

Visual Impairment

Description

About 378,000 people are registered blind or partially-sighted in the UK. Visual impairment includes poor distance and/or near vision, tunnel or double vision, sight in only one eye and squinting.

Points for discussion

How is the client affected?

Visual impairment can restrict the client's mobility or make it difficult for them to do detailed work.

What is the treatment?

Treatment for visual impairment will vary depending on the nature and severity of the condition.

Most commonly, people with some degree of impairment use glasses or contact lenses.

Eye exercises and surgery can correct certain conditions. For example, most cataracts can be treated successfully with surgery to remove the 'cloudy' lens followed by its replacement with a plastic lens.

Laser surgery can save, but not improve, the existing sight of people with impairments related to diabetes.

What is the effect of treatment?

Clients might need to take time off during the working day to go to consultations or treatment sessions. Glasses and contact lenses can correct sight to within an 'acceptable' range.

Medication, eg, for glaucoma, can cause side-effects such as headaches.

What caused the impairment?

Some people are born with visual impairments. Changes in vision can also take place in people of any age. Common causes of visual impairment include damage to visual nerves, eg, as a result of head injury, brain tumour or infection.

The eyes can also be damaged by conditions such as diabetes and glaucoma (pressure inside the eye), or be affected by brain damage, eg, associated with a stroke.

It is important to establish whether the client's condition is stable or deteriorating or, indeed, if it is improving with treatment.

Does the client have any other health conditions or impairments?

Visual impairments are sometimes associated with another condition, such as diabetes. Other health conditions and impairments may affect the client's job choices.

Implications for job choice

Blind and partially-sighted people are able to do most jobs. Sometimes employers might need to provide specialist support or equipment to enable clients to fulfil the requirements of their job.

However, the client should consider the implications of their impairment in areas of work that involve:

- Detailed craft/manual work, eg, electronic assembly, tailoring, electrical repair.
- Observation as a key part of the work: eg, some areas of scientific research, medicine, nursing and some other healthcare occupations, the police force, the prison service, some jobs in aviation and surveying.
- An appreciation of shape, design and colour, eg, in design and photography work.
- Driving, or operating machinery such as cranes and hoists. Also, moving around in areas that contain dangerous machinery and equipment.
- The armed forces – eyesight standards vary according to the role. The need to wear glasses or contact lenses might be a bar to entry to some roles.

Some employers insist that applicants have unaided vision, ie, without glasses or contact lenses. These include the fire service for firefighting duties. Some brigades allow entry for applicants who have had laser correction.

Glasses and contact lenses are acceptable for entry into the prison service and for the police force. It is possible for clients with aided vision to become airline pilots.

Overcoming difficulties

At the recruitment stage, employers could allow job applications to be submitted on tape.

In employment, adjustments could include:

- Improving lighting.
- Adapting existing equipment, eg, Braille instructions on machinery and equipment.
- Reallocating some duties to a colleague who does not have a visual impairment.

An increasing number of visually-impaired people are able to use computers, eg, through large text or modified colour displays. Others can use audio text readers or electronic Braille pads.

It is also worth noting that:

- Employers could get financial assistance through Access to Work (AtW), eg, to provide someone to read for a blind or partially-sighted employee.
- Some vocational subjects that might appear to demand normal vision, eg, computer graphics design, jewellery-making and piano tuning/repair, can be taught at specialist colleges.

Sources of information and advice

Action for Blind People

14-16 Verney Road,
London SE16 3DZ
Tel: 0800 915 4666
Email: supporter-services@afbp.org
Website: www.afbp.org

This charity aims to enable blind and partially-sighted people to enjoy equal opportunities at work.

The Eyecare Trust

PO Box 804, Aylesbury,
Bucks HP20 9DF
Tel: 0845 129 5001
Fax: 0845 129 5001
Email: info@eyecaretrust.org.uk
Website: www.eye-care.org.uk

Royal National College for the Blind

College Road,
Hereford HR1 1EB
Tel: 01432 265 725
Email: info@rnib.ac.uk
Website: www.rnib.ac.uk

The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)

105 Judd Street,
London WC1H 9NE
Tel: 020 7388 1266
Helpline: 0845 766 9999, open on weekdays from 9:00 am – 5:00 pm, except Wednesday (closes at 4:00 pm)
Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk
Website: www.rnib.org.uk

The RNIB offers a disability consultancy service and an education and employment service, with links to the RNIB Vocational College, Loughborough.

RNIB Technology in Learning and Employment (TiLE)

58-72 John Bright Street,
Birmingham B1 1BN
Tel: 0870 013 9555
Email: technology@rnib.org.uk
Website: www.rnib.org.uk/technology

RNIB TiLE provides an information service for all aspects of visual impairment technology. It researches how new technology can help in the workplace.

The Partially Sighted Society (PSS)

Queen's Road,
Doncaster,
South Yorkshire DN1 2NX
Tel: 01302 368 998
Email: info@partightsight.org.uk

The PSS offers information, advice, publications, aids to vision, etc.

Please also see **IMPAIRED COLOUR VISION**.