

Supporting students with a vision impairment in further education.

When supporting young people with a vision impairment in their transition into further education there are some key organisations offering support and guidance to students. This guide aims to highlight the support available for students in this phase of their transition by offering advice on accessible admissions, information on funding as well as the legal responsibilities of the institutions in relation to meeting the support needs of students with a vision impairment.

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1. Supporting disabled learners

Colleges and sixth forms have to make 'reasonable adjustments' so that any learners with a disability or impairment are not disadvantaged. There are all sorts of support and equipment that a college might offer and the college will look at what works best for an individual. Some examples of support may include a support teacher or worker, or a sighted guide, materials in alternative formats such as Braille or large print, assistive computer technology eg closed-circuit television, computers with speech synthesisers and magnification etc. They may also be able to offer assistance during assessments or exams, so that all learners are assessed fairly. The type of support available varies between colleges and it is important that young people are encouraged to contact and visit any further education establishments as early as possible to discuss their requirements and confirm the college will

meet their needs. Although there is no longer a legal requirement for colleges to produce a Disability Equality Scheme, some colleges may still have a DES or a Single Equality Scheme which you may wish to review. It is also important to consider the Public Sector Equality Duty and what action the college is taking on equality, especially in relation to the delivery of services for students.

The college's Learning Support Adviser, Disability adviser, Student support team or Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) will be able to offer further details on the support offered within a specific college.

For further information on what support students are entitled to at college in relation to the Equality Act 2010 visit www.gov.uk or follow this link: [Disability rights - Education](#)

2. Creating an accessible application process.

Clear guidelines for admissions staff

In selecting students, institutions should ensure equitable consideration of all applicants. Procedures for admissions should be drawn up with clear guidelines as to any action to be taken when a person declares a disability.

Disclosing a disability and other needs

Letters and forms for completion, which are sent to all prospective and future students or are available online, should provide an opportunity to encourage disclosure of a disability, any support needs or additional requirements.

Preferred medium for communications

On the initial letter, there should also be the opportunity for the student to indicate their preferred medium (eg large print, disk, BSL) for future communications. Any information received should be noted and acted upon (such as always using the preferred medium for future communications or arranging for an interpreter to be present at interview).

Enrolment and other forms should be designed to facilitate their completion by all students. Completion by electronic means, if possible in advance, should be considered. There should be the opportunity to declare a disability by means of carefully worded questions on the forms, together with explanation as to the advantages of declaration and how the information will be used.

Careful wording about disabilities

The way in which students are asked about their impairment influences how likely they are to tell you. Partly this is a question of language. Some people do not consider themselves as having a disability, especially those with Specific Learning Difficulties or health conditions.

Colleges should try and avoid a 'tick box approach' to identifying students' impairments. A narrow labelling approach reflects the medical model of disability and reinforces the idea that there is something 'wrong' with the individual and that the problems they face are a direct result of their own impairment or health condition.

It's important to make clear that the reason people are asked to 'disclose' is so the college can become aware of any barriers, develop solutions, make adjustments and provide support. This will result in fewer misunderstandings or anxieties. This also reflects the social model of disability in that it puts more emphasis on the barriers and responsibilities of the college and less on the disabled person.

The wording of questions should therefore be considered as well as the nature of the provider's response once a loss of vision and/or health condition is declared. You should ensure that further opportunities exist for Specific Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities to be reported and/or detected through, for example, Open Days, course inductions, Personal Tutors Learning Support and particular periods when they need support, such as the run up to exams.

Advertise the available support and confidentiality

Publicising the support available, and re-iterating that confidentiality will be observed, are positive steps to encourage disclosure. This could be supported by making available information and advice about relevant legislation, so students are aware of their legal entitlements.

Consider how a student will find this information on your website and in the Local Authority Local Offer.

Stress the benefits of disclosure

The benefits of disclosure and how the information will be used must be clearly stated as well as the provider's position when known information is withheld, i.e. provision of 'reasonable adjustments' for students who do not disclose a disability. There should also be a statement assuring confidentiality at all points where disclosure could occur.

Using information systems

Institutional information systems should monitor the applications, admissions, academic progress and nature of impairment of disabled students.

If an applicant indicates they are blind or partially sighted on application, the provider should ensure that a system is in place to inform the Disability Adviser (or named contact). The Disability Adviser or a designated representative should then contact the applicant directly to discuss any access arrangements or concerns they may have in relation to their studies including the application process.

Staff development

There should be specific and comprehensive staff development sessions relating to Part 6 Chapter 2 of the Equality Act 2010 for admissions tutors and administrative staff.

For more information on legal responsibilities including the Equality Act 2010, see legal responsibilities section in this guide.

3. Accessing available funding

Colleges receive funding in order to provide reasonable adjustments and make sure learners with a disability or impairment have the support they require. In colleges this is called Learning Support (LS). This is no longer a separate discreet funding stream, but is automatically included in the college funding mechanism. It is illegal to ask the disabled student to fund their reasonable adjustments.

Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Some students have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which outlines the student's aspirations, what course they want to do on leaving school, which is their preferred college and what support they will need to achieve their potential. Students and their parents have the right to request an EHCP from their Local Authority up to age 25 and can go to appeal through a Tribunal if they do not agree with the Local Authority. The EHCP has to be a person centred, individual assessment, involving the young person and their parents. With the student's agreement the Local Authority will share the EHCP with local and specialist colleges so that they know exactly what support the student may need, its cost and can advise on specific needs relating to the course and college. Colleges and Local Authorities have to co-operate and Adult Social Care departments must also co-operate – for example to ensure the student's care package takes into account their personal care needs at college.

Those students with an EHCP may receive funding from their Local Authority for their college course and have the right to request a Personal Budget.

Full details about EHCPs, the Local Offer, sources of information and support can be found in a leaflet SEND Guide for parents and carers here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-guide-for-parents-and-carers

In England there are two funding bodies for colleges;

- [Education Funding Agency](#) which funds young Learners between 16 and 19 years old or up to the age of 25 if the young learner has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or a Section 139a Learning Difficulty Assessment.
- [Skills Funding Agency \(SFA\)](#) which funds adult learners over 19 or 25 if they do not have an EHCP or learning Difficulty Assessment

Local Authorities have a duty to provide appropriate education and training for all young people up to 19 and up to 25 for those with an EHCP or a Section 139a Learning Difficulty Assessment who need to continue in education or training to achieve the outcomes agreed in their EHCP.

Local Offer

Local Authorities also have a legal duty to make available their Local Offer in accessible formats, including a website. The Local Offer means information on all the services and opportunities available for children and young people with a disability or Special Educational Needs in the local area. It must include information on all the approved specialist colleges out of the local area on the Section 41 list which can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/section-41-secretary-of-state-approved-list>

Apprenticeships

Colleges are expected to make reasonable adjustments and provide support with the training-related aspects of an apprenticeship, paid for through LS. Support costs for apprentices in the workplace should normally be covered by the [Access to Work](#) scheme.

Supported Internships and Traineeships

Access to Work is also available for the work placement elements of Supported Internships and Traineeships. A factsheet is available on the Preparing for Adulthood website

www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/what-we-do/supportedinternships/access-to-work-fund

And Access to Work - <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

There is a bursary fund for mature students who take out a [24+ Advanced Learning Loan](#). This fund will be similar to Discretionary Learner Support but colleges will have flexibility to respond to students' needs and local circumstances. The fund can be used to support learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, for example with support teachers, sighted guides and specialist equipment. It is expected that learners from age 19 may be eligible for loans and the bursary fund for Level 3 and 4 courses in future.

Discretionary Learner Support

Colleges receive funding from the two funding agencies to support students with hardship needs. Each college publishes its own policy, eligibility rules, how and when to apply and appeals procedure. The hardship fund covers items like transport to college and course equipment.

There is normally no guarantee that a student will automatically continue to receive Learner Support through this fund from one term or year to the next, depending on demand and the college's eligibility criteria.

Further information on Funding further education for disabled students in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can be found through the [Disability Rights UK website](#) in the 'publications' section or by contacting the [Skills Funding Agency \(SFA\)](#) and [Education Funding Agency](#) directly.

4. Legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010

It is unlawful for schools and other education providers to discriminate, either directly or indirectly, against disabled pupils, students and adult learners.

Indirect discrimination can occur when a disabled person is inadvertently discriminated against because of the way a college does things. For example, a policy that requires students to use

online systems which are not accessible to assistive technology could be seen as indirect discrimination against a student with a visual impairment.

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) colleges have a duty to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This includes consulting and involving disabled students to help them identify their priorities for action.

Find out how the Equality Act 2010 has increased protection for disabled learners against unfair treatment.

To learn more about the Equality Act visit [RNIB: Equality Act 2010](#) or visit [Gov.uk: Disability rights - Education](#)

5. Disability Rights UK

Skill: National Bureau for Disabled Students closed in April 2011. Disability Rights UK, in partnership with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), has taken over some former Skill activities and delivers a wider 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.

You can download a variety of factsheets for disabled students and advisors including information on making Reasonable Adjustments to ensure disabled students can access opportunities and funding further and higher education for disabled students. Into FE and Into Apprenticeships are available hard copy and online.

Disability Rights UK runs a helpline offering free information and advice to disabled students, parents and advisers in England, As well as general questions about support and funding, the helpline can advise on welfare benefits, for example how full-time students may be able to continue to claim income related-benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Housing Benefit.

Disabled Student Helpline

Tel: 0800 328 5050, Tues 11.30-1.30, Thurs 1.30-3.30

Email: students@disabilityrightsuk.org

Visit www.disabilityrightsuk.org for further information.

6. Useful publications

- **Your future, your vision, your choice: Bridging the gap**
RNIB have produced a series of transition guidance for young blind or partially sighted people aged 14 to 25 years. These guides outline the support and services available to assist young people in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland throughout their journey from school, through further and higher education and on into employment. The guide aims to empower young people, enabling them to make their own informed choices about their future.
www.rnib.org.uk/transitionguide
- **Disability Rights UK Publications**
Disability Rights UK produces a range of information booklets that focus on issues that affect studying or looking for work as a disabled person. www.disabilityrightsuk.org and click on publications These include Into FE and Into Apprenticeships, with case studies showing how a range of students are supported to achieve their potential at college and work.
- **The [funding regulations guide for 2014 to 2015](http://www.gov.uk/16-to-19-education-funding-guidance)** is produced by the Education Funding Agency and provides the funding principles, rules on eligibility, and other regulations for colleges and other providers. This includes funding for specialist colleges and for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. The Guide is available on the government website here www.gov.uk/16-to-19-education-funding-guidance
- **Preparing for adulthood – England**

This guide outlines the changes since September 2014 and aims to bring together some of the main issues that parents and young people need to think about to be ready for moving on from school. The guide can be downloaded at:

www.cafamily.org.uk/media/792666/send_reforms_-_moving_into_adulthood_september_2014.pdf

- **RNIB's young people's webpages**

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.

Website: www.rnib.org.uk/youngpeople

- **Supported Internships**

This factsheet explains what a Supported Internship is, the policy surrounding them and how colleges can set them up. The programme became widely available in England from September 2013.

www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/resources/pfa-resources

- **Supporting you at college 2014/15**

This is a guide for people with additional support needs in colleges in Scotland and available on the Scottish Government website. Guidance can be downloaded at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/UniversitiesColleges/16640/partnershipmatters/PartnershipMatters/SupportingYouatCollege>

7. Useful contacts

Benefits Enquiry Line for people with disabilities, carers and representatives

2nd Floor, Red Rose House, Lancaster Road, Preston

Lancashire PR1 1HB
England, Scotland, Wales:
Telephone: 0800 882 200
Textphone: 0800 243 355
Email: BEL-Customer-Services@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)

Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn WA7 2GJ
Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-innovation-skills

The government department with overall responsibility for further education.

Department for Education and Skills

3rd Floor, Pillar MO1/02, Welsh Assembly Government
Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ
Telephone: English 0300 060 3300, Welsh 0300 060 4400
Email: wag-en@mailuk.custhelp.com
Website: www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills

Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) (DELNI)

Adelaide House, 39-49 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8FD
Telephone: 028 9025 7777
Email: info@delni.gov.uk
Website: www.delni.gov.uk

Gov.uk

Website: www.gov.uk/
Information on a wide range of government services, including, education, training, employment, Access to Work and welfare benefits.

Directory of Social Change

24 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2DP
Tel: 0845 077 7707
Fax: 020 7391 4804
Email: publications@dsc.org.uk

Website: www.dsc.org.uk

DIS-FORUM

www.jiscmail.ac.uk/DIS-FORUM

An online forum open to anyone working in Further or Higher Education with an interest in disability. Contributions or queries on the subject of support for disabled students and staff in colleges and universities are welcome.

Education and Library Boards (Northern Ireland)

Details of local education and library boards are available on the DELNI website at:
www.delni.gov.uk

Education Funding Agency

53-55 Butts Road, Earlsdon Park
Coventry CV1 3BH Tel: 0800 121 8989
Email: learnersupport.EFA@education.gsi.gov.uk
Website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-funding-agency>

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Contains a guide for FE providers in relation to the Equality Act 2010 and a Guide for FE students

Go Wales

Website: www.gowales.co.uk
Offers services to help students and graduates in Wales including work placements, work experience and funding for training.

Jobcentre Plus

Website: www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus
Helpline: 0845 606 0234 Textphone: 0845 605 5255
Provides services to jobseekers including help finding work, vacancy search through Universal Jobmatch, Access to Work and Disability Employment Advisers.

Lead Scotland

Princes House, 5 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh EH2 4RG

Tel: 0131 228 9441 Information service: 0800 999 2568

Email: info@lead.org.uk

Website: www.lead.org.uk

Lead Scotland enables disabled adults and carers to access inclusive learning opportunities in Scotland. They also run an information and advice service for disabled students in Scotland.

My World of Work

Telephone: 0800 917 8000

Website: www.myworldofwork.co.uk/

Provides information and advice on learning in Scotland, including help with finding a course.

NADP

Tel: 01604 497933

Email: admin@nadp-uk.org

Website: <http://nadp-uk.org>

NADP is a professional association for those working in the post-secondary education sector involved in the management or delivery of services for disabled students.

National Careers Service

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>

Telephone 0800 100 900 Career planning, information and advice service for students in England. Adults aged 20 and over who have a disability, learning difficulty or health condition should be able to get at least three sessions of face-to-face advice and help by e-mail and phone. Young people can access advice by e-mail and phone.

Natspec – Association of National Specialist Colleges

Tel: 0117 923 2830 **9.00am – 5.30pm**

Email: chiefexecutive@natspec.org.uk

Website: www.natspec.org.uk

Promotes specialism and expertise for students with learning difficulties or disabilities. Membership association for specialist colleges and provides advice to parents, young people, professionals. Lists all specialist colleges approved by DfE for funding (S41 list).NI Direct

Website: www.nidirect.gov.uk

Information on a wide range of government services in Northern Ireland, including, education, training, employment and welfare benefits.

Scottish Funding Council

Donaldson House, 97 Haymarket Terrace

Edinburgh EH12 5HD

Tel: 0131 313 6500

Email: info@sfc.ac.uk

Website: www.sfc.ac.uk

Skills Funding Agency

Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road, Coventry CV1 2WT

Telephone: 0845 377 5000

Email: info@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk

Website: <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk>

Translink

Telephone: 028 90 66 66 30

Email: callcentre@translink.co.uk

Provide free and concessionary bus passes to disabled people in Northern Ireland.

8. Contact us

If you have any other questions about the learning and teaching of blind or partially sighted young people, contact us (RNIB's Children, Young people and Families (CYPF) team at cypf@rnib.org.uk or visit www.rnib.org.uk/educationprofessionals

For further information about RNIB

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), and its associate charity Action for Blind People, provide a range of services to support children with visual impairment, their families and the professionals who work with them.

RNIB Helpline can refer you to specialists for further advice and guidance relating to your situation. RNIB Helpline can also help you by providing information and advice on a range of topics, such as eye health, the latest products, leisure opportunities, benefits advice and emotional support.

Call the Helpline team on 0303 123 9999 or email helpline@rnib.org.uk

If you would like regular information to help your work with children who have vision impairment, why not subscribe to "Insight", RNIB's magazine for all who live or work with children and young people with VI.

Information Disclaimer

Effective Practice Guides provide general information and ideas for consideration when working with children and young people who have a visual impairment (and complex needs). All information provided is from the personal perspective of the author of each guide and as such, RNIB will not accept liability for any loss or damage or inconvenience arising as a consequence of the use of or the inability to use any information within this guide. Readers who use this guide and rely on any information do so at their own risk. All activities should be done with the full knowledge of the medical condition of the child or young person and with guidance from the QTVI and other professionals involved with the child. RNIB does not represent or warrant that the information accessible via the website, including Effective Practice Guidance is accurate, complete or up to date.

Guide updated: February 2015