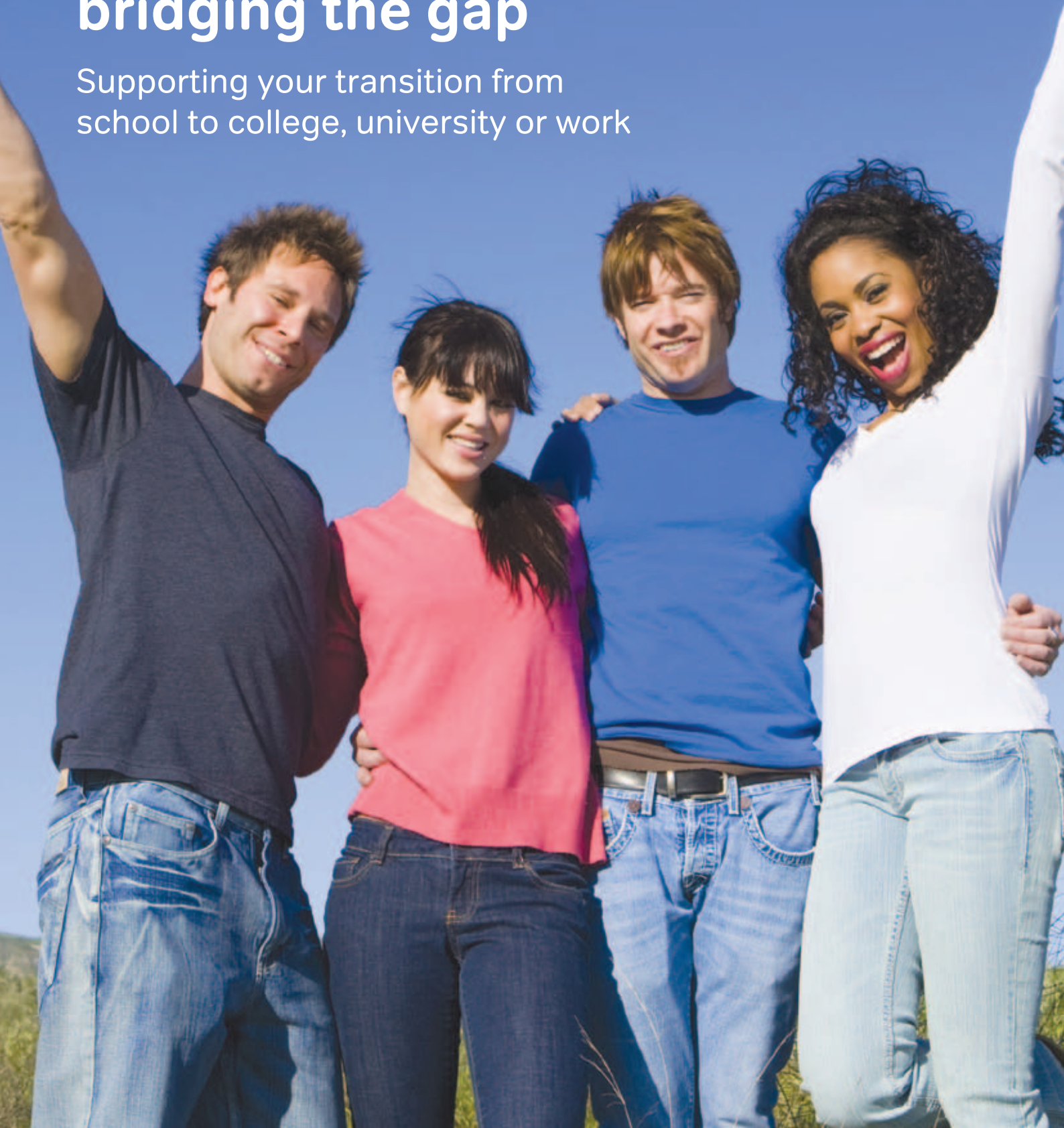


Your future, your choice: bridging the gap

Supporting your transition from
school to college, university or work



Working together



Supporting people
with sight loss


Action for blind people

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Bridging the gap: what does it mean?

Think about your time at school. You'll be familiar with the staff that 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 or perhaps you have a support teacher or teaching assistant who takes notes for you in class. At school, both you and the staff are aware of the support that you need to ensure that your sight problems, 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 and 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.

School life and planning ahead

Once you finish your GCSEs you can choose from a number of options in terms of what you want to do next.

Since the summer of 2013 young people have to stay in education or training until the end of the academic year when you turn 17. From 2015 this will be extended to your 18th birthday. This could be:

- full-time education or training, including school, sixth form, college and home education
- vocational training, such as an apprenticeship, supported internship or traineeship, or
- full-time work of 20 hours a week or more and for eight weeks or more consecutively with part-time education, training or volunteering.

Recent changes to the way your support is planned

In September 2014 the Children and Families Act changed the way local authorities, schools and colleges assess your support needs and help you plan ahead. Now the local authority must bring together support offered by education, health and social care services for all disabled young people from birth and up to the age of 25.

Code of Practice

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

Local Offer

Local authorities are now required to publish a Local Offer that outlines the full range of support services available in the area for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). This should include education and training options, apprenticeships, traineeships, supported internships, school and college courses as well as specialist colleges out of the area approved by government (Section 41 providers). It must also show who can provide information, advice and guidance on the options, including your local parent partnership, voluntary sector organisations, Connexions service, careers guidance providers and the National Careers Service. The Local Offer also provides information on health and social care options in your area and who can help you understand whether you are entitled to a Personal Budget and whether to have a Direct Payment.

Local authorities are required to ask disabled young people what should be included in the Local Offer and to publish their findings so that the Local Offer develops and improves each year.

The Local Offer should help you understand the choices available once you have left school and to make an informed decision about what would suit you best for your future education and training, employment, independent living, friends and community involvement.

Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

From September 2014 some young people will have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) instead of a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) at school or a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA) – sometimes called a Section 139A assessment – in the last year before leaving school.

What is an EHCP?

Children and young people who need support to achieve their potential in education can ask for an assessment to decide exactly what kind of support would help them, who can provide it, and whether health or social care is also required. If the local authority agrees to the assessment they will involve all the organisations already providing services to help you. They will ask you what you hope to achieve, including when you leave school, and will involve your family or carer. They will then write an EHCP that describes all the different types of support you need, who is responsible for providing it and when the plan will be reviewed with you, to check it is working well.

One of the most important reviews takes place in Year 9, when you will need to make important decisions about future choices.

Preparing for Adulthood Review Meeting: for those with a Statement or EHCP

There are lots of options but if you have a Statement or EHCP, planning for your future will begin with your Year 9 preparing for adulthood review meeting. From this meeting your EHCP will be written or updated to make clear your aspirations, what you want to be able to do when you leave post-16 education or training and the support you need to achieve your ambitions. It should look at all aspects of your life including education, employment, housing, health, transport and leisure activities.

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

- be offered face-to-face careers guidance at school to discuss which subjects you are enjoying and achieving good grades in, which subjects you plan to take for GCSE and your aspirations for life after school
- talk to your subject teachers about your strengths and which subjects you are best at and enjoy most
- talk to your parents about what you may want to do after school, if you are considering sixth form, a local college, residential college, further training or going straight into work or an apprenticeship

- think about any difficulties you are having in school so that you can talk about these at the meeting.

The preparing for adulthood transition review is usually held at your school and will involve you and people who will support you in moving into adulthood. These people could be:

- someone from social services, to make sure you get a health and social care assessment if you have health and social care needs
- your local doctor or community nurse
- your teacher(s)
- a Qualified Teacher of Visually Impaired Children (QTVI)
- a careers adviser
- an educational psychologist, to make sure you get the support you need to carry on learning
- your parents or carers
- anyone else who you would like to support you at the meeting.

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

Your revised EHCP

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

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

The education department of your local authority is responsible for making sure that you receive all the support and services that are listed as necessary for you in your revised EHCP.

The local social care and health services must cooperate with the education department and ensure their support is in place too.

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

You should have at least one other review meeting each school year to update your EHCP. 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 you feel it says what you think it should.

What if I carry on to college?

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

What happens to my Statement of Special Educational Needs or EHCP?

From September 2014 if you have a Statement your review in the last year at school will result in an EHCP. This will identify what you want to study or train for, where you would like to study, how you will get there, what support you will need, depending on the course, assessment methods, work placements and depending on your personal support needs.

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

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

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

Your EHCP in your final year at school, and ideally from Year 9 should state your preferred course and college.

Your transition support: for those without a Statement or EHCP

Many young people with special educational needs or a disability do not have a Statement or EHCP. By 2015 School Action and School Action Plus will be phased out. In future school pupils and college students will have graduated support, which could involve professionals from outside the school or college as well as school staff for example a VI specialist, assistive technology or a notetaker. Whether or not you have an EHCP, the local authority and school are still responsible to make sure you have the right support for you to achieve as well as you can at school and afterwards.

Even if you do not have an EHCP or statement, young people with a disability may still have an annual review and should still expect help and guidance on your future choices and support arrangements.



Moving on to college or vocational training

The support that you can get at college varies and it's really important that you 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.

Legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act says that it is against the law for schools and other education providers to discriminate against disabled students, school pupils or adult learners.

How does it work?

Education providers (this includes schools, colleges and universities) are not allowed to discriminate against learners because of a “protected characteristic”. These include your disability, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity. Education providers also have to comply with the duty to make “reasonable adjustments”. This is a very important part of the Act and can make a real difference to how you can access education.

Admissions and exclusions: Education providers are not allowed to discriminate in the arrangements they use to decide who to admit as a pupil or student or the terms on which they offer a place. A school is not allowed to exclude a pupil because of their disability. However, if someone behaves unacceptably and that isn't to do with their disability, then they could be excluded. Similarly, universities and colleges are not allowed to terminate someone's studies because of their disability.

Provision of education and services: Education providers must not discriminate against pupils and students in:

- providing education
- providing access to any benefit, facility or service.

“Education” can cover all issues to do with teaching, for example timetables, field trips and homework. The Act can also cover access to school trips, after school activities and clubs or societies.

Reasonable adjustments: The Act includes a duty to make reasonable adjustments. There are three different parts (requirements) to the duty.

The first requirement applies where a school, college or university procedure or rule puts you at a substantial disadvantage compared to a non-disabled person in relation to education provision. The education provider has to take reasonable steps to avoid this disadvantage.

The second requirement is for schools, colleges and universities to take reasonable steps to provide an auxiliary aid or service if, without this, a disabled person would be

at a substantial disadvantage in relation to, for example, provision of education, when compared to a non-disabled person. Auxiliary aids and services “are things or persons which help.” Examples could be hearing loops, adaptive keyboards and special software.

The reasonable adjustments duty can also apply to examinations and tests. You can find more information on the websites below and you should ask the schools and colleges you visit what alternative arrangements may be possible.

The third requirement for colleges and universities is to make reasonable adjustments to a physical feature which puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared to a non-disabled person in relation to education provision. Schools have a legal duty to carry out accessibility planning for disabled pupils. Schools must implement accessibility plans which are aimed at:

- increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the curriculum
- improving the physical environment of schools to enable disabled pupils to take better advantage of education, benefits, facilities and services provided and
- improving the availability of accessible information to disabled pupils.

Harassment: The Act prohibits harassment that is related to a “relevant protected characteristic”. This includes disability. Harassment is where an education provider’s conduct creates a humiliating or offensive environment for the pupil/student or violates their dignity. The conduct must be related to a relevant protected characteristic.

To find out more about the Equality Act 2010, visit: www.rnib.org.uk/equalityact , www.equalityhumanrights.com or www.gov.uk.

Things to help you decide if a college is right for you

- Check out their website – every college has one.
- Talk to other people who have been there and ask how they got on.
- Talk to your subject teachers and support staff at school and ask if they think the college is right for you.
- Make contact with the student services team or the disability adviser 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. Also, make sure you find out what assistive technology they’ve got – ask about how many computers have screen magnification software and what software they use. All of this will be important to you in making your decision.
- Talk to the lecturers who will be teaching you at college.
- Talk to your college about mobility and orientation training prior to starting your course.

What if I'm thinking about applying to residential or specialist college?

Some local colleges may not have the support services you need. Where there are gaps in local provision 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 parents should begin to:

- investigate residential or specialist colleges
- research opportunities as to where to study
- arrange to visit colleges
- consider which college may best meet your needs.

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

What support will I get at college?

You may not see your Qualified Teacher for the Visually Impaired any longer and you will be taught by a new team of staff at the college.

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

- 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
- computers with speech synthesisers and magnification.

Assessment of your needs at college

College staff will liaise with you, your school and local authority to decide what support you will need on all aspects of your course. This includes lectures, classes, practicals, field trips, work experience placements, course assessments and exams. Your local authority will ask your permission to share information about your future plans and support needs from your EHCP with college staff. You should be involved throughout and agree to the support plans before term starts.

Your course and the college will be different from school, and sometimes the support you need will also be different.

Ideally you need to know what support arrangements are to be made before your EHCP transition review, because as part of that you will need to tell them your preferred college course and which college you want to study at. After your transition EHCP review you will receive a copy of your draft EHCP. You will have 15 days to read it and respond. If you disagree with the draft EHCP you must write to the local authority to tell them why within 15 days. You also have the right to specify the name of the specific school or college you wish to move to.

Once you have agreed the draft EHCP the local authority will inform the school or college you want to move to. This should not come as a surprise to you, the provider or the local authority.

The new system to support disabled young people is designed to include your views throughout, to help you get the information you need to make choices about your future based on all the relevant facts.

However, if the local authority does not agree with your choice of college you have the right to mediation support and to take your case to the First Tier Tribunal.

What choices are available?

In addition to full-time A Levels and college courses in a wide range of vocational skills, from hairdressing to accountancy, to music to mechanical engineering, you should also explore courses that combine work placements with study to be sure you have chosen the right option for you.

Apprenticeships

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

- Intermediate: equivalent to five A*– C GCSE's
- Advanced: equivalent to two A Levels
- Higher: equivalent to Level 4 and above qualifications.

Getting on to an apprenticeship

Apprenticeships are often very popular and sometimes employers, colleges or training providers ask for qualifications including GCSEs. However, they must give equal access for disabled people and offer you the chance to show you are ready for an apprenticeship through things other than qualifications. This is called a “portfolio of evidence” and may include work experience or volunteering that you have done, as well as non-accredited courses and life experiences.

Some colleges and training providers offer a programme called Traineeships for young people who have additional learning and/or social “needs”. Traineeships can

prepare you for a full apprenticeship and is a good idea if you need to build up your skills or experience. For more details see below.

Support on apprenticeships

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

The training provider or college should give you support with the training-related aspects of your apprenticeship. At college this will be paid for through Learning Support and Exceptional Learning Support for eligible apprentices of all ages. You may also be able to receive Access to Work support to help you when you are on the job. See the section “Moving into work” for more information on Access to Work. If you are interested in doing an apprenticeship you should speak to a careers adviser as well as discuss it at your preparing for adulthood transition review.

Study programmes

Many college courses now include work experience placements, further study of English and Maths and vocational skills training.

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. Work experience is a great way of showing motivation and initiative on your CV and will help you decide if you would like to go into a particular area of work. It may form part of a course you do at university and can sometimes even lead to the offer of a job. It's really important to see work experience as something that you do not only in school, but after you leave as well.

Your school may have a work experience coordinator to support you in finding potential placements for work experience. Arranging the placement will be your responsibility, but you may want to ask your parents to help you.

Supported internships

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

Traineeships

Some colleges offer traineeships for young people who need some extra support before moving into work, but for up to six months. Any young person from age 16 to 24 can apply for a traineeship, whether or not you have an EHCP or LDA. Again the course is based at an employer, includes Maths and English and off-the-job training. The college will arrange your support at college and ensure your Access to Work is in place on the work placement. The aim of traineeships is to help you move into an apprenticeship or other work.

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. Volunteering with an organisation can sometimes lead to the offer of a job.

There are lots of volunteering opportunities, including many with RNIB. To find out more, please phone **08456 03 05 75** or email volunteering@rnib.org.uk

If you are thinking of going to college, visit RNIB's young people's pages at www.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.



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, the right university and most importantly to make sure 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.

Selecting a university

- Discuss course options with your careers adviser, subject tutors, support staff and parents.
- Look at the UCAS website (www.ucas.ac.uk) for information on courses, institutions and entry requirements.
- Every university has its own website. This will give you information about their courses, social activities and halls of residence. There will be specific pages which tell you about the extra support and types of assistive technology and access software available within the library.
- Contact the disability adviser to find out what support they can offer to help you choose your university.
- 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.

Course costs

Course costs and the available financial support are likely to influence which university you select. Universities can charge up to £9,000 per year in tuition fees. You can cover the cost of your tuition through a student loan, which you only start to pay back when you are earning over £21,000 a year.

It's worth remembering that you'll repay the same each month regardless of whether tuition fees are £6,000 or £9,000. However universities which are charging more than £6,000, have to put in place measures to support students from poorer backgrounds.

Bursaries, scholarships and awards

Students in higher education can apply for money directly from their university or college on top of any other student finance.

Each university or college has their own rules about bursaries, scholarships and awards for example who qualifies, how much you can get and how to apply. Bursaries are like grants and don't have to be paid back. You get your bursary directly from your university or college. Talk to your student support service to find out what's available.

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)

DSAs are allowances towards the extra course costs students can face as a direct result of their sight condition and/or other disabilities. DSAs enable you to study and have access to course materials on an equal basis to other students and they are paid on top of the standard student finance package. The amount of money available depends on the amount and types of extra support you need. DSAs don't have to be repaid and don't affect any benefits you may be in receipt of. It's also important to know that your entitlement to DSAs is not affected by your household income – it's about what you need.

What type of things can my DSAs pay for?

The government is currently reviewing DSAs so details may change for students starting university in September 2016. Students considering university for 2016 should check the most up to date information at

www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas

Students starting in 2015 could have DSAs to pay for:

- Items of specialist equipment – for example screen readers, computer magnification software, braille notetakers.
- Non-medical helper's allowance – for example library support or the use of a reader during examinations.
- General allowance – which can cover things like enlarged examination papers and course materials.

Some changes to DSAs were introduced for students starting in September 2015. Students will be asked to contribute the first £200 towards the cost of your computer even if you need it as part of your support package. Students will also have to pay their printing costs, whether you use the university or your own equipment. Students will not now get DSAs towards the costs of adapted accommodation needs if you are in university housing or housing provided by an agent to the university.

However, universities are required to make reasonable adjustments as outlined above so that disabled students are not at a disadvantage compared with others.

One great thing about DSAs is that the equipment they pay for is yours to keep and can be kept at home or at your halls of residence. DSAs can also pay towards the costs of learning braille, rehabilitation skills and mobility training, taxi fares to and from university and training in the use of access technology.

It's important that you are aware of the wide range of support that you may be able to access through your DSA payment. Think about the list outlined above before you leave college and talk through what your needs have been in the past and what they may be throughout your course of study. You may need some mobility training on arrival to familiarise yourself with certain routes and the layout of the university. You may need different support while on a field trip or work placement. Give thought to all of these things when you are looking for and applying to university.

Top tip on technology

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. You may want to check out organisations such as Ability Net (www.abilitynet.org.uk) and Blind in Business (www.blindinbusiness.co.uk), which offer advice to blind and partially sighted students moving into education or work including assessments, equipment supply, ICT training and employment services. RNIB also has information on the latest technology at www.rnib.org.uk/technology

If you see something that you think might be useful at university, you can discuss this with the Disability Support Service and your DSA needs assessor, who may be able to include it in their list of recommendations to Student Finance England.

How do I apply for DSAs?

You should apply directly to Student Finance England for DSAs. This can be done at the same time you are making your UCAS application. You'll need to supply evidence with your application of your disability. This might be a letter from your doctor or VI specialist. Student Finance England will be able to advise you on the evidence you need to submit.

You should apply as soon as possible and not wait until you've been accepted on a course.

The DSA assessment

If you qualify for DSAs, 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.

The centre will then write a report setting out all the help they think you need and will send this to Student Finance England. The centre will also send a copy to you for you to agree the content.

Remember, you are the best person to describe your own needs so make sure your voice is heard.

What if my needs change throughout my time at university?

The DSA assessment is designed to meet your needs throughout your time at university but sometimes things change. You may experience deterioration in your sight or may come up against a particular module which causes problems and may require you to have access to a new piece of equipment. If you experience any such difficulties you are entitled to request a “top-up assessment” which will look at a particular problem and provide a solution. The university disability adviser can help you sort out any changes you need.

To find out more about DSAs visit: www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas

Action for Blind People operate DSA Assessment Centres in Surrey, London and Liverpool. Type actn.it/DSAtheGap into your browser to find out more.

Other funding

As well as DSAs, you may be able to secure funding towards any additional equipment through charitable trusts such as the Snowdon Foundation (www.snowdonawardscheme.org.uk). Their decision to award you funding is not means tested but you must show that:

- you are a student,
- you need additional support.

Welfare benefits

Most full-time students can't claim welfare benefits. However, if you're registered blind or you get Disability Living Allowance (DLA), 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).

For individual benefits advice 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 Bureau. You can also get advice from the Disability Rights UK student helpline. Tel **0800 328 5050**. Email students@disabilityrightsuk.org

Speaking out

Many universities are very large and can include lots of different buildings, sometimes spread out over a considerable area with lots of staff and different departments. It's crucial not to be overwhelmed by this. It's important that you know exactly who is responsible for providing your support, for example who within your subject department will be producing your materials in large print and organising your extra time for exams.

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 DSAs.

And 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.

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



Moving on to work: important things to know

Careers advice

In England, schools have a duty to provide independent and impartial careers advice for 13-18 year olds. Face-to-face guidance is generally quite limited, with schools only providing online, email and phone support. However the Statutory Guidance for Schools makes clear that they should provide face-to-face careers guidance for all young people with a learning difficulty and/or disability and you should already have had a careers interview as part of your preparing for adulthood transition review.

Colleges and universities have their own dedicated careers advisers. Your local authority may continue to support you up to the age of 25 if you have an EHCP or Section 139A Learning Difficulty Assessment. Alternatively you can use the National Careers Service. If you're aged 13 to 19 you can call for advice or email through their website. Adults aged 20 and over can also get face-to-face guidance. Call **0800 100 900** to make an appointment with an adviser at your nearest National Careers Service Centre. Blind and partially sighted people should be able to get at least three sessions in person with an adviser.

Find your Disability Employment Adviser

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. If you need extra employment support because of your sight condition, the Jobcentre can put you in touch with one of their Disability Employment Advisers, sometimes called DEAs. They can help you find work or gain new skills even if you have been out of work for a long time, or if you have little or no work experience. It's well worth getting in touch with a DEA in your area to get some additional help with your job search.

The two ticks symbol

When you are applying for jobs, look out for employers displaying the disability symbol. It shows they have a positive attitude towards applications from people with a disability and guarantees that they will offer you an interview if you meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy.

The disability symbol is made up of two ticks and the words "positive about disabled people". Look out for the symbol on job adverts and application forms.

To find out more about the role of the Disability Employment Adviser or the two ticks symbol visit www.gov.uk/looking-for-work-if-disabled/looking-for-a-job



Talking to employers about your sight condition

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

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.

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. If you 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 is lots of useful information about the Equality Act 2010, disclosure and guidance about how to form your disclosure strategy on RNIB's website www.rnib.org.uk/equalityact.

Interview skills: top tips

- Arrange any adjustments 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. You're unlikely to get the job if you are late.
- Make sure you know about the Access to Work Scheme.
- Dress appropriately.
- Be confident and practice good posture.
- Research the organisation and content of the job.
- Re-read your application form.
- Research and think about who is interviewing you.
- Think about what questions you might be asked and plan your response.
- Think about your disclosure strategy.
- Prepare some questions to ask at the end of the interview.

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 Jobcentre Plus programme and can pay for things like:

- taxis to and from work – really useful where transport links are poor
- a large monitor and screen magnification software for your work computer
- a support worker driver to get you to meetings that are otherwise hard to reach
- hi-tech low vision aids to help carry out your work.

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.

Work experience and the Access to Work scheme

Between 2011 and 2014 the government has announced that £1billion will be spent in order to provide unemployed young people with extra help as part of a new "Youth Contract". An extra 250,000 work experience places will be offered to young people during this period, and young people aged 18 to 24 years old will be offered a work experience place, before they enter the Work Programme. As part of the Youth Contract, young people can also receive Access to Work funding when completing work experience placements.

For more information about the Access to Work Scheme, eligibility under the Youth Contract and the support this offers visit www.gov.uk/access-to-work

See above for availability of Access to Work on work experience placements on supported internships, traineeships and apprenticeships.

Putting the employer's mind at ease

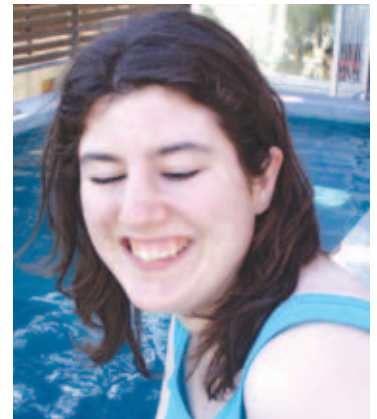
It's really useful to find out as much as you can about the Access to Work scheme before your interview. Employers often worry about the potential costs of employing a person with a sight condition because they think the equipment and support needed may be expensive. Many employers don't know about the 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.

If you are thinking of starting work, visit the RNIB young people's pages at 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.

Case studies

Emma's story: developing skills through transition

“My eye condition is called optic atrophy. I was born with light perception but no useful vision. I went to a special school between the ages of seven and fifteen where I learned braille, touch typing, cane and mobility techniques, plus many living skills. At secondary school, although I had less than half my books, my computer often didn't work and some of the teachers didn't know how to treat me, I had an amazing friendship group and felt, for the first time, like I was really integrated into society. Look after your personal life and the education bit will take care of itself.



At university, I gained a BA degree in Communications Media. Again, many of my books were not accessible to me and sometimes the lecturers were not as helpful as they could have been. I didn't know how to advocate for myself very well. I was unsure of exactly what I was entitled to or needed and while there was a disability service available and they did what they could, the support just wasn't there. But again, with the help of friends, the internet and a bit of stubbornness, I got through. I'd advise anyone to study the system and find someone who can help you, practically and emotionally, with your disability requirements while at university. It's also worthwhile stacking up extra-curricular activities. It's all good stuff for the CV and for life lessons in general. I got a part time job at my local braille production centre where I proofread school books and learned how an office works.

When I was younger I had gained some work experience at the local radio station and had been interested in audio for a long time, so I opted for the radio modules on my degree. After I graduated, a friend told me about an audio magazine for blind people called Talk Around, which used to be very popular, but had no one to look after it at that time. So I sourced some funding, bought the necessary equipment and got it back up and running. I produced, edited and did the admin for the magazine for two years. It went out to around 100 people and got some great feedback.

When I was interviewing someone from the BBC for Talk Around, they mentioned that there was a job coming up. I added myself to the BBC job search emails and waited. Eventually the ad appeared and I went for a researcher post. It's all about the networking! My application was successful and so was my interview. I moved to London on a six-month contract. It was scary, I didn't even have anywhere to live, but I was so passionate about the role that I took the decision to dive in. I've been working at the BBC now for five and a half years. In that time, my job has changed from researcher, to assistant producer, to producer, to broadcast journalist. I'm lucky that my employer is very good when it comes to arranging my adjustments, like technology and support workers. Without these interventions I'd find it difficult to do my job.”

Matthew's story: a musical journey

"I am Matthew, 23 years old, from the UK. I was born with folds in the retina of both eyes and have been partially sighted since birth. I got into music from a very young age, by listening to my father's hi-fi machine which had always been an attraction for me. This started my long term hobbies – collecting records, and recording.

I started playing piano at the age of five and passed my grade 8 when I was 15. I carried on studying the piano and passed my ATCL Diploma in classical recital. It was at my first piano lesson where my music teacher and family discovered that I have 'perfect pitch' which only one in 20,000 people have. This is the ability to recognize a sound and name the note instantly. I also enjoyed playing the violin with the Wolverhampton Youth Orchestra and now professionally play the ukulele.



One of the main obstacles that I have had to overcome is the loss of vision in my right eye. An unexpected haemorrhage left me permanently blind. I have a very supportive family and, in the modern world, anything is possible.

I attended a mainstream school which I found to be an advantage especially when leaving college and entering into employment. I trained at RNC in Hereford as a piano tuner technician. I have since started my own business, tuning and repairing pianos around my local area. I also studied music technology, and compose, and produce music. I also perform as a professional musician on the stage, around residential homes, and at weddings. Both the tuning and the music combined provide a stable self-employed job, and I couldn't ask for more – a good job that I enjoy. I am now living independently in my own home.

The message that I would give young and up-and-coming teens and adults is that they need to find a practical skill in life. There may be obstacles along the way, but there is always an alternative option to overcome them. Be positive about what you wish to achieve."

Karina's story: through education to employment

"I am 26 years old, registered blind and live in the midlands. I attended mainstream school until the age of 13 when I moved into specialist education where I completed my GCSEs and A Levels. From here, I went on to study a degree in Business Information Technology at Coventry University. It was difficult deciding what I wanted to study at university as I didn't want to specialise too much to try and maximise my chances of getting a job afterwards. I originally wanted to study social work, but at the time the minimum age for starting that degree was 19 and I didn't want to take a gap year. Although I enjoyed my course, I found it very difficult to make friends at university, but I think this was due to the fact I didn't stay in university accommodation. University was definitely worth it though!



After university, I was determined that I wanted to work and was confident I had as much to contribute as everyone else despite my visual impairment. It took me about 12 months to get my first job which was based around supporting people with disabilities to find employment. I was, and remain, very passionate about this area of work as by this stage I had realised it isn't as easy as I thought it was going to be. My manager was very supportive and gave me a lot of confidence. Unfortunately, this job came to an end after two years. Three months later, I started my second job on a temporary contract, which involved working in a hospital, completing administrative tasks for social workers. This was a very fast-paced role and I found it difficult to keep up with the expected output of the job. But the job helped me to develop my skills, and gain further experience. I now work for a community-based social work team which I enjoy greatly.

In terms of the future, I am hoping to return to university to train either as a social worker or an occupational therapist. My colleagues have provided a lot of information, advice and encouragement regarding my future potential. Employment has enabled me to make some long friendships, develop my social skills, and has given me a purpose in life. What I would say to you is, if you know what you want to do, do everything you can to achieve your aim; ask questions, make contacts, make suggestions. Something which might help you could also help other people. Good luck for the future!"

Help with low vision

Let's take moving away to university as an example. Imagine you have just finished your exams and you are about to live alone for the first time in your life. Magnifiers and other low vision aids are important in ways that you may never have thought of before. You may find magnifiers 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.

Living alone for the first time means you'll need to do things you perhaps relied on others for in the past. This is exciting and allows you to become more independent and confident about taking care of yourself. Low vision aids are essential for tasks like these so have an assessment before you go and talk through your lifestyle changes with your optometrist. Low vision aids may also be useful for accessing course materials at university. Let's say, for example, that your lecture notes haven't been enlarged in time, do you:

1. sit through the lecture unable to follow it and catch up later that evening or
2. use a magnifier to read the lecture notes alongside everyone else and spend the evening with your friends?

Low vision services will 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.

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 visual, 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.

A good low vision service will have a wide range of equipment including hand held 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.

For further information on low vision, order our free guide "See for yourself: Making the most of your sight" from RNIB Helpline on **0303 123 9999**. This guide includes some practical ideas to help you, such as making things bigger, brighter and bolder.

Further help

Benefits and financial help

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

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

Personal Independence Payments (PIP)

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

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.

To find out about the benefits and financial help you may be entitled to, contact RNIB's Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or email helpline@rnib.org.uk and our Welfare Rights Advisors can help to resolve any problems you have in getting the right support.

Useful contacts for more information and support

Action for Blind People

Action for Blind People (Action) provides practical and emotional advice and support across England to people who are blind or partially sighted and their friends and family.

Action Connect. Action recognises the importance of putting the people we support at the heart of our work. So, in partnership with people who are blind or partially sighted, we developed Action Connect – a forum to share experiences and tell your story. You can network with people in your area or who share your interests; influence how Action's services are developed; participate on your terms, in a way that suits you best. To find out more call Natalie Swiderska on **01509 632 407** or email connect@actionforblindpeople.org.uk or you can visit www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk/connect

Action for children, young people and families. Action for Blind People (Action) provides information and support to children and young people who are blind or partially sighted, and their families.

Get active with Actionnaires. Our Actionnaires clubs provide opportunities for children who are aged from four to 16 to participate in sporting, leisure and social activities in a safe, structured and fun environment. We also run residential, activity breaks and family weekends.

Maximising opportunities for young people. If you need any advice or guidance about starting work, college or university, or managing your finances, we are here to provide support.

Our residential weekends and breaks, day events and career workshops, for 14 to 25 year olds, are designed to enable you to build your confidence, increase your independence and meet new people. In addition volunteering opportunities are available for older children and young adults. We will work with you to set an action plan designed to meet your needs and aspirations.

To find out about activities going on in your local area visit our online Activity Calendar by typing actn.it/CYPFtheGap into your browser.

Living with Sight Loss. Action's community based, confidence building courses provide information, advice, support and practical solutions to independent living. There are three programmes to choose from, all designed for anyone affected by visual impairment – including friends and family members.

- 1. First Steps** is a one day course best suited to people just coming to terms with sight loss. It provides information about local services and support.
- 2. Finding your Feet** is a two day course that delves into things a little deeper. It may include speakers from other organisations who will talk about some of the services or opportunities they offer.
- 3. Living with Sight Loss** course is a six week programme made up of weekly day-long modules, delivered in partnership with other national charities and local groups.

Our courses provide opportunities to discuss the challenges sight loss presents with people who have been through it and, where possible, elements of the courses are run by people who are blind or partially sighted themselves. Courses are tailored to each group of attendees but the core elements are:

- getting out and making the most of your leisure time
- coping strategies designed to address the emotional aspects of sight loss
- practical solutions to overcome challenges to everyday living
- using technology
- looking after your eyes and skills for making the most of your vision.

For more information, including details of dates and locations, call your nearest Action team or visit our website at www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Employment. Our skilled employment advisers, based in teams around the country, offer practical support with looking for a job. We provide advice and guidance on making the most of your skills and job searching techniques. We have lots of tips to build your confidence and get you ready for interviews. Contact our Employment Line 'freephone' number to find out more. Call **0800 440 2255**

Email employmentline@actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Technology. Our Assistive Technology coordinators are here to explain what technology can do for you. They can assess your needs and abilities and discuss the various equipment options available – so, you could still use the internet to search for information and services, and join online groups.

We can talk to you about other devices too, including phones, mobiles, iPads (and other tablets) and electronic magnifiers that have features and adaptations built in to assist people who are blind or partially sighted.

Technology can sometimes be expensive, so we offer advice on various sources of funding or low cost solutions.

Resource Centres. Action's six Resource Centres are located in our Stoke, Stafford, Solihull, central London (Kings Cross), Liverpool and Bristol offices, providing advice and guidance on local services.

With sight loss it's easy to feel that choices are limited when it comes to technology and appliances used everyday to make life easier. Our friendly and knowledgeable staff are on hand to give impartial advice and demonstrate over 1,000 products that are available to buy from us.

Check Action's website for more information at

www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk/our-services/resource-centres or

call **0303 123 9999**. Appointments are not required but call ahead to check opening times.

Sight Loss Advisory Service. Adjusting to sight loss can be a challenging time for some people and for those who support them. Sight loss advisers (also known as ECLOs or eye clinic liaison officers) form a valuable link between people who are blind or partially sighted, their families and carers and health, social and community services. They provide initial emotional support and up to date information on local and national resources. In areas where the service operates, people choose whether to see an ECLO at their first appointment or at a later time.

If you would like further information on any of the services listed above, please visit: www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk call the RNIB Helpline on: **0303 123 9999** or email helpline@rnib.org.uk

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.

Telephone **020 7588 1885**. www.blindinbusiness.org.uk

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 advisors and a helpline/email advice service. Call the students helpline on **0800 328 5050** or email students@disabilityrightsuk.org or visit

www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/education-skills-and-employment

Early Support

The Early Support resources have been revised, updated and adapted for use with older children and disabled young people, including My Life, a resource developed and owned by young people and their families. www.ncb.org.uk/early-support

The Government website

The Government website includes information on a wide range of subjects, including transition into further education and training, employment and welfare benefits. It provides information on applying for DSAs at university and Access to Work in employment. www.gov.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. www.guidedogs.org.uk

Blind Children UK

Blind Children UK offer young people advice and guidance on educational advocacy, access technology as well as a nationwide programme of events for young people.

www.blindchildrenuk.org

NATSPEC: 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. www.natspec.org.uk

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

RNIB is the UK's leading charity offering information, support and advice to blind and partially sighted people, their friends, family and carers.

RNIB Helpline is your 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. Telephone **0303 123 9999**. Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

RNIB's website offers useful information for young people who are studying or looking for work. In particular, the Young people's section offers advice and guidance for blind and partially sighted young people aged from 14 to 25 on all stages of transition from school, to college, university and into employment. It has been co-designed and reviewed by young people across the UK and also offers information on emotional support, free time activities, technology and more.

You can read other young people's experiences of transition, along with the exciting "Mind's Eye" blog which offers the opportunity for you to become a "blogger" too! Visit our new Young People's section at www.rnib.org.uk/youngpeople or email cypf@rnib.org.uk

RNIB Emotional Support Service (ESS) provides confidential support, information and counselling if you are experiencing emotional difficulties because of your sight condition. We can also put you in touch with counsellors and support in your local area. For more information, visit www.rnib.org.uk/emotionalsupport, call RNIB's Helpline on **0303 123 9999** (and ask to be referred to the Emotional Support Service) or email ess@rnib.org.uk

RNIB Products and Publications. With over 1,000 products and publications, we have the widest range available from any organisation in Europe for blind and partially sighted people. All products are designed to make your life easier and help you to remain independent, whether you are at home, work, school, enjoying your leisure time or out and about. Shop with RNIB and get advice from our helpline team on the best products for you. For more information, visit www.rnib.org.uk/shop, call RNIB's helpline on **0303 123 9999** or email shop@rnib.org.uk

RNIB College Loughborough welcomes people of all abilities aged 16 upwards, on a residential or day basis. We offer a friendly and supportive environment for learners who are blind or partially sighted and/or have other disabilities. Both the College and halls of residence are modern and purpose-built. We share a campus with a mainstream college, which allows us to offer a wide range of choice and opportunities. For more information, to request a prospectus or arrange a visit please call **01509 61 10 77** or email enquiries@rnibcollege.ac.uk

About RNIB and Action for Blind People. RNIB works with Action for Blind People to draw on a wide range of skills and resources to support blind and partially sighted people. Our close relationship enables us to provide a unique combination of complementary strengths and expertise to support an ever increasing number of blind and partially sighted people.

If you require further copies of this guide, please visit www.rnib.org.uk/bridgingthegap or email cypf@rnib.org.uk

Notes

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