



Leicestershire Cares

A Focus on the Future

A Leicestershire Cares project funded by the
Thomas Pocklington Trust - Employability Programme
for visually impaired young people

Raising Awareness
of Visual Impairment
in Business



Context of the project

In 2021 The Thomas Pocklington Trust commissioned a report into the post-school experiences of young people with vision impairment. Amongst other findings, the report highlighted the lack of support for young people with a visual impairment in accessing the labour market, and evidence of ‘churning’ – that is, taking the same level (or lower level) educational courses without appearing to make positive progress.

We secured funding to evaluate and adapt our employability resources to ensure they're accessible for young people with a visual impairment to try to address this. We established a steering group comprised of business members and we met with staff from schools who work with students with a visual impairment.

We worked in close collaboration with our steering group and the Vision Support Team at Leicester City Council to develop and run a successful pilot employability programme for students with visual impairments. In total, thirteen students from five different schools took part in three sessions which aimed to improve their employability skills.



We recruited nine volunteers from businesses including Hinckley and Rugby Building Society, Joules, Lloyds Banking Group and the Samworth Brothers Group to deliver careers talks, advice on CVs, identifying and developing employability skills, advice on disclosing disability, rights and responsibilities, workplace behaviours, interview preparation and mock interviews. The final session was a work tour at Leicester City Football Club where the students learnt about the running of the club and how the pitch and grounds are maintained. All sessions were very successful with positive feedback from students, staff and volunteers alike.

- Almost 70% of participants agreed they had a **clear plan of their career** after the employability pilot, as opposed to 40% before
- Almost all participants agreed or strongly agreed that they **felt more confident** talking to an employer about their support needs after the pilot
- Over 80% of participants **enjoyed the sessions**
- 100% of the support staff and Vision Support Team rated the programme **5 out of 5 stars**
- **100% were positive** about the students working towards improving their employability skills and confidence following on from the pilot
- Several commented on it being a **great opportunity for the students to meet one another and share their experiences**, and it was invaluable and inspirational for them to hear from blind volunteers



Student comments:

“I liked meeting new people with a visual impairment, learning more about jobs, listening to people with a visual impairment speak about their jobs.”

“I did really good at the interview. Overall, it was an excellent experience.”

“It was very informative and helpful. The volunteers were friendly and my interviewer did not mind that she had to explain something to me.”



Raising awareness of visual impairment in business

When we set up our steering group, we sent out questionnaires to establish our business members' experience and understanding of working with people with visual impairment. We wanted to find out what businesses want to know about employing or providing work experience and how we can be most helpful in supporting this.

The findings from our first questionnaire to business members identified three key areas of concern:

- **Health and safety practices**
- **Key considerations for colleagues / managers of a visually impaired person**
- **Sources of support / information and advice for employers**

Other considerations included ensuring policies are inclusive and challenging stereotypes and assumptions.

This pack is designed to offer practical support and information signposting for these key areas. We have included information on resources available for businesses wanting to provide good support for blind employees.

Accessibility and inclusion for all

Almost two million people in the UK are living with sight loss and there are dozens of different eye conditions. (fightforsight.org.uk)

Every individual has different needs, so when employing a blind or visually impaired person, communication and consultation are key. Suitable adjustments can then be implemented for the individual to thrive in their employment.

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) website is an excellent resource for employers who employ a blind or visually impaired employee. (rnib.org.uk)

They also have a helpline specifically for supporting employees with sight loss (see below) and a Corporate Partner scheme where your organisation can help create a fairer society for blind and partially sighted people and leave a legacy for generations to come.



1. Health and Safety Practices

The RNIB has a section on their website specifically aimed at employers and businesses: <https://www.rnib.org.uk/living-with-sight-loss/equality-and-employment>. It includes sections on employing a blind or visually impaired person and on making your business inclusive. In the section on making your workplace accessible, they cover health and safety, getting around, meeting training needs and accessibility at work.

On risk assessments they write:

“Carrying out a risk assessment of the workplace or an activity for blind or partially sighted people doesn’t have to be difficult, but it can sometimes be a daunting prospect. If you haven’t worked with blind people before, it can be very easy to over-estimate risks or make assumptions about what blind people can or can’t do.” RNIB

Their guidance highlights some of the things they are often asked about and offers suggestions on ways to manage risk and reach informed decisions. There are sections on lighting, trip hazards, stairs, safe use of computer systems, machinery, evacuating the building, mobility and travel, Guide Dogs in the workplace, lone working and caring for others.

[Risk assessments - www.rnib.org.uk](https://www.rnib.org.uk)

As an employer you have legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to make your workplace accessible and all its processes as fair and equal as possible. For a guide on legal responsibilities and information about the Equality Act, see the RNIB guidance below:

[Guidance on your legal responsibilities - www.rnib.org.uk - See differently](https://www.rnib.org.uk)

2. Key considerations for colleagues/managers of a visually impaired person

Getting around and guiding a visually impaired person

One of the main worries of our business steering group was the accessibility of their office space for blind or visually impaired colleagues. The RNIB offer excellent advice on getting around and guiding a blind person.

“Many blind and partially sighted people have some useful vision. Some people will be able to see fine detail, while others may have very good peripheral vision. If someone has very little or no useful vision, they will usually receive mobility training before seeking a job.

The most important thing is to speak to your employee, they are the best person to tell you what support or adjustments they might need.

We can provide you and your colleagues with visual awareness training, which includes information about how to guide a blind

person and lots more information about sight loss and some of the common myths and misconceptions. This can often be paid for through the Access to Work scheme.” RNIB

[Making your workplace accessible - www.rnib.org.uk - See differently](https://www.rnib.org.uk)

Do check out their training courses which are online and easily accessible and may be funded by the Access to Work scheme (see more info below).

RNIB Accessibility Awareness Training Courses:

- Disability equality training for business
- How to guide people with sight loss
- Visual awareness

Contact **01733 375 370** for more information

Meeting training needs

If you are running a training course where blind or visually impaired delegates will be attending, there are some things you will need to consider.

The RNIB have produced guidance to help you ensure these delegates are not disadvantaged. It covers course materials, note-taking, the training environment, access to refreshments and other facilities. They also have a factsheet on making training courses accessible that you can download.

Accessibility and IT

There is a huge range of assistive technology that can help blind or visually impaired people access computers and read printed documents. As a sighted person, it's important to ensure your work is accessible for all. A simple way of doing this when using Microsoft Word is to click on Review – Check Accessibility and follow the guidance. Photographs and images will often need a description added in order to be read out by a screen reader.

The following information is from the RNIB website. They have a technology resource hub and an online shop where you can browse the wide range of assistive technology.



Computer users with low vision

There are many ways in which partially sighted people can adapt computers to make them easier to use.

- Simple adaptations can be made to a computer such as displaying large fonts and icons, changing the colour scheme and increasing contrast
- Large monitors can be helpful for someone who wants to increase the size of the text on the screen, as can magnifying filter screens
- Magnification software can increase the size of a small part of the screen to fill the viewable area
- Video magnifiers can be used to electronically magnify the screen
- Adapted keyboards are available, as are keyboard stickers which can make a standard keyboard easier to use

Computer users with no vision

It is quite possible for someone with little or no vision to use a computer.

- Screen reader software, such as JAWS or SuperNova, reads out text from the screen using synthetic speech. Screen readers also allow users to navigate through the system and control programmes from the keyboard
- Voice recognition software allows users to voice-activate programmes on the computer
- An electronic braille display is a tactile device placed under a conventional computer keyboard, which enables the user to read the contents of the computer screen, by touch in braille
- To read print, a scanner with optical character recognition (OCR) converts print into electronic text that is read aloud using synthetic speech

IT and accessibility at work - www.rnib.org.uk - See differently

The Vision Support Team at Leicester City Council provided us with this handy guide to working with young people with a visual impairment which is invaluable in working with people of all ages.

Advice for working with young people with a visual impairment

- Talk to the child or young person as you would any child or young person
- Email over key resources that you want to show the child or young person so that they can be modified in advance i.e. braille or large print
- If using PowerPoint – print a copy of the slide view pages onto A4 paper for students with low vision, as most won't be able to see on the board. They need them close-up. Present slides appropriately
- Read all out information that you are presenting on PowerPoint or handouts
- Avoid pointing and saying 'over here' 'there' – be descriptive
- Use everyone's names when you want them to respond
- Don't worry about using terms that include 'see, look...'
It is fine to say, 'Did you see Emmerdale last night?'

3. Sources of support / information and advice for employers

As stated, the RNIB have excellent advice for Employers and businesses – accessibility and inclusion for all. Browse their website and you will find all the information you need.

Employers and businesses - www.rnib.org.uk - See differently

RNIB Helpline **0303 123 9999**

For advice on the Access to Work scheme, the RNIB has an excellent information page on their website.

“Access to Work is a scheme run by Jobcentre Plus. The scheme provides practical support and advice to disabled people and employers to help overcome work related obstacles resulting from a disability.

Access to Work pays towards any extra employment costs that result from a disability. If one of your employees or new starters has a disability then Access to Work may be able

to help. It applies to any paid job, part-time or full-time, permanent or temporary. There is no minimum number of hours for eligibility for support under the scheme.

It is provided where an individual requires support or adaptations beyond the reasonable adjustments which an employer is legally obliged to provide under the Equality Act.”

Access to Work - what employers need to know - www.rnib.org.uk - See differently



The Thomas Pocklington Trust is a national charity which supports blind and partially sighted people with a focus on education, employment and engagement. Their website is also an excellent resource.

Thomas Pocklington Trust - Thomas Pocklington Trust (www.pocklington-trust.org.uk)

They offer advice on employment for visually impaired people and companies:

Employment - Thomas Pocklington Trust (www.pocklington-trust.org.uk)

They have several videos of inspirational stories from visually impaired people in employment:

Employment stories - Thomas Pocklington Trust (www.pocklington-trust.org.uk)

They have excellent videos about the benefits of being an inclusive employer:

Inclusive employers: good for business - Thomas Pocklington Trust (www.pocklington-trust.org.uk)

Disability Confident Employer Scheme

The government run a scheme for businesses to sign up to become a Disability Confident Employer.

“Disability Confident is creating a movement of change, encouraging employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop disabled people.

Being Disability Confident is a unique opportunity to lead the way in your community, and you might just discover someone your business cannot do without.

It was developed by employers and disabled people’s representatives to make it rigorous but easily accessible, particularly for smaller businesses.” Gov.uk

Please see the website for more information and details on how to sign up.

[Disability Confident employer scheme \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

The VIP Pod

For inspirational and interesting listening, check out this podcast:

[The VIP Pod: The Visually Impaired People Podcast on Apple Podcasts \(www.podcasts.apple.com\)](https://www.podcasts.apple.com)

Blind in Business

A useful organisation that supports blind university students and employers:

[Blind in Business About Us - Blind in Business \(www.blindinbusiness.org.uk\)](http://www.blindinbusiness.org.uk)

Sharepoint

A handy presentation/ guide for using accessible text:

[Accessible Text.pptx \(sharepoint.com\)](https://sharepoint.com)

We hope this pack gives helpful advice, information and signposting to other resources that may be useful in employing people with a visual impairment.

You can see articles on our visual impairment project,

A Focus on the Future on our website www.leicestershirecares.co.uk

- [Outstanding contribution to work with students with Special Educational Needs and Disability | Leicestershire Cares](#)
- [Never quit! A Focus on the Future - Work tour at Leicester City Football ground | Leicestershire Cares](#)
- [A Focus on the Future - SKILLS FOR LEARNING, SKILLS FOR LIFE | Leicestershire Cares](#)
- [A Collaborative Approach - A Focus on the Future Employability Programme | Leicestershire Cares](#)
- [Employability programme connecting business members with young people with a visual impairment | Leicestershire Cares](#)

Please contact:

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for more information or to make a comment.