# Employment facts and stats 2020

### Note

This document was originally due to be published in spring 2020 to accompany a research report (Employment for blind and partially sighted people in 2019). Due to the COVID pandemic and subsequent lockdown, and the impact this had on blind and partially sighted people, we made the decision not to publish that research, or this accompanying facts and stats document at that time.

### Introduction

Blind and partially sighted people have told us that issues faced around employment represent one of the biggest barriers to equal participation [1]. Rectifying this imbalance is a priority for RNIB.

We have a range of evidence on the employment situation of blind and partially sighted people that can help us better understand what the problem is.

We can then work to develop solutions to improve the situation and help more people who want to work, find or stay in work.

This document lays out the key evidence we have. For further information on the statistics, please view the following documents available at our [Employment research web section](https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/research-reports/employment-research).

* Employment for blind and partially sighted people in 2019
* Labour Force Survey 2018

If you have any queries about using these statistics, get in touch with [research@rnib.org.uk](mailto:research@rnib.org.uk).

## What are the trends in society?

* People are working later in life; we have an ageing population and people have less economic security.
* The employment rate of people aged 65 and over has more than doubled since 2000 and the state pension age will be 67 by 2028 [2, 3].
* One-third of people expect to work in their current job with same hours after they had reached State Pension age [4].
* Probably the most significant of these three trends is the older population increase.
* The number of people aged 55-64 is going to increase by just under 10% over the next 25 years [5].
* Together, these trends mean that over the next few years, there will be more older people working later in life when acquired sight loss becomes more prevalent.

## What are the trends in employment amongst blind and partially sighted people?

* The employment rate and the number of blind and partially sighted people in work hasn’t changed significantly in a generation [6].
* 1 in 4 registered blind and partially sighted people are in employment, and this hasn’t significantly changed since similar research was carried out in 1991 [6].
* Stat safety notice: another source of evidence on the employment rate can be found in the government’s Labour Force Survey (LFS). This reports an employment rate of around or just under 50% for people with a seeing difficulty. The definition used in LFS does not limit to those registered blind or partially sighted, but includes people with much milder sight loss. This is why the rate differs from RNIB research findings which are more relevant due to the objective measure of sight loss [6, 7].
* There are an estimated 8,000 more blind and partially sighted people of working age each year, with the majority of these acquiring sight loss in adulthood. However, a similar number leave the working age group each year as they reach 65 years of age [8, 9, 10, 11].
* Stat safety notice: this stat indicates the potential number of ‘new’ blind and partially sighted people in the working age group. However, it does not mean a significant increase in the total number because a similar number of people with sight loss will reach the official retirement age every year, cancelling out the new entrants to the age group.
* There is a significant employment gap between blind and partially sighted people and the general population [7].
* The employment rate is 76% in the general population, 51% amongst the disabled population excluding sight loss and 27% for people registered blind and partially sighted [7].
* Some factors influence the likelihood of being in work: age; educational attainment; severity of sight loss; additional disabilities and general health [12].
* Registered blind and partially sighted people with a degree or higher still only have the same chance of getting a job as someone with no qualifications in the general public [12].
* When someone experiences sight loss influences the challenges they face, either in entry to the job market or job retention [6].
* People born blind or who lost their sight in childhood are less likely to ever enter the labour market, with 76% of this group ever having a job compared to 96% of people who lost their sight over the age of 30. However, it is very likely other factors influence this such as additional disabilities [6].

## What have blind and partially sighted people told us?

In 2019, we carried out research with over 1,000 blind and partially sighed people. This included a large scale survey and some smaller scale focus groups.

* Only 1 in 4 blind and partially sighted people of working age are in work [6].
* Stat safety notice: We can’t say that because 1 in 4 are in work, that means 3 in 4 are unemployed or out of work. Most won’t be defined as economically active. They may actually be retired, long-term sick or disabled, students or looking after family or home. Stick to the 1 in 4 stat and avoid using the word ‘unemployment’.
* The majority (75%) of blind and partially sighted people feel that their sight loss has stopped them from reaching their potential at work. This increases to 84% for those not in employment. It is slightly lower for those in work at 66%, yet that still represents a significant two thirds of people in work [6].
* Stat safety notice: This stat is referring to challenges and barriers faced in work due to sight loss, resulting in missed potential. It does not indicate that sight loss, in itself, has been the reason for missed potential.

#### Quotes from blind and partially sighted people

“Employers need to stop making assumptions based on what they think your ability to do something is based on your sight loss…. It affects your skills development and means you get passed over for promotions.”

“You look at a visually impaired person. They can move about, get on busses and trains, navigate and get around and they can't see properly, or anything at all. Imagine what they can do while they're sitting down working.”

### People in work

* Blind and partially sighted people in work are generally happy with job seeking support, however the majority have had at least some negative experiences in the past [6].
* 76% had a positive experience looking for their current job
* 54% had at least some negative experience while looking for previous jobs
* Four out of five blind and partially sighted people had some form of adjustment to help them in work [6]. These included:
* special aids or equipment (62%)
* time off work (50%)
* adaptations to the working environment (41%)
* People in work are generally happy with the support they receive in relation to their sight loss [6].
* Two thirds (67%) of people were happy all or most of the time
* Nearly one in four (23%) people were only sometimes, rarely or never satisfied with the support offered.
* Around half (47%) of blind and partially sighted people have confidence in progressing their careers but four in ten (40%) do not [6].
* For those who had previous employment, over one-third (36%) thought they could have stayed in their old role given the right support [6].

#### Quotes from blind and partially sighted people in work

“Their view is if you need reasonable adjustments, it's just like saying you need a chair to sit down on.”

“Every job is two interviews. I was being interviewed for the role and I was being interviewed for my sight loss… you had to sell your sight loss as well as your skills. As I wasn't a cane user or a guide dog user, it was more confusing for people.”

“Access to Work is a major problem, ok, just in the absolute unclearness of it.”

### People not in work

* This group includes everyone who is not in work, so those describing themselves as: unemployed; long term sick or disabled; retired; looking after family or home; and students [6].
* Most blind and partially sighted people who are not in employment were in work at some stage (78%), but have now been out of work for many years (64%) [6].
* More than 90% of blind and partially sighted people experiencing sight loss over the age of 30 had been in employment at some stage. This compares to 63% of people who experienced sight loss under the age of two years [6].
* For those who had previous employment, one in four (26%) said that they thought they could have stayed in their old role given the right support. This is a slightly lower proportion than people in work who had left a previous job [6].
* Of all the people who are not currently in work, 39% say that they want a job and just under half of these were actively seeking work [6].
* The majority of people in younger age group tend to be wanting or seeking work, whilst the older age group tend to not want and not be seeking work.
* Whether or not someone wants a job depends on their circumstances. Life stage, other health conditions and other activities are likely to influence this. Specifically, people who are retired or long term sick or disabled are less likely to report wanting a job than those reporting as unemployed [6].
* People who want a job are very pessimistic about their chances of finding one [6].
* 75% of people who wanted a job felt it was unlikely that they would be in a job within next 12 months
* Younger people are more optimistic, with 44% of people aged 18-29 saying that they thought it was likely they would have a job in the next 12 months.
* The most common barriers given by blind and partially sighted people to gaining work are related to employer attitudes and processes citing inaccessible recruitment processes (36%); poor employer attitudes (35%) and; poor employer support (32%) [6].

#### Quotes from blind and partially sighted people not in work

“I didn't get the job because of the culture in the organisation and the [recruiting manager] couldn't go and do the adaptations.”

“It's about confidence and self-esteem, it's a huge thing, because how you come across in interview is massive.”

## What have employers told us?

In 2019, we carried out research with over 500 employers. YouGov was commissioned to undertake the research and findings were broken down by large, medium and small employers.

In general, larger employers considered themselves better equipped to be able to provide adjustments or practical support to blind or partially sighted employees or candidates. This was true across most of the key questions asked.

* 40% of employers were confident that their recruitment processes (e.g. advertising, application, induction, etc) were accessible for people who are blind or partially sighted [6].
* 52% for large employers
* 24% for small employers
* 60% of employers said that they would be willing to make adaptations in order to employ a blind or partially sighted person. Despite obligations under the Equality Act to make adjustments, 23% said they would not be willing [6].
* 74% for large employers would make adaptions
* 40% for small employers would make adaptions
* 32% of employers agreed that they would know how to access funding to cover the extra costs of practical support for employees who are blind or partially sighted. This indicates a low awareness of Access to Work, particularly among small organisations [6].
* 44% for large employers
* 18% for small employers
* 25% of employers agreed that all managers and supervisors in their business have the knowledge to support and manage people who are blind or partially sighted, while 61% disagreed [6].
* More promisingly, 70% of employers said they would be confident in having conversations with employees who are blind or partially sighted about their sight and what support they needed [6].
* There were some common misconceptions about employing someone who was blind or partially sighted [6]:
* 50% of employers thought that there may be additional health and safety risks in the workplace
* 33% of employers thought that they may not be able to operate a computer/laptop
* 33% of employers thought that they may not be able to operate the necessary equipment, excluding computers/laptops

## References

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4. Age UK (2017) [Creating a career MOT at 50](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-news/articles/2017/october/half-of-uk-workers-aged-40-64-wont-have-enough-money-to-retire-when-they-reach-their-state-pension-age/).
5. Office for National Statistics (2019) Population estimates time series dataset.
6. Slade, Edwards and Crawley (2020) Employment for blind and partially sighted people in 2019. RNIB.
7. Slade (2019) Labour Force Survey 2018: comparison of people with sight loss to the rest of the population.
8. NHS Digital (2017) Registered Blind and Partially Sighted People, England 2016-17. Note: registration data for England has been used to extrapolate for the rest of the UK population.
9. Deloitte Access Economics (2019) The economic impact of sight loss and blindness in the UK adult population
10. Morris and Smith (2008) Educational provision for blind and partially sighted children and young people in Britain. RNIB.
11. Department for Education (2019) Statistics: school and pupil numbers.
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End.