



Understanding Vision Loss

Disability Team



A Guide for Disability Support Staff

Our Vision
Our Voice

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 vision differently. Some students will have better near vision than distance vision. Some students have less vision if there is glare. Some may have little periphery vision; some may have little central vision.

This [link](#) will give you an idea of what vision impairment may look like. Giving you an idea of what text and a street scape may look like at 6/60+

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 College staff 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.

What does that mean?

- Teaching and non-teaching staff need to make accessible documents and presentations.
- Teaching Units are responsible for accessible LMS and websites.
- IT technology officers/departments are responsible for the accessibility of all college platforms including apps.



Facts & Myths

About Vision impairment

Facts

- 1) **A student with vision impairment will take longer to read printed material even when magnified.**
 - ◆ Reading rates for students with VI will be slower than their sighted peers even when materials are magnified.
- 2) **A student with VI will take longer to take down notes.**
 - ◆ Even with fast typing speeds and using magnification tools, issues with text tracking and scanning will result in more time needed for note-taking.
- 3) **A student with vision impairment will suffer from eye fatigue.**
 - ◆ The strain of using residual vision will often lead to headaches or migraines or difficulties concentrating for long periods.
 - ◆ A student will often be granted extra time in exams and a scribe/reader to compensate for this.

“ For the first semester, I had to go back to my room for breaks a lot as my fatigue headaches were more frequent than normal, trying to find your way in a new environment is exhausting.

Myths

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.
- What a student uses will be dependent on their level of vision and what works best for them.
- Electronic Braille is still in use and will continue to be used alongside technology for some students.

3) 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.

4) 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 of college, 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.

What students with VI would find helpful from the disability support services

1) The huge number of emails received when starting college.

- ◆ This is challenging for all students but particularly for those with low vision as an overload of information can lead to them missing important emails.
- ◆ Visual clutter is hard to navigate, sorting through 20 emails to find the relevant one is a bigger chore for them than their sighted peers.
- ◆ Group sessions or videos on how to use the platforms will not work for vision impaired students as they cannot follow them.

Suggestion

- ◆ A 1:1 session with IT at the beginning of the year to help the student filter emails into folders would be beneficial.

“When I first started, I got could not cope with the number of emails. Ironically some of the emails were about looking after our “mental health”, but the number of emails was affecting my mental health as I was totally losing control, missing important emails, the visual clutter was mind-blowing.

2) Learning to navigate the college platform.

- ◆ Platforms like Brightspace, Canvas, Moodle, Teams etc take time to learn, especially when a student has the added burden of having to master the accessibility tools also.
- ◆ Group sessions or videos on how to manage IT platforms etc will not work for vision impaired students as they cannot follow them.

Suggestion

- ◆ A 1:1 IT session with someone who knows how to use platforms with accessibility settings would be useful.
- ◆ The student can then follow up with individual questions as issues arise. This extra mentoring would be very beneficial.

3) Learning to reference articles/journals/texts.

- ◆ Learning to reference correctly is often cited as one of the first academic stumbling blocks when asked to submit work.
- ◆ The explanation materials and videos are hard to work in conjunction with magnification tools.

Suggestion

- ◆ 1:1 sessions on how to use the various citation platforms the departments recommend would relieve a lot of early stress.

4) Finding their way to sports clubs or societies.

- ◆ Trying to find clubs and societies on the first couple of occasions can be difficult.
- ◆ All the students bar one, we interviewed for this guide did not join any clubs as it was too difficult, and they were already feeling overwhelmed.
- ◆ They often delayed this for 2nd term or 2nd year, however they found it was harder to join later.

Suggestion

- ◆ A system whereby a member of the club can, contact a new student that has disclosed a disability and offer to accompany them on their first couple of sessions, would be useful.

5) Notes takers and Personal Assistants (PAs) are often not aware of how to support a student with VI.

- ◆ All students had problems with PA's not showing up, lecture notes not being sent and/or lecture notes not being accessible.
- ◆ This always happens in the 1st term and usually gets resolved.

Suggestion

- ◆ Some communication between student and PA/Note taker to discuss needs and how support should be given.



Our Vision Our Voice

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