



# See My Skills

Breaking the cycle of unemployment for  
blind and partially sighted people

JULY 2021



Vision Foundation

**100**  
years



“ One of the biggest barriers from my point of view is employer perception. ”

*Annika*

“ On the positive side... when companies do get it right and offer you Access to Work and the proper support, and then it does work and it's generally really good. ”

*Simon*

# Foreword



“ Blind and partially sighted people do the vast majority of the jobs that sighted people do. They might do them a little differently – using specialist technology or admin support – but they do them successfully. In my role I’ve worked alongside blind or partially sighted politicians, journalists, lawyers, presenters, teachers, fundraisers, professors, artists, authors, actors, bankers, CEOs, entrepreneurs and chefs. But these success stories are far too few. In fact, if you’re a blind adult of working age in the UK, there is only a 1 in 4 chance that you’re working. That means that over 300,000 blind and partially sighted people are currently excluded from the workplace.

This report sets out a roadmap to ensure that everyone, sighted or blind, has the chance to enjoy the independence, purpose and meaning that employment can bring. We identify the barriers, and how to knock them down.

The pandemic has shown us that we can overhaul working norms overnight. Let’s extend that adaptability and create a level playing field for sight loss employment. ”

**Dr Olivia Curno**

Chief Executive  
Vision Foundation



“ I was born with very little sight which gradually deteriorated and left me blind since I was seven. Despite the loss of a sense that most people rely on all the time, I’ve been able to lead a fulfilling life and have a good career because of determination, walking the untrodden path and people’s faith in my abilities and their willingness to take risks.

It deeply saddens me to know that 73 % of blind and partially sighted people of working age in the UK are unemployed, which doesn’t only mean a lack of financial independence, but also lower confidence, more isolation and inequality in our communities. I know that we can give so much if given a chance. All it takes is the willingness to change the status quo and belief that disability is not the same as inability.

Through determination, patience and the support of my loved ones, I graduated as an engineer and have built a full-time career in financial services. This report will shed light on the challenges blind and partially sighted people face but more importantly what we all can do about it. It will help pave the way for others, so please join the Vision Foundation on this important journey and make a difference. ”

**Naqi Rizvi**

Appeal Board Chair for Vision  
Foundation



“ Legal & General has been working in partnership with the Vision Foundation since 2020. At Legal & General, we believe diversity strengthens us, and are proud to be a vibrant business that values and embraces difference. We want our employees to feel they belong and are empowered to deliver business results.

We are committed to embedding diversity in every aspect of our business and believe an inclusive culture is vital for a thriving, performing workforce.

We are really proud to have supported this research report and are pleased to be contributing to changing employment outcomes for blind and partially sighted people. ”

**Sara Heald**

Head of Corporate Social  
Responsibility  
Legal & General



# Introduction

Right now, more than 2 million people in the UK are living with sight loss<sup>1</sup>, causing a significant impact on their daily lives. Issues around employment represent one of the biggest barriers to equal participation,<sup>1</sup> with only 1 in 4 blind and partially sighted people of working age in employment, a figure that has worsened in the last decade.<sup>2</sup>

The sight loss employment gap is a shocking 48%. Currently 75% of the general population are in employment,<sup>3</sup> falling to 51% amongst the disabled population (excluding sight loss) and to 27% for people registered blind or partially sighted.<sup>4</sup>

In order to better understand what factors contribute towards positive employment outcomes for blind and partially sighted people, the Vision Foundation commissioned research from the University of Birmingham's Department of Disability Inclusion and Special Needs.

This briefing outlines the research findings and makes recommendations for a united response from the public, private and charity sectors to level the employment playing field for blind and partially sighted people.



- 1 Barriers faced by blind and partially sighted people (2018) RNIB
- 2 Slade, Edwards, Crawley (2020) Employment for blind and partially sighted people in 2019. RNIB
- 3 ONS Labour market data (April 2021) .
- 4 Slade (2019), Labour Force Survey 2018: comparison of people with sight loss to the rest of the population

## Definition of terms

### Blind

Someone who has been identified as Severely Sight Impaired on a Certificate of Vision Impairment form from an eye hospital, and then registered blind by their local authority.

### Partially sighted

Someone who has been identified as Sight Impaired on a Certificate of Vision Impairment from an eye hospital, and then registered partially sighted by their local authority.

### Working age

This is defined as 18-64 years. The term "working age" includes everyone within this age range, regardless of their employment status.

### Access to Work

A government funded employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work. It can provide practical and financial support for disabled people or people with a long term physical or mental health condition.

### Jobcentre Plus

Part of the Department for Work and Pensions which delivers working-age support services in the UK.

## Sight loss employment statistics

Across the UK there are an estimated **2,190,000** people living with sight loss.<sup>5</sup> An estimated **424,000** of these are of working age.

Only **27%** of working age blind or partially sighted people are in work, compared to **51%** of disabled people, and **75%** of the general population.<sup>6,7</sup>

**90%** of those with the most severe sight loss are not in work.<sup>6</sup>

**90%** of those who lose their sight during childhood will not work for more than 6 months in their lives.<sup>8</sup>

**23%** of employers would not be willing to make adaptations to employ a blind or partially sighted person despite Equality Act obligations.<sup>9</sup>

Only **40%** of employers are confident that their recruitment processes are accessible to blind or partially sighted people [**24% for small employers**].<sup>9</sup>

**90%** of employers state that it would be “difficult” or “impossible” to employ a visually impaired person.<sup>9</sup>

Working age people with no qualifications are **six times** more likely to be in employment than registered blind and partially sighted people with no qualifications.<sup>6</sup>

Unemployment contributes to the cost of sight loss each year in the UK. This is estimated to be **£28 billion**,<sup>5</sup> more than heart disease, cancer and stroke combined.<sup>10</sup>

“ Inclusion means everyone. This has been ignored for too long. UK Plc is missing out on a wealth of talent and capability, and the cost to society is huge. ”

HRH The Countess of Wessex  
Royal Patron of Vision Foundation  
Speaking at a Disability Inclusion event, St James' Palace, 2019

5 Barriers faced by blind and partially sighted people (2018) RNIB

6 Slade, Edwards and White (2017). Employment status and sightloss. RNIB.

7 ONS Labour market data (April 2021) .

8 Functionality and the Needs of Blind and Partially Sighted Young People in the UK: A Survey of Young People, Parents, Educators and Mobility Specialists' (Nzegwu and Dooley 2008). Investigation of data relating to blind and partially sighted people in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey: October 2009 – September 2012' (Hewett 2013)

9 Roberts, S, C Heaver, K Hill, J Rennison, B Stafford, N Howat, G Kelly, S Krishnan, P Tapp and Thomas (2004), Disability in the Workplace: Employers' and Service Providers' responses to the Disability Discrimination Act in 2003 and preparation for 2004 changes, DWP, report No 2002

10 Luengo-Fernandez, R., Leal, J., Gray, A. 2012. UK research expenditure on dementia, heart disease, stroke and cancer: are levels of spending related to disease burden? European Journal of Neurology 2012, 19: 149-154

# Executive Summary

## Overview

Employment rates for blind and partially sighted people are staggeringly low. Just one in four people living with sight loss are in work, a situation that has only worsened in the last decade.

Blind and partially sighted people have the right to work like anybody else – but far too many are being written off, forgotten, destined to live a life on benefits. This contributes to the economic impact of sight loss, an estimated £28 billion per year in the UK – more than heart disease, cancer and stroke combined.<sup>10</sup>

## Research

In order to understand the factors that contribute towards positive employment outcomes for blind and partially sighted people, we commissioned research in 2020/21 by Dr Rachel Hewitt and Dr Liz Ellis at the University of Birmingham.

The research included the identification and categorisation of 605 peer-reviewed academic and professional journals, thorough review of those papers most relevant, and focus groups with visually impaired individuals and sight loss professionals.

**The aims of the research were two-fold.**

1. To guide the Vision Foundation's grant programme
2. To develop evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, businesses and sight loss charities.

## Key findings

### Enablers and barriers

Blind and partially sighted people face significant and multi-faceted barriers in accessing the labour market. These include personal barriers (e.g. their skillset or levels of self-determination), societal barriers (e.g. stigmatization) and programmatic barriers (e.g. lack of signposting to key services or inaccessibility of the Government's Access to Work scheme).<sup>11</sup>

The lack of understanding about visual impairment by employers and Jobcentre Plus staff are major barriers to employment. Our research highlighted the importance of working with employers and service providers to educate them to overcome negative attitudes.

### Positive interventions

Our research highlighted the importance of individual assessments to identify the support required and bespoke programmes to enable their participation in the labour market. This might include, for example, support to develop key skills (such as mobility and orientation or computer skills), counselling to help in acceptance of their visual impairment or support to develop self-advocacy skills.

The importance and positive impact of mentoring for both the mentee and the mentor was also highlighted. Sight loss organisations play an important role in helping improve employers' knowledge of visual impairment, which in turn can help overcome negative attitudes.

### There is a lack of evidence of "what works"

Most of the literature focuses on barriers to entering the labour market or participating in the workplace, rather than identifying positive interventions. Further research is needed into which interventions are most effective, and sight loss charities should publish their outcome data to improve knowledge across the sector.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

## Key recommendations

### To address current gaps in provision – in particular:

- Work experience opportunities, including internships and voluntary placements.
- Mentoring schemes including those which link blind and partially sighted job seekers with non-disabled employers, or with others with a visual impairment, with a particular focus on increased mentoring opportunities for 26 years +.
- Tailored support for individuals who wish to set up as self-employed.
- Workplace visual impairment awareness training to facilitate the inclusion of blind and partially sighted employees.

### To improve employment support services within the vision impairment sector:

- Services should be holistic and address individuals' specific needs.
- Services should be offered as early as possible to those who have lost, or are in danger of losing, their job; particularly if their sight loss is recent.

### To promote change through campaigning and advocacy:

- Access to Work must be more accessible.
- Jobcentre Plus must be improved, including raising staff aspirations for blind and partially sighted job seekers.
- Employers and recruiters must improve the accessibility of job application processes.
- Sight loss charities should lead by example by employing more blind and partially sighted people.
- Sight loss charities should work with employers, trade and professional organisations and unions to improve their understanding of visual impairment.


### To address gaps in evidence:

- Sight loss charities should publish the outcomes of their interventions to improve knowledge within the sector.
- Further academic research is needed to improve understanding of which interventions best support blind and partially sighted people into employment.

## A roadmap for change

We're calling for a united response to address unemployment in the visually impaired community; to see skills not barriers. Through small changes in practice and attitudes, we know that together the public, private and charitable sectors can level the employment playing field for blind and partially sighted people.

- We're calling on **policy makers** to make improvements to Access to Work and Jobcentre Plus to better support blind and partially sighted people into employment.
- We're calling on **businesses, big and small**, to reduce employment barriers for blind and partially sighted people, by improving job application processes, increasing their understanding of visual impairment and providing awareness training in the workplace.
- We're calling on **sight loss charities**, including those that provide employment support, to work together to amplify successes and address gaps in evidence and service provision.

A man with short hair, wearing a blue V-neck t-shirt, is looking down at a white laptop. He is using a Braille keyboard, which is a dark grey strip with raised dots, placed over the standard keyboard. His hands are on the keyboard, and he appears to be focused on his work. The background shows a white door and a wooden floor.

**“ The whole process, you really need all of it to work, whether that’s the right equipment, right team, right set up to enable you to do your job. ”**

*Tom*



# Research approach

The following questions underpinned both the literature review and focus groups research

1. Who is at most risk of unemployment?
2. What can be done about this?
3. Which interventions have good outcomes and why?
4. Are there good employment programmes not aimed at people with a visual impairment that can be replicated?
5. What does best practice look like?
6. What improvements can be made?
7. What policy changes are needed?

## Literature review

A literature review using highly defined search terms, identified 605 relevant research papers published since the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act<sup>12</sup> covering the following questions:

1. Which factors determine likelihood of positive outcomes in the labour market for blind and partially sighted people?
2. Which interventions can help blind and partially sighted people to develop the skills they need to work independently in the workplace?
3. Which interventions can help disabled people to develop the skills they need to work independently in the workplace and access the labour market?
4. What are the barriers and enablers for blind and partially sighted people in the labour market?

Only English language papers from peer reviewed academic or professional journals were included. Research covering visual impairment included international sources, but more general disability research was UK only. Evidence was segmented into four categories to reflect the research questions and the most relevant papers were then reviewed against pre-determined questions.

## Focus groups

23 individuals were recruited to five focus groups through organisations in Greater London that provide services to blind and partially sighted people. To increase representation of under 25-year-olds, some individuals were recruited from outside Greater London. Focus groups included a mix of professionals who provide employment related support to blind and partially sighted people and individuals that have used these services. 8 of the 10 professional participants were blind or partially sighted themselves. Due to Covid restrictions, focus groups took place via Zoom with a maximum of 6 individuals per group.

These were recorded, transcribed and key themes summarised.<sup>13</sup> Topics explored included:

- What might positive employment related outcomes for blind and partially sighted people look like?
- Barriers and enablers which impact on blind and partially sighted people securing employment and participating within the workplace
- Experiences of the Access to Work scheme
- Experiences of Jobcentre Plus
- Interventions which have been successful in helping blind and partially sighted people develop the skills they require to work independently in the workplace and move closer to the labour market
- Gaps in employment related services for blind and partially sighted people in the Greater London area

<sup>12</sup> Literature search terms, categorisation and a summary of the papers reviewed can be found in the full research report on the Vision Foundation website.

<sup>13</sup> Pseudonyms were used for focus group participant quotes.

# Literature review

## Which factors determine likelihood of positive outcomes in the labour market for blind and partially sighted people?

Though many of the factors identified are fixed, understanding their impact is important when designing interventions to support blind and partially sighted people into employment.<sup>14</sup>

### The following increase the likelihood of a positive outcome for working age people:

- higher level qualifications
- proficiency in communication skills
- mobility skills
- acceptance of visual impairment
- living in a metropolitan area

### For younger adults:

- confidence to travel independently
- previous work experience

### The following are linked to negative outcomes:

- additional disabilities
- higher severity of visual impairment
- length of time away from employment



Factors which improve employment chances for blind and partially sighted people.

## Which interventions help blind and partially sighted people to develop the skills they need to work independently in the workplace?

- Several studies found positive effects for mentoring programmes<sup>15</sup> including an increased focus on job searching, increased ability to job search independently, increased confidence in making career seeking decisions and a more positive attitude.
- Research of rehabilitation providers in the US<sup>16</sup> showed a need for employers to be educated about visual impairment and for rehabilitation providers to act as a resource and support system for both individuals and employers.
- A survey of 229 individuals identified three non-fixed factors for employment service providers to consider at initial assessment stage – mobility skills, acceptance of visual impairment (particularly significant) and optimism for positive outcomes.<sup>14</sup>
- Our literature review found limited research of evidence-based interventions for supporting blind and partially sighted people into employment. Service providers can help fill this evidence gap by evaluating and reporting on the services they deliver.

14 Goertz et al (2017) "Factors associated with participation on the competitive labour market of people with visual impairments in The Netherlands." *Work: A Journal of Prevention Assessment and Rehabilitation*

15 Antonelli et al (2018) "College graduates with visual impairments: A report on seeking and finding employment." *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*

16 Crudden et al (2005) "Overcoming Barriers to Employment: Strategies of Rehabilitation Providers." *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*

## More broadly, which interventions help disabled people to develop the skills they need to work independently in the workplace and access the labour market?

- A systematic review of papers between 2002 and 2008<sup>17</sup> reported on several UK national-level interventions aimed at helping people who received a disability benefit into work, financial incentive interventions and health condition management.
- They concluded that personal advisers and individual case management were effective but time pressures and job outcome targets tended to prioritise easier to place and more work-ready individuals onto programmes.
- Financial incentives can help transition to work, but not if set too low or short term.
- Research into employer attitudes to employing disabled employees<sup>18</sup> showed better outcomes in larger employers with specialist HR, good practice is least developed in smaller companies.

## What are the barriers and enablers for blind and partially sighted people in the labour market?

### One study separated barriers into three categories:<sup>19</sup>

- **Personal barriers** include individuals that have difficulty coming to terms with the consequences of sight loss, having additional disabilities, low confidence for independent travel or mobility skills, lack of previous work experience opportunities, lack of knowledge about rights, lack of confidence, having dependents or lower level qualifications.
- **Societal barriers** include those faced by blind and partially sighted people within the labour market, such as disability stigmatization, limited understanding of visual impairment, lack of ability or willingness to make accommodations or difficult processes to do so.
- **Programmatic barriers** are unintended resulting from systems and processes to support disabled people, for example, lack of employment support, low staff aspiration for blind and partially sighted people to find work, or a perceived 'benefits trap.'

### Enablers included:

- improved employer awareness
- accessing vocational services
- using social networks to find jobs
- securing the right adaptations and technical support from employers
- improved transport
- personal motivation
- the chance to demonstrate skills to employers



17 Clayton et al (2011) "Assembling the evidence jigsaw: insights from a systematic review of UK studies of individual-focused return to work initiatives for disabled and long-term ill people." BMC Public Health

18 Goss et al (2000) "Disability and employment: A comparative critique of UK legislation." International Journal of Human Resource Management

19 O'Day (1999) "Employment Barriers for People with Visual Impairments." Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness

# Focus groups

## Positive employment related outcomes

Participants overwhelmingly felt that employers and colleagues needed to be more aware of visual impairment in order to breakdown pre-conceived stereotypes and to be proactive in providing the right technology and support. People wanted to be seen as valued employees equal to their sighted colleagues, seen for their skills and qualifications.

Participants spoke of their desire for job satisfaction and an opportunity to progress but acknowledged that some blind and partially sighted people find themselves in a 'sticky floor' situation once everything is set up and they feel comfortable there. A need for flexibility, for example allowing start and finish times that avoid rush hour, or time off for eye appointments was also highlighted.

In essence, participants said they needed the whole package – right job, right team, right set up - to make employment work for them.

*“There is a big, big hurdle that a person with a visual impairment has to overcome to convince employers that they are able to do the job.”*

**Annika**

## Barriers, enablers and strategies to employment

Specialist support, information and guidance, including knowing how and where to access it were identified as the cornerstone of positive employment experiences. Participants acknowledged that a lack of self-esteem or confidence could be a barrier for some blind or partially sighted people, which can stem from negative comments about their abilities or a reaction to how they felt about losing their sight.

Developing self-advocacy skills with specialist input and support was identified as an important strategy to increase confidence in skills and abilities, but publicity and availability of these services is variable. Being part of networks for blind and partially sighted people was seen as a positive step to reducing isolation, promoting self-confidence and signposting to specialist support.

Having poor mobility and orientation skills was particularly identified by the professionals in the focus groups as a barrier to successful employment. Having the appropriate technology and adaptations for work is redundant, if you can't get there or navigate around.

Technology was frequently mentioned as a barrier and an enabler. Access to it is important, but knowledge about what's on offer, how to access funding and correct training for its use is equally necessary.

Compatibility of software with other workplace systems can prove a challenge and for those with a progressive eye conditions, technology and other support needs can change over time; there is often a lack of awareness in employers that there is not a one size fits all solution.

Poor accessibility to job application processes was highlighted as a barrier, most job boards are not accessible and alternative formats are still not always available. A lack of work experience opportunities was identified as a major barrier, putting blind and partially sighted people at a skills disadvantage to their sighted peers.

*“I think the barrier is opportunity. For sighted people, gaining work experience is quite straightforward and you can do a variety of work experiences. ...But what they do is build up a bank of skills which employers value, and because of that bank of skills, you then get that break..”*

**John**

Employers' negative perceptions of blind and partially sighted people and general lack of awareness were seen as a major barrier. Making employers aware of the skills and talents that blind or partially sighted employees can bring to a workplace, is one way of improving employment outcomes.

There was scepticism of 'Disability Confident' employers because the scheme is self-certifying and can feel like a box ticking exercise. Access to personalised support was overwhelmingly seen as an enabler to successful employment.

*“I need specialised assistance I guess, in some ways you could say I would need more of a person-centred plan than your average jobseeker would.”*

**Zainab**

## Programmatic barriers – Access to Work and Jobcentre Plus

Access to Work was valued, but participants highlighted many flaws. There is a lack of awareness of it, what it covers and how to apply. This is compounded ironically by poor accessibility, making it difficult for blind and partially sighted people to navigate it independently. Delays leave people without the technology or equipment to do their jobs effectively or out of pocket. The assessment and application process itself is seen as unduly onerous. Participants voiced concerns that Access to Work doesn't cover all apprenticeships, voluntary work or work experience - an additional barrier to future employment.

*“There’s not enough knowledge about Access to Work at all, outside a very small bubble if you’re lucky to know someone who knows the whole process and what the support worker is for.”*

**Simon**

*“I just find it incredibly strange that in the 21st century you can’t send them an application or a claim form by email securely. It has to be signed, and it’s not accessible [for] visually impaired people at all.”*

**Hazem**

Jobcentre Plus was universally criticised by participants who voiced concerns about poor staff attitudes and a feeling of being written off employment wise in favour of benefits. This is compounded by a lack of understanding of visual impairment and lack of assistive technology in the offices.

*“...there’s an assumption of we will put you on benefits and off you go on your merry way...but there’s plenty of people that doesn’t work for and equally discourages blind and partially sighted people to look for work.”*

**Zainab**

*“It’s not that job centre staff want to be unhelpful towards individuals with sight loss. It’s quite simply that they do not have the expertise.”*

**John**

## Future directions – priorities for the future

Participants identified three priorities for charities and organisations that support blind and partially sighted people.

- To lead by example in their recruitment decisions.
- To increase their mentoring and peer support.

To raise awareness of visual impairment with employers, trade associations and trade unions to help improve employment prospects.

*“In my experience, most people who have employment with sight loss are either working for a large governmental organization or for a charity or working in local government, or indeed self-employed. In terms of the sort of people working at supermarket, for example, I’ve yet to see someone with a visual impairment working in that kind of job.”*

**Martin**



# Conclusions

Unemployment remains one of the biggest challenges facing blind and partially sighted people. Our research has highlighted several areas of focus to help break this cycle.

## Predicting risk factors for unemployment

The literature review identified some key factors that make the visually impaired community more at risk of being unemployed or economically inactive. An understanding of these is vital in developing and delivering effective interventions. For example, having an additional disability, being out of work for a long time, having more severe sight loss, having limited skills for accessing information, not having accepted their visual impairment or limited mobility skills, all increase the risk of being out of work.

## Delivering positive interventions

Published research about which interventions have the best employment outcomes for blind and partially sighted people is limited. Our research did however highlight some positive interventions that may be beneficial, including mentoring schemes, counselling support to help with acceptance of visual impairment, support to access work placements, availability of tailored support, skills development and working with employers to improve their understanding of visual impairment.

## Learning from generalist employment programmes

There are a number of effective employment programmes aimed at the general population that could be replicated including support from personal advisors, financial incentives to support transition into work, support from specialist HR departments in larger employers and working with employers to raise awareness of the potential benefits of employing a disabled person. A responsive welfare system and a reliable funding system for employment programmes is also necessary.

## Improving employment outcomes together

There is much that a united sight loss sector could do to improve employment outcomes for blind and partially sighted people, including leading by example by employing blind and partially sighted people, running mentoring programmes, supporting self-employment, providing bespoke services, raising awareness of visual impairment and offering support and awareness training to employers.

## Reducing employment barriers through policy change

Barriers at policy level need to be addressed. Job seekers with disabilities need more protection from discrimination. Access to Work should be made available earlier to facilitate work experience, internships and voluntary work; accessibility to the scheme for blind and partially sighted people needs improving and more publicity is needed. Improved accessibility to Jobcentre Plus services and appropriate training for its staff is required.

**This report provides a roadmap to address the shockingly poor sight loss employment rates, which bring significant economic cost to society and immeasurable opportunity cost to the individual.**

**Join us on this journey and break the cycle of unemployment for blind and partially sighted people.**

# Our Call to Action

We're calling for a united response to address unemployment in the visually impaired community, to see skills not barriers. Through small changes in practice and attitudes across the private, public and charitable sectors, we can level the employment playing field. Here are our key recommendations.

## Policy Makers

**We're calling on policy makers to improve Access to Work and Jobcentre Plus to better support blind and partially sighted people into employment.**

Despite the Equality Act, blind and partially sighted people still face discrimination when trying to access the labour market. Access to Work and Jobcentre Plus, government programmes designed to support people into work, are creating additional barriers to employment, due to the way they are designed, administered and delivered.

**Access to Work needs to be made more accessible**

- Awareness of Access to Work and how to apply should be better promoted to individuals and employers of all sizes. Current awareness is low. For example, only 9 per cent of small businesses - who have the most to gain - use it.<sup>20</sup>
- The application, assessment and claims process should be made more accessible to blind and partially sighted people, in formats that can be completed independently, without sighted assistance.
- The process needs to be speeded up so that individuals are not starting employment without the necessary equipment or support, or out of pocket.
- The eligibility criteria should be broadened to cover all unpaid opportunities including internships, work experience or voluntary work.

**Jobcentre Plus provision needs to be improved**

- Staff should receive better training about visual impairment and how to signpost to specialist support.
- Staff need to raise their aspirations for blind and partially sighted job seekers and not assume they will be 'better off' on benefits.
- Jobcentre Plus offices should offer assistive technology.
- Where they exist, generalist disability employment advisers should receive specialist training in visual impairment.

## Businesses

**We're calling on businesses big and small, to work with us to reduce employment barriers for blind and partially sighted people.**

The most common barriers identified by blind and partially sighted people about gaining work are related to employer attitudes and processes – inaccessible recruitment processes, poor employer attitudes and poor employer support.<sup>21</sup>

- Employers and recruiters should make application processes accessible.
- Employers, trade, professional organisations and unions should improve their understanding of visual impairment.
- Employers should provide sight loss awareness training in the workplace.

## Sight Loss Charities

**We're calling on sight loss charities, to work together to amplify successes and address gaps in evidence and service provision.**

- Intervene earlier when someone is at risk of losing their job or has just lost a job.
- Provide services tailored to the needs of the individual. This might include providing technology, facilitating work experience, helping an individual to accept their visual impairment, supporting the development of self-advocacy skills or helping someone to set up their own business.
- Lead by example by offering employment, work experience, internships and voluntary work placements and sharing their expertise as accessible employers.
- Provide mentoring schemes, with a particular focus on filling the gap in provision for older job seekers (26+).
- Evaluate and report on the effectiveness and impact of employment support interventions to improve knowledge in the sector.

<sup>20</sup> Now is the Time (2021) CSJ Disability Commission

<sup>21</sup> Slade, Edwards, Crawley (2020) Employment for blind and partially sighted people in 2019. RNIB

Sight is the sense people fear losing the most. Yet 1 in 12 people living in London are at risk of losing their sight and this figure is set to increase.

For those already living with sight loss, London is not accessible. Blind and partially sighted people face isolation, poverty, discrimination and exclusion.

## It doesn't have to be this way.

We promote positive eye health to ensure losing your sight is something you never have to face. And we support and connect London's best projects for blind and partially sighted people, so everyone living with sight loss is fully included in our society.



Vision Foundation

100  
years

## Connect with us:

Call us: 020 7620 2066  
Email us: [hello@visionfoundation.org.uk](mailto:hello@visionfoundation.org.uk)  
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