's obviously limited. So there is a reason – that's the reason."

5.5.2 Voluntary Work

Table 39: Have you ever done any voluntary work?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 continuing in FE	Year 11 – leaving further education	Year 11 – Employed	Total	Total (%)
Yes	14	8	23	0	45	65.2%
No	11	8	4	0	23	33.3%
Not known	0	0	0	1	1	1.4%
Total	25	16	27	1	69	100.0%

Table 40: What voluntary work have you done?

Type of work	Total (N)	Total (%)
Charity work	14	31.1%
Leader at a club	9	20.0%
College placement	7	15.6%
Sports coaching	4	8.9%
Musical theatre	2	4.4%
Conservation work	2	4.4%
Other	7	15.6%
Total	45	100.0%

Two thirds (65.2%) of the young people have done some form of voluntary work in the past. The most common type was charity work or helping out at a club that they have been involved in (e.g. Brownies or a sports club). Other types of voluntary work included: working at a library; helping at a horse stables; volunteering at a radio station; working in a nursery and working as a sales assistant.

Table 41: Would you like to do some voluntary work?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 continuing in FE	Year 11 – leaving further education	Year 11 – Employed	Total	Total (%)
Yes	5	4	1	0	10	15.6%
No	4	2	2	0	8	12.5%
Unknown	0	0	0	1	1	1.6%
Not applicable (already	14	8	23	0	45	70.3%

done)						
Total	23	14	26	1	64	100.0%

Table 42: What are the reasons why you don't do any voluntary work at the moment (those who would like to do some)?

Reason	Total (N)	Total (%)
Limited time	3	30.0%
Got some scheduled / trying to get some scheduled	4	40.0%
Restricted by visual impairment	2	20.0%
Not looked into it	1	10.0%
Total	10	100.0%

The ten young people who were interested in doing some voluntary work explained why they had not done any until this point. Three felt that their time was too limited, whilst another four were in the process of getting voluntary work arranged. Two of the young people felt that they were limited by their visual impairment, including one person who had applied for a position and believed that their visual impairment had been the reason they had not been successful:

“And I asked if they would allow me, take me on to do it voluntary, to see whether they could cater for my needs, and they said they won't take on work placement because it's too much hassle for us.”

5.5.3 Work experience placements

There was a degree of overlap between the responses given to the voluntary work questions and additional work experience questions. In general, responses given in this section tended to relate to work experience placements in a field in which the young person was interested in working (the overlap tended to come where there was a close association between the young persons' extra- curricular interests and their chosen career).

Table 43: Have you undertaken any work experience placements, other than the ones arranged through school?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 continuing in FE	Year 11 – leaving further education	Year 11 – Employed	Total	Total (%)
Yes	7	8	18	0	33	47.1%
No	18	8	9	0	35	50.0%

Unknown	0	0	1	1	2	2.9%
Total	25	16	28	1	70	100.0%

Examples of work experience placements included: spending time shadowing a physiotherapist; working on musical productions; working on reception at a hotel and helping in schools.

Table 44: Would you like to do a work placement (for those who have not already)?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 continuing in FE	Year 11 – leaving further education	Total	Total (%)
Yes	5	1	7	13	68.4%
No	3	2	1	6	31.6%
Total	8	3	8	19	100.0%

Over two-thirds of the young people who had not done an additional work placement said that they would be interested in getting further experience this way. The reasons given by those who did not want to get additional work experience included: a need to get some paid work (young person had left education and was looking for full time work); it being too late for their UCAS application and already having paid work experience.

Table 45: What do you think the benefits are of getting work experience?

Benefit	Total (N=44)	Total (%)
Looks good on a CV	12	27.3%
Experience of work	12	27.3%
Insight into work	10	22.7%
Get experience in a particular field of work	6	13.6%
Help you get a job	5	11.4%
Help you make decisions for the future	5	11.4%
Help build confidence	4	9.1%
Signal to employers that YP is capable	3	6.8%
Develop people skills	2	4.5%

Those who had undertaken additional work experience, or thought that it would be useful to do suggested a variety of potential benefits.

Looks good on a CV

“Just purely for your CV, I didn’t feel I learned much from it, but it’s a good thing on your CV really.”

“It will probably look good on my CV because I am volunteering and I get even more experience.”

Experience of work

“With jobs nowadays they would like experience, so I thought I would do some voluntary work to get some experience to put on my CV.”

“It gives you work experience! It gives experiences of work life, and world, so I think it’s good that they do the work experience, in my opinion.”

Insight into work

“It gives you an insight into how certain different places are run. I never knew what a charity shop did out back, I was like wow! And learnt it all.”

“It will give me an idea of what it’s like to work, be in employment, and what it’s going to be like for a lot of later life, as I am going to have to be working to bring in the income.”

Get experience in a particular field

“Probably to see what it was like, whether I wanted to go into it.”

“If I got to a place I wanted to work at, it would let me see what exactly it is they do there, and give me a better understanding of whether I want to work there or not.”

Help you get a job

“Just improvement and a better chance of getting a job.”

“I could – could – could come out with a job with it, if I work hard. If I show that I am willing to do what they ask me and that.”

Help you make decisions for the future

“Just a good way to find out what’s suitable for you.”

“Help in deciding which degree course and profession to go into.”

Help to build confidence

“It makes you a lot more confident, and it will help you with your future.”

Signal to employers

“It gives you something that you can put down to say that you are capable of doing work on your own, and you don’t necessarily just want to do so for profit purposes.”

Develop people skills

“I think it really exposes you to the world of work, and the various tasks involved. Teamwork and co-operational skills, you know your place in the team. I think socially it’s good because you are interacting with people. It allows you, it gives you evidence for interviews, and especially as a blind person, I think it’s really-really valuable to have.”

Table 46: Are you aware of any assistance, in relation to your visual impairment, that may be available to you when you make the transition into employment?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 continuing in FE	Year 11 – leaving further education	Total	Total (%)
Yes	2	8	6	16	25.0%
Some knowledge	2	4	3	9	14.1%
No	20	3	16	39	60.9%
Total	24	15	25	64	100.0%

Finally the young people were asked if they were aware of anything that may assist them in their transition into employment. Only a quarter were confident that they knew of some form of assistance (most commonly through Access to Work, but there was also reference to employment services at RNIB/Action and employment law). A few when prompted remembered that they had heard of Access to Work, whilst 60.9% said that they had never heard of the scheme. Some of the responses given by the young people to the self-advocacy questions also highlighted the gap in the young people’s knowledge about available support and who would be responsible for providing it.

5.6 Independence: Summing up

The participants were asked a series of shorter questions, each one a statement which they were invited to say whether they would 'Strongly agree' (SA), 'Agree' (A), 'Disagree' (D), or 'Strongly disagree' (SD), or if they didn't feel the question was relevant to them 'not applicable' (NA).

Table 47: Independence Summing Up: Skills the young person has

	SA (N)	A (N)	D (N)	SD (N)	NA (N)	Total (N)
I am able to travel independently around my school	48	19	1	0	0	68
I am able to use magnifiers to be able to access any print independently	19	22	2	0	25	68
I am able to use computers to be able to access any print independently	32	31	3	0	1	67
I am able to adapt to receiving lesson material in a format which is not in my preferred format	19	42	6	1	0	68
I am able to travel independently outside of school	35	23	6	1	0	65
I am confident in travelling independently from my home to local shops and other places local to where I live.	43	18	7	0	0	68
I am confident in travelling independently to places which are unfamiliar to me.	15	26	18	5	0	64

Table 47 shows the responses given by the young people to a series of questions asking them to evaluate their level of independence. We observe that they feel most confident in being able to travel independently outside of school, whilst they are least confident in travelling to a place which is unfamiliar to them (this is consistent with our findings from the open questions). It is interesting to note how many of the young people said that using magnifiers was not applicable to them. A number of these respondents were non-print users (approximately 13), but several of those who would not consider using a magnifier could well be people who would benefit from using them. Instead, confidence is much higher in using computers, which supports findings earlier in this report that showed that typically the young people favoured receiving material electronically.

Table 48: Independence Summing Up: Support the young person has been given

	SA (N)	A (N)	D (N)	SD (N)	NA (N)	Total (N)
I have been well equipped with additional life skills that I will need, such as mobility training and ICT skills	25	32	5	1	4	67
The specialist support I have received has helped me to become as independent as possible.	25	37	5	0	1	68
The teachers and services supporting me have helped me to maximise my academic attainment.	32	30	5	1	0	68

Table 48 shows the responses given by the young people in reference to questions about the support that they report to have been given whilst in school/college. On the whole they are positive about the support that has been received, although there are six who disagree that they have been well equipped with the additional life skills they will need, five who do not believe that the specialist support has helped them to become as independent as possible, and six who do not think that the teachers and services supporting them have helped maximise their academic attainment.

The participants were also asked a similar series of short questions, this time focusing on what they believed should be the role and priorities of teachers and support services for students with visual impairment. For each statement they were invited to say whether they “Strongly agree” (SA), “Agree” (A), “Disagree” (D), or “Strongly disagree”. The responses for these questions are shown in Tables 49 and 50.

Table 49: Independence - Views of Independence: Access to Information

	SA (N)	A (N)	D (N)	SD (N)	NA (N)	Total (N)
Providing young people with visual impairments with material in their preferred print size or format is essential	43	24	1	0	0	68
It is important to teach young people with visual impairments to use magnifiers as these enable them to access any print independently	17	31	7	0	13	68
Students should be taught to independently access technology (computers and mobile technology)	33	31	4	0	0	68
Young people with a visual impairment should be taught to be able to access a range of print sizes and presentations, which might not necessarily be their preferred format	18	39	10	0	0	67
Magnifiers are hard to use, and teachers should not insist their students use them	10	26	12	1	18	67
Teachers/QTVIs should ensure students have too the teaching material in a format which best suits them	33	34	0	0	0	67
It is more important for teachers and support services to teach visually impaired people skills to be able to independently access information than to produce all materials in the students preferred format	17	40	9	0	0	66

Table 49 shows the young people's views towards access to information. All but one agreed that it is essential to provide material to visually impaired young people in their preferred format, and many also recognised the important of being taught how to independently access technology. There was less agreement that the young people should be seeking to learn to access information independently in school (for

example in learning to use magnifiers and learning to access a range of formats).

Table 50: Independence - Views of Independence: Priorities

	SA (N)	A (N)	D (N)	SD (N)	NA (N)	Total (N)
The priority of teachers and support services should be to support visually impaired students to achieve the highest possible grades	34	28	4	0	1	67
Helping students with visual impairment develop independence skills which they will use later on in life should be prioritised ahead of supporting the students in their classes	7	34	20	3	0	64
Priority should be given to teaching visually impaired young people to travel independently around their school	20	38	7	0	0	65
Priority should be given to teaching visually impaired young people to travel independently outside of school	19	42	5	0	2	68
Support staff need to help visually impaired students in moving around their school or college safely and quickly	21	28	12	2	1	64
As much as possible should be done in school/college to meet individual needs of visually impaired students, even if the 'real world' might not be like that	13	31	19	1	1	65
It is more important for teachers and support services to teach visually impaired people skills to be able to independently access information than to produce all materials in the students preferred format	17	40	9	0	0	66

Table 50 looks at the young people's responses to what they think should be priorities of teachers and support services for visually impaired students. The majority (93%) of students agreed that it was the priority of teachers and support services to support visually impaired students to achieve the highest possible grades, and many considered it a priority to teach visually impaired young people to travel independently around their school.

However, there was a belief amongst some that it is important to be prepared to live independently, with 20 who disagreed that as much should be done to meet individual needs, even if the 'real world' might not be like that.

We see mixed responses to the idea of teachers prioritising teaching independence skills, with preferences tending towards teachers providing direct support to students, rather than teaching them skills to be able to work independently.

6 Conclusions

Longitudinal Study

We have now been following this group of young people for approaching three years, and it is encouraging to see so many of the original participants still engaged within the project – an indicator of just how important these issues that we are investigating are to visually impaired young people.

There have been successful transition outcomes for the majority of the participants, with several successfully securing places at university, completing their studies, or getting onto apprenticeships or into work. However, there are some young people who are starting to give more cause for concern, for example, those who have been unable to complete their college courses and are having to repeat them again, and the young people who wanted to move onto apprenticeships, but had difficulty in finding anything suitable. The majority of those who went to university in autumn 2012 were spoken to prior to their courses commencing, and so it will be interesting to see what their first year experiences were like, and if they were as prepared for it as they had thought.

On the whole, the young people seem confident about at least their immediate plans for the future. For many, particularly those who are continuing in education, the consideration of future careers still seems premature, although we do see evidence of frustration for some who really feel that they could benefit from careers advice specific to their disability. Those in this position tended to be young people who were looking to apply for work, and therefore in a position where this was of more immediate relevance to them.

For the first time in this study, we have a group of young people who could be considered NEET. There has been previous quantitative evidence showing that blind and partially sighted young people can be particularly vulnerable to end up in this position, but there has been limited evidence of who exactly these young people are, and how they got there. We also observe that there are some young people who are not officially NEET, yet are still in a far from ideal situation. Whilst we hope to see positive transitions for all of our participants, research evidence shows that this is unlikely, and so tracking young people such

as these will hopefully better inform practice and policy to help others avoid being in this position.

More broadly, it is interesting at this stage to note that even with a high attaining group, there is already quite a lot of divergence in pathways, particularly with those who are taking an extra year to complete their courses. This demonstrates the importance of flexibility within the formal transition planning process.

Independence

The responses given by the young people demonstrate that for the majority of them, independence is something that they value and do not take for granted. As could be anticipated, this became increasingly true, in relation to the severity of their visual impairment.

The majority of the young people are able to get around independently, at least within their local area. However, it was common for the young people to feel uncomfortable in travelling to a place which was unfamiliar to them. It will be interesting to see how some of them deal with moving to a new town (e.g. going to university) or how well they are able to travel to a new workplace, and how well they are able to apply the mobility skills that they have learned until now.

Despite the responses to independent travel being mostly positive, there are concerns for some, for example those who report having difficulty in getting around independently, yet report that they have never had mobility training, or at least have not received any recently.

Responses from both this interview and a previous interview looking at social networking demonstrate just how confident the majority of young people are in accessing information electronically. There were several references throughout the interviews about wanting to appear 'normal' amongst their peers, and by using mainstream equipment to be able to access information, this is one way in which they can feel more comfortable amongst friends. There is the question, however, of whether this emphasis on mainstream technology is resulting in the loss of other important skills that may be needed in circumstances where mainstream technology is not appropriate or inadequate. For example, those who could potentially benefit from using magnifiers or low vision aids who consider using such equipment as not relevant to them, or perhaps feel self-conscious using such equipment. These challenges (and potential solutions) have been discussed in previous work (e.g. Douglas et al, 2011a, 2011b).

We observe that in general the young people would feel confident in self-advocating for themselves in a variety of situations. Many felt that this confidence comes as a result of experience of self-advocating for themselves in school/college. This is an example of why it's important to encourage and enable the young people to become increasingly more independent as they move through the school system. There appears to be a distinction between those who would approach these situations with a more *outward* sense of responsibility, i.e. seeing that it is the responsibility of others to ensure that they can function in the workplace/school, whilst others have a more *inner* sense of responsibility, i.e. they see that ultimately it is their responsibility to ensure that modifications are in place and that they should actively be looking to make adjustments themselves. This of course is a broad generalisation, and for many of the participants, there are examples of both type of attitude.

There is evidence of a gap in knowledge for some of the young people surrounding careers. For example, many were unaware of the services provided by Access to Work, leading to confusion around who is responsible for providing equipment in the workplace. Whilst several of the young people felt that they did not need careers advice specific to their visual impairment at this point in their lives, not many of the young people knew where they would go to get such advice when they did need it.

Finally, it is encouraging to see how many of the young people have been able to get some form of work experience – particularly through voluntary work. There are still unfortunately concerns for those with more severe visual impairments, and the barriers that this can cause in getting work experience.

7 Future Plans

This report is part of a series of reports from a longitudinal study, which is following the transition experiences of 80 young people. The project commenced in autumn 2009, and is currently funded to continue until March 2015.

During each year of the project, we plan to speak to the young people once in depth about particular issues relating to transition, along with shorter interviews which will help track their journey.

In summer 2013, we will commence case study work, looking at the experiences of several of the young people in more depth, and particularly focussing on the influences of people around them (for example family, support services, university disability support offices and Access to work).

We are also planning annual surveys of the support services that work with the young people whilst at school and sometimes in college to learn more about the role that they play, particularly in the context of changing legislation (for example, schools turning to academies).

Results will be presented in technical reports similar to this one, focussed reports looking at particular themes, and papers in peer-reviewed journals. A conference to present the findings of the longitudinal study is scheduled for spring 2015.

8 Appendix

Sample demographics and representativeness

Table 51: Gender

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 still in FE	Year 11 – leaving FE	Year 11 - employed	Total (N)	Total (%)
Male	13	6	14	0	33	47.1%
Female	12	10	14	1	37	52.9%
Total	25	16	28	1	70	100.0%

Table 52: Ethnic Group

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 still in FE	Year 11 – leaving FE	Year 11 - employed	Total (N)	Total (%)
White	22	12	25	1	60	85.7%
African	1	1	0	0	2	2.9%
Other black	0	1	0	0	1	1.4%
Indian	1	1	0	0	2	2.9%
Pakistani	0	1	1	0	2	2.9%
Bangladeshi	0	0	1	0	1	1.4%
Any other Mixed background	1	0	0	0	1	1.4%
Don't know	0	0	1	0	1	1.4%
Total	25	16	28	1	70	100.0%

Table 53: Preferred format of participants

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 still in FE	Year 11 – leaving FE	Year 11 – Employed	Total (N)	Total (%)
Normal to large print (12-17 point)	11	1	14	1	27	38.6%
Large print (18-27 point)	9	5	12	0	26	37.1%
Very large print (\geq 28 point)	1	2	1	0	4	5.7%
Braille	4	8	1	0	13	18.6%
Total	25	16	28	1	70	100.0%

Table 54: What Educational Settings are the young people currently in?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 still in FE	Year 11 – leaving FE	Total (N)	Total (%)
Mainstream School	16	8	24	48	69.6%
Resource base	4	0	1	5	7.2%
Residential / Special School	5	8	3	16	23.2%
Total	25	16	28	69	100.0%

Table 55: Have the participants got additional Special Educational Needs?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 still in FE	Year 11 – leaving FE	Year 11 - employed	Total (N)	Total (%)
Had additional SEN	6	3	4	1	14	21.2%
No additional SEN	16	12	24	0	52	78.8%
Total	22	15	28	1	66	100.0%

Table 56: Have the participants had a Statement of Special Educational Needs?

	Year 9 cohort	Year 10/11 still in FE	Year 11 – leaving FE	Year 11 - employed	Total (N)	Total (%)
Has Statement of SEN	18	13	19	0	50	80.6%
No Statement of SEN	4	2	5	1	12	19.4%
Total	22	15	24	1	62	100.0%

Table 57: Independence: Summing up

	SA (N)	SA (%)	A (N)	A (%)	D (N)	D (%)	SD (N)	SD (%)	NA (N)	NA (%)	Tot al (N)
It has always been my expectation that I will receive material in my preferred format when in lessons/lectures	12	17.9	40	59.7	10	14.9	1	1.5	4	5.6	67
I am able to travel independently around my school	48	70.6	19	27.9	1	1.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	68
I am able to use magnifiers to be able to access any print independently	19	27.9	22	32.4	2	2.9	0	0.0	25	36.8	68
I am able to use computers to be able to access any print independently	32	47.8	31	46.3	3	4.5	0	0.0	1	1.5	67
I have been well equipped with additional life skills that I will need, such as mobility training and ICT skills	25	37.3	32	47.8	5	7.5	1	1.5	4	6.0	67
I am able to travel independently outside of school	35	53.8	23	35.4	6	9.2	1	1.5	0	0.0	65
The specialist support I have received has helped me to become as independent as possible.	25	36.8	37	54.4	5	7.4	0	0.0	1	1.5	68
I am confident in travelling independently from my home to local shops and other places local to where I live.	43	63.2	18	26.5	7	10.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	68
The teachers and services supporting me have helped me to maximise my academic attainment.	32	47.1	30	44.1	5	7.4	1	1.5	0	0.0	68

I am able to adapt to receiving lesson material in a format which is not in my preferred format	19	27.9	42	61.8	6	8.8	1	1.5	0	0.0	68
I am confident in travelling independently to places which are unfamiliar to me.	15	23.4	26	40.6	18	28.1	5	7.8	0	0.0	64
If I had a new teacher, I would be able to confidently explain to them about my visual impairment and the support that I need in the classroom	27	40.9	33	50.0	4	6.1	1	1.5	1	1.5	66
I am confident that I would be able to discuss any adjustments that I may require in order to be able to access a computer in the workplace	34	50.7	30	44.8	3	4.5	0	0.0 %	0	0.0	67
I am confident that I would be able to discuss any adjustments that I may require in order to access written material in the workplace	29	43.3	34	50.7	3	4.5	0	0.0	1	1.5	67

Table 58: Independence: Views of Independence

	SA (N)	SA (%)	A (N)	A (%)	D (N)	D (%)	SD (N)	SD (%)	NA (N)	NA (%)	Tot al (N)
Providing young people with visual impairments with material in their preferred print size or format is essential	43	63.2	24	35.3	1	1.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	68
Support staff need to help visually impaired students in moving around their school or college safely and quickly	21	32.8	28	43.8	12	18.8	2	3.1	1	1.6	64
It is important to teach young people with visual impairments to use magnifiers as these enable them to access any print independently	17	25.0	31	45.6	7	10.3	0	0.0	13	19.1	68
Students should be taught to independently access technology (computers and mobile technology)	33	48.5	31	45.6	4	5.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	68
Young people with a visual impairment should be taught to be able to access a range of print sizes and presentations, which might not necessarily be their preferred format	18	26.9	39	58.2	10	14.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	67
Magnifiers are hard to use, and teachers should not insist their students use them	10	14.9	26	38.8	12	17.9	1	1.5	18	26.9	67
The priority of teachers and support	34	50.7	28	41.8	4	6.0	0	0.0	1	1.5	67

services should be to support visually impaired students to achieve the highest possible grades											
Teachers/QTVIs should ensure students have too the teaching material in a format which bests suits them	33	49.3	34	50.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	67
As much as possible should be done in school/college to meet individual needs of visually impaired students, even if the 'real world' might not be like that	13	20.0	31	47.7	19	29.2	1	1.5	1	1.5	65
Helping students with visual impairment develop independence skills which they will use later on in life should be prioritised ahead of supporting the students in their classes	7	10.9	34	53.1	20	31.1	3	4.7	0	0.0	64
Priority should be given to teaching visually impaired young people to travel independently around their school	20	30.8	38	58.5	7	10.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	65
Priority should be given to teaching visually impaired young people to travel independently outside of school	19	27.9	42	61.8	5	7.4	0	0.0	2	2.9	68
It is more important for teachers and support services to teach visually impaired people skills to be able to independently access information than to produce all materials in the students preferred format	17	25.8	40	60.6	9	13.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	66

9 References

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