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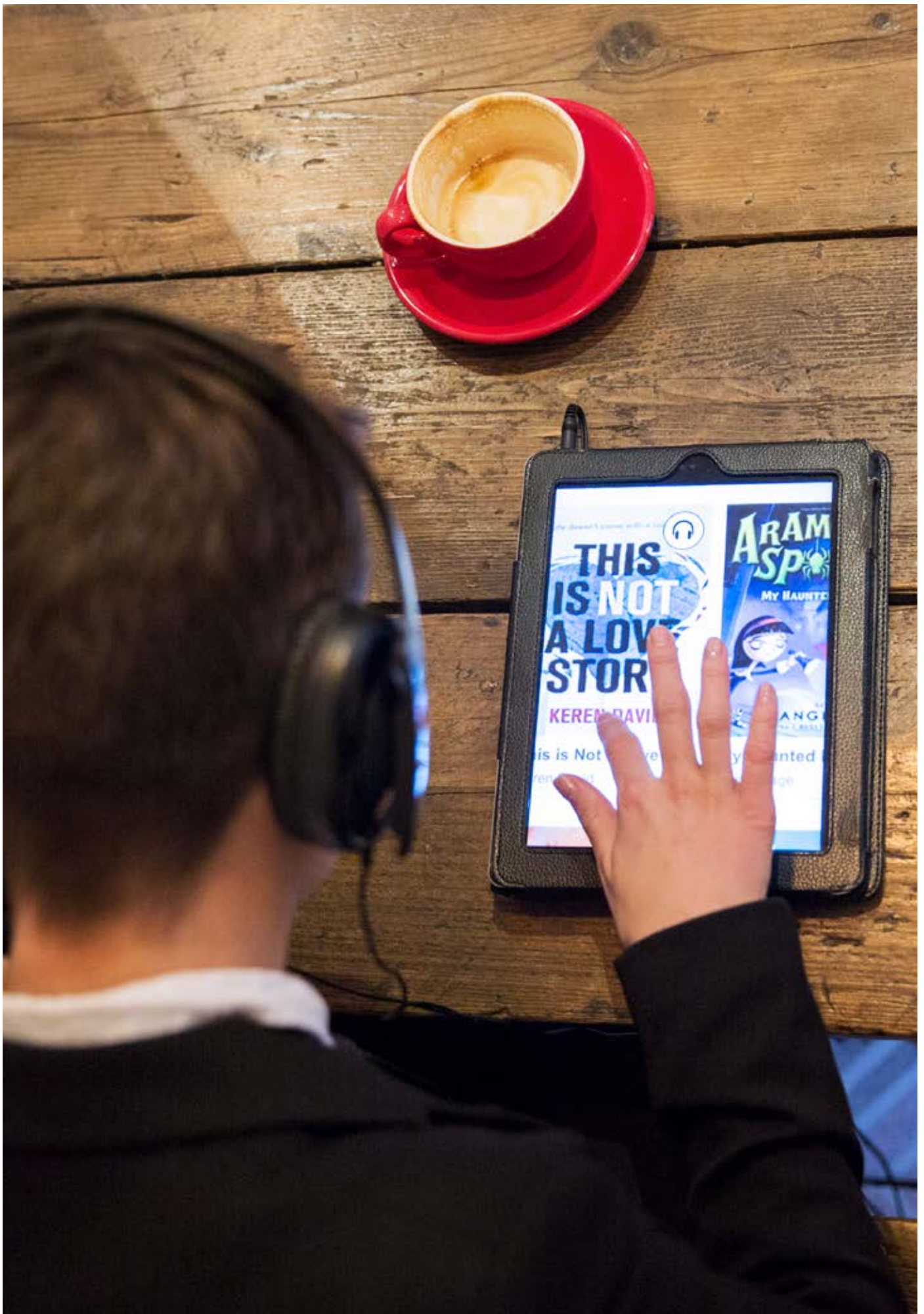
See differently

# Your Future, Your Choice: Bridging the Gap

Supporting your  
transition from school  
and into adulthood



**Cymru**



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## **Acknowledgements**

# Section 1

## Who is this guide for?

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 parent/carer 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 the experiences of young people with vision impairment in Wales and findings of a research study run by Vision Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research at University of Birmingham which has been following the experience of young people with a vision impairment as they've followed 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, or courses there
- moving to a residential specialist college for learners with vision impairment
- going into work or training.

There are lots of options but planning for your future will begin in Year 9. Advanced planning is important to ensure that everything is in place in time, especially if you are thinking about going away to residential college. Thinking about your options early means that you can arrange visits to possible schools and colleges, talk to others who have been there, and it will give you time to research appropriate courses.

#### Year 9

This is an important year as you prepare to choose your GCSE options and move into further education and adult life. Transition planning in Year 9 will involve all those people who play a significant role as you prepare to leave school, including Careers Wales. The Careers Wales careers adviser will work with you to produce a plan which will outline the things you intend to do and the support you will receive from Careers Wales and others. If you have a Statement of Special Educational

Needs, this will be shared with the school's Special Educational Needs or Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO or ALNCO) and discussed during your Transition Review.

#### During Year 9 you should:

- Consider your ideas for what you want to do when you are older.
- Meet with your careers adviser 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 your subject teachers about your strengths and which subjects you are best at and enjoy most.
- Talk to your Careers Wales careers adviser and your parent/carer about what you may want to do after completing Year 11. You might be considering sixth form, a local college, residential college, further training or going straight into work.
- Think about any difficulties you are having in school so that you can talk about these at the meeting.
- Think about what support you may need.

If you have a Statement of Special Educational Needs you should do these things before your Year 9 transitions meeting at school.

As well as Careers Advisers, teachers and Qualified Teachers of children and young people with a visual impairment (QTVIs), your parent/carer will also be invited to attend 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 someone beforehand, or you could write it down or even record yourself asking the questions.

“Martha” was assigned a key worker to help her prepare for Transition meetings. Here, is a quote where 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 I thought were important to me, and where I wanted to see myself in five years, things like that. 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.”

A report will be written after the meeting which summarises everything you talked about. You and your parent/ carer will be sent a copy and you can read through it to check that you are happy with it. If you think anything has been missed out, talk to a member of staff about it.

Remember, it’s your plan for your future so it’s important that it reflects your ideas and aspirations.

### **Year 10**

You may have another meeting with your careers adviser to continue discussions about your options and future plans. Work experience, which often takes place in Year 10, can also be discussed. Any actions agreed will be included in a plan to help you move forward.

If you have a Statement of Special Educational Needs you’ll have an Annual Review in Year 10. At this meeting you may also be joined by staff from your local college or sixth form. There will be discussions about the support that you’ve had through

school and the support that you are likely to need at sixth form or college. You will all need to consider the courses or subjects you are planning to do and what types of support you might need. You could also ask your school to invite anyone else who has been working with you (for example a Transitions Officer) to your Year 10 or 11 review meeting.

### **After the Year 10 meeting**

A report will be written and copies will be given to you, your parent/carer, school staff, Careers Wales and staff at the sixth form or college you are planning to attend. This will outline your plans for after Year 11 and will examine:

- the support you receive at school
- your skills for getting around independently and living independently
- the support that you will need at sixth form or college or other options.

**It is important to read through the report after the meeting to check that you are happy with it.**

### **Year 11**

If you have a Statement and you are considering entering college or training, your careers adviser will work with you to draw up a Learning and Skills Plan. This document will identify your educational and training needs as well as the provision required to meet those needs. The careers adviser will use information provided by other agencies to help them make appropriate recommendations. With your permission, the Learning and Skills Plan will be passed onto the college or training provider so that they can arrange for the support to be put in place.

#### **Further information**

For more detailed information on Careers Wales services go to [careerswales.com](https://careerswales.com) or contact **0800 028 4844**.



# Section 3

## Moving on to sixth form, college or vocational training

### Sixth form

If you carry on to sixth form, things will pretty much remain the same. You'll continue to get support from your school and the support staff you are familiar with. Occasionally young people may change to a different school for sixth form especially if their school does not have one.

### Further Education (FE) college

If you leave and decide to move on to an FE college or a residential college, or if you are going into work-based learning, then your Statement will cease – it won't exist anymore.

You will still get support but it may be provided by a different source or person. You will still have the opportunity to meet with a Careers Wales careers adviser. You can ask for an appointment through your college Student Support Services, speaking to your link adviser or by telephoning **0800 028 4844**.

The support that you can get at college varies and it's really important that you go and visit before you apply. Even if you are not sure that you definitely want to go, it's a good idea to arrange a visit because it may help you make up your mind.

If you are thinking of going to college, visit RNIB's young people's pages at **[rnib.org.uk/startingcollege](http://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.
- Contact 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, 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 at your review meeting.

Young people identify advantages and disadvantages of residential school and college as illustrated by the experiences of these two young people:

"I spent five years at [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 [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, practicals, field trips, work experience placements, course assessments and exams.

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 a young person who shared his experience 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 gives 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. There are three types of apprenticeships:

- foundation apprenticeship
- apprenticeship
- higher apprenticeship.



### 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.

Quote from a young person talking about why they chose an apprenticeship:

"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."

Careers Wales offer an Apprenticeship Matching Service on their website: [careerswales.com/en/jobs-and-training](https://careerswales.com/en/jobs-and-training)

You may be 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 transition review.

### For more information on apprenticeships

the Welsh government pages on apprenticeships at [gov.wales/to-pics/educationandskills](https://gov.wales/to-pics/educationandskills)

the RNIB website at [rnib.org.uk/young-people-starting-work/apprenticeships](https://rnib.org.uk/young-people-starting-work/apprenticeships).



## 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.

Your training provider will plan and organise the support you need. They will look at your Learning and Skills Plan and, in discussion with you, agree what type of support you need. In some circumstances your training provider can make a request to the Welsh government for additional funding to support you.

More information may be found from the Welsh government at: [gov.wales](http://gov.wales) or through Careers Wales at [careerswales.com](http://careerswales.com)

Here is an example of a course that helped one young person:

After college, “Andrea” decided to go onto 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.

# 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.

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

"Work experience was 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) and <https://www.wcva.org.uk>

To find out more general information about volunteering opportunities in Wales, visit [volunteering-wales.net](https://www.volunteering-wales.net).

NVCO (The National Council of Voluntary Organisations) is the English equivalent of WCVA (Wales Council for Voluntary Action) but they do provide a lot of general advice and guidance on voluntary work that could also be useful to you.

You can find out more by visiting their website at [ncvo.org.uk](https://www.ncvo.org.uk)

There are lots of volunteering opportunities at RNIB, including many in Wales. To find out more, please phone **0845 603 0575**, email [volunteering@rnib.org.uk](mailto: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 inbuilt 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](http://nvaccess.org).

## Finding volunteering and work experience opportunities

If you are still in school, your school's work experience co-ordinator will support you in finding potential placements for work experience on the National Work Experience Database. Arranging the placement will be your responsibility, but you may want to ask your parent/carer to help you.

If you are seeking employment and are connected to a jobcentre, this is something you may want to discuss further with your adviser.

There are several other 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 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 a young person speaking about their experience 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. I chose locations I felt comfortable travelling to. I went into places that took volunteers and asked if they had any work for volunteers. 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.

“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.”

## 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 what 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:

“...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](http://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 about the type of opportunities that you are considering – for more information see [rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living/work-and-employment](http://rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living/work-and-employment).

## 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 Sasha who speaks about socialising 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. They may also be able to provide some support with access and accessible information for you to attend the fresher's fair.

Quote from a young person who talks about the social activities at 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](https://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 a 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: [studentfinancewales.co.uk](http://studentfinancewales.co.uk)

In 2017-18 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.

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.”

You should apply as soon as possible rather than waiting until you’ve been accepted on a course, or till you have made a firm choice. You can normally apply in the spring before you start your course.

### How do I apply for a DSA?

You can apply through Student Finance Wales ([studentfinancewales.co.uk](http://studentfinancewales.co.uk)). 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 Wales will be able to advise you on the evidence you need to submit.

### 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 London and Surrey: [rnib.org.uk/disabled-students-allowances-assessments](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. Wales has a different assessment system, so even if you are applying for university in other parts of the UK, make sure your assessor knows that you live in Wales.

It is really important to consider in advance of your assessment the type of support that you may need once at university.

Quote from one young person who reflects on their DSA assessment:

"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: [studentfinancewales.co.uk/](https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/)

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

Careers advice in Wales is available through Careers Wales. You can find out more about their service at [careerswales.com](https://www.careerswales.com).

Quote from one young person who talked about the positive aspects of a meeting with their careers advisor:

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

**When you are ready to look for work, these pages from RNIB and Careers Wales 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)
- [www.careerswales.com/en/your-career/features-1/my-future/supported-work/](https://www.careerswales.com/en/your-career/features-1/my-future/supported-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 it 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.

One young person talked about the reasonable adjustments that their employer made:

**"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."**



There is lots of useful information about disclosure and guidance about how to form your disclosure strategy on the RNIB website: [rnib.org.uk/](https://www.rnib.org.uk/).

## 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 like:

- 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 during work
- other equipment such as special lighting and magnifiers.

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. You'll then be able to talk about the Scheme at your interview and reassure the employer that support is available and that it won't cost them lots of money.

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

## Interview skills: top tips

Interviews can be really stressful – but you can help yourself as much as possible by preparing beforehand:

- Arrange any adjustments you may need in advance. For example, if you have to complete a test you may need a large print version.
- Plan your journey, and know what transport links you need to catch to get you there a little early. You're unlikely to get the job if you are late!
- Make sure you know about the Access to Work Scheme, which provides you with practical support to do your job.
- Dress appropriately.
- Be confident and practise good posture.
- Research the organisation and content of the job.
- Re-read your application form.
- Research and think about who is interviewing you.
- Use the job description and person specification to think about what questions you might be asked, and plan your responses using your past experiences as examples.
- Think about how you talk about your sight loss (your disclosure strategy).
- Prepare some questions to ask at the end of the interview.



## 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 a young person describing what methods worked 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... 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 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 a 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.

Quote from one young person who talks about using 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.

The low vision service in Wales provides these assessments at local high street optometrists and dispensing opticians. Once you have contacted your local Low vision practice they should offer you a free hour-long appointment within two weeks. Visit [www.eyecare.wales.nhs.uk/low-vision-service-wales](http://www.eyecare.wales.nhs.uk/low-vision-service-wales) for more information.

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](http://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 for preparing for your future.

Quote from an employer:

"It's definitely very important, because nowadays everyone uses technology. Even now as we speak you are using a computer. You know everyone emails, reports whatever, 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](http://abilitynet.org.uk)) and Blind in Business ([blindinbusiness.co.uk](http://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](http://www.qac.ac.uk/exhibitions.htm)).

Quote from one young person who visited an annual exhibition called 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](http://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 a Student:

"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](http://rnib.org.uk/technology).

## Speaking out

During your time in school you will likely 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 parent/carer 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.

Quote from 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 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 described how she is more confident travelling independently:

"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 vision impairment who are looking for a home: [.pocklington-trust.org.uk](https://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk). This advice is helpfully tailored for specific personal circumstances.

RNIB have advice designed for young people with 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: The SEN Code of Practice for Wales

The SEN (Special Educational Needs) Code of Practice for Wales provides a set of principles which early education settings, schools, Local Education Authorities (LEA's) and health and social services must follow when supporting children and young people with SEN. Significantly, it states that these organisations should take your views and your family's views into account. You can read more about this at: [gov.wales/](http://gov.wales/)

The SEN Code of Practice for Wales outlines several steps which should be followed by educators supporting young people with SEN as they think about their futures. These have been outlined in Section 2.

The Welsh government are introducing reforms in the way that children with special educational needs and disabilities are assessed and supported.

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 replaces the terms "special educational needs" and "learning difficulties and/or disabilities" with "additional learning needs".

The Act is expected to come into force from September 2020 and the implementation period will last until 2023. Until then, local authorities must ensure that they continue to comply with the duties placed upon them by the Education Act 1996 and the SEN Code of Practice for Wales. Where we refer to the new system to be introduced by the Act, we will use the term "additional learning needs" or "ALN".

A key element of the changes is to provide a unified system of support for children and young people aged 0-25.

More information is available here: [gov.wales](http://gov.wales)



## 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](mailto: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 may be entitled to Disabled Students Allowance and at work you may 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](https://www.rnib.org.uk/managingyourmoney). Disability living allowance currently applies for anyone under the age of 16 – for more information visit [gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children](https://www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children).

## 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](mailto: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](https://www.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](http://blindinbusiness.org.uk)**

### RNIB

The RNIB website **[rnib.org.uk](http://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** and to read other young people's experiences of transition. Visit our Young People's section at **[rnib.org.uk/youngpeople](http://rnib.org.uk/youngpeople)**

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](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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.

Website: **natspec.org.uk**



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# RNIB

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