

All-Party Parliamentary Group on
Eye Health and Visual Impairment

Changing Attitudes, Changing Lives: An Inquiry into Employer Attitudes and the Employment of Blind and Partially Sighted People



Eye Health
and Visual
Impairment



RNIB

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This report was supported and funded by Thomas Pocklington Trust and RNIB.

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About the APPG on Eye Health and Visual Impairment

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Eye Health and Visual Impairment (APPG) exists to raise awareness, educate, influence and shape future policy. It also aims to keep eye health and the issues facing people living with a vision impairment on the political agenda and acts as a space to build the understanding of Parliamentarians and civil society to support their effective advocacy, advice and scrutiny of relevant UK Government departments.

The APPG holds regular meetings and has produced a number of policy papers, recommendations and reports including the 2018 'See the Light' report outlining solutions to the current capacity issues in eye care services in England.

eyehealthviappg.org.uk

Foreword

Everyone deserves the right to work, yet in the UK if you are blind, there is only a one in four chance that you will be in work.

Despite having the Equality Act (2010), Government employment support schemes such as Access to Work (ATW) and the rise of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies within workplaces, the number of blind and partially sighted people not in work is woefully low. Which begs the question, why?



With 884,000 vacancies in the UK at present and the number of people living with sight loss set to double by 2050¹, employers need to wake up to the talent they are missing out on by breaking down barriers and changing their attitudes.

In Autumn 2023 the APPG commissioned the polling agency YouGov to carry out research on employer attitudes towards blind and partially sighted people. The findings were shocking, revealing urgent action is needed.

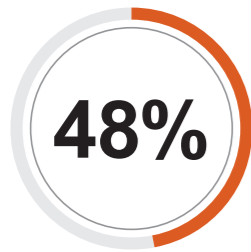


¹ Key Statistics About Sight Loss – (rnib.org.uk)

A snapshot of 2,000 UK employers polled found that:



of employers said they would not be willing to make workplace adaptations and adjustments in order to employ a blind or partially sighted person.



did not have accessible recruitment processes.



did not know where to find funding to help cover the extra costs of practical support for employees who are blind or partially sighted, such as the Government's Access to Work Scheme.

The findings reveal a pattern demonstrating many years of outdated views, misconceptions and even discrimination which has led to many blind and partially sighted people being consistently excluded from the labour market. The impact on their financial aspirations, mental health, confidence, and overall quality of life is profound.

The inquiry found that both the UK Government and employers could and should be doing so much more. From employers taking practical steps to ensure their workplaces are inclusive and their recruitment and selection processes are accessible to the UK Government addressing the structural failings in the Access to Work (ATW) scheme, including tackling the current delays and backlogs.

The report makes a series of recommendations calling on the UK Government and employers to take action. I believe the publication of this report must be a watershed moment and lead to lasting change, breaking down barriers for blind and partially sighted people to find work and changing employer attitudes that will ultimately change lives.

As a woman who has lived with nystagmus all my life, I know first-hand the challenges that can be experienced in the workplace. Now, as a Parliamentarian it has been my mission to do all I can to ensure those coming behind me do not experience the same battles.

It is time to shift the narrative and start to focus on what blind and partially sighted people can do, instead of what people presume we can't.

Marsha de Cordova MP Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Eye Health and Visual Impairment



Executive Summary

The APPG inquiry sought to understand employer attitudes and explore and eliminate some of the myths and misconceptions that still exist which are preventing many blind and partially sighted people from securing decent, well-paid work. It also sought to bring attention to where the practical barriers are, where legislation needs to be enforced, and what solutions there are to closing the disability employment gap.

Statistics and experiences show there is an obvious failure to comply with legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010, a lack of willingness from employers to understand and implement reasonable adjustments and, for the last decade, UK Government support schemes such as Access to Work (ATW) are not always reaching those that need them.

What is stark and hard to quantify is the number of blind and partially sighted people who feel like they have to leave their employment after a diagnosis or a deterioration in their sight. This is often down to employer attitudes towards people's ability to continue doing the job, and a lack of awareness of how to access support and make workplace adaptations.

A significant number of employers who submitted written evidence asked to stay anonymous yet spoke proudly about their equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies, how they ensure they are meeting their legal obligations, and how they are committed to achieving a diverse and inclusive workforce.

Yet blind and partially sighted people who participated in the inquiry spoke about experiencing challenge after challenge in obtaining and staying in work, many being out of employment for years.

A lot of the employers who did respond and participate however did so with an open mind, many with a desire to learn more.

One of the questions employers were asked to respond to through the written call for evidence was: *What support do you feel your organisation could benefit from to employ blind and partially sighted people?*

In response to this, one UK sport body said, 'As part of considering our response to this inquiry, we are now considering the need for the organisation to complete a broader assessment to understand further what additional support we should put in place to support people with sight loss and ensure we have a safe, supportive workplace that they would be able to navigate easily.'²

Others spoke about how greater awareness and information sharing around how to overcome perceived barriers would be helpful.

However, throughout the inquiry we struggled to engage a significant number of employers, with some saying they were concerned about what the impact on their organisation could be, others saying they didn't feel like they would have anything meaningful to contribute.

We hope that the findings and recommendations from this report are considered and implemented by employers, and that the UK Government takes relevant action to legislate and promote our recommendations as good practice to employers.

² Anonymous, Written Evidence

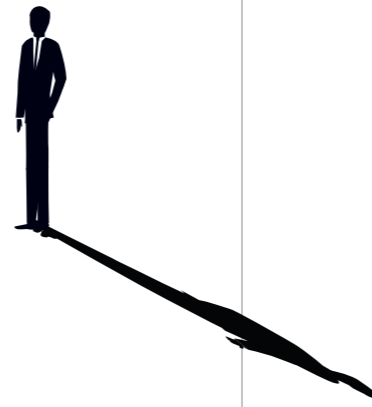
Key Findings

Barriers to Employment

- **Inaccessible Recruitment Processes:** Many online job application systems are not compatible with assistive technology, preventing blind and partially sighted people from applying for jobs. Additionally, interview processes often do not ask people if they require reasonable adjustments, nor can always accommodate them, such as having psychometric testing on inaccessible platforms.
- **Lack of Funding for Adaptations:** Insufficient funding for workplace adaptations presents a significant barrier. Small businesses, in particular, struggle with the costs associated with making their workplaces accessible. There appears to be limited knowledge among employers and employees as to where to access Government funding for this support, such as Access to Work (ATW) administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- **Systemic Issues:** Broader systemic issues, including the lack of inclusive education, training and development programmes further impede the employment prospects of blind and partially sighted people.

Employer Attitudes

- **Mixed Willingness:** While some employers demonstrate a willingness to comply and provide necessary adaptations, significant misconceptions and biases persist. Many employers hold outdated views that blind and partially sighted employees are less productive and require costly adaptations.
- **Awareness Deficit:** The report found that there was a significant awareness deficit and therefore a critical need for increased awareness and education among employers regarding the capabilities and potential of blind and partially sighted individuals. Charities and advocacy groups consistently emphasise this gap and it must be addressed.



Support and Adaptations

- **Effective Adaptations:** Successful implementation of adaptations, such as screen readers, ergonomic workstations, and flexible working hours, significantly enhances productivity and job satisfaction among blind and partially sighted employees.
- **Personalised Support:** Tailored support plans that address the specific needs of each individual are crucial.

Personal Experiences

- **Diverse Experiences:** Blind and partially sighted individuals shared a wide range of experiences, from facing significant barriers and discrimination to finding supportive environments that enabled them to thrive. These stories highlight the importance of personalised support and demonstrate the potential for blind and partially sighted individuals to make substantial contributions to the workforce.

Best Practice and Inclusive Cultures

- **Model Employers:** Oral evidence sessions highlighted best practice from employers which have successfully integrated inclusive practices, an example being active internal disability networks, supported by all departments. These employers report higher employee satisfaction and retention rates, demonstrating the benefits of fostering an inclusive workplace culture.
- **Technology:** The role of technology in supporting blind and partially sighted employees cannot be overstated as it enhances the functional capabilities of blind and partially sighted employees. Employers who invest in assistive technologies and provide ongoing training see significant improvements in employee performance and morale. With rapid advances in assistive technology and the role of artificial intelligence (AI) the opportunities and potential are only going to increase.

Recommendations

The UK government must produce a Disability Employment Strategy setting out measures to improve employer attitudes and increase the number of blind and partially sighted people finding and retaining work.

Barriers to Employment

1. The UK Government must partner with sight loss organisations to develop best practice on recruiting and supporting blind and partially sighted people to enter the labour market.
2. Employers must take practical steps to ensure their workplaces are inclusive. This includes:
 - Producing information and documents in accessible formats.
 - Regularly testing their interface, for compatibility and accessibility.
 - Having text to speech software as a standard build on any company hardware and software.
 - Ensuring their recruitment and selection processes are fully accessible.
 - Ensuring their training and development platforms are fully accessible.
3. Employers should ensure that those carrying out the recruitment and selection process have a good understanding of sight loss and how it affects people in the workplace. Examples can be found in the Appendix.
4. The UK Government must legislate to enforce minimum accessibility standards. This should be informed by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), an internationally recognised set of recommendations for improving web accessibility. The UK Government should require all employer websites to achieve WCAG 2.1 level AA as a minimum.

5. Employers must regularly review and update their Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies to keep up to date with developments in technology and changing needs.

Employer Attitudes

6. Employers should engage with internship programmes or joint training sessions where they can interact with blind and partially sighted people. An example is the Thomas Pocklington Trust's 'Get Set Progress' programme.³
7. Employers should sign up to RNIB's 'Visibly Better Employer Quality Standard.'⁴
8. Employers should ensure all employees complete e-learning courses on understanding sight loss. Examples of these can be found in the Appendix.
9. The UK Government should lead a national conversation with employers and blind and partially sighted people to enable a step change in the negative attitudes and assumptions held about employing blind and partially sighted people.
10. Employers should establish internal disability groups and forums, and where possible have a dedicated sight loss lead.
11. Employers should offer a holistic workplace assessment to all new employees, and at regular points throughout an individual's employment.

³ Get Set Progress Internships – Thomas Pocklington Trust

⁴ Visibly Better Employer Quality Standard | RNIB

Policy and Frameworks

12. The UK Government should review the Equality Act (2010) to make sure it is fit for purpose in the 21st century to protect and support blind and partially sighted people to participate in the labour market.
13. The UK Government must ensure that employers comply with their obligations under the Equality Act (2010).
14. The Department for Work and Pensions must adequately address the structural failings in the Access to Work (ATW) scheme, including tackling the current delays and backlog.
15. The Department for Work and Pensions must commit to introducing specific sight loss training for Access to Work (ATW) assessors and Job Centre staff.
16. The Department for Work and Pensions should extend the Access to Work (ATW) scheme to formal volunteering placements to help open up job opportunities for blind and partially sighted people.
17. HMRC should include information about Access to Work (ATW) in their correspondence to all UK employers.



18. The Department for Work and Pensions must overhaul and reform the Disability Confident Scheme to ensure it is fit for purpose and has proper quality and compliance standards.
19. Employers should ensure Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies are given equal parity with health and safety policies in the workplace.
20. The UK Government should ensure its National Careers Service has specific provision for blind and partially sighted young people which ensures they receive the early support they need.
21. The UK Government must consult with blind and partially sighted people to feed into the development of the Draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill.
22. Where possible as part of the proposed Mandatory Disability Pay Gap reporting, the UK Government should also collect impairment specific data.



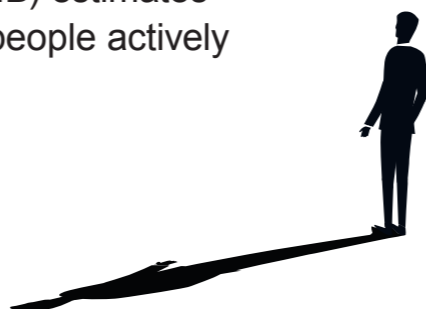
The Report – Changing Attitudes, Changing Lives: An Inquiry into Employer Attitudes and the Employment of Blind and Partially Sighted People

Introduction

In January 2024 the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Eye Health and Visual Impairment (APPG) launched an inquiry into employer attitudes and the employment of blind and partially sighted people.

The APPG repeatedly hears about the difficulties blind and partially sighted people have in obtaining and staying in paid employment. For decades charities and disabled people's organisations (DPOs) have been campaigning for better employment opportunities and have been delivering programmes to support people into work. The need for these today shows just how far away we are from reaching equality in employment.

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) estimates that there are 11,000 blind and partially sighted people actively seeking work at present.



One critical insight is from the Labour Force Survey, 2022,⁵ which found that the employment rate of 'people with a difficulty seeing' remains lower than other disabled people and non-disabled people. Employment rates are significantly lower for 'people with difficulty seeing' (42 per cent) compared to the non-disabled population (82 per cent).

Further, research by the TUC⁶ reveals that the current disability pay gap – the difference in pay between disabled and non-disabled employees – is 17.2 per cent, rising from 16.5 per cent in 2021. This equates to £3,700 a year on average, or free labour for 54 days of the year.

Blind and partially sighted people have the right to work. This includes rights to equal pay, opportunities for career progression and reasonable accommodation of support needs at work. The Equality Act (2010) provides a legal mandate to protect against discrimination in the workplace on the basis of disability status, at all stages of employment.

As of July 2024, there were 884,000 vacancies in the UK and data suggests that around one-third of employers with 10 or more employees are experiencing a shortage of workers. Therefore, it appears that employers can no longer afford to overlook the employment potential of blind and partially sighted people.⁷

The inquiry was determined to show an up-to-date picture of employer attitudes towards hiring blind and partially sighted people and reveal the lived experiences of blind and partially sighted people and their employment journeys, but also highlight the solutions which can be found in the recommendations.

Underneath these individual recommendations, however, are several more fundamental points.

The first is a deep sense of anger and frustration that legislation is not being enforced. This is leaving blind and partially sighted

⁵ Labour Force Survey annual tables 2022 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁶ TUC Report Exposes Disability Pay Gap | Disability Rights UK

⁷ Vacancy Survey QMI – Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

people at a huge disadvantage, and at a constant risk of discrimination. The 2019 Public Health England 'Health Matters: Health and Work' report⁸ states:

'Being in good work is better for your health than being out of work. Good work is defined as having a safe and secure job with good working hours and conditions, supportive management and opportunities for training and development.'

'There is clear evidence that good work improves health and wellbeing across people's lives and protects against social exclusion. Conversely, unemployment is bad for health and wellbeing, as it is associated with an increased risk of mortality and morbidity.'

Similarly, the 2024 Health Foundation report⁹ states:

'Employment can bring with it better incomes, financial stability, security and greater sense of purpose, which in turn can lead to healthier diets and exercise, higher living standards, and better mental health.'

The fight to be in work can be an incredibly distressing time, and some respondents said they experienced overwhelming feelings of hopelessness and frustration. One respondent noted that at times they were made to feel so insignificant, they didn't feel life was worth living.

The second fundamental point is not being seen as a capable and valued member of society. Many blind and partially sighted people told the APPG that they felt they are being pre-judged on what being blind or partially sighted might mean in the workplace, rather than employers taking steps to actively understand individual needs.

The page opposite shows responses from employers who participated in a YouGov poll.

⁸ Health Matters: Health And Work – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁹ Relationship Between Employment And Health – The Health Foundation

We asked them: *What concerns do you have about employing a blind or partially sighted person?*



These responses reflect many of the myths and misconceptions that exist – and which this inquiry hopes to dispel.

The inquiry aimed to:

- Better understand the impact that attitudes and barriers have on the likelihood of a blind or partially sighted person being employed.
- Explore the policies and practices employers currently have in place to support blind and partially sighted people in work.
- Look into attitudes around the perceived benefits and challenges of having blind and partially sighted people in the workforce.
- Assess the extent to which current legislation is working and is fit for purpose.
- Better understand what blind and partially sighted people would like to see from an employer.
- Gather solutions that Government and other partners should consider at a policy and operational level.

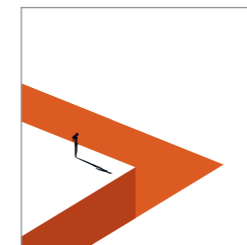
Methodology

The inquiry, chaired by Marsha de Cordova MP, used a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to gather evidence from a wide range of stakeholders. The methods included three oral evidence sessions in Parliament during February and March 2024 with APPG members receiving testimony from expert witnesses including blind and partially sighted people, supporting organisations such as charities and businesses. In addition, the APPG issued a call for written evidence which resulted in over 50 written submissions from:

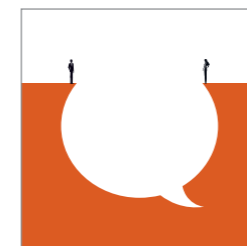
- **Employers** – Detailing their experiences, challenges, and best practice in hiring and supporting blind and partially sighted employees.

- **Sight Loss Organisations** – Offering insights into the systemic barriers faced by blind and partially sighted people and successful interventions.
- **Personal accounts** – Shared by blind and partially sighted people, highlighting both discrimination and success in the workplace.

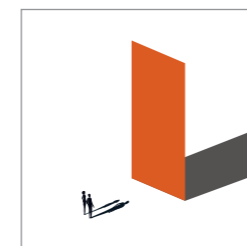
We have structured this report in a way which highlights four key themes:



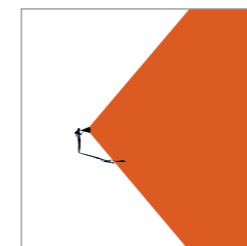
1. Barriers to Employment



2. Employer Attitudes



3. Policy and Frameworks



4. Best Practice

Within these themes we look at finding work and being in work.

Employment support is a devolved issue in Northern Ireland – so unless otherwise specified the recommendations to UK Government apply to Great Britain.

Theme 1: Barriers to Employment

One of the most consistent themes was the practical barriers faced by blind and partially sighted people when looking for work and progressing in their careers, from inaccessible recruitment processes, including applications and interviews, through not being able to access online platforms for training and development, to not getting support for workplace adaptations and having reasonable adjustments put in place.

Understanding the barriers to employment faced by blind and partially sighted people is essential for developing effective strategies to improve employment outcomes. This section delves into the structural and systemic challenges identified by employers, sight loss organisations and blind and partially sighted people.

Finding Work

Every blind and partially sighted person who contributed to this inquiry noted experiencing difficulties at some point with finding work.

75 per cent of employers who participated in the YouGov poll said they want to but would not know how to employ a blind or partially sighted person.

Angela from the Business Disability Forum told us that, 'Recruitment is often one of the lowest performing areas of a business in terms of accessibility and inclusion.'¹⁰

Often, just accessing job search platforms can pose practical challenges. Many blind and partially sighted people use text-to-speech software, or applications which allow the text

¹⁰ Angela, Head of Policy and Research, Business Disability Forum, Oral Evidence



to be enlarged. Sometimes websites do not meet accessibility standards, which means individuals using these applications cannot access the information.

Many charities offer support to blind and partially sighted people to find work. One example is the charity Thomas Pocklington Trust's *Get Set Progress*¹¹ programme. The charity told us that, 'So many job platforms are not compatible with things like screen readers and it is something we are continuously needing to challenge.'¹²

This issue extends to employers' websites not being accessible, or the application systems that are available to use not being accessible. Many employers came forward and recognised this barrier which hinders the possibility of employment. One civil service organisation pointed out that, 'This technological gap in accessibility often prevents blind and partially sighted people from even getting their foot in the door.'¹³

One respondent detailed the challenges she faced in obtaining reasonable adjustments and the lengthy process of negotiating them. She said, 'These hurdles often discourage me from pursuing certain job opportunities.'¹⁴

Another respondent mentioned, 'The application process itself is a barrier. If companies don't make their forms accessible, how can they expect to hire blind or partially sighted people?.'¹⁵

This sentiment highlights the critical need for accessible recruitment processes to ensure equal opportunities for blind and partially sighted candidates.

¹¹ Get Set Progress Internships – Thomas Pocklington Trust

¹² Thomas Pocklington Trust, Written Evidence

¹³ Anonymous, Written Evidence

¹⁴ Anonymous, Written Evidence

¹⁵ Anonymous, Written Evidence

Tahira, a university student at King's College London said, 'I am currently applying for graduate roles where as part of the recruitment there are online tests, but often they are not accessible – and then I am deterred for [stet] continuing with the process. Also I often need to spend time editing PDFs so I can fill in the application... Sometimes employers don't even respond to my requests for reasonable adjustments.'¹⁶

Martin, an employment and skills manager told us that, 'If you need to download anything to complete, it should always be available in Word format, without having to ask.'¹⁷

Several blind and partially sighted people who participated in the inquiry said they are more likely to want to apply for a job and be interested in a company if its website is accessible. This lack of accessibility in the initial stages of employment prevents many individuals from securing opportunities and one person reported an employer telling them, 'If you can't use our system you can't have the job.'¹⁸

The challenges continue for many as they progress through the recruitment process. Attending an interview, either online or in person, can cause difficulties.

Amanda mentioned that, 'There is so much more added stress at the interview stage for blind and partially sighted people. The cognitive load is huge. Not knowing where the chair is, the glass of water, how many people are in the room.'¹⁹ Many employers are not aware that verbally explaining this is important.

¹⁶ Tahira, Graduate – King's College London, Oral Evidence

¹⁷ Martin, Employment and Skills Manager, Local Authority, Oral Evidence

¹⁸ Anonymous, Written Evidence

¹⁹ Amanda, Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Guide Dogs, Oral Evidence

While in Work

It is rare that a workplace is fully physically or technologically equipped to support blind and partially sighted employees.

This includes a lack of assistive technologies and physical adjustments necessary for a blind or partially sighted person to perform effectively.

One employer candidly mentioned, 'Even if we want to hire blind and partially sighted individuals, our current infrastructure is not equipped to support their needs.'²⁰

This reflects a broader issue of inadequate investment in accessibility infrastructure within many employers.

The sight loss charity Fight for Sight stated, 'Small businesses often struggle with the costs of adaptations, which can be a significant barrier to hiring blind and partially sighted people.'²¹ This financial hurdle limits the opportunities, particularly in smaller organisations that may not have the resources to invest in necessary adaptations.

Sight loss organisations provided other insights into the financial and logistical barriers that many blind and partially sighted people face in the workplace. Vision Support highlighted the availability of grants for workplace adaptations such as the Government's Access to Work (ATW) scheme, but noted that many employers are unaware of these resources or find the application process too complex and daunting.

The YouGov polling supports this, as it showed 47 per cent of employers did not know where to find funding to help cover the extra costs of practical support for employees who are blind or partially sighted, such as the Government's ATW scheme.

The oral evidence sessions highlighted the role of continuous professional development and training for blind and partially sighted employees and several people called for more inclusive training programmes that help develop the skills needed for

²⁰ Anonymous, Written Evidence

²¹ Fight for Sight, Written Evidence

people's chosen careers. This includes not only technical skills but also soft skills and professional development opportunities that can enhance employability and career progression.

One of the barriers here is again down to technology, as many online training and development portals that employers use are not accessible – this means that training, wellbeing initiatives and other employee benefits cannot be easily accessed by blind and partially sighted employees. One respondent said that, 'Digital learning is designed for sighted people'²² and Jamie said that, 'Often online training courses will have activities which ask you to 'click and drag', which isn't possible for many blind and partially sighted people.'²³

Similarly, health and wellbeing apps which employers widely use now are not always accessible. This means that blind and partially sighted employees are excluded from some employee benefits, which can contribute to a feeling of being excluded.

Often navigating complicated databases within an organisation can be a challenge. For example, if an organisation uses a system which isn't compatible with assistive technology, a blind or partially sighted employee may not be able to carry out any work related to that system independently.

Employers including Channel 4 agreed that there needed to be some standardisation when it comes to technology.

Paul commented that, 'It is important for organisations to have a baseline assistive technology offer available for employees as standard.'²⁴

However, this can also be quite challenging. With most business software now provided 'as a service' it is common for many of the regular updates to cause compatibility issues with assistive technology. Whilst these are often temporary until the new

²² Giles, Disability Lead, Channel 4 Television

²³ Jamie, Head of Talent and Learning, Channel 4 Television

²⁴ Paul, Deputy CEO and Chief Operating Officer at The Information Commissioner's Office, Oral Evidence

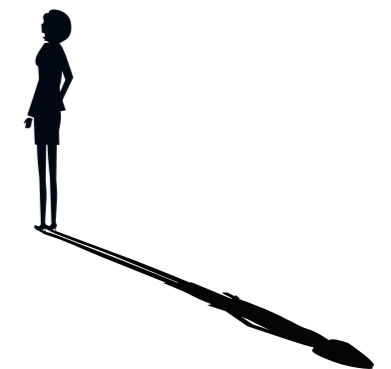
software release becomes more stable, it can make a huge difference for the employee if they need to identify workarounds or even lose access to certain features or services. **This great race for businesses to make everything more efficient is often leaving disabled people behind.**

Recommendations to Tackle Barriers to Employment

1. The UK Government must partner with sight loss organisations to develop best practice on recruiting and supporting blind and partially sighted people to enter the labour market.
2. Employers must take practical steps to ensure their workplaces are inclusive. This includes:
 - Producing information and documents in accessible formats.
 - Regularly testing their interface, for compatibility and accessibility.
 - Having text to speech software as a standard build on any company hardware and software.
 - Ensuring their recruitment and selection processes are fully accessible.
 - Ensuring their training and development platforms are fully accessible.
3. Employers should ensure that those carrying out the recruitment and selection process have a good understanding of sight loss and how it affects people in the workplace. Examples can be found in the Appendix.



4. The UK Government must legislate to enforce minimum accessibility standards. This should be informed by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), an internationally recognised set of recommendations for improving web accessibility. The UK Government should require all employer websites to achieve WCAG 2.1 level AA as a minimum.
5. Employers must regularly review and update their Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies to keep up to date with developments in technology and changing needs.



Theme 2: Employer Attitudes

The inquiry revealed a broad spectrum of attitudes, ranging from supportive and proactive to hesitant and misinformed.

Finding Work

The vast majority of responses from employers demonstrated a lack of understanding and preparedness regarding the specific needs of blind and partially sighted employees. Many employers admitted they were unsure of what adaptations would be necessary or how to implement them effectively. This uncertainty often translates into hesitation to hire blind and partially sighted people, fearing that as an organisation they might not be able to provide the required support.

Among blind and partially sighted people, whether to disclose their vision impairment at the interview or application stage or not was a recurring theme. Some said that they would, others did not but for many it was linked to feeling as if asking for reasonable adjustments would put them at a disadvantage.

Charlie said that, 'If an employer does ask, I see it as good practice and I am therefore likely to disclose.'²⁵

Others had negative experiences of this. Tahira²⁶ said that she has sometimes had to chase employers to confirm adjustments at interviews and received negative responses when asking for more time for assessments.

Amanda said that, 'Asking for things like having the lights off during an interview can be very nerve racking, and it can be a worry that the interview panel just will not understand or accommodate it.'²⁷

Another theme in the responses was a lack of awareness and understanding about the capabilities of blind and partially sighted people. Employers who had not previously worked with blind and partially sighted employees were more likely to have reservations and misconceptions and often doubted productivity, fearing that performance would lag behind that of sighted employees.

Dominic noted, 'Employers often focus on the perceived limitations rather than the potential, which hinders blind and partially sighted people's employment opportunities.'²⁸ This focus on perceived limitations rather than actual abilities creates a significant barrier to employment.

Paul expressed that he feels some employers are reluctant to hire blind and partially sighted people due to assumptions about

²⁵ Charlie, Internship Coordinator, Thomas Pocklington Trust, Oral Evidence

²⁶ Tahira, Graduate – King's College London, Oral Evidence

²⁷ Amanda, Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Guide Dogs, Oral Evidence

²⁸ Dominic, Legal Rights Officer, RNIB, Oral Evidence

productivity and the challenge of the potential adjustments needing to be in place to be able to do the job. Despite evidence showing that blind and partially sighted individuals can perform just as well as their sighted counterparts without unnecessary barriers in the way, these assumptions persist. Paul also said that, 'I have had to prove myself more than my sighted colleagues, and even then, there has been hesitance to give me opportunities at times.'²⁹

Organisations working with and for blind and partially sighted people provided valuable insights into employer attitudes and highlighted the need for increased education and support. RNIB suggested that, 'Many businesses hold outdated views, underestimating the capabilities of blind and partially sighted employees.'³⁰ A persistent belief is that blind and partially sighted employees require constant supervision and are less productive, which is not supported by evidence.

Another respondent shared, 'I once applied for a job where the interviewer seemed more focused on my blindness than my qualifications. It felt like my abilities were secondary to my disability.'³¹

Such experiences are not uncommon and highlight the need for greater employer education and sensitivity training. The charity Scope emphasised that these misconceptions can lead to discriminatory hiring practices and a reluctance to provide necessary adjustments. It reported that, 'Blind and partially sighted people are often overlooked during the hiring process, not because of a lack of qualifications, but due to unfounded fears about their ability to perform job tasks.'³²

²⁹ Paul, Deputy CEO and Chief Operating Officer at The Information Commissioner's Office, Oral Evidence

³⁰ RNIB, Written Evidence

³¹ Anonymous, Written Evidence

³² Scope, Written Evidence

Individuals' confidence also came up as a factor. Paul said, 'At the start of my career I was very combative and didn't want to talk about my condition. I saw it as a vulnerability or as an opportunity for my peers to judge me. But then I saw that by doing this I was isolating myself and had to unlearn certain behaviours, particularly as I was starting out on my management career.' Paul went on to say, 'I had to do a lot to work on silent assumptions, and now I have my own positive confident narrative as to why my sight loss makes me great at my job.'³³

There was a common trend that the further along or the more senior a person was in their career, the easier it becomes. Colin said that, in his own lived experience of sight loss, and experience working in employment support, 'Often if you are at the start of your sight loss journey, you don't have the narrative to understand your needs, let alone your rights.'³⁴

Greater awareness and understanding around sight loss and promoting blind and partially sighted people in different roles and industries is really important. Paul writes a weekly blog where he sometimes talks about his eye condition, and it allows his colleagues to hear the story of his disability that he wants to tell.

Articulating a point made by several others, one person who submitted evidence anonymously said, 'Blind and partially sighted people are often given a limited expectation of what they can do, and are not told to be ambitious.'³⁵ This can significantly affect an individual's confidence levels. This is also the case within education where recent research shows that there is inconsistent support and poorly defined careers provision at school, college and local authority level for young blind and partially sighted people.³⁶

³³ Paul, Deputy CEO and Chief Operating Officer at The Information Commissioner's Office, Oral Evidence

³⁴ Colin, Working Age and Young People Manager, Macular Society, Oral Evidence

³⁵ Anonymous, Written Evidence

³⁶ Research Shows Careers Education Information is Failing Many Young People with Vision Impairment – Thomas Pocklington Trust

Staying in Work

A number of blind and partially sighted people pointed out the lack of inclusive workplace cultures that can further exacerbate the challenges that can be faced. Many reported feeling isolated or unsupported in workplaces that were not prepared to accommodate their needs. This lack of support can not only affect job performance but also overall job satisfaction and retention.

The inquiry revealed that employer attitudes towards supporting blind and partially sighted individuals in the workplace vary significantly. Some employers have shown a commendable willingness to adapt their practices and provide necessary adjustments, demonstrating an understanding of the value of diversity and inclusivity in the workplace. For instance, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) highlighted that while some employers are proactive in hiring blind and partially sighted individuals, others remain reluctant due to misconceptions about productivity and the perceived cost of accommodations.³⁷

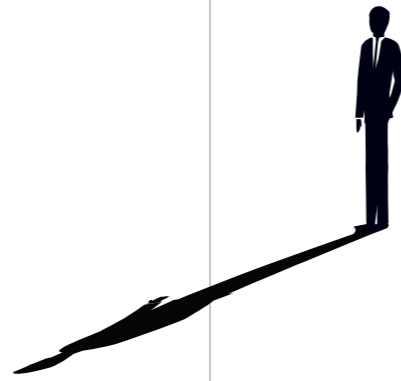
One employer stated, 'We recognise the value of diversity in the workplace, but the lack of understanding and resources makes it challenging to support blind and partially sighted employees effectively.'³⁸ This sentiment captures the dual challenge of wanting to be inclusive but feeling ill-equipped to do so effectively.

However, it is important to note that this willingness is not universal. Many employers expressed concerns about the perceived financial and logistical burdens of making workplace adjustments. These employers often overestimate the cost and complexity of adaptations, not realising that many adjustments are relatively inexpensive and straightforward to implement.

When it came to promotional and development opportunities, many blind and partially sighted employees felt like they were at a disadvantage compared to their sighted peers.

³⁷ Confederation of British Industry, Written Evidence

³⁸ Anonymous, Written Evidence



A civil servant shared that while some colleagues and managers were very supportive, others doubted disabled people's abilities and made them feel unwelcome. They described instances where they had to repeatedly prove their competence, which added unnecessary stress to their work life.³⁹

My Sight Nottinghamshire said that, 'A lot of people we support with sight loss have had their confidence knocked by an employer or know the way that society views disability and so they feel as if they would not be selected for a role despite often being overqualified.'⁴⁰

Paul said that at the start of his career he often felt like there was pressure to demonstrate he could do something in order to be given an opportunity to experience new things. He would always say yes to volunteering for something. As he progressed in his career, Paul said, 'It has got easier to identify development opportunities and it's now assumed I have the capability.'⁴¹

George commented that when his sight deteriorated, he felt he could not, and was not, supported to stay in his role as a primary school teacher, and colleagues saw only what he wasn't able to do. Now he works in the sight loss sector, for the charity Nystagmus Network, where he said he feels supported, and is working with people who understand.⁴²

This was common and many respondents said that they wish to stay in the sight loss sector as they feel comfortable, valued, understood and supported.

Amanda said she has a fear of working outside the sector. She went on to say that, 'Last year I was offered a senior position elsewhere but was scared about not getting the same level of support and working with colleagues who wouldn't understand my disability.'⁴³

³⁹ Anonymous, Written Evidence

⁴⁰ My Sight Nottinghamshire, Written Evidence

⁴¹ Paul, Deputy CEO and Chief Operating Officer at The Information Commissioner's Office, Oral Evidence

⁴² George, Information Support Officer, Nystagmus Network, Oral Evidence

⁴³ Amanda, Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Guide Dogs, Oral

Others stated how their lived experience of sight loss encouraged them to take a job in the sector, where they could use their experiences to help others.

Another issue which came up regularly was the lack of understanding of the trauma that people can experience when they get a diagnosis or experience a deterioration in their sight.

Jamie talked positively about his experience working for Channel 4 at the time his sight deteriorated. Even with a six-month Access to Work (ATW) delay, Channel 4 stepped in and supported him through all stages. The team took the time to understand his condition. They also understood that things may change, so scheduled regular meetings to discuss any changes.⁴⁴ However, one respondent said, 'It felt like once my ATW arrived I could just carry on, despite having to face and overcome new challenges relating to my condition quite regularly.'⁴⁵

Colin said, 'It's very frustrating when an employer doesn't understand individual needs and you have to explain to them the purpose of having a support worker.'⁴⁶

George said that, 'Sometimes you are seen as more of a burden on other colleagues, and employers think you will need to ask colleagues to do the bit you can't do.'⁴⁷

Amanda explained, 'Sometimes when you get a diagnosis, you don't yourself even know what support you may need, or even what's out there.'⁴⁸

This is why holistic workplace assessments are so important, as they help both the individual and the employer know what support is required. It is also why it is crucial employers have knowledge and understanding of reasonable adjustments and have good practices in place.

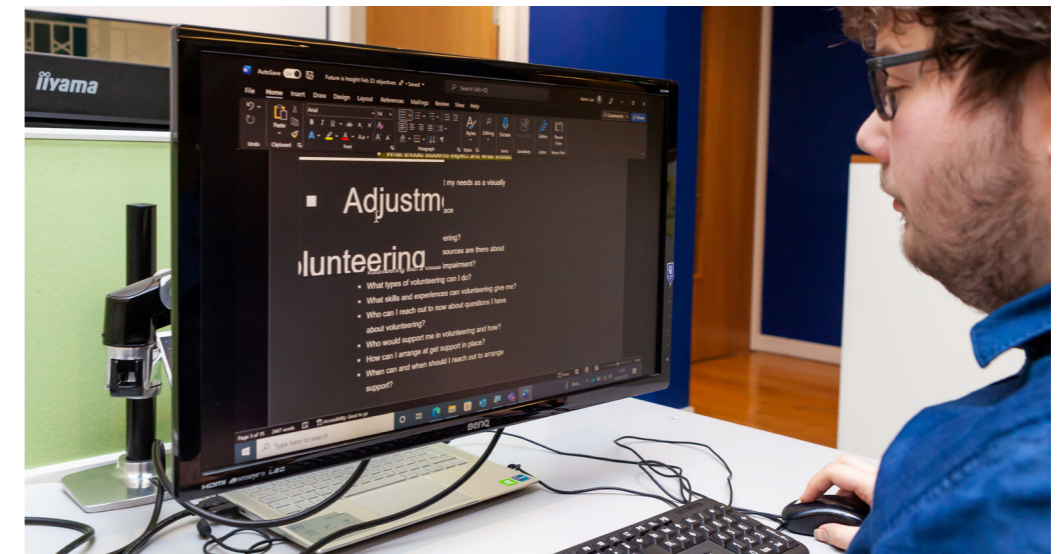
⁴⁴ Jamie, Head of Talent and Learning, Channel 4

⁴⁵ Anonymous, Written Evidence

⁴⁶ Colin, Working Age and Young People Manager, Macular Society, Oral Evidence

⁴⁷ George, Information Support Officer, Nystagmus Network, Oral Evidence

⁴⁸ Amanda, Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Guide Dogs, Oral Evidence



Angela works with hundreds of employers to make them more inclusive and accessible. She said, 'Often one of the challenges can be having fragmented departments internally, and a lack of clarity over whose responsibility it is to be supporting employees with disabilities or health conditions.'⁴⁹ Angela went on to say, 'This is also the same for the recruitment processes – is it the hiring manager, the recruitment lead, HR, someone from the equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) team. It often gets very confused with no single person taking the lead.'

As part of the written consultation, we asked businesses and charities: '*What actions has your organisation taken to build and develop best practice for disabled people in your workplace? Please include any examples and case studies where possible.*'

We noticed significant disparities between some businesses' responses and the thoughts of supporting charities and blind and partially sighted people on good practice.

A significant number of employers spoke broadly about their equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies, some with a dedicated EDI lead and others without. Some were vague in informing us about training that staff receive, some saying it is their HR teams who receive regular training and are responsible for ensuring this reaches the rest of the organisation. Other

⁴⁹ Angela, Head of Policy and Research at Business Disability Forum, Oral Evidence

employers openly said they would benefit from more advice and guidance on how to make their workplace more accessible and inclusive.

Charities spoke of the importance of introducing disability staff networks with sight loss leads, having specific policies such as a reasonable adjustment policy or an inclusive recruitment policy, providing training and resources which are done in partnership with leading disability and sight loss organisations and, importantly, ensuring every employee across the business receives this training. Flexible working was also mentioned as an important factor in staying in work and being able to do the job successfully. For some blind and partially sighted people, regular travel to a particular location can provide practical challenges, due to inaccessible transport for example, as can working in an office that has poor lighting.

These personal stories reveal that while supportive environments exist, many blind and partially sighted people still face significant challenges due to employer attitudes. The need for ongoing awareness-raising and training for employers is evident to ensure that blind and partially sighted people are given fair opportunities to succeed.

Many respondents noted that employers who had previous experience working with blind and partially sighted people were more likely to have positive attitudes and be open to making necessary adaptations. It can significantly reduce biases and demystify the process of accommodating blind and partially sighted employees and showcase their potential contributions. One respondent stated, 'Seeing first-hand how capable blind and partially sighted people are can change an employer's perspective completely.'⁵⁰ Sight loss organisations also highlighted the importance of positive reinforcement and success stories. When employers' hear about successful blind and partially sighted employees who have excelled in their roles, it can help to change attitudes and reduce biases.

⁵⁰ Anonymous, Written Evidence

Recommendations on Employer Attitudes

6. Employers should engage with internship programmes or joint training sessions where they can interact with blind and partially sighted people. An example is the Thomas Pocklington Trust's 'Get Set Progress' programme.⁵¹
7. Employers should sign up to RNIB's 'Visibly Better Employer Quality Standard.'⁵²
8. Employers should ensure all employees complete e-learning courses on understanding sight loss. Examples of these can be found in the Appendix.
9. The UK Government should lead a national conversation with employers and blind and partially sighted people to enable a step change in the negative attitudes and assumptions held about employing blind and partially sighted people.
10. Employers should establish internal disability groups and forums, and where possible have a dedicated sight loss lead.
11. Employers should offer a holistic workplace assessment to all new employees, and at regular points throughout an individual's employment.

⁵¹ Get Set Progress Internships – Thomas Pocklington Trust

⁵² Visibly better Employer Quality Standard | RNIB

Theme 3: Policy and Frameworks

There was a strong consensus amongst all blind and partially sighted people and organisations that the UK Government and employers do not do enough.

First there was the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), which was then replaced by the Equality Act (2010), both of which set out to protect those with disabilities from discrimination in a number of areas, including employment. However, it's widely evidenced that employers are often not upholding their legal responsibilities, nor is the UK Government doing enough to enforce them.

The oral evidence sessions provided a platform for discussing structural barriers such as the lack of inclusive education and training programmes. Participants noted that blind and partially sighted people often do not receive the same quality of career advice and support in educational settings, which can limit their employment opportunities from the outset. One oral evidence session highlighted the importance of inclusive education and training programmes that prepare blind and partially sighted people for the job market, ensuring they have the skills and confidence needed to succeed.



One person emphasised, 'Inclusive education is the foundation for employment. Without it, blind and partially sighted people are at a disadvantage from the start.'⁵³ This statement highlights the need for systemic changes in educational institutions to provide equal opportunities for blind and partially sighted students. Essential changes would be the provision of accessible learning materials, assistive technologies, and career counselling that considers the specific needs of blind and partially sighted people.

Volunteering opportunities are also a way to enable blind and partially sighted people to develop skills and seek opportunities, especially when leaving school. However, support which would enable this, like the Government's Access to Work (ATW) scheme, does not currently support volunteering or unpaid work experience opportunities, resulting in many blind and partially sighted people being at a disadvantage compared to their sighted peers.

⁵³ Anonymous, Written Evidence

Recruitment

The role of job centres came up frequently. Barry said that during his job search he sought support from the job centre, but, 'The job centre told me I wouldn't be able to do many jobs, it made me feel really small.'⁵⁴ George said, 'When I was in there [the job centre] I was made to feel so unemployable.'

The sight loss charity Thomas Pocklington Trust said, 'Staff at job centres are often inexperienced in helping blind and partially sighted people, recommending physically impossible roles or failing to grasp the concept that work is possible at all.'⁵⁵

Access to Work (ATW) is a Government run programme aimed to support disabled people to take up or remain in work. It a discretionary grant scheme that covers a wide range of interventions beyond 'reasonable adjustments' associated with overcoming work-related barriers resulting from disability. The support package is agreed based on individual need.⁵⁶ Significant problems include long application processes, negative experiences with assessors and huge delays in receiving the granted support. The security of people's jobs is being put at risk, as some cannot begin until their support is in place. Several employers told us about negative experiences they have had with employees experiencing delays, and one UK leading retailer said, 'We would like to use ATW in the future to support more disabled people into work, but we have some concerns about ATW's ability to deliver at pace.'⁵⁷

A charity also told us, 'It's no good employers knowing about ATW if when they try to use it the system lets them and their employees down. If ATW messes up with one employee, it's quite understandable if that experience then puts the employer off employing another blind person.'⁵⁸ When it came to ATW assessors, many felt that they needed to know a lot more about

⁵⁴ Barry, Unemployed, Oral Evidence

⁵⁵ Thomas Pocklington Trust, Written Evidence

⁵⁶ Reference Access to Work, Disability Rights UK

⁵⁷ Anonymous, Written Evidence

⁵⁸ Glaucoma UK, Written Evidence

sight loss. One person told us, 'My ATW assessor had no understanding of what having sight loss meant for me or where support could help me. It was just a few months after a rapid deterioration in my sight and I found the whole processes very traumatic.'⁵⁹ ATW is also a factor when looking to progress or change roles. Claire said, 'I have stayed in bad jobs where I am treated badly because I cannot bear to have to go through an ATW application with a new employer.'⁶⁰

On average, it now takes five to six months from an initial application to assessment and determination of an application. Worryingly, the delays appear to be getting worse, with some 46,000 outstanding applications in July 2024 compared to around 25,000 in December 2022.⁶¹

George re-emphasised the point that employers need to know what support is out there, 'If they knew ATW was available, they would be less hesitant to employ a blind or partially sighted person as they would know the financial cost of support would be covered.'⁶²

It is evident that ATW needs proper structural and operational change to effectively deliver on what it set out to do.

Other Government schemes, like Disability Confident, have received significant criticism with many seeing it as just a tick box exercise. There was very little evaluation by the previous Government on the success of the scheme, nor any requirement on Disability Confident employers for them to actually hire disabled people. Many employers received the Disability Confident status, without ever hiring one single disabled person. Martin said that, 'We held a jobs fair for disabled people in the local authority I work for. This was done in partnership with DWP's Disability Confident lead, and we didn't have one Disability Confident employer with a live role attend.'⁶³

⁵⁹ Anonymous, Written Evidence

⁶⁰ Claire, Written Evidence

⁶¹ Access to Work Delays and the Actions You Can Take | RNIB

⁶² George, Information Support Officer, Nystagmus Network, Oral Evidence

⁶³ Martin, Employment and Skills Manager, Local Authority, Oral Evidence

There has been little to no quality control over the scheme, and despite employers feeling Disability Confident is a demonstration of their commitment to ensure disabled people are treated fairly and have access to the same opportunities, there is no proof that it is improving employment opportunities.

In Work

Charities pointed out the critical role of supportive policies and frameworks. Without strong legal and policy support, employers might not feel compelled or incentivised to invest in the required adaptations. Thus, charities called for enhanced policy frameworks that mandate accessibility and provide financial support for employers to make necessary adaptations.

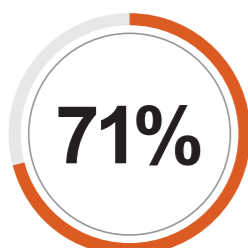
The CIPD's 2022 Inclusion at Work report⁶⁴ includes the following findings:



of employers had an overall inclusion and diversity policy.



of organisations had a specific inclusion and diversity budget, and 62 per cent did not have a specific budget for inclusion and diversity activities.



of employers said senior leaders were completely committed or fairly committed to having a diverse workforce, and 75 per cent said they were committed to having an inclusive workplace. However, 22 per cent said leaders were not very committed or not at all committed to having a diverse workforce, 17 per cent were not committed to having an inclusive workplace, and 15 per cent of leaders did not understand how an inclusive and diverse workforce could benefit their organisation.

⁶⁴ [cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/inclusion-work](https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/inclusion-work)

Keith expressed that, 'Accessibility is a compliance issue, and we need to generate a culture of compliance, rather than everything around equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) being just a tick box exercise.'⁶⁵

Furthermore, oral evidence sessions stressed the importance of leadership in fostering inclusive attitudes. Leaders who prioritise diversity and inclusivity set the tone for the rest of the organisation. When senior management actively supports and advocates for blind and partially sighted employees, it creates a more welcoming environment and encourages other employees to adopt similar attitudes.

Channel 4 shared that it has a dedicated Disability Lead, a full-time role which really allows others to have a better understanding and ensures accessibility and inclusivity are embedded across the whole organisation. Channel 4 also has a specific visually impaired policy.

Smaller organisations often listed resources as a challenge in having good employment practices and EDI policies. Also, some stated a high turnover of staff contributes to a lack of consistent knowledge and buy-in. Migrant Help, a charity, spoke about how it sought support from a sight loss organisation and took the time to review all its policies in relation to fair recruitment.⁶⁶ It noticed there were improvements needed because it took on board the advice and guidance to improve the accessibility of its recruitment.

It is crucial that the UK Government and employers advocate for inclusive workplaces that celebrate diversity and provide equal opportunities for everyone to thrive. One respondent said, 'I think the workplace is an important setting for embedding fair and inclusive norms. If more was done to educate and inform the wider workforce, less of the responsibility would fall on to blind and partially sighted people to fight for their rightful space in society.'⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Keith, CEO, Fight for Sight, Oral Evidence

⁶⁶ Migrant Help, Oral Evidence

⁶⁷ Anonymous, Written Evidence

Another respondent said, 'The more blind and partially sighted people there are in the workforce, the more public assumptions and attitudes will be challenged. This will benefit blind and partially sighted people of all ages, and ultimately change social attitudes, which is the biggest barrier to thriving for all.'⁶⁸

Recommendations on Policy and Frameworks

12. The UK Government should review the Equality Act (2010) to make sure it is fit for purpose in the 21st century to protect and support blind and partially sighted people to participate in the labour market.
13. The UK Government must ensure that employers comply with their obligations under the Equality Act (2010).
14. The Department for Work and Pensions must adequately address the structural failings in the Access to Work (ATW) scheme, including tackling the current delays and backlog.
15. The Department for Work and Pensions must commit to introducing specific sight loss training for Access to Work (ATW) assessors and Job Centre staff.
16. The Department for Work and Pensions should extend the Access to Work (ATW) scheme to formal volunteering placements to help open up job opportunities for blind and partially sighted people.

17. HMRC should include information about Access to Work (ATW) in their correspondence to all UK employers.
18. The Department for Work and Pensions must overhaul and reform the Disability Confident Scheme to ensure it is fit for purpose and has proper quality and compliance standards.
19. Employers should ensure Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies are given equal parity with health and safety policies in the workplace.
20. The UK Government should ensure its National Careers Service has specific provision for blind and partially sighted young people which ensures they receive the early support they need.
21. The UK Government must consult with blind and partially sighted people to feed into the development of the Draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill.
22. Where possible as part of the proposed Mandatory Disability Pay Gap reporting, the UK Government should also collect impairment specific data.



⁶⁸ Anonymous, Written Evidence

Theme 4: Best Practice

This section examines the strategies employed by forward-thinking employers, the insights and best practices shared by sight loss organisations, the personal experiences of blind and partially sighted individuals, and the discussions from evidence sessions. Together, these perspectives illustrate the crucial role of tailored support and the effective use of technology in fostering an inclusive work environment.

As has been discussed, ensuring website accessibility and the accessibility of all application materials is crucial. Beyond this, having accessible interview processes is very important. Charlie said, 'In my role supporting interns, I hear a lot about good and bad interview experiences. One intern I support told me about a good experience where one member of the panel guided them into the room and explained the layout of the room. Once they were sat down everyone on the panel described themselves and gave information on who they were. Prior to this the employer had sent out headshots of the panel.'⁶⁹ This demonstrates how the recruitment process can be easily adapted to ensure blind and partially sighted applicants feel at ease.



George said, 'When I was applying for the role at Nystagmus Network, they asked lots of questions and really tried to understand what adjustments needed to be made. They asked lots of questions but did so in a really supportive way.'⁷⁰

Several employers who submitted written evidence and who have blind and partially sighted people in their workplace shared their strategies and experiences. One UK leading retailer detailed its comprehensive approach to making reasonable adjustments. Its initiatives include providing screen reader software, offering ergonomic workstations, and allowing flexible working hours to accommodate medical appointments.⁷¹

⁷⁰ George, Information Support Officer, Nystagmus Network, Oral Evidence

⁷¹ Anonymous, Written Evidence

⁶⁹ Charlie, Internship Coordinator, Thomas Pocklington Trust, Oral Evidence

The retailer emphasises the importance of not just providing the necessary tools, but also creating an environment where blind and partially sighted employees feel supported and valued.

It went on to say, 'It's not just about providing the tools; it's about creating a supportive environment where blind and partially sighted employees can thrive.'⁷²

This holistic approach has proven effective in ensuring that blind and partially sighted employees are able to perform their roles efficiently and comfortably.

TPP Recruitment highlighted the importance of ongoing support and training for both employees and employers. It has implemented regular workshops to educate staff on the use of assistive technologies and to foster a culture of understanding and empathy. It found that continuous training and open communication channels significantly improved the effectiveness of adaptations and the overall workplace environment. It also said, 'Continuous support and training are crucial. We ensure that our visually impaired employees and their colleagues are well-versed in using adaptive technologies, which enhances productivity and job satisfaction.'⁷³

Other employers shared similar sentiments, emphasising the need for a proactive approach to support and adaptations. This includes regular reviews and updates to support plans, ensuring that they remain relevant and effective as technology and individual needs evolve.

Sight loss organisations provided valuable case studies and best practice for supporting blind and partially sighted employees. Glaucoma UK shared examples where tailored support plans, including regular check-ins and assistive technology, helped visually impaired employees excel in their roles. It stressed the need for personalised approaches, as everyone's needs and

⁷² John Lewis, Written Evidence

⁷³ TPP Recruitment, Written Evidence

preferences vary. It also said, 'Tailored support can make a significant difference in the productivity and well-being of blind and partially sighted employees. Regular check-ins and adjustments to support plans ensure that the support and adaptations provided remain effective.'⁷⁴

Nystagmus Network emphasised the importance of personalised support plans that address the specific needs of each individual, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. It gave examples such as providing large print materials, adjusting lighting conditions, and allowing flexible schedules. Involving blind and partially sighted employees in the planning and implementation of their adaptations ensures that their preferences and feedback are considered.

Sight loss organisations also highlighted the critical role of assistive technologies in enabling blind and partially sighted employees to perform their duties effectively. This includes screen readers, braille displays, and voice recognition software. They stressed the importance of ensuring that these technologies are integrated seamlessly into the workplace and supported by proper training.

Many blind and partially sighted individuals shared their positive experiences with tailored support during their academic and professional journeys. Roger, who works in a corporate environment, benefited from assistive technologies and supportive colleagues in maintaining productivity. He said, 'Screen reader software and ergonomic equipment enable me to perform my tasks efficiently and having a supportive team who understand my needs makes me feel valued and included.'⁷⁵

Katie shared her journey of succeeding academically and professionally with the help of personalised adaptations. During her studies, she received accessible study materials, extra time for exams, and one-to-one support from tutors. In her professional life, she benefited from assistive technologies,

⁷⁴ Glaucoma UK, Written Evidence

⁷⁵ Roger, Written Evidence

such as screen magnifiers and voice recognition software. She emphasised that these not only helped her perform her duties effectively but also boosted her confidence and motivation.⁷⁶

One respondent stated, ‘With the right support, I can perform just as well as, if not better than, my sighted colleagues. The support I receive allows me to focus on my work without worrying about accessibility issues.’⁷⁷

Other best practice included effective policies. One employer said, ‘We provide a range of educational resources and opportunities on the topic of disability, including a webinar in partnership with the Business Disability Forum for managers and a whole company ‘*Inclusion Speaker Series event*’ on disability in the workplace.’⁷⁸

Another employer said, ‘We have our Personal Development Programme for colleagues with disabilities. It is a three-day residential course that helps them understand their disability and their rights, and gives them confidence on how to manage their disability. This programme has been running since 2001 and attendees, including those with visual impairments, have described it as life-changing.’⁷⁹

These personal stories highlight the transformative impact of tailored support and workplace adaptations. They demonstrate that with the right tools and environment, blind and partially sighted people can achieve their full potential and contribute significantly to their workplaces. However employers need to take a lead on this, and the inquiry has demonstrated the importance of creating a culture of inclusivity where, for example, adaptations are seen as a standard practice rather than an exception.



⁷⁶ Katie, Written Evidence

⁷⁷ Anonymous, Written Evidence

⁷⁸ UK Publisher, Written Evidence

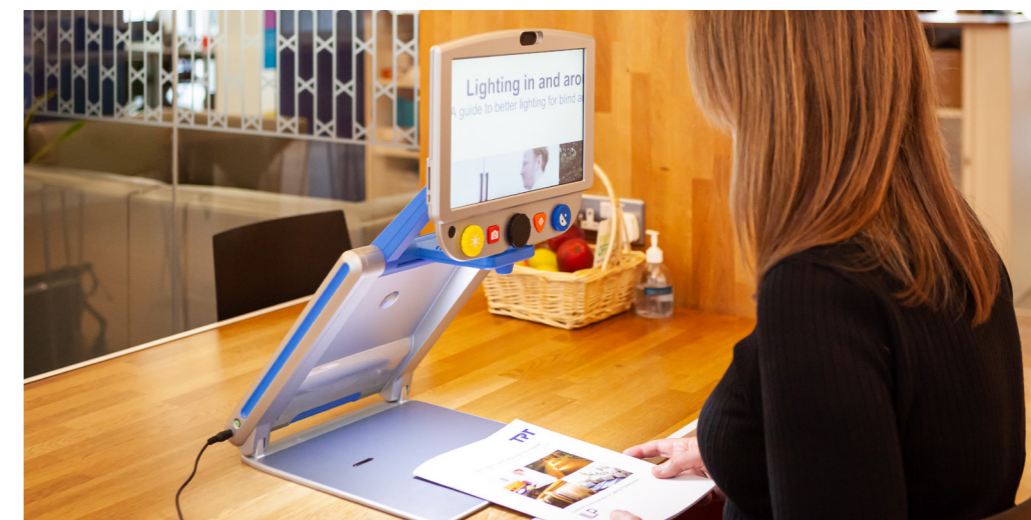
⁷⁹ UK Bank, Written Evidence

Conclusion

The findings of this inquiry into the employment of blind and partially sighted individuals reveal a complex landscape of both challenges and opportunities. While blind and partially sighted people possess the skills, motivation, and potential to contribute meaningfully to the workforce, they continue to face significant barriers that hinder their employment prospects. These barriers are rooted in misconceptions, structural inefficiencies, and a lack of comprehensive support systems.

There is a spectrum of attitudes among employers, ranging from supportive to hesitant. Some employers demonstrate a willingness to adapt and provide necessary adaptations, while others remain reluctant due to misconceptions about productivity and the perceived cost of making reasonable adjustments in order to employ someone. These outdated views underestimate the capabilities of blind and partially sighted employees, leading to discriminatory hiring practices and insufficient support.

Solutions are out there and are not costly. Ensuring all stages of an organisation’s recruitment processes are accessible, and delivering training to all employees on sight loss to increase knowledge and understanding, are easy measures to implement. Guidance and support are out there through the fantastic work of sight loss charities and DPOs.



Employers that have integrated inclusive practices into their core operations experience high employee satisfaction and retention rates. Inclusive workplaces benefit from diverse perspectives and enhanced problem-solving capabilities.

Creating a more inclusive and equitable employment landscape for blind and partially sighted people requires the collective efforts of UK Government and employers. Both have a critical role to play.

The UK Government needs to ensure that legal frameworks protect the rights of blind and partially sighted people. This includes strengthening the enforcement of existing laws and introducing new policies that mandate accessible recruitment processes. The UK Government should also work to streamline the application process for grants and funding to support workplace adaptations.

The King's Speech on 17 July 2024 which set out the Government's plan, spoke of the changes anticipated in this Parliament and the opportunities available. With the Employment Rights Bill intending to make flexible working the default and establish a Fair Work Agency to strengthen the enforcement of workplace rights, and The Draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill which will enshrine the full right to equal pay for disabled people in law, and introduce mandatory disability pay reporting for larger employers (those with 250+ employees), now is the time for action.

Employers must commit to creating accessible and supportive workplaces. This involves not only making physical and technological adjustments but also fostering an inclusive culture where diversity is valued. Employers should implement mandatory training for recruiting managers on the capabilities and needs of blind and partially sighted people and continuously review and update their policies.

However, every single person has a role to play in challenging stereotypes and promoting the capabilities of blind and partially sighted people. Awareness campaigns and public education initiatives can help change perceptions and we must all advocate for inclusivity and support policies and practices that promote equal employment opportunities.

This report provides a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing employment opportunities for blind and partially sighted people. The recommendations outlined herein are actionable steps that can be implemented to create a more inclusive job market. It is imperative that stakeholders take these recommendations seriously and work collaboratively to break down the barriers faced by blind and partially sighted people.

By taking these steps, we can create a more diverse, inclusive and prosperous society where all individuals, regardless of their visual abilities, have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from economic growth. By embracing inclusivity and implementing the recommended actions, we can create a future where blind and partially sighted people are valued, supported and empowered to achieve their full potential in the workplace.



Appendix

Evidence

The APPG would like to thank all those who provided evidence to the inquiry.

Oral Evidence

The APPG held three oral evidence sessions with the following witnesses:

Tuesday 6 February 2024 (Lived Experience)

- Amanda Bennet, Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Paul Arnold MBE, Deputy CEO and Chief Operating Officer, Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)
- Charlie Rashbrook, Internship Coordinator, Thomas Pocklington Trust
- George Plumridge, Information Support Officer, Nystagmus Network
- Barry Jones, Unemployed
- Colin Daniels, Working Age and Young People's Manager, Macular Society
- Tahira Amini, Graduate, King's College London

Tuesday 6 February 2024 (Sight Loss Organisations, Charities and Lived Experience)

- Keith Valentine, CEO, Fight for Sight
- Svetlana Kotova, Director of Campaigns and Justice, Inclusion London
- Angela Matthews, Head of Policy and Research, Business Disability Forum
- Chantelle O'Hagan, Employment Manager, Blind in Business
- Martin, Employment and Skills Manager, Local Authority

Tuesday 19 March 2024 (Employers, Researchers and Sight Loss Organisations)

- Dominic Milne, Legal Rights Officer, RNIB and Disability Benefits Consortium (DBC) Co-Chair

- Mollie Eadsforth, Executive Assistant to the Director of People and Culture, Migrant Help
- Hannah Karim, Talent Acquisition Advisor, Migrant Help
- Dr Calum Carson, Senior Research Associate, Centre for Health Inequalities Research, Lancaster University
- Dr Paula Holland, Senior Lecturer in Public Health, Division of Health Research, Lancaster University

Written Evidence

We received over 60 written submissions from blind and partially sighted people and employers.

Informal conversations were held with a number of employers, including Apple and Channel 4.

Resources and Guidance

Employment resources from the Thomas Pocklington Trust (TPT)

Works For Me is TPT's free service dedicated to supporting blind and partially sighted individuals in their pursuit of paid employment or a change of career. pocklington.org.uk/employment/works-for-me-employment-programme

Get Set Progress is TPT's pioneering programme providing paid internships exclusively for blind and partially sighted individuals. pocklington.org.uk/employment/internships

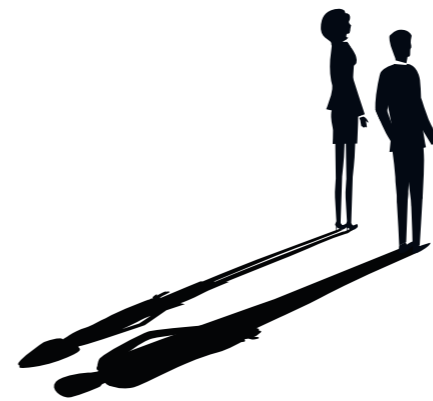
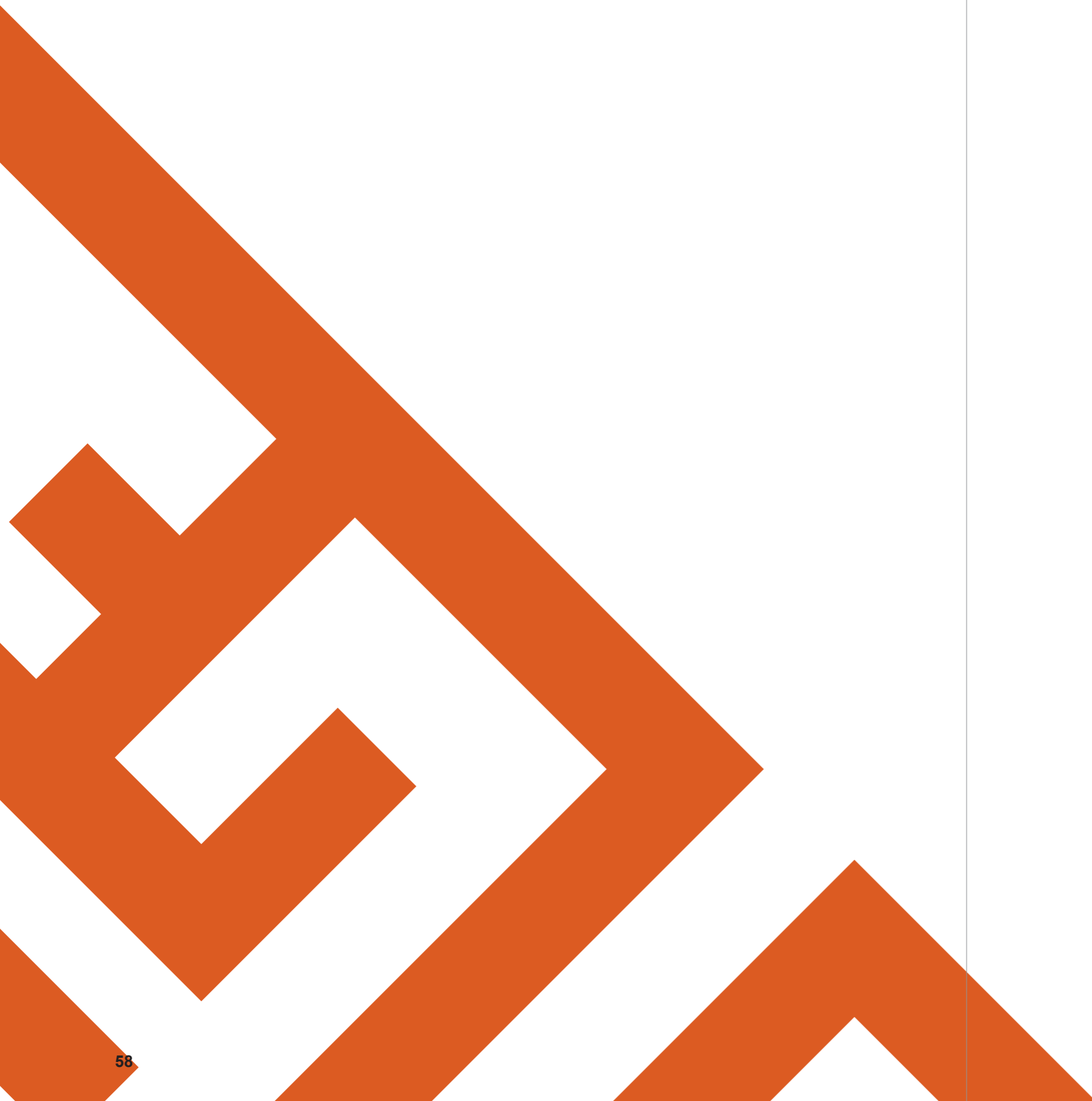
Employment resources from RNIB

RNIB offers a free eLearning course to help employers have a better understanding of sight loss and how to support blind or partially sighted colleagues. rnib.org.uk/living-with-sight-loss/equality-and-employment/employers/understanding-sight-loss-elearning

RNIB also has information on how you can make your workplace more accessible and inclusive for blind and partially sighted people. rnib.org.uk/living-with-sight-loss/equality-and-employment/employers

Acknowledgement

This report was produced by Katy Wright, working with Thomas Pocklington Trust and RNIB as the APPG's secretariat.





Eye Health
and Visual
Impairment

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