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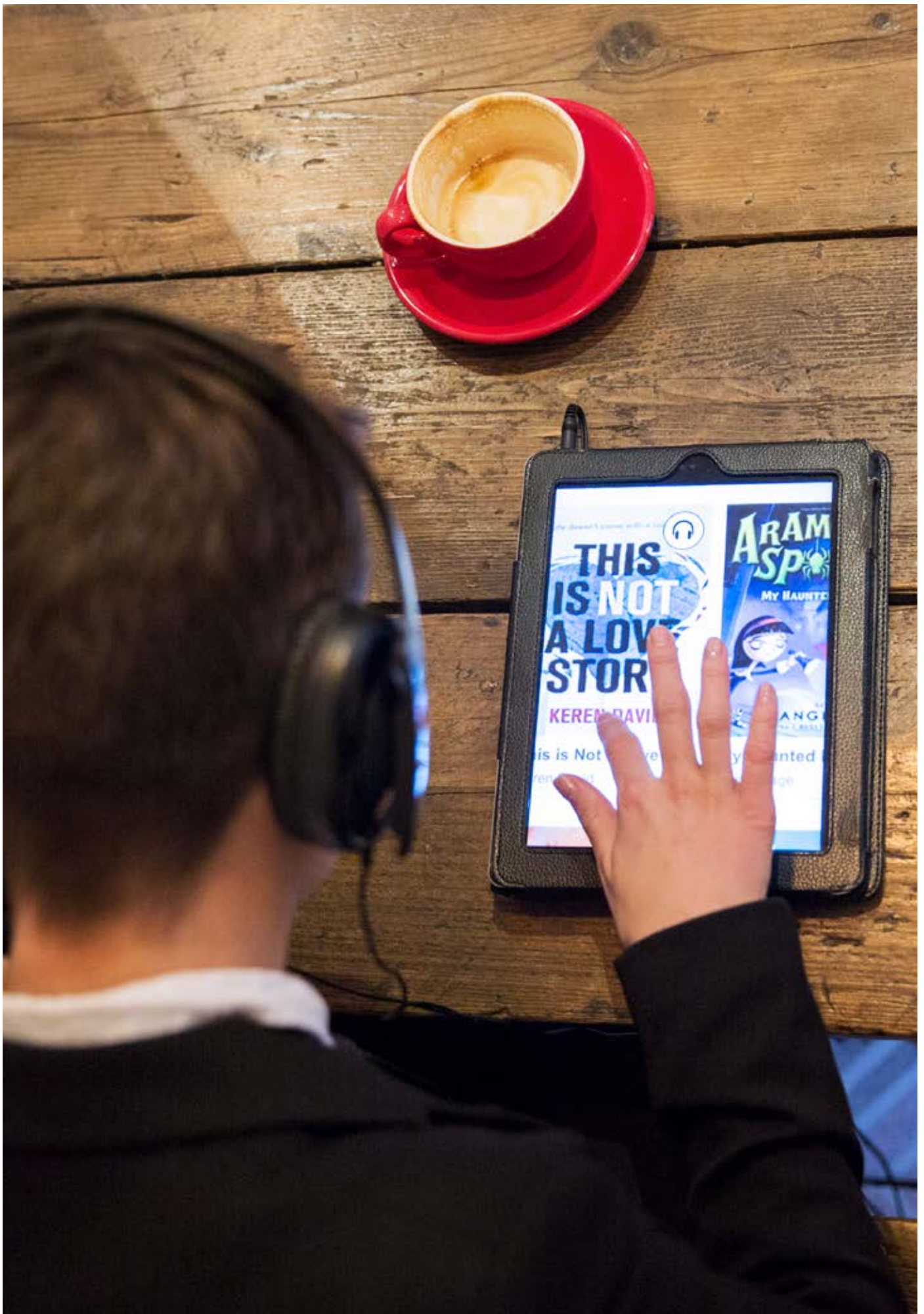
See differently

Your Future, Your Choice: Bridging the Gap

Supporting your transition
from school to college,
university and work



England



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Section 1

Introduction

This guide is aimed at young people with a vision impairment, to help you prepare for your future after school. It includes information about a variety of possible pathways, including:

- sixth form
- further education
- higher education
- apprenticeships
- volunteering
- training
- employment.

Its purpose is to provide an overview of the main information that you will need, and to provide you with links to more comprehensive guidance if required.

The guide will also be helpful as a reference for parents/carers and professionals supporting you through these transitions.

We've looked to bring the guidance to life by including quotes and case studies of other young people with a vision impairment. These have been taken from findings of a research study run by Vision Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research at University of Birmingham, with support from RNIB, which has been following the experience of young people with vision impairment as they've made their way through various pathways after school.

What is "transition"?

Think about your time in education. You'll be familiar with the staff who support you and the adjustments that are made to ensure you can access your subject materials. You may have worksheets and textbooks provided in large print or braille, specialist programs on your computer – or perhaps you have a teaching assistant who takes notes for you in class. And during that time in education, you will have learnt lots of skills including mobility and the use of access technology, and hopefully built up confidence in how to communicate to staff and peers.

At school, both you and the staff are aware of the support that you need to ensure that your vision impairment, and any additional needs you may have, don't interfere with your learning. But have you thought much about what happens when you leave school and go on to college, university or work?

Think of your transition from school and beyond as a series of journeys from one location to another. For example:

- school to employment
- school to college to university to employment
- school to vocational training, apprenticeship or employment.

The journeys that get you from one location to another are what we call your points of transition. It's important that you, and the different agencies that support you, plan for these times of change well in advance of them happening. This will ensure that your move from, let's say, sixth form to university is smooth and effective and that you're fully aware of what support you'll get and who will be responsible for providing it. Careful planning is also very important for practical reasons, for example to make sure that you have access to assistive technology, such as screen readers or magnification software, from the outset of your course.

There is a lot of support out there, but you may not be aware of it. Knowing what help is available enables you to take control of your future and allows you the freedom to make informed choices about what you want to do next.



Section 2

Planning for your future while still at school

There are many options which may be available to you once you finish your GCSEs:

- staying in school if your school has a sixth form
- moving to a local sixth form or further education (FE) college and taking a course there
- moving to a residential specialist college for learners with vision impairment
- going into work or training.

The support that you will receive will likely depend on whether you have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). There is more information on EHCPs on RNIB's website at rnib.org.uk, but in short, these are documents which outline the support that you should receive in education, and where appropriate, through health and social care. A significant part of the EHCP process is a review which takes place in Year 9 to consider your ideas for what you want to do when you are older.

Whether or not you have an EHCP, it is important to start thinking about your future and putting together a plan in Year 9. If you would like to find out more information about the types of services available in your local area, you can look at your local authority's "Local Offer" via rnib.org.uk/insight-online/finding-local-support-families-children-vi

If you have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

If you have an EHCP, planning for your future should begin with your Year 9 "preparing for adulthood" review meeting. If you haven't been offered this review meeting, you can remind the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) that you need it. Following this meeting, your EHCP should be written or updated so that your aspirations, what you want to be able to do when you leave post-16 education or training, are clearly recorded along with the support you need to achieve these ambitions. It should look at all aspects of your life including education, employment, housing, health, transport and leisure activities. It is really important that you make time to think about what you want in the future so that the planning can begin.

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



Before your Year 9 “preparing for adulthood” review meeting, you should:

- be offered careers guidance at school to discuss which subjects you are enjoying and achieving good grades in, which subjects you plan to take for GCSE and your aspirations for life after school
 - talk to a teacher about your strengths and which subjects you are best at and enjoy most
 - talk to your parent/carer about what you may want to do after school – whether you are considering sixth form, a local college, residential college, further training or going straight into work or an apprenticeship
 - think about any difficulties you are having in school so that you can talk about these at the meeting
 - think about any questions you might want to ask, for example, if there is anything you are confused or anxious about.
- The “preparing for adulthood transition” review is usually held at your school and should involve you and people who will support you in moving into adulthood. These people could be:
 - someone from social services, to make sure you get a health and social care assessment if you have health and social care needs
 - your teacher(s)
 - a Qualified Teacher of children and young people with vision impairment (QTVI)
 - a careers adviser
 - an educational psychologist
 - your parents or carers
 - anyone else who you would like to support you at the meeting.

If you feel shy or nervous about raising things at the meeting, it is a good idea to talk through any issues with your parents/carers or a member of staff beforehand so that they can help you put your ideas across at the meeting.

“Martha” was assigned a key worker to help her prepare for the meetings. Here, she described her experience:

“I was about 14... she was basically there to advocate for me, so I worked with her a lot, I went to see her a few times before every annual or interim review. We made a mind map of things I was concerned about, things I wanted to discuss, or things I wanted brought up, and things that I wanted to say or have said. And we worked on things that, things that I thought were important to me, and where I wanted to see myself in five years. She was there, she could have either supported me to express views myself if I wanted to, or she was able to speak on my behalf if wanted to as well.”

Your revised EHCP

After the meeting, you and your parents or carers should be sent a copy of the revised EHCP. The plan should set out:

- what subjects you want to study and what other activities you'd like to be involved in for your remaining time at school
- what you want to do when you leave school
- what information you need to help you make decisions about your future
- what opportunities there are in your area to do what you want to do
- what support you might need to achieve your goals.

The education department of your local authority is responsible for making sure that you receive all the support and services that are listed in your revised EHCP. The local social care and health services must co-operate with the education department and ensure their support is in place too.

Transition review meetings

You should have at least one review meeting each school year to update your EHCP. The focus of these meetings will vary depending on which school year you are in. For example:

- In Year 9 the focus will be on helping you explore your aspirations and how different post-16 education options can help you meet them.
- In Year 10 you will be supported to explore more specific courses or places to study (for example, through taster days and visits).
- In Year 11 you will be supported to firm up your post-16 plans and to familiarise yourself with this new setting.

If you think anything has been missed out, talk to a member of staff, or your QTVI about it. Remember, it's your plan for your future so it's important that it reflects your ideas and aspirations.

If you don't have an EHCP

If you don't have an EHCP you should be on “SEN support” and should still have access to support. This could involve professionals from outside the school or college (such as a QTVI or mobility/habilitation officer) as well as school staff.

Whether or not you have an EHCP, the local authority and school are still responsible for making sure you have the right support so you are able to achieve as well as you can at school and afterwards. You are still entitled to adjustments under the Equality Act and entitled to support to develop your independence. Even if you do not have an EHCP, you may still have an annual review and should expect help and guidance on your future choices and support arrangements.

What happens when I leave school if I have an EHCP?

If you want to continue your education, you can stay on at a secondary school with an attached sixth form, transfer to a local sixth form college, or go to a more vocational further education college. (Although, depending on geographical location, not all of these options may be available.)

What happens to my EHCP when I move to sixth form or college?

If you move into a sixth form which is linked to your school, things could pretty much remain the same. You'll continue to get support from your school and the support staff you are familiar with. But the review may include the support provided by social care and health services too.

If you decide to move on to a further education (FE) college or a residential college, or if you are going into vocational training, then the review in your final school year should result in an EHCP which is reviewed by college staff once you are at college.

This “preparing for adulthood” review is to support your transition into college or vocational training. Your local authority will still be responsible for ensuring that you are supported in the ways your EHCP describes. This review should bring together up-to-date assessments and is about identifying your needs and the right support and provision for you. It should take into consideration your EHCP and your own views and aspirations. With your permission, your school or local authority will pass the information about your particular needs, recorded in your EHCP, to the college so that they can work with you to make sure your support is in place before the beginning of your course.



What happens when I leave school if I do not have an EHCP?

Planning the transition to college without an EHCP

Even if you do not have an EHCP, you may still have an annual review at school to help you prepare for your move to college and should still expect help and guidance on your future choices and support arrangements. The college should discuss with you what sort of support you need and how it is to be provided.

Whether or not you have an EHCP, the local authority and college are still responsible for making sure you have the right support so you are able to achieve as well as you can at college and afterwards. You are still entitled to adjustments under the Equality Act, and this support and adjustment can be changed over time according to your needs, skills and circumstances.

Quote from Charlotte where she explains how she entered FE College without an EHCP in place. But with careful planning the college were able to provide the support she needed. Charlotte talks about her experience:

"I was given a support worker who showed me around the campus, and showed me where the dark spots were so I could avoid them because I don't see very well in those parts, the first couple of days she stayed with me at break and made sure that I knew where I was going, and then over time I won't need her anymore, so we have discussed that. I can have support, but she is not in class anymore. And they have given me a laptop and if we are doing map work they do maps on different colour paper so it's easier for me to see. They have ordered eBooks for me and they have sent me eBooks for my laptop. They also gave me a Dictaphone so if I can't take notes, or look at the board quick enough, I can record it and listen to it later."

More information about personal budgets and direct payments can be found on the Council for Disabled Children website at: councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/making-ourselves-heard/resources/your-rights-your-future-toolkit-personal-budgets

Personal budgets and direct payments

At age 18, your social care normally transfers from children's services to adult services. However, you can ask for a Children's Needs Assessment before you are 18 so that adult social services can advise you what will be available after your 18th birthday and give you an idea of the budget you could have. They can help you decide whether you would like to manage your own finances for your education and care support by having a direct payment.

Learning from others

Many young people with vision impairment find that it is helpful to talk to others who have been or are going through the same experiences as them to share stories and to learn from one another. Consequently many voluntary organisations put on special events, and in particular ones to help you start to make decisions about what you want to do in the future. There is further information on different organisations in Section 11.



Section 3

Moving on to college or vocational training

The support that you can get varies between colleges and so it's really important that you visit before you apply. It is a good idea to arrange a visit even if you are not sure that you definitely want to go, because it may help you make up your mind. It could also be helpful to review college Ofsted reports to learn more about provision for students with SEN and disability.

If you are thinking of going to college, visit RNIB's young people's pages at rnib.org.uk/startingcollege to find out about choosing a college, study advice and more! You can also read about other young people's experiences of college life.

Finding the right college

There are lots of ways to find out about a college. Gathering information from lots of sources will help you to get a good picture of the support they offer before you think of applying. You can:

- Check out their website – every college has one.
- Talk to other people who have been there and ask how they got on.
- Make contact with the student services team or the disability adviser at the college, well before you apply, to check out what specialist support is available.

- Visit the colleges you are considering as soon as possible. You'll be able to meet the support staff there and ask questions, for example about what assistive technology they have got and whether they have supported someone with vision impairment before and what adjustments they would propose making.

What about residential or specialist colleges?

Some local colleges may not have the support services you need. If you aren't happy that the local college can support you, then you may want to consider applying to a residential or specialist college.

You need to start planning for this as soon as you can. By Year 9 or 10 you and your parent/carer should begin to:

- investigate residential or specialist colleges
- research opportunities about the courses and support they offer
- arrange to visit the colleges
- consider which college may best meet your needs.

If you're thinking about going to a residential or specialist college, it's really important that this is written down in your EHCP and discussed at your "preparing for adulthood transition" review meetings.

Young people identify advantages and disadvantages of residential school and college as illustrated in the following quotes from the experiences of these two young people:

"I spent five years at a residential school. Although the experience is useful for many young people, I felt that my education would be no different there or in mainstream school. I missed the friends I had at home and wanted to be integrated."

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

What support can I get at college?

You will be taught by a new team of staff at the college and you may not see your QTVI any longer. This is because colleges and schools are funded differently.

Colleges get money from their funding body in order, to provide reasonable adjustments and make sure you have the support you need. This is called Learning Support (LS). There is a variety of support and equipment that a college might offer and they should look at what works best for you.



Assessment of your needs at college

College staff should liaise with you, your school and local authority to decide what support you will need for all the different aspects of your course. This includes lectures, classes, practical sessions, field trips, work experience placements, course assessments and exams.

If you have an EHCP, this will give details of the support you are to have at college. The EHCP should be reviewed regularly by the college.

If you don't have an EHCP you should be on "SEN support" and should still have access to support. Although the type of support and who provides it may be different to school, this could still involve providing equipment such as assistive technology or human support such as a notetaker or mobility training.

Remember that your course and the college environment will be different from school, and sometimes the support you need will also be different. Some examples of support are:

- mobility training so you can navigate your way independently around the college
- a support teacher or worker, or a sighted guide
- materials in alternative formats such as braille or large print
- assistive computer technology, for example closed-circuit television, and training in how to use it
- computers with speech synthesisers and magnification.

Quote from one young person discussed the learning support he received at college:

"I had an interview with the course tutor going through things like what my GCSE grades were and stuff, so then I spoke to learning support and they spoke to me about how they could produce a book for me, and how I would access a lab and stuff. Each week I get two hours of subject specific support... what she does is given me support with stuff which is specifically related to the subject, like I need help with say diagrams or stuff, because she's got the subject specific knowledge."

Section 4

Working while you study

Some courses offer you the opportunity to work and gain qualifications at the same time. These options are worth considering, especially if you prefer to study a practical course rather than an academic one.

Apprenticeships

An apprenticeship is a great way to learn on the job alongside experienced people while studying for a nationally recognised qualification. It means you get the opportunity to do a real job, in a real workplace, and earn money at the same time. You can do an apprenticeship in many different areas ranging from accountancy to textiles, engineering to veterinary nursing, business administration to construction. They are available at four levels:

- Intermediate: equivalent to five A* – C GCSEs
- Advanced: equivalent to two A-levels
- Higher: equivalent to Level 4 and above qualifications (Foundation degree and above)
- Degree: equivalent to Level 6 and 7 (Bachelor's or Master's degree)

Getting an apprenticeship

Apprenticeships are very popular and sometimes employers, colleges or training providers ask for qualifications including GCSEs. However, they must give equal access for disabled people and offer you the chance to show you are ready for an apprenticeship through things other than qualifications. This is called a "portfolio of evidence" and may include work experience or volunteering

that you have done, as well as non-accredited courses and life experiences.

Quote from a young person who told us about how he came to choose the apprenticeship route.

"There were a good few months where I didn't fully know what I wanted to do. College was all well and done, but I don't think I was getting all that I could out of it. I am definitely sure that I made the right decision to get my apprenticeship. I just think university, I don't think, was too right for me. Maybe one day I will go."



Support on apprenticeships

The government recognises that disabled people are under-represented in apprenticeships. The National Apprenticeship Service provides funding for training costs and apprenticeship grants for employers which can be used to encourage large employers to take on blind and partially sighted young people.

The training provider or college should give you support with the training-related aspects of your apprenticeship. At college this should be paid for through Learning Support and Exceptional Learning Support for eligible apprentices of all ages. You maybe able to receive support from the Access to Work programme to help you when you are on the job.

See the section “Moving into work” for more information on Access to Work. If you are interested in doing an apprenticeship you should speak to a careers adviser as well as discuss it at your “preparing for adulthood transition” review.

For more information on apprenticeships, visit:

- the government education and learning pages at [gov.uk/apprenticeships-guide](https://www.gov.uk/apprenticeships-guide)
- the Disability Rights UK website at disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2014/april/our-new-apprenticeships-guide
- the RNIB website at rnib.org.uk/young-people-starting-work/apprenticeships.



Supported internships

Some colleges offer a supported internship programme for young people who have an EHCP. Supported internships are structured study programmes, based at an employer and tailored to your individual needs. They are designed to give you the skills needed for the workplace and include on-the-job training, English and Maths lessons and relevant vocational qualifications. As well as support to make sure you can get to work safely, you should have a job coach to help you learn the job, liaise with your work colleagues and make sure the support you need from Access to Work, the employer and college are all in place. Afterwards, some students progress to other skills courses and many people move into employment, either with their work placement employer or another.

Traineeships

Some colleges and training providers offer traineeships – programmes for young people who need extra support for their learning and/or social skills. A traineeship can prepare you for a full apprenticeship and is a good idea if you need to build up your skills or experience. Some colleges offer traineeships of up to six months for young people who need some extra support before moving into work.

If you are between the ages of 16 and 24, you can apply for a traineeship whether or not you have an EHCP or LDA. Again, the course is based at an employer and it includes Maths and English lessons and off-the-job training. More information may be found at: [gov.uk/find-traineeship](https://www.gov.uk/find-traineeship)

After college, “Andrea” decided to go into a training course to help prepare her for the workplace. The course covered topics such as writing a CV, applying for jobs, interview skills and also included a work experience placement. She found the experience very beneficial and afterwards secured an apprenticeship.

“It’s normally 24 weeks, but it depends on the person, how they progress. It has a work placement as well... if the employer is impressed by them, then they might take them on.”

The college should arrange your support at college and ensure your Access to Work is in place for the work placement. The aim of a traineeship is to help you move into an apprenticeship or other work.

Section 5

Work experience and volunteering

Work experience and volunteering are both great ways to find out about the different types of work you might be interested in doing. They also give you something to put on your CV to demonstrate that you have interests and have been reliable and hard working in your placements.

Work experience

Work experience is a crucial part of moving on and allows you to have hands-on experience of what it's like to work in different environments. It isn't just something you do towards the end of your time at school; it's something that you should look to do again when you are in college or university or potentially when looking for employment. Work experience is a great way of showing motivation and initiative on your CV and will help you decide if you would like to go into a particular area of work. It may form part of a course you do at university and can sometimes even lead to the offer of a job. It's really important to see work experience as something that you do not only in school, but after you leave as well.

Your school may have a work experience co-ordinator to support you in finding potential placements for work experience. It's important that you make use of available support. Arranging the placement will be your responsibility, but you may want to ask your parents/carers to help you.

If you are seeking employment and are connected to a centre, this is

something you may want to discuss further with your advisor.

Quote from a young person talking about his work experience placement:

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

Volunteering

Volunteering can add a great deal to your life and the lives of others. It offers you the chance to become involved with something you really care about as well as an opportunity to meet new and like-minded people. It also enables you to try out something new and can be useful in terms of determining whether you'd like a career in a certain area. Skills and experience gained from volunteering are another way to show potential employers what you can offer and can sometimes lead to the offer of a job.

Government advice on volunteering can be found at [gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/volunteer](https://www.gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/volunteer)

NVCO provide a lot of advice and guidance on voluntary work. You can find out more by visiting their website at [ncvo.org.uk](https://www.ncvo.org.uk) which includes links to local volunteer centres.

There are lots of volunteering opportunities, including many with RNIB. To find out more, please phone **0845 603 0575**, email volunteering@rnib.org.uk or visit [rnib.org.uk/volunteering](https://www.rnib.org.uk/volunteering)

Assistive technology

If you are likely to need assistive technology to be able to undertake work experience or voluntary work, it is important to consider in advance the type of equipment you might need, and how you might access this, and learn to use it efficiently and effectively. While specialist equipment for the workplace can be funded by the government Access to Work scheme, this does not apply to work experience or voluntary positions, and therefore you will need to consider alternative ways of accessing technology.

One solution could be to use your own technology, for example by using your own laptop and any assistive technology you usually use. You could also consider using in-built accessibility options, such as the magnification tools which are built into the operating systems of Mac and Windows computers. If you need to use a screen

reader, you could consider using NVDA, which is a free screen reader. You can find more information about this at [nvaccess.org](https://www.nvaccess.org).

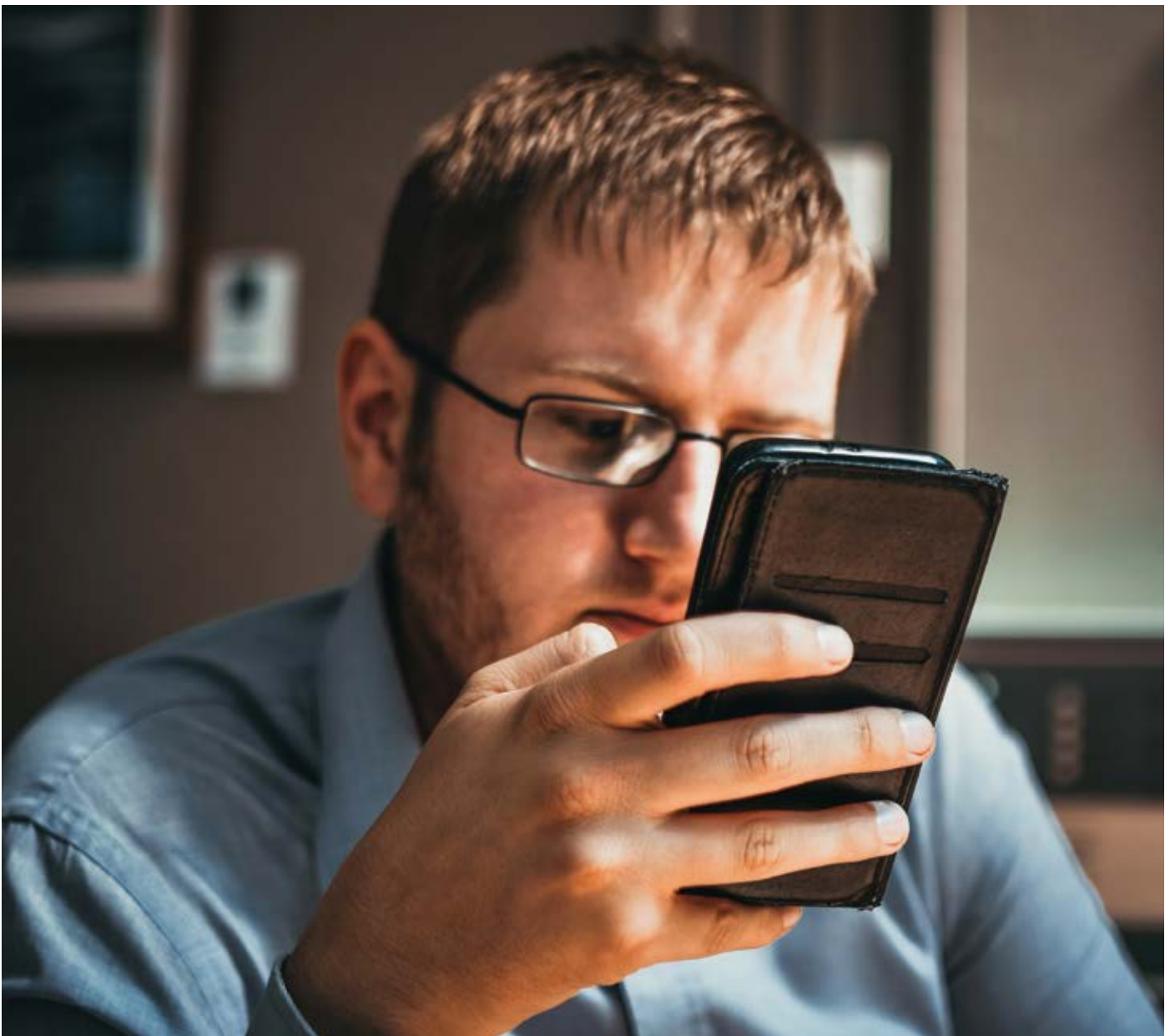
Finding volunteering and work experience opportunities

There are several ways in which you could identify volunteering and work experience opportunities. Some organisations offer unpaid internships which you may need to apply for as part of a competitive process. This is particularly true for competitive industries like media who often advertise positions online. Another option to consider is approaching organisations directly to ask whether they have any opportunities available by sending them a copy of your CV and a covering letter and explaining why you would like to work at their organisation. Finally consider using your existing networks such as family members or friends to find a suitable placement. The best approach will likely depend on the type of organisation you are seeking to work with, so you may need to conduct some research first or get advice from others.

Quote from one young person who talked about the benefits of volunteering.

"I chose to search for voluntary work upon graduating from university a couple of years ago. I did this as I felt it would boost my CV, teach me to be more independent and provide some much needed work experience whilst looking for employment".

"There were services available to help me find voluntary positions which I was advised on at my jobcentre; however I found searching for myself to be more beneficial. Choosing locations I felt comfortable travelling to, I went into places that took volunteers and inquired after work. This worked well for me because I could get a general idea for the place and see if it was suitable for me and it made people who I could be working with aware of my abilities, despite my vision impairment".



Gap years

You may wish to take an extended period of time away from education or before pursuing your chosen career. Many young people take “gap years” during which they may, for example, travel and work abroad, or save up to earn money before going to university. Taking a gap year can be a helpful time, particularly if you are unsure about you want to do next.

Several of the young people in the research study took gap years to do extended periods of voluntary work, including working abroad and had very positive experiences. The following quote demonstrates this:

“...had a fantastic, fantastic gap year. I had three jobs at the end of it practically. Non-paid, all voluntary and all music related and enjoyable, and it was the best decision I ever made.”

If you're interested in taking a gap year you may find independentgapadvice.org helpful. The website provides general advice for taking a gap year, as well as providing specific advice and case studies of gap years for people with disabilities.

You may wish to speak to a RNIB employment adviser to get more specific advice of the type of opportunities that you are considering – for more information see rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living/work-and-employment

“When I was called into the places I would be volunteering at, I was first given brief inductions. These were the best times to disclose what requirements would need to be met in order for me to work in the locations. We discussed the layout of the workplace, what tasks might be required of me and health and safety. We couldn't be sure initially of all the requirements that needed to be met, as voluntary positions can incorporate different types of work in the same place, so we agreed that I'd usually have a person (either a member of staff, or a more experienced volunteer) available for me to talk to should I require more assistance. If I did find that reasonable adjustments were not being made, I'd use quieter times to discuss the issue with a member of staff to see if we could figure out any more adjustments that could be made. I have gained many benefits from my voluntary work. My confidence has been greatly improved and I feel more secure in my abilities in a working environment. My communication skills (especially in discussing my needs) have greatly improved which I can use in employment. Most importantly for me, I am more independent. I used to be quite anxious about the issues my vision impairment would cause whereas now I am more aware of when and what issues may occur and how to best resolve them.”

Section 6

Moving on to university

Once you have finished sixth form or college you may be considering applying to university. This is a really exciting time and may even involve moving away from home and living alone for the first time. Again, it's really important to plan well in advance so start thinking about this as soon as you can. It's important to think ahead to make sure that you choose the right course at the right university and, most importantly, that everything is in place and ready for your first day. This means you can start your course without having to worry about any issues to do with your equipment and support needs and concentrate on making friends and settling in.

Quote from one young person who talks about their experience at University:

"It's really fun, honestly. I have joined the ice skating society, I have friends I go out and stuff, that side of uni is fine, that's pretty perfect."

At university, the responsibility is on you to make sure that you are receiving the help you need. However, all universities have a disability or learning support team. This team can help with any issues and it's a good idea to meet with them before or when you begin your course. They will be able to talk about the support available and can help you with applying for Disabled Students Allowance. It is important to be aware that disability or learning support teams will be looking for you to take more responsibility for your

support needs than you may have taken in school or college, as illustrated in the following quote from one university staff member:

"I think you have got to be aware that they are now 18, and they are coming to university, they are independent adults, we are going to treat them as an adult, and that works both ways, in that they have to let us know if things aren't right. And we will try and, you know, we will talk to them about that, try and change things if things are wrong, or work things out."

But remember that university is about more than your course – the social aspects are very important too. Try to get involved at Freshers' Week and think about joining clubs and societies where you can meet people and make friends. Again, if there are any problems, just get in touch with the disability or learning support team at your university.

Quote from one young person talks about societies available at the University:

"Social-wise I have joined a few new clubs and societies and I have got a buddy, they have set up a new scheme, like a peer mentoring system, so I have got a buddy to come with me to one of the societies, because it's like a volunteering society, so I have got a buddy coming there to support me when I am volunteering."

Choosing a university

It is important that you choose a university that has the course you really want to do and that has support services in place to help you to succeed in it. It may help to:

- Discuss course options with your careers adviser, subject tutors, support staff and parent/carer.
- Look at the UCAS website (ucas.ac.uk) for information on courses, institutions and entry requirements.
- Look at the university's website.
- Contact the disability adviser at the university to find out what support they can offer.
- Arrange a visit. There will be open days advertised on the website although you may want to contact the disability support service directly as you might be able to go and meet them at the same time. This is useful as you can meet the staff in advance and ask questions about the types of support you'll be able to access.

Quote from one young person who explains what he considered before going to university:

"They had a good disability department, one of the best that I have seen, from my experience so far it's been absolutely brilliant... they really do seem to know what they are doing, so that's good. And I had a friend who is also vision impaired who came up here and had a really positive time with the disability department and the course. Also I like the course structure that you have to pick three courses in your first two years, I think that's quite good, because it means that you can chop and change and switch."



Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

The DSA provides funding that can be put towards the extra course costs you may face as a direct result of your vision impairment and/or other disabilities. It enables you to study and have access to course materials on an equal basis to other students. As part of the process you will be assessed for the type of extra support that you need and the funding will be allocated to cover it.

What type of things can my DSA pay for?

Up-to-date information about the DSA, how much funding is available to you and what you can use it for can be found at gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas

disabled-students-allowances-dsas

In 2016-17 your DSA could pay for:

- specialist equipment – for example a computer, a screen reader, magnification software, braille notetaker
- non-medical help – for example readers or other non-medical assistants you need to benefit fully from your course
- extra travel because of your disability
- other disability-related costs of studying – things like enlarged examination papers and course materials.

Quote from one young person discovered during the DSA process that there was a lot of new technology he hadn't heard of:

"There's a lot of things that I wasn't aware of at the time. I was very surprised with what they can actually provide, and the detail they actually go into, I had no idea there was software programme that can read out stuff to you, if you highlighted things. I was very surprised with what was there really."

How do I apply for a DSA?

You will need to visit gov.uk/student-finance-forms to download and fill in a form to apply for a DSA. If you want to apply for student finance, you should do that before applying for a DSA. You will need to supply evidence of your disability with your application and this could be a letter from your doctor or VI specialist. Student Finance England will be able to advise you on the evidence you need to submit. You should apply as soon as possible and not wait until you've been accepted on a course.

The DSA assessment

If you qualify for a DSA, you'll be asked to attend an "assessment centre" to work out what support and equipment you might need. The assessor should have received information about the support you have received at school or college and will take into account:

- the prognosis of your sight condition
- the demands of the course over the coming years.

You can choose your own DSA assessment centre. You may decide to choose a centre which is close to where you live, or your university may recommend a centre which they are used to working with. RNIB also operate DSA Assessment Centres in Surrey and London:

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/disabled-students-allowances-assessments>

Some students find it beneficial to meet an assessor with specialist knowledge of vision impairment, while others prefer to use assessors recommended by their institution.

It is really important to consider in advance of your assessment the type of support that you may need once at university. There is more guidance about this on our Starting University pages.

On reflecting on their DSA assessment, one young person said:

"I think it was really, really good. It was literally asking questions about everything, and I found that everything was tailored to what I needed, there wasn't anything that I am not really happy about, because everything I needed was taken into account and it really, really helped."

To find out more about DSA visit: **[gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas](https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas)**.

For more guidance on moving on to university, check out our step-by-step guide. This will take you through the steps of choosing and applying for a course, arranging your support and making the transition to university **[rnib.org.uk/startinguniversity](https://www.rnib.org.uk/startinguniversity)**



Section 7

Moving on to work

If you are thinking of starting work, visit the RNIB young people's pages at [rnib.org.uk/startingwork](https://www.rnib.org.uk/startingwork)

From choosing a career and interview tips to writing a CV and deciding how you'll approach discussing your sight condition with potential employers, there is lots of useful information for you. You can also read about other young people's experiences of starting work.

Careers advice

Schools in England have a duty to provide independent and impartial careers advice for 13-18 year olds and there is statutory guidance that schools should provide targeted support for all young people with a learning difficulty and/or disability.

Quote about a young person's experience having an advisor:

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

Your local authority may continue to support you up to the age of 25 if you have an EHCP and are in (or preparing to enter) education. Alternatively you can use the National Careers Service and if you're aged 13 to 19 you can call for advice or email through their website:
nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk

Adults aged 20 and over can also get face-to-face guidance by calling **0800 100 900**

When you are ready to look for work, these pages from RNIB and the DWP may be helpful:

- [rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living-work-and-employment/looking-work](https://www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living-work-and-employment/looking-work)
- [gov.uk/government/publications/help-and-support-for-young-disabled-people-to-find-and-stay-in-work](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/help-and-support-for-young-disabled-people-to-find-and-stay-in-work)

Jobcentre

Your local jobcentre will be able to help you look for work in your area. They advertise job opportunities online and also in the jobcentre itself.

To find out more about the support available for disabled people searching for employment, visit [gov.uk/looking-for-work-if-disabled](https://www.gov.uk/looking-for-work-if-disabled) and [gov.uk/recruitment-disabled-people/encouraging-applications](https://www.gov.uk/recruitment-disabled-people/encouraging-applications)

Things to tell your potential employer

Talking positively about your sight condition

When you are applying for jobs you need to think about if and when you plan to tell your employer about your sight condition. There aren't any rules about this and you don't have to tell an employer if you don't want to. It is up to you to decide at what point in applying for a job you choose to discuss it.

One young person described why it's important to be prepared in advance for disclosing your vision impairment:

"I am confident to talk about it, and I know how to talk about it in a way that advocates, not like 'I need help 24-7, help me!' I know how to explain what I need, but not come across in a bad way."

There are lots of benefits to talking to your employer about your sight condition. It means that you have the opportunity to approach the issue in a positive way and allows you to reassure the employer that your sight condition does not mean that you are unable to do the job properly by talking about the adjustments you will make. If you do decide that you want to talk about your sight condition to a potential employer, you can design your own disclosure strategy. This means you

plan exactly how and when you want to discuss this and you should think about this before going to job interviews.

There are many more reasons why talking to your employer about your sight condition may be a good idea. It is only when you disclose your disability that you have rights under the Equality Act 2010 and that you become entitled to reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

A quote from one young student explains:

"...the people at my work are really, really good. They are really supportive of all disabilities, and for me with my vision impairment they have been really, really good with that. So even just little things like when I got here they adjusted my computer screen straight away, stuff like the brightness level and the contrast. They are always checking in to make sure."



The Access to Work scheme

When you are looking for work it's really important that you know about the Access to Work scheme. It's a government programme that can pay for things such as:

- taxis to and from work – really useful where transport links are poor
- screen reader or magnification software for your work computer
- a support worker to help read and deal with paperwork
- a driver where public transport is not available for travel to, from and for work
- other equipment such as special lighting and magnifiers.

One young person applied to Access to Work for taxi fares for darker evenings when he found it more difficult to get home independently. Below is a quote talking about their experience

"I live about a mile from work, so I am happy to walk a mile that's not a problem, but I am hoping to get money for a taxi now and again. When it rains I either get a bus or a taxi home which is only £4 but you know, in the winter... luckily we had quite a good winter to be fair, I was thinking for the future if I was getting say four taxis a week depending on the situation."

The support that you'll get will depend on the job you are doing and your needs. You'll be assessed by an Access to Work assessor who will discuss the support you are likely to need and look at the requirements of your job. But be prepared for the Access to Work process to only begin near or maybe even after your start date.

Young people can also receive Access to Work funding when participating in work experience placements such as supported internships, traineeships and apprenticeships.

Employers often worry about the potential costs of employing a person with a sight condition because they think the equipment and support needed may be expensive. Many employers don't know about the Access to Work scheme, so it's a good idea to find out as much as you can about it.

For more information about the Access to Work Scheme visit [gov.uk/access-to-work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)

Section 8

Preparing for independence

Imagine you have just got your place at college or university – or that new job that you really wanted. You may be about to live alone for the first time in your life. Preparing for this ahead of time – learning how to cook basic meals, handle the laundry and shop independently – is really important, especially if you have relied on others to do these for you in the past.

Adjusting the way you work

Part of the role of specialist services, and education in general, is to prepare you to become an independent adult. This is also true for other students as the education system is structured to allow young people to become more independent over time.

It is important as you get older to be prepared to adapt the way in which you work to allow you to become more independent and to be able to adjust to the different settings you move into. For example, in your early years in school your teachers may provide you with materials which are in your preferred reading format. However over time they may instead focus their attention on teaching you ways in which to adapt learning material yourself, for example, by using assistive technology.

Quote from one young person described how during her time in college she experimented with different forms of technology to understand what would work best for her:

“I developed an understanding of what technology works best for me. I am using different technology to what I used when I transitioned from [secondary school], and that’s good, not because the technology that I used when I transitioned was bad, but I kind of... I have got it down to a fine art of what I need to use when, and what software works best and what kind of PC I want, you know I am investing in new technology just to experiment with myself and see if that can help me.”



It is also important to be prepared to take responsibility for your own support needs and to challenge the relevant authorities when reasonable adjustments are not being met. This may be daunting at first, which is why it can be beneficial to start doing this when in a familiar environment like school.

Using low vision aids

For some young people with vision impairment, magnifiers and other low vision aids can boost your independence by enabling you to read print you wouldn't be able to read otherwise. They can be really useful for:

- reading ingredients, sell by dates and cooking instructions
- reading information on medicine bottles looking at the dials on the microwave, cooker and washing machine

Before you make a transition you should look into having an assessment with an optometrist to talk through your lifestyle changes. Low vision aids may be useful, for example, for reading course materials at university. Let's say, for example, that your lecture notes haven't been enlarged in time. A low vision aid could enable you to follow the session along with the other students. In fact, students often prefer to use technology such as computers and low vision aids compared to large print materials as it means they can be more independent.

Quotes from one young student explains their experience of visual aids:

"At primary school I found it a bit embarrassing because I wasn't the same as everyone else, and I had to use the big magnifiers to see everything, it was a bit embarrassing then, but as I got older, I just got used to it, I know I need them. At school I would try not to use them, I was struggling then, and I'd make myself struggle just so I didn't have to use the magnifying glass or whatever I needed to use, but now I just don't bother struggling, I know that I need it, I am just hurting myself if I don't use them. It's better for me if I do use them, use the magnifying glasses and things, whatever I need, I use it."

Low vision services

Low vision services can help you make the most of your remaining sight. Specialist low vision practitioners can assess your vision and provide support, advice and practical solutions for you. It is important to have a thorough low vision assessment before buying any magnifiers. A good low vision service will have a wide range of equipment including handheld magnifiers in a variety of shapes and handles (including those with in-built illumination) and stand magnifiers. They can also establish which low vision aids would be most useful for you. These may include other aids, such as large buttoned telephones, talking watches, and liquid level indicators to help increase your independence in your home.

Finding your local low vision service

Low vision service provision across the UK is very variable and may be based in a local hospital, located in opticians' practices or offered from a resource centre run by the local society for people with sight loss. To find out more about low vision services in your area, contact a local hospital eye department or speak to your GP, social services (the vision, sensory impairment team) or local society for people with sight loss. If you no longer see an eye specialist it may be useful to visit your local optometrist who can carry out an eye health check as well as help signpost you to local services.

For further information on low vision, download our guide "**Starting Out: Making the Most of Your Sight**" at rnib.org.uk/recently-diagnosed/take-action-and-next-steps

Using assistive technology

Assistive technology such as magnification software and screen readers may prove more important to you once in new settings. For example, many of the young people who participated in the research study found that once they got to university there was a lot more reading required than they were previously used to. They found that while they had not benefited from assistive technology in the past, once at university, they found it helpful in reducing fatigue. So, learning to use assistive technology efficiently and effectively is very important.

Quote from a young person talking about the importance of technology:

"It's definitely very important, because nowadays everyone uses... even now you are using a computer. You know everyone emails, reports, everything is more technology now."



You may not know much about the wide range of technology that's on the market and, with technology advancing constantly, it can be hard to keep up. It might be a good idea to contact someone who can come and visit you to show you the latest products on the market. This is something which could be arranged by your DSA or Access to Work assessor. You may want to check out the services offered by RNIB, Ability Net (abilitynet.org.uk) and Blind in Business (blindinbusiness.co.uk), which offer advice to vision impaired students moving into education or work including assessments, equipment supply, ICT training and employment services. You may also wish to visit an

event like Sight Village where you will have the opportunity to explore the latest technology (www.qac.ac.uk/exhibitions.htm).

Quote from a young person who visited Sight Village:

"I was very lucky, I went to Sight Village about two weeks before my DSA assessment, so obviously I was walking around, and they had all the equipment, and I was like 'ahh, that looks like it could be useful!'"

RNIB has information on the latest technology at rnib.org.uk/technology



Using braille

Many of the young people interviewed as part of the research study found that they had moved away from the use of braille towards the end of their time in school. However once in new settings such as college and university they found that braille was extremely beneficial for certain tasks. Areas particularly highlighted included when revising for exams, when delivering presentations and when following notes during lectures.

Quote from one young person who reads Braille:

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

Many young people enjoy using electronic refreshable braille devices, which allow the user to read electronic material in braille (and in the case of some devices, also take notes). You can find out more about these devices at rnib.org.uk/technology

Speaking out

During your time in school you will probably have had people advocating on your behalf. For example, this may have included specialist teachers advising your school on how best to support you in lessons or your parents/carers intervening if something was not going well. Once in settings like university and employment the

expectation will be on you to advocate for yourself. For example, you may need to explain the adjustments you need, you may need to explain how your vision impairment affects you, or you may need to challenge others when reasonable adjustments are not met.

The young people we spoke to in our study identified several ways in which they felt better prepared to do this. These included:

- having had opportunities to self-advocate when younger (for example explaining what they needed in school or college)
- having a good understanding of their vision impairment and how it affects them
- having a good knowledge and understanding of available specialist equipment and support.

A young person in our study said:

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

Getting around on your own

Often young people with a vision impairment are taught and learn to confidently get around independently in an area which is familiar to them. This is a very important skill which should be developed as much as possible at school. Even with these skills, young people find that it is more challenging getting around independently once they move into a new area.

If you are going into Further Education or Higher Education it may be advisable for you to request mobility support to help you familiarise yourself with your new setting. If you are moving to an entirely new area you may also wish to ask for mobility support from the local authority to help you get around independently in your new home. If you do request support, do this as far in advance as possible. If you are going to be using the train you may benefit from using the free rail assistance service.

Quote from one young person who talks about gaining confidence as a result of using apps on her phone:

"One of the most stressful things for me when I was younger was public transport and getting around and being able to see the timetables and all that kind of stuff. Whereas these days it's so much easier. I live in Manchester which is a big city but since I had a smartphone which could do maps and stuff which was in the first year, everything just completely changed."

Further guidance on travel and mobility, including details of the free rail assistance service and mobile apps, is available at: [rnib.org.uk/cy/information-everyday-living/getting-around](https://www.rnib.org.uk/cy/information-everyday-living/getting-around)

Living independently

As you move into new settings such as higher education and employment, you may also start living on your own for the first time.

The Thomas Pocklington Trust have published a guide on specific advice for people with a vision impairment who are looking for a home: [pocklington-trust.org.uk/guide-finding-home-visually-impaired-people1](https://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/guide-finding-home-visually-impaired-people1)

This advice is helpfully tailored for specific personal circumstances.

RNIB have advice designed for young people with a vision impairment who are preparing to live on their own for the first time: [rnib.org.uk/young-people/leaving-home](https://www.rnib.org.uk/young-people/leaving-home)

Section 9

Know your rights

There are two laws that protect you at school and as you move into your adult life. The Children and Families Act (2014) outlines how local authorities must explain what is available for children and young people and support your choices. The Equality Act (2010) protects you against discrimination by providing legal rights in the following areas:

- employment
- education
- access to goods, services and facilities
- buying and renting land or property.

The Children and Families Act (2014)

Under this law, your local authority must comply with guidance that is given in the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice.

The SEND Code of Practice

The SEND Code of Practice describes what local authorities, schools and colleges, health and social care services must do to support children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities from birth up to age 25.

The Local Offer

Your local authority (local council) has, by law, to publish on its website a Local Offer that gives details of the full range of support services available to children and young people with disabilities in the local area. It should help you to understand the choices available once you have left school so you can decide what would be best for your future. This includes your options for education, training and employment, independent living, and how your family, friends and community can be involved. Local Authorities vary in terms of the support that they provide, and therefore it is important to check your Local Offer page to ascertain the support that is provided in your area.

The Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

From September 2016 everyone with a statement of special educational needs should have been transferred onto an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). If you are applying for an assessment of your special educational needs now, you will automatically be assessed for an EHCP.

To find out more about Education, Health and Care Plans, visit: rnib.org.uk/young-people-school-life-and-planning-ahead-making-transition-school/school-transition-plan-england

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act (2010) makes it illegal to discriminate against disabled people. This includes education providers (schools, colleges and universities) and employers which means it is against the law for them to discriminate against learners and employees because they have a disability. A disability is referred to in the Act as a “protected characteristic”. Your school, college, university or employer must ensure you are not disadvantaged because of your vision impairment.

Equality Act in education

Under the Equality Act, all education providers are required to ensure that disabled people’s access requirements are met. Schools, colleges and universities are required to provide publicity and all other materials in a range of accessible formats (large print, braille, etc) so you should ask for these in the format you prefer. They have an “anticipatory” duty under the law and they should be able to provide materials in an appropriate format without difficulty. The environment should also be accessible and you should be able to get around safely.

To find out more about the Equality Act 2010 in education, visit: [rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living-education-and-learning-adult-learning/your-rights-education](https://www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living-education-and-learning-adult-learning/your-rights-education)

Equality Act in employment

An employer must not discriminate at any point during their recruitment process. This includes how applications are dealt with, who is invited for interviews and how they make their

decision for offering someone a job. It can also be discrimination if an employer advertises a position in such a way as to exclude or discourage disabled people from applying and does not refer to a consideration of any reasonable adjustments.

The Equality Act says that employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to support their employees with disabilities to carry out their jobs. The reasonable adjustments required will depend on the individual’s needs and the type of job they do, for example, providing documents in alternative formats. A failure to make these reasonable adjustments could amount to discrimination.

To find out more about the Equality Act 2010 in employment, visit [rnib.org.uk/equalityact](https://www.rnib.org.uk/equalityact)

What to do if things go wrong

These guidance materials outline the type of support that should be available to you. However, research evidence demonstrates that this is not always the case. If you are not receiving the support that you require and this is having a negative effect on the transitions that you are making, it is important to challenge this. For further advice and guidance contact the RNIB helpline on **0303 123 9999** or helpline@rnib.org.uk

Section 10

Benefits and financial help

As you move through your journey from school and beyond, you may be entitled to different benefits and financial assistance because of your sight condition. The financial help you'll be able to get will depend on what you are doing and your circumstances at the time: for example, at university you'll have access to DSAs and at work you'll be entitled to funding through the Access to Work scheme.

You may also be entitled to benefits such as Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payments (PIP) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

Personal Independence Payments (PIP)

The government is replacing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for people aged between 16 and 64 with a new benefit called Personal Independence Payment (PIP). You can find out more about the introduction of PIP and how this is likely to affect you if you are blind or partially sighted at rnib.org.uk/managingyourmoney. If you are under 16, there are currently no plans to replace DLA for you.

Welfare benefits

Most full-time students can't claim welfare benefits. However, if you're registered blind or you get PIP, you may be able to apply for other benefits including housing benefit.

Housing benefit can be paid towards the cost of living in halls provided by your university or college, as well as if you live in private rented

accommodation. The amount you can claim depends on various factors, including the available income from student loans and maintenance grants (but not the Special Support Grant, as this doesn't count as income).

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a benefit for people on low incomes. It will gradually replace many other welfare benefits – including housing benefit, income support and jobseeker's allowance.

For advice on individual benefits, it's best to speak with a welfare rights specialist in the student money advice team at your university or college, or try your local Citizens Advice service.

You could also contact RNIB's Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or email helpline@rnib.org.uk for help to resolve any problems you have in getting the right support.

Another source of advice is Disability Rights UK (disabilityrightsuk.org), which can be contacted on **0800 328 5050**

Section 11

Useful contacts for more information and support

Blind in Business

Blind in Business is a charity working with blind and partially sighted young people to maximise educational and employment opportunities. It offers specialist workshops and training programmes and specific services to older pupils and graduates.

Tel: **020 7588 1885**

Website: **blindinbusiness.org.uk**

RNIB

RNIB's website at **rnib.org.uk** offers useful information for young people who are studying or looking for work. Use the website to get help with writing a CV, deciding how you'll approach discussing your sight loss with potential employers and to find out more about things like the Access to Work Scheme. You can read other young people's experiences of transition, along with the exciting "Mind's Eye" blog which offers the opportunity for you to become a blogger too! Visit our Young People's section at **rnib.org.uk/youngpeople** or email **cypf@rnib.org.uk**.

The RNIB Helpline is the direct line to the support, advice and products you need. We'll help you to find out what's available in your area and beyond, both from RNIB and other organisations. Whether you want to know more about an eye condition, buy a product from our shop, join our library, find out about possible benefit entitlements, be put in touch with a trained counsellor, or make a general enquiry, we're only a call away.

Tel: **0303 123 9999**

Email: **helpline@rnib.org.uk**

Guide Dogs

Guide dogs offer a Mobility and Independence Education Preparation and Support service for young people through critical transition stages such as school to further education and/or employment. Provision for those over 18 covers a wide spectrum of services in relation to orientation and mobility skills, independent living skills and communication skills.

Website: **guidedogs.org.uk**

Thomas Pocklington Trust

The Thomas Pocklington Trust advocates and provides support for people with vision impairment. They have a particular focus on supporting adults, and offer a range of advice on topics such as housing and registration.

Website: **pocklington-trust.org.uk**

Sense

Sense is a national charity which supports people who are deafblind, have sensory impairments or complex needs, to enjoy more independent lives.

Website: **sense.org.uk**

VICTA

VICTA support children and young people who are blind or partially sighted and their families across the UK. They run many residential opportunities, including supported overseas adventure holidays.

Website: **victa.org.uk**

Other sight loss charities

There are many locally based sight loss charities or charities which focus on particular conditions.

Disability Rights UK

Disability Rights UK offers a wide range of information and advice to ensure disabled students have specialist support in making decisions about their education, training and employment choices after leaving school. This includes online information for disabled students, families and professionals, factsheets for disabled students and advisers and a helpline/ email advice service. Call the students helpline on **0800 328 5050** or email **students@disabilityrightsuk.org**. Website: **disabilityrightsuk.org**

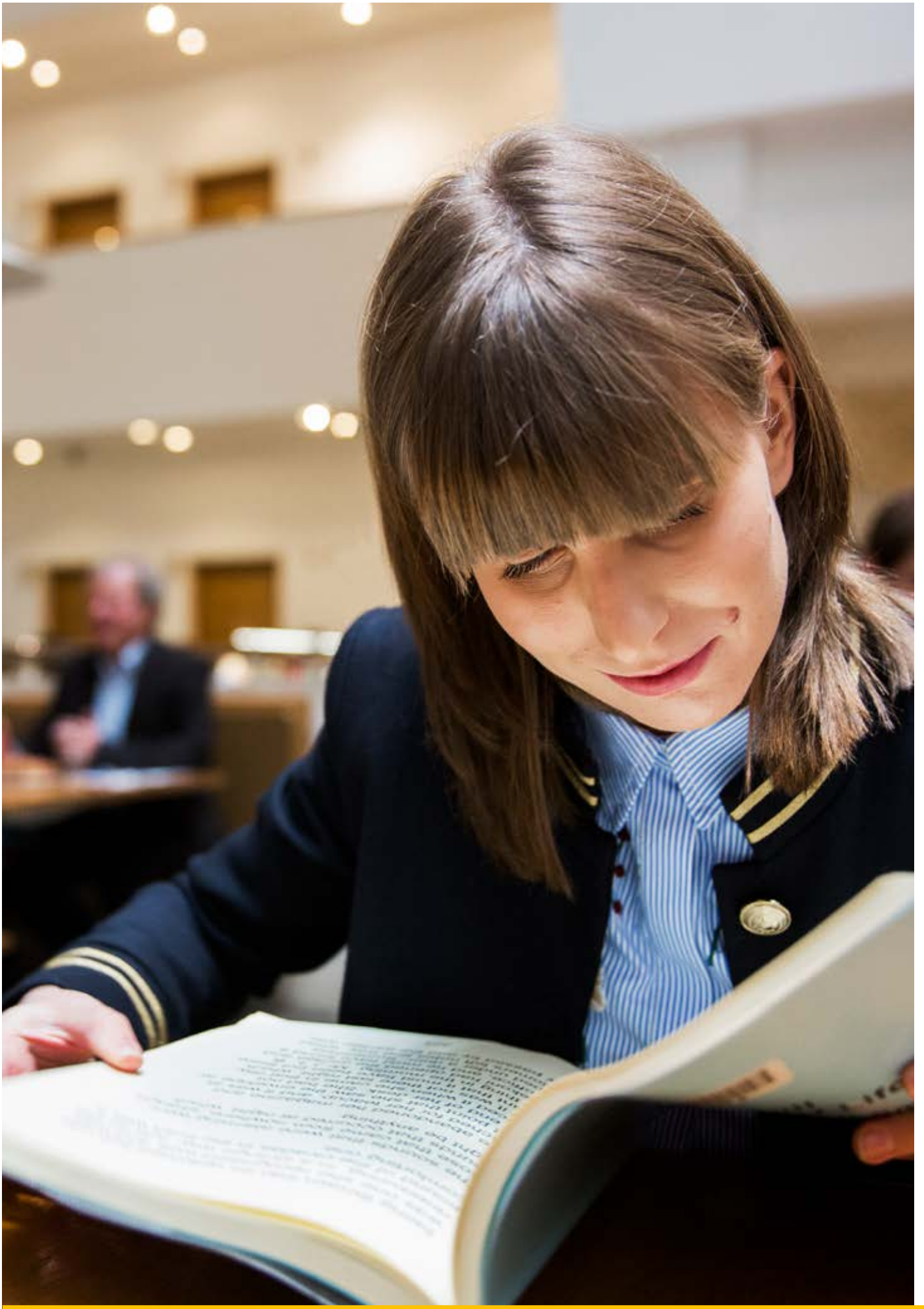
The Association of National Specialist Colleges

NATSPEC is a membership association for independent specialist colleges that provide further education or training for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In the Directory Pages of their website, you will find information about specialist colleges and how to apply to them.



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