**Employment - Good practice guidelines for Eye Clinic Liaison Officers (ECLOs)**

## Introduction

People of working age that are losing their sight will most likely be considering the impact of their sight loss on their employment situation. The key message for anyone is that **sight ‘loss does not equal job loss’**.

* People in work should be supported and encouraged to stay in work whenever possible and provided with the right information, advice, equipment and support to help them retain work to progress in their careers.
* Only around a quarter of registered blind and partially sighted people of working age are in paid or self-employment, compared with around three quarters of the UK general population.
* People registered as blind or partially sighted are nearly five times more likely to be unemployed for five years or more than the general population.

## How many people of working age lose their sight each year?

* More than 4,000 people of working age are newly certified by an Ophthalmologist as severely sight impaired or sight impaired each year across the UK.

## How many people lose their job each year because of the onset of sight loss or deterioration of sight?

We do not know the number of people with sight loss who lose their jobs each year, but we do know there is a link between sight loss and job loss.

* twenty-seven per cent of non-working **registered** blind and partially sighted people said the main reason for leaving their last job was the onset of sight loss or deterioration of their sight.
* thirty per cent of those not in work but who had worked in the past said that they maybe or definitely could have continued in their job given the right support.

## What jobs do blind and partially sighted people do?

We have moved away from the outdated concept of “jobs for blind people”. Blind and partially sighted people succeed in a wide variety of jobs in almost all employment sectors.

To help spread this message, we have published a series of booklets called This IS Working, which highlight the successful careers of a wide cross section of blind and partially sighted people. They are available alongside many other success stories on RNIB's website at:

## <https://www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living-work-and-employment/success-stories>

## What does the law say?

Sight loss is considered a disability under equality law. Employers are not allowed to discriminate against someone on the basis of their disability. For someone experiencing sight loss, this most likely means that it is unlawful to dismiss someone on the grounds of their sight, and instead places a duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace to accommodate a person's specific needs. More information is available on RNIB's website at:

[www.rnib.org.uk/rights](http://www.rnib.org.uk/rights)

## What support is available?

### RNIB employment services

RNIB provides support and advice to help blind and partially sighted people find employment or stay in their jobs if they are losing their sight. Most enquiries are dealt with by our Helpline, with an additional team of specialist employment advisers across the UK. This means that most customers who need employment support should be directed to:

**RNIB helpline:**

* 0303 123 9999
* [helpline@rnib.org.uk](mailto:helpline@rnib.org.uk)

To supplement this service, we have a team of specialist employment advisers who concentrate on supporting people in work, influencing employers and providing detailed advice and recommendations through our work-based assessments.

If a customer is-in-need of urgent specialist advice (for example, if someone is about to lose their job), please make a direct referral to the specialist employment team. For ECLOs with access to RNIB’s Ascent system, please make a referral to the Employment team (marked FAO Employment Line) and send an email to:

[EmploymentEnquiries@rnib.org.uk](mailto:EmploymentEnquiries@rnib.org.uk).

For ECLOs who don’t have access, please make a referral by email (above address).

### RNIB website

RNIB's website contains lots of information and advice to help blind and partially sighted people prepare for and find employment, start their own business or stay in their jobs if they are losing their sight.

Visit: [www.rnib.org.uk/employment](http://www.rnib.org.uk/employmentstories)

It also has lots of useful information for employers.

Visit: [www.rnib.org.uk/employingsomeone](http://www.rnib.org.uk/employingsomeone)

It also has lots of useful information for intermediaries and professionals supporting blind and partially sighted people to gain and retain employment.

Visit: [www.rnib.org.uk/employmentservices](http://www.rnib.org.uk/employmentservices)

### Factsheets

RNIB produce a series of employment factsheets for people living with sight loss, to provide information and advice on looking for and staying in work. They include:

* Access to Work
* Looking for work
* Staying in work
* Self-employment
* Job seeking resources
* RNIB's trainee grade scheme
* Your rights in employment

All these factsheets can be downloaded from:

[www.rnib.org.uk/employment](http://www.rnib.org.uk/employment)

### 4. Access to Work

The Government’s Access to Work (ATW) scheme provides practical and financial support for disabled people in work and those starting a new job. It awards discretionary grants towards any extra employment costs that result from a disability, including special aids and equipment, support workers and travel support to or within work. Some elements of ATW grants are paid to employers (for example, to purchase software or equipment). Other grants can be paid to individuals (for example for travel support). RNIB produce a factsheet on ATW (see above), and information is available on GOV.UK at:

[www.gov.uk/access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)

### 5. Government Programmes

Across the UK, including where powers have been devolved, there are Government programmes, funded to help people find or stay in work. Examples include the Work and Health Programme (England and Wales), Fair Start Scotland and both Workable and Eye Work Too in Northern Ireland. These programmes are delivered through ‘Prime’ contractors in partnership with other organisations. RNIB do not deliver these programmes but have agreed partnerships in many areas to try to influence and support delivery.

While eligibility rules regularly change, most referrals to programmes are made by Jobcentre Plus. Customers can find out more about the programmes in their area by asking at a local Jobcentre. The programmes are not just for people who ‘sign on’. In addition, Jobcentres can ‘signpost’ people to local services that might help people move towards work, including volunteering.

## Key Points

* Working age people that are losing their sight should be asked if they are receiving specialist support to help them find work or stay in their current job.
* The key message for anyone in work and losing their sight is that ‘**Sight Loss does not equal Job Loss’.**
* Anyone with sight loss should be supported and encouraged to stay in work whenever possible. Blind and partially sighted people who are in work should be provided with the right information, advice, equipment and support to help them retain work, and progress in their careers.
* Let them know that RNIB provide support and advice to help blind and partially sighted people find employment or stay in their jobs if they are losing their sight. Further advice is available on how to refer to Sight Loss Advisors or when a referral to our specialist employment team would be appropriate.
* It is important to recognise that sight loss is generally considered a disability under the Equality Act, and that it is unlawful for an employer to dismiss a person or discriminate against someone on the grounds of their disability.
* Governments across the UK fund support for people with disabilities to find and keep work, particularly let them know about Access to Work and Jobcentre services:
* Access to Work: [www.gov.uk/access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)
* Jobcentre Plus: https://www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus

# Check whether they would like to meet other people in a similar situation, or whether emotional support is appropriate. Let them know about RNIB Group’s confidence building programmes – Living with Sight Loss and RNIB's Emotional Support Service, as required.

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