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# Post-14 transitions support – a survey of the transition experience of visually impaired young people: Technical report of findings to summer 2011

## Introduction

This is the second report from a 5-year research study that is being carried out for RNIB by researchers from VICTAR (Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research at the University of Birmingham. The study is following two cohorts of blind and partially sighted young people in the UK from the ages of 14 and 16 through further and higher education and training and into employment.

The key objectives of the research are:

1. To track the process of transition from through various stages of education and training for blind and partially sighted young people from the age of 14 over a five year period
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.

This technical report focuses on data collected through questionnaires and telephone interviews with young people in summer and autumn 2010 and spring 2011. It will be followed by a series of focussed reports that aim to explore key themes, and to make greater use of the longitudinal nature of the data.

## Method

This is a 5-year, longitudinal survey of 2 cohorts of blind and partially sighted young people who were recruited into the project through 18 local authorities, 2 resource bases and 1 special school all located within the English West and East Midlands and Wales. The study began in 2009 and is following 31 young people from the age of 14 (Year 9) and 47 from the age of 16 (Year 11). Ten participants are braillists. One in five has an additional special educational need (SEN). The information has been collected through a self-completion questionnaire survey and telephone interviews.

## Key messages from the research

* **GCSE results and examination experiences**
* 61% of the Year 11 cohort achieved 5 grades A\*-C including Maths and English at GCSE in comparison with a national average of 53% of all students achieving these grades
* There were several types of access arrangements for examinations reported by the young people, including extra time, examinations papers in a preferred format, having a reader and/or a scribe and taking the examination in a different room
* The majority seemed happy with the examination arrangements they had experienced. There were, however, some problems reported, such as:
  + Confusion over how much extra exam time the person was allowed
  + Mistakes found in some modified papers
  + Papers enlarged by being photocopies to A3 size, which made them too large for the desk
* **Transition experience of Year 11 students**

Overall the Year 11 students were positive about their transition experience: only eight of the 47 young people thought that it could be improved, whilst three were unsure. Some suggestions for improving the transition experience were:

* + Better careers guidance from the school and Connexions
  + More information in advance about the course they had chosen
  + Better preparation to prepare them for the difference between courses of study at GCSE and A-level
  + More preparation time - one student had their funding decision a week before starting at residential college
* Factors that had helped to make the transition process a positive one included:
  + Having interviews at college where they could find out about the college and ask questions
  + External providers coming into school to explain what would happen next
  + Information about their access needs being passed onto the college, such as need for extra time, enlarged papers, writing in black pen on the whiteboard
  + Transitions days and ice breakers

##### Specialist support at school and college

On the whole the Year 11 students were positive about the support they had received after their transition to sixth form or college. The majority of those in college were enthusiastic about being able to request support when it was needed, enjoying the opportunity to be more independent and act as their own advocates. They benefited from having a central person (such as a Support Worker, Coordinator of Support or Department for Additional Support) within the college who they knew they could contact if they were experiencing any problems.

* **Work Experience placements**

In summer 2010, both cohorts were asked about any work experience placements that they had done. Only one Year 9 student reported having had a work experience placement, with most not scheduled to do a placement until Year 10 or Year 11. Of the Year 11 cohort, 2 in 5 had work experience in Year 10 and just fewer than 3 in 5 did so in Year 11. Only two students had not had a work experience placement by the end of Year 11.

The placements were very varied, and for many students the work experience they had related well to the type of career they were considering. 81% of respondents rated their placement as either ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’

* Examples of work experience placements included:
  + Backstage at a theatre
  + Engineering firm
  + Primary schools or nurseries
  + Law firm
  + Retail
* **Paid employment**

By spring 2011, four of the Year 9 cohort and seven of the Year 11 cohort said that they did some form of part time work. This is fewer than might be expected of young people of this age. Of those who didn’t have any part time work, 45 said that they would like to have a part-time job. Main reasons given for not having a part-time job were lack of time as they were focussing on their course of study or other commitments or there not being any jobs available. A small number of students - all of whom had more severe visual impairment - gave their sight difficulties as a reason for not having a part time job.

* Ten respondents from year 11 reported doing some sort of voluntary work. Examples of voluntary work included helping at a youth club for disabled children, dog sitting, helping at nurseries, helping at a classes/groups for younger children, helping an elderly friend in her home, and working in a charity shop.

### Summary

The transition from compulsory education is an important time for all young people as they move into the next phase of education or training as part of their transition to adult life. This is an especially important period for young people with visual impairment as the advice and guidance they are offered at this stage may be crucial for their eventual prospects for employment. Overall, the findings of the young people's experiences following transition from Years 9 and 11 are positive. Most of the young people feel they were well prepared as they made the transition and continue to be well supported in their current educational setting. Most did well at GCSE and as a group, achieved a better average than the general population. In terms of more specific preparations for employment it is encouraging that most students had experienced a work experience placement in Year 10 or 11, and most felt it had been very valuable. Less positive was the finding that the young people with visual impairment in our Year 11 cohort appeared less likely to have a part time job than their fully sighted peers. We will continue to follow the young people as they move towards the next transition stage into higher education, training or employment.

Downloads:

A page introducing the full report for download can be found at:

<http://www.rnib.org.uk/aboutus/Research/reports/education/Pages/transitions_experience_2011.aspx>

### About RNIB’s research

RNIB is a leading source of information on sight loss and the issues affecting blind and partially sighted people. Our Research and Knowledge Hub contains key information and statistics about blind and partially sighted people including our Sight Loss Data Tool, which provides information about sight loss at a local level throughout the UK. You’ll also find research reports on a range of topics including employment, education, technology, accessibility and more. Visit our Knowledge and Research Hub at: **rnib.org.uk/research**