|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| University of Birmingham logo | http://pocklington-trust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/logo3.jpg |

Reflections of Transition Experiences by Young People with Visual Impairments aged 19-22

Summary report of findings to April 2016

January 2017

Authors:

Rachel Hewett

Graeme Douglas

Sue Keil\*

Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR)

The Department of Disability Inclusion and Special Needs

School of Education

University of Birmingham

Birmingham, B15 2TT

\*Royal National Institute of Blind People

58-72 John Bright Street

Birmingham, B1 1BN

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many people who have supported this project.

We would like to thank the participants who have agreed to take part in this longitudinal study, and for continually giving up their time to complete questionnaires and take part in telephone interviews.

We are very grateful to the Thomas Pocklington Trust for funding this research and for their continued support of the study.

We would like to recognise the contribution given by the Visual Impairment Support Services, Resource Bases and Special School who assisted in the recruitment of the participants in this project, by identifying suitable young people to take part in the research and sending out recruitment packs to them.

We are also very thankful to Jean-Paul Anderson, Elizabeth Clery, Rory Cobb, John Dixon, Pat Dyson, Liz Ellis, John Harris, Emma Hughes, Lesley Inganni, Chris Muldoon, Ilfeoma Offiah, Felicity Poulton, Callum Russell, Philippa Simkiss, Rebecca Szekely, Tracie Tappenden, Lynn Watson, Andy White, Dan Williams and Sue Wright for their guidance through the project steering group.

Glossary

DSA Disabled Students’ Allowance

ESA Employment and support allowance

FE Further Education

HE Higher Education

ICT Information and communications technology

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

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

Introduction

This is the summary of findings from the first report of phase 3 of the Longitudinal Transitions Study (Hewett, Douglas and Keil, 2017).

The Longitudinal Transitions Study was designed in 2009 by a team from RNIB and the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR) at the University of Birmingham in response to the research brief prepared by RNIB.

The key objectives of the project were:

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

Phase 1 of the study involved the recruitment of an original sample of approximately 80 young people to the longitudinal study and carrying out several surveys of their views and circumstances. This took place between autumn 2009 – March 2012 and was funded by RNIB. This phase of research resulted in a number of reports (e.g. Hewett and Douglas, 2011a; Hewett and Douglas, 2011b, Hewett, Douglas, Ramli, and Keil, 2012). Phase 2 of the study was funded by the Nuffield Foundation, and centred on follow-up surveys and case studies of the sample of young people with visual impairment. Phase 3 commenced in November 2015 is being funded by Thomas Pocklington Trust.

This report focuses upon data collected between December 2015 and March 2016 when the young people were aged between 19 and 22 years old. The report is part of a series of technical reports which present all findings in the project since 2010.

Overview of data collected in Y1 of Phase 3 (November 2015-October 2016)

The first round of interviews with participants in Year 1 of Phase 3 of the project took place between December 2015 and March 2016. These interviews covered the following topics:

* What the participants were currently doing (including details of transitions made and planned)
* SEND reforms and Education Health and Care Plans
* Reflections on specialist support received during time in compulsory education and level of preparedness

It was possible to speak with 59 of the participants in the first round of interviews. Sixty-three participants remain involved in the project.

In summer 2016 the participants were surveyed again to establish what setting they were in and what their plans were for the next academic year. Their responses have been collated with the transition data collected in the winter 2015/16 interviews and are presented in a separate report.

As in previous analyses in this project, it is helpful to consider an analysis of the *resources* that are available to young people as they navigate their transition to adulthood: individually-based resources include academic attainment and important independence skills, while socially-based resources include support mechanisms, services, inclusive practice by services and employers, and also policies and legislation. How the balance between these different resources is experienced will inevitably vary from person to person. Importantly, the balance, and how an individual conceptualises this balance, will *change* with time and place. It is this change, and the tensions and challenges associated with this change during periods of transition which is exposed by the research.

Initial reflections

The participants gave mixed responses with regards to how prepared they felt for the transitions they made after leaving school. Several of the participants described themselves as feeling generally confident making the transition from school. Examples of positive experiences identified by the young people in assisting them in making these transitions include: support from services or family members; having the opportunity to board at residential school to practice independent living skills; and having a good understanding of the adjustments that they would require. In contrast several participants felt extremely unprepared for the transitions they were making and gave examples of ways in which they had left compulsory education without certain skills in place or without having felt supported to make choices for their future.

Some participants had felt prepared for transitions at that time, but now felt that they had not been realistic with these expectations. Examples of unanticipated challenges faced included: finding it harder to access support than expected and not being prepared for moving into a mainstream environment (from specialist schools and colleges).

Examples of positive support received whilst in education included:

* good support for accessing their course;
* encouragement to be independent;
* encouragement to participate in all school activities;
* positive guidance when preparing to transition into a new setting.

Examples of ways the young people felt support in education could have been improved included:

* more training to develop independent living skills;
* more opportunity to connect with the ‘sighted’ world for students in residential settings;
* more opportunities to learn to self-advocate;
* better support in lessons;
* better preparation for independent learning and development of independent study skills;
* better inclusive practice in schools;
* more practical support for making the transition into a new setting.

Examples of positive support the participants received from family members included:

* practical support (being accompanied to university open days);
* being encouraged to be as independent as possible;
* defending their rights as a disabled person.

Examples of ways in which the young people felt they had been restricted by family members included:

* being over-supported (which in turn had had a negative effect on them);
* their family not fully understanding the young person’s visual impairment and how it affects them;
* their family’s lack of confidence in their abilities.

Educational settings

During their time in secondary school, over half the participants had been exclusively in mainstream settings while a fifth were in specialist settings. A fifth of the participants moved between specialist and mainstream settings.

The participants who had been in mainstream school had mixed opinions with regards to how well included they been by their school. Almost two thirds felt like they had been included, whilst a third did not. Physical Education was particularly highlighted by several of the participants who illustrated how complex it was for them to be included in these lessons. The participants who did not feel included gave a range of explanations for this including:

* not feeling included by their peers;
* being sat at the front of the classroom;
* having to work with a teaching assistant;
* being told to use a laptop in lessons;
* not receiving the necessary adjustments in lessons.

Explanations for feeling included at school included:

* teachers addressing the participant’s needs in a subtle way;
* having positive relationships with teaching staff;
* teachers having the same expectations of them as of the average student.

Only 2 of 17 participants who had been in a specialist setting felt that the experience had equipped them for leaving school/college and going into a mainstream setting. The main challenges that the participants identified were in terms of studying independently, living independently and socialising with others, as they felt they had been living in a ‘bubble’. Positive factors identified of being in a specialist setting included:

* skills associated with preparation for living independently;
* learning to live independently;
* having the opportunity to be around people in the same situation.

Support to make transitions

Planning transitions with young people at key points in their education is important. It allows individuals and services to organise and prepare for the next phase (e.g. college or apprenticeship) – this might be targeted skills and qualifications for the young person, as well as ensuring appropriate support and equipment is in place. A formal process for young people with SENis the ‘Transition Review’ (and associated ‘Transition Plan’) which is an annual meeting at school which is held to talk about the young person’s future.

Over three-quarters of the participants recalled going through a ‘Transition Review’ process at school. However, just under half the participants judged this to have been a negative experience and less than a third viewed it positively. The participants gave various explanations for their views, including:

* 14 participants who did not view the process as sufficiently person-centred;
* 11 participants who viewed it simply as an extension of parents evening or their school report;
* 8 participants who felt only minimal time was invested into discussing their future;
* 4 participants who did not view the content of the meeting as relevant to them;
* 3 participants who felt that actions were not put into place following the meeting;
* 1 participant who felt that transition guidance was not available at the time when they most needed it (before moving into HE).

Just under two-thirds of the participants who went into FE recalled receiving some specific support for this transition. Examples given of such support included:

* taster sessions; being assigned a key worker;
* having specialist support to prepare for the transition (e.g. mobility support);
* being given new equipment.

A small number of the participants highlighted various challenges that they faced during this transition. These included:

* not knowing the full range of options available to them;
* not feeling confident about which course they wanted to do;
* not having the required support in place.

Careers advice and work experience

At the time when the participants were in compulsory education (pre-2014), school-facilitated work experience placements were a statutory requirement. While this is no longer the case, there are clear benefits of well organised work experience placements as well as broader careers advice which includes disability-specific content (e.g. relevant individual skills, government schemes such as ‘Access to Work’). This is part of a young person’s general educational entitlement but it is also linked to transition planning.

All but four of the participants had work experience placements whilst in school as part of the school curriculum. The four participants who did not receive work experience were all registered as severely sight impaired. Over half the participants viewed work experience to have been a positive experience, whilst just over a quarter viewed it negatively. Positive outcomes identified included:

* experience of being in a working environment;
* help in forming ideas of future careers;
* help in developing confidence and independence;
* a boost to their CV.

Negative responses towards work experience included:

* not being able to do much in the workplace/not learning very much during their placement;
* placements not being long enough to be of real benefit;
* insufficient support in arranging placements;
* accommodations not being met;
* not being facilitated/allowed to be as independent as they would have liked.

Only 6 of the participants recalled receiving guidance for disclosing their visual impairment to potential employers, and in one of these cases it was after they had already left compulsory education. Over three quarters of the participants who had not received guidance felt that it would have been beneficial if they had done. Ten participants in particular noted that they either had faced situations where they did not know how to approach disclosing their visual impairment, or anticipated that they would be unprepared in such situations.

Around a third of the participants recalled receiving some guidance to think about careers in relation to their visual impairment. All but three of these participants thought that the advice that they received was helpful. Of 29 participants who had not previously received such guidance, 21 thought that it would have been beneficial.

Only 5 participants specifically recalled receiving guidance on the support available in employment (such as the government scheme Access to Work) during their time in compulsory education, although in total 12 participants had at least some awareness of the type of support that was available. Nineteen participants felt that they would have benefited from more guidance of this nature, while 6 did not.

Accessing information

Being able to access information is a key barrier faced by visually impaired people. A dual approach is adopted in education (and beyond). Firstly, educational services are required to ensure that written material is prepared and available in an accessible format (e.g. available as braille, electronic format, and large print). Secondly, educational services are required to provide appropriate equipment and teaching to encourage efficient and independent access to information (e.g. access technology and teaching in the use of that technology). Skilful and efficient access to information is recognised as an important educational outcome for visually impaired young people.

The participants reported using a range of types of assistive technology to use a computer, including:

* Supernova (magnification and screen reader) (7);
* Jaws (screen reader) (5);
* Magnification/screen reader inbuilt into Windows/Apple operating system;
* Zoomtext (magnification) (4);
* unspecified magnification software (2);
* mouse with inbuilt magnification (2)
* CCTV (1).

A further 9 participants reported that they do not use any assistive technology and instead prefer to make basic adjustments to their computer, such as zooming in, changing the screen resolution and changing the font size. Nine participants stated that they had changed the assistive technology that they were using as it was no longer fit for purpose. This includes participants who were allocated a particular software package in school or university but later moved to different software as they felt it was restricting them in their education, and participants who were given magnification software which they found to become too pixelated to be of benefit.

Importantly, young people need to learn and be taught to use technology effectively. Just over half the participants stated that they had received training for using assistive technology when in school. Twelve of the participants who reflected back on the helpfulness of the training they received said it had been of benefit to them. Nine of the participants viewed assistive technology as ‘essential’ to enable them to work; two participants recognised that assistive technology will be helpful to them on a day to day basis in the workplace and three further participants anticipated that it would be helpful to them with some specific tasks. Twelve participants also identified touch typing as an extremely important skill they were taught during their time in school.

Less than half of the participants who had used Low Vision Aids (LVAs) when in school anticipated using them as they got older. However we do note that some of the young people in employment despite being initially reluctant to use LVAs have since identified situations where it was helpful to have a LVA. Therefore this could change in the future. Indeed, several of the participants who previously used LVAs are instead choosing to use mainstream technology instead, such as apps on their mobile phones.

All braille reading participants who were asked whether they anticipated braille having a role in their adult lives (and primarily in employment) agreed that it would, although to varying degrees. Six participants concluded that it would depend on the task that they were undertaking, such as when they needed to read information more deeply. Four participants also identified ways in which they would like to use braille more frequently in their everyday life.

Self-advocacy and social skills

While organisations such as universities, employers and general services such as shops are required to make adjustments to be inclusive, it is also recognised that visually impaired people benefit from being able to confidently explain the adjustments they need. This is why attention to teaching in this area is recognised as an important educational outcome.

Only one participant recalled receiving guidance for how best to explain their visual impairment to others, while 28 participants said they had not received such guidance. Twenty participants felt that they were prepared to explain their visual impairment to others, while 14 did not. Several of the participants identified situations where this had proved to be a challenge to them. Practice was identified as a means of overcoming this. A small number of the participants described a reluctance to disclose their visual impairment to others.

Twelve participants recalled receiving guidance to equip them for explaining the support that they may need when in a new setting, whilst 26 participants said that they had not. Twenty nine of the participants felt prepared for this (with varying degrees of confidence) and a further 10 did not. It is worth noting that some of those participants who said that they would be prepared for explaining their support needs had not been in a position where it was necessary for them to do so. Enablers for explaining support needs included: prior experience; having had experience; having been encouraged to explain support needs; having had discussions with family. Barriers included: not having sufficient personal understanding; the young person being self-conscious; a lack of specialist guidance; and a lack of previous opportunities.

Only one participant recalled receiving guidance on how to self-advocate in the event of things going wrong, whilst 34 participants said that they had not received any support of this nature. Nevertheless, 20 participants felt that they would be prepared for doing this, whilst 12 felt unprepared. Enablers for self-advocating when things go wrong identified by the young people included:

* an underlying confidence;
* being encouraged to self-advocate when younger;
* being equipped through life experiences;
* having common sense;
* being able to develop positive working relations with others;
* having had previous positive responses.

Mobility and orientation

Being able to efficiently and confidently move around the environment is recognised as an important educational outcome for visually impaired young people. This is why a key part of the additional support required at school-age is mobility and orientation training.

Thirty one of the participants reported having received mobility support around their local area when in school, whilst 12 reported that they did not. Of those who received such mobility support, 15 of the participants viewed this support as helpful and 11 as unhelpful. The ‘unhelpful’ experiences were often attributed to the way in which the training had been delivered.

Only 4 of 27 participants had received training which was specifically designed to help them learn to navigate new places. Nineteen participants felt prepared for getting about in new areas, whilst 20 felt unprepared.

Twenty participants reported having had mobility support to learn to use public transport independently, while 11 participants stated that they had not. Twenty one participants felt prepared for using public transport independently, and 17 did not. Barriers identified included: feeling anxious; infrequent mobility sessions and a lack of opportunity to practice.

Independent living

Developing independent living skills such as shopping, managing one’s home and cooking is recognised as an important educational outcome for visually impaired young people. This is why a key part of the additional support required at school-age is independence training.

Twelve participants reported receiving specialist training to help prepare them for cooking and preparing food, while 26 participants did not. Additionally, 4 of the participants stated that they did not receive this support when in compulsory education within mainstream settings, but did eventually when they moved into specialist settings. Twenty of the participants said that they felt prepared to cook and prepare food independently, whilst 12 said that they did not.

Fewer participants received specialist training for organising and cleaning their home environment (9) and shopping independently (9). Six participants said they did not feel prepared for organising and cleaning their home and nine did not feel prepared for shopping independently

A small number of participants who attended specialist schools felt they received insufficient training to develop independent living skills, while a further small group identified ways in which they had been restricted by family members in developing their independence.

Project outcomes and future plans

This publication is part of a series of reports from the Longitudinal Transitions Study, which is following the transition experiences of over 80 young people with visual impairments. The project commenced in autumn 2009, and we have working alongside the young people since 2010. Funding has been received in three phases:

* Phase 1: 2009-2011 - Royal National Institute of Blind People
* Phase 2: 2012-2015 - Nuffield Foundation
* Phase 3: 2015 onwards - Thomas Pocklington Trust

The study aims to track the experiences of the participants as they continue their transition towards the labour market. Over 60 of young people remain active participants in the project.

We continue to apply our research findings in more practical ways, such as by developing resources to help both young people with visual impairment navigating various transitions and those professionals supporting them.

References

Hewett R, Douglas D and Keil S (2017) **Reflections of transition experiences by young people with visual impairments aged 19-22:**

**Technical report of findings to April 2016**. (January 2017). VICTAR, University of Birmingham funded by Thomas Pocklington Trust.