Feach

For Kids with Low or No Vision

Our Vision Our Voice

Facts About Vision Impairment & Tips

To Support VI or Blind Students.

A Guide for Lecturers and Tutors

Blindness and Vision Impairment.

- Vision loss is a spectrum, some students may only see light and shapes, some may see people but not their faces.

- Most will have some level of vision.

- Only 15% of blind/vision impaired students have no sight.

What does legally blind mean?

- Someone who is legally blind is defined as having less than 10% of their vision even when corrected with glasses.

- What you see from 60 metres they see at 6 metres.

- Different types of vision loss affect people differently – No two people with vision loss are the same.
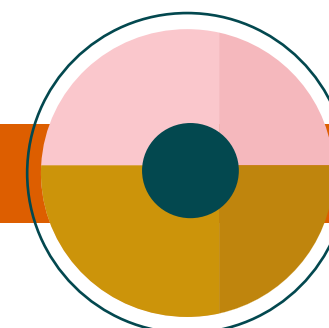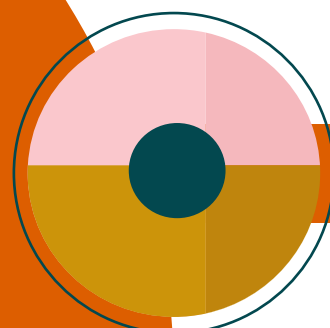
Simulating a visual impairment

The website below will give you an idea of what vision impairment may look like. It will give you an idea of what text and a street scape may look like at 6/60+. Tip, select the dial at the bottom of the web page and drag it to 6/60 to begin the simulation and drag the dial further to view increasing low vision.

What are your legal obligations regarding materials for students with vision impairment?

Under the Disability Act 2005, the Equal Status Act 2000, the University Act 1997, and the Web Accessibility Law 2020, all Lecturers are;

- Legally obliged to provide reasonable accommodations to allow equal access for students with disabilities. It is the law, and it is set out in college policy.

Furthermore Ireland adopted the Web Accessibility Law for all public bodies in the year 2020 - See publication here

What students with Vision Impairment find helpful from Lecturers and Tutors

1) Lecture notes in advance - Why is this important?

- The majority of Vision Impaired students cannot see what you are doing on the board.

- However, once the lecture notes are on their own laptops, students with vision loss can access what everyone else is seeing on the board

- They can type directly into their copy of the notes, making them less reliant on an external note taker resulting in a more inclusive learning environment.

" All my lecturers either emailed me the notes or put them up on Canvas. It was great I could put them up on my laptop and just add my notes.

2) Accessible materials

- Word documents or Power Points that are formatted appropriately with bullet points, headings, and links that have a description. These considerations create accessible information and can be read aloud and edited by the student to suit their vision needs.

- Photographs, scans of PDF's or diagrams or screenshots without Alt Text (alternative text is text that is added to describe a picture) are inaccessible. They cannot be read by screen readers.

What is a Screen Reader?

A screen reader is software a student may use to read out text, navigate a website and access other applications so they can access information through audio. Specialist Screen readers includes JAWS or NVDA.

Why is accessibility important?

- Inaccessible information cannot be read aloud and are incompatible with screen readers.

- When information like photocopied notes are magnified the quality is too poor for the student to read.

How to fix this?

- If you are scanning a reading/ book/ journal article from a hard copy, select scan using OCR on your scanner. This will create a higher quality, more accessible PDF which is compatible with screen readers, text can also be highlighted and copied.

- If you have access to an online tool like Sensus Access then you or the student can upload the document.

- Any material uploaded on college platform should ideally be in the form of marked up/tagged PDF'S/MS Word/PowerPoint.

- If an image or diagram is key to learning, consider including Alt Text or a written description of the image so the student has access to the information the diagram is providing.

Another Useful link - Checklist for accessible content guidance

> **If I get scanned or photographed materials, I just leave them out, I can't read them. It means I don't have all the material for the assignment, but I usually muddle through, it probably does affect my grade.**

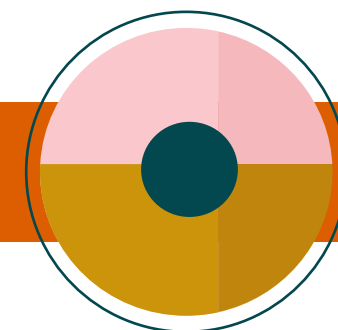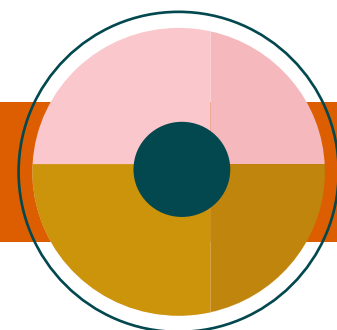3) **Lecturers describing what they are doing out loud. Why is this important?**

- The student with a vision loss will have a much better idea of what is happening.
- They will be more easily be able to follow your instructions.
- They will not have to strain their eyes looking up the front.
- They will not have to rely on their peers to explain to them what is going on.

> **I'm doing computer science, and most of the lecturers say what they are doing as they do it, so I can just follow along. This makes a big difference to me.**

4) **Prior consultation re-accommodations for Labs, Field Trips, or Work Placements. Why is this important?**

- These accommodations may not have come up in the initial needs assessment.
- An additional needs assessment specific to Labs/Field Trip/Work placement will ensure the student can work effectively from the start.

> **When I started my work placement, no one had asked me about my needs. All medical notes were handwritten so I couldn't read the case files. The last VI student could read writing so they assumed I could. We sorted it out in the end, but it was really stressful. I left that placement feeling like I didn't have the same level of skill as my sighted peers.**

Myths About Low Vision & Blind People

1) **All blind and VI students use a cane**

- Some students use a cane all the time.

- Some use a cane only in new locations or a night time.

- Some have enough sight to navigate independently.

- Some choose not to use a cane due to societal perceptions.

" Because I didn't have a cane or a guide dog, the disability officer assumed my sight was much better than it was. I was refused most supports I asked for and had to get Vision Ireland in to explain what vision impairment meant.

2) **Blind students no longer use Braille, technology does everything.**

- Variety of access solutions is needed to access course materials. These include braille, audio, assistive and mainstream technology, and magnification tools

- Electronic Braille is still in use and will continue to be used alongside technology for some students.

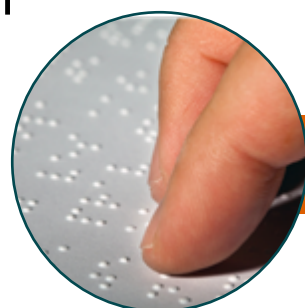- What a student uses will be dependent on their level of vision and what works best for them

" There are apps that will easily compensate for their low vision and give them greater access to college life.

- Often apps are inaccessible when using magnification tools, or they may work but create other technical issues which make them impractical.

- It takes time and lots of trial and error to find what apps work for them.

3) **Blind students are comfortable telling their peers that they cannot see well and what they need help with.**

- Most students have moved from post primary school where parents and SNAs have advocated for them due to their age and their peers are aware they have a vision impairment.

- Often, they do not have the language or experience to outline their needs.

- Advocating for themselves will develop throughout their time in college. In 1st year they may need more support than later in college.

" I didn't tell anyone initially as I was trying to make friends and didn't want people to think I would be a burden.

Top tips to help you support
low vision & blind students.

No two students who have low vision and are blind are the same. The best way to make sure you can support these people is to talk to them and find out what their specific needs are. Sometimes you can find solution with the person and other times you may need to reach out to the community. This community can involve

- Organisations like Vision Ireland that has advice and specialists,

- Services like **Bookshare** Ireland that can convert books into other formats,

- Assistive Technology experts like Assistive Technology Officers in Universities.

Our Vision
Our Voice

#NothingAboutUsWithoutUs

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