



**R N I B**

See differently

# **Delivering Accessible Learning:**

A guide for Further Education  
providers supporting blind and  
partially sighted students

April 2021

# Delivering Accessible Learning:

This guide provides information and a check list on all aspects that should be considered when supporting blind and partially sighted students to thrive at college and in Further Education (FE).

If you are a disability practitioner, lecturer or any other support staff working in a mainstream college supporting a blind or partially sighted student then this guide is for you.

It is also a helpful tool for blind and partially sighted students and their parents and carers - providing a framework for the areas and topics they may wish to discuss with their chosen college.



# Contents

<b>Understanding the needs of blind and partially sighted students</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Why colleges may not have the in-house knowledge to support blind and partially sighted students .....	<b>4</b>
Getting the right advice and support .....	<b>5</b>
 <b>Moving into college and further education</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Education and Health Care Plan.....	<b>8</b>
 <b>Studying</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Modifying resources and materials .....	<b>11</b>
Digital inclusion and virtual learning .....	<b>13</b>
Assistive technology .....	<b>15</b>
Exams and assessments.....	<b>16</b>
 <b>Getting around</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Orientation and mobility .....	<b>17</b>
The learning environment .....	<b>18</b>
 <b>Funding</b> .....	<b>19</b>
 <b>Further information</b> .....	<b>20</b>

# Understanding the needs of blind and partially sighted students

Blind and partially sighted students have the same ability, aspirations and potential as their peers. However, there are often obstacles to their learning that can be removed through thinking about how

courses are delivered, by making information and resources accessible and ensuring that they have the right equipment to access their course.

## Why colleges may not have the in-house knowledge to support blind and partially sighted students

Childhood vision impairment is a low incidence disability. Based on a WHO international classification only two in every 1,000 (0.2 per cent) of children and young people aged to 24 have a vision impairment – are blind or partially sighted.

Additionally, approximately 5.6 per cent of children with learning disabilities are estimated to have vision impairment.

### TOP TIP:

**The key theme running through this guide is to always include the student in discussions and decisions about their learning and to take advice and involve qualified experts and professionals in shaping plans.**

It may be that the student starting at your college will need specific support, but there are a number of inclusive learning steps that you can take which will benefit all students.

Given this, it may be that your college hasn't supported any or many blind or partially sighted students and may need extra guidance to put the right support in place. No one expects a mainstream college to be an expert in knowing what support a blind or partially sighted student may need, that is why there is support out there.

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**References** RNIB has designed a '[sight loss data tool](#)', which sets out key statistics on the number of blind and partially sighted people living within a local authority area.

# Getting the right advice and support

A blind or partially sighted student coming to your college will have had input and support from a 'qualified teacher of children and young people with vision impairment' (QTVI). They play a crucial role in the development and education of blind and partially sighted learners. They work with children and families from birth, working in their homes, throughout early years, school and post 16 settings.

Their role is varied, but they can support with functional vision assessments, provide advice on strategies for learning and communication, link in with other professionals, teach specialist skills (for example braille), the use of ICT and specialist equipment.

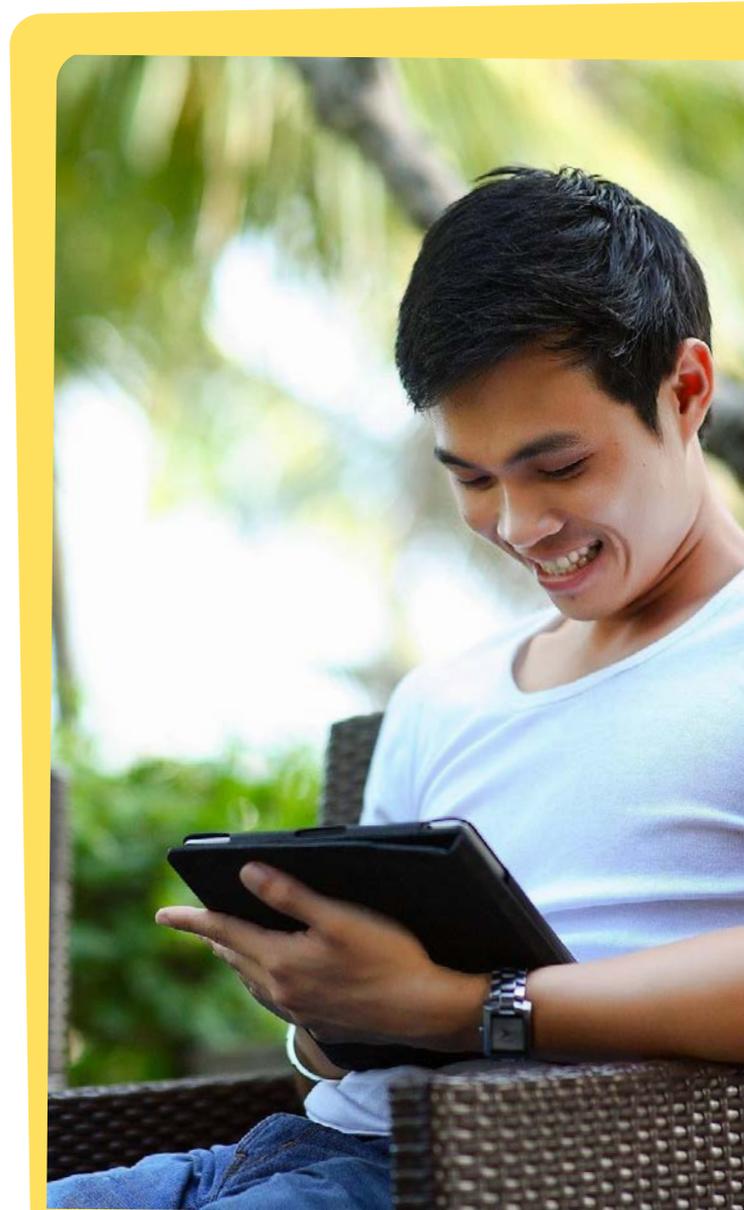
The SEND code of practice identifies the need for specialist support both within and beyond the college.

QTVIs are the specialist staff that can be called upon by a college for advice and guidance at any point during the students learning journey. It is unlikely for a college to be able to fully understand and meet the needs of a blind or partially sighted learner without specialist input. They are typically based within a local authority education support service, sometimes known as the Sensory Support Service, Specialist Teaching Service or Vision Impairment team.



## Checklist

1. Is a QTVI involved with the transitioning of the student into college?
2. Do you know how to contact the QTVI service?
3. Do you know what the local arrangements are for getting in support?





Colleges should ensure they have access to external specialist services and expertise. These can include educational psychologists, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), specialist teachers and support services, supported employment services and therapists. They can be involved at any point for help or advice on the best way to support a student with SEN or a disability.

#### TOP TIP:

Each local authority will have its own arrangement on how the QTVI service can be accessed. Some may provide the service to support students to transition in to college or may require the college to buy in the service. It is important to check what arrangement your local authority has and to plan resources accordingly.

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**References** RNIB has produced a video and factsheet on [the role of a QTVI](#) and how they support blind and partially sighted children and young people. [The professional association of the vision impairment education workforce \(VIEW\)](#) is a membership organisation which provides a wide range of information on the role of the QTVI and other professionals that support blind and partially sighted children and young people.

# Moving into college and further education

The transition into college can be a huge leap for many blind and partially sighted students. Many students will be wanting to take that next step to independence – but unsure of the support available to them.

No two blind or partially sighted students will need the same support. Each will have preferred accessible technology they use, will have different confidence levels and will have a preferred format to receive information. It is important not to make assumptions and to find out about each students' learning needs, what learning strategies they have in place and what their aspirations are.

Hopefully, during school, the learner has been supported according to the “**access to learning, learning to access**” model. In earlier years, adaptations, provision of alternative formats and human support enable a child to access lessons and curriculum materials. As the child gets older, they are enabled to develop skills to increase their ability to access learning more independently. This may include the use of technology, skills such as touch-typing, mobility, living skills, self-confidence, resilience and self-advocacy. It will be important for colleges to understand where a young person is on this journey and to support their development along it.

When working with the student to identify what support they will need, it is important to understand:

- What their aspirations are
- How they currently learn and access information
- What equipment they have, may need and how they use it
- What strategies they have in place to support their learning
- What independence and negotiation skills they have and how they may need to develop these
- What their confidence levels are in getting around campus and their environment

Thinking and planning at the earliest stage can help the student to know what it is they want to do, what they need to do to achieve this goal and what support and assistive technology (AT) they may need to achieve this.



# Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP)

It may be that the student already has an EHCP which should have had input from a QTVI. The EHCP is a good starting point for identifying the support the student may need.

Ideally the college should have been involved during the transition stages to feed into this plan. If the student doesn't have one, we would recommend that they should be referred for an assessment, as this may unlock further funding for support with equipment.

## TOP TIP:

**Involve the young learner in discussions on what support they might need at the earliest opportunity. This will allow time to explore and implement the right support.**





## Checklist

1. Does the student have an EHCP?
2. Is there a clear and confident approach that encourages students to disclose and be open about their disability?
3. Has a one-to-one meeting been arranged with the student in advance of them starting college to discuss their learning needs?
4. Is there already a transition plan in place?
5. Have other professionals for example, career services, sensory impairment services, educational psychologist and QTVIs been involved in the planning of support for the student?
6. Are all lecturers and support staff included and involved in the discussions with students about what support could be put in place?
7. What visual awareness training is in place for staff who will be teaching and providing support to the student?
8. Has the student been asked what learning strategies they have developed, what technology they have used and how they use this?
9. Has the student been informed about what options and support is available?
10. Has a discussion with the student taken place on what they would like to get out of college and would like from the future?

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**References:** [Just Enough' Support'](#), guidance for supporting young people with sensory impairment in further education, developed by the Department for Education and National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NATSIP).

[Your future, your choice](#): bridging the gap, a guide outlining the support and services available to assist young people with vision impairment through their journey from school, through further and higher education, and into employment.

[Specialist VI Curriculum](#), VIEW has written a paper on why we need a UK specialist curriculum to enable participation in education.

# Studying

For the student to get the most out of their college studies, it is likely some adaptations will be needed to ensure all elements of learning are accessible.

What is accessible for one student may differ for another. There is a range of approaches that can be taken to make information and resources accessible. It is important the student is included in these discussions throughout the process.

Some students may be resistant to engaging with anything that makes them stand out from their peers. This section includes solutions that can be adopted by a college that can make learning accessible.



# Modifying resources and materials

Some students may need their learning materials and resources modified or adapted to be accessible.

This is not simply a case of enlarging text to fit an A3 page. There must be a plan in place to ensure that the student has the resources they need in time for lectures and at the same time as their peers.

Here are some tips to support colleges in making this happen.

- Plan ahead to make sure there is sufficient time to modify materials before the lesson.
- Ensure everyone knows exactly what is required by them and when.
- Consider producing materials for all learners in an accessible font size (at least 14 point) and typeface (e.g. Arial) to reduce the amount of modification needed. This will also help other learners, including those with dyslexia and/or specific learning difficulties.
- Prepare resources electronically so that they can be saved and modified easily to produce different versions.
- Provide electronic copies of resources so the student can use their personal access features on devices or that the material is compatible with access technology such as JAWS.

- Encourage the student to submit written work electronically wherever possible.
- All written feedback and comments should be made electronically to enable the student to read them independently.
- Give extra time, if needed, for blind and partially sighted learners to process information and complete tasks. Where extra time is not possible, think about the simplest approach or resource that will enable them to meet the learning outcomes.





## Checklist

1. Do you know how the student currently accesses their learning materials?
2. Have you explored how all learning materials will be accessible for the student? This includes consideration of how (the process) and who (is responsible) for timely production. It is important that the student has access at the same time as their peers, and not after the event.
3. Do you know how to modify materials, is there clear process of how this will happen?
4. How are/can pictures, diagrams, charts and graphs be made accessible for the student?
5. Has the student had a low vision assessment and do they have the appropriate low-vision aids (magnifiers etc)?
6. Are they a braille learner? If so, what equipment do they need? What resources, including staffing, are in place to enable the modification of braille resources?

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**References** [RNIB Bookshare](#) provides textbooks and materials to support the UK curriculum. They offer a range of accessible formats that can be read electronically or adapted to suit the personal reading needs of learners. They now have 969,989 titles - with more being added all the time.

Microsoft Office has a suite of resources advising on how to make documents accessible

[Make your Word documents accessible](#)

[Make your Excel spreadsheets accessible](#)

[Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible](#)

[Make your SharePoint site accessible](#)

[Create accessible Office documents](#) (Office Support)

[Create accessible PDFs](#) (Office Support)

[Video: creating accessible documents](#) (Office Support)

[Video: create more accessible slides](#) (Office Support)

Adobe Acrobat Pro, not all PDFs are compatible with screen reading technology. It is important to ensure that these documents are accessible, here are some guides to doing this.

[Create and verify PDF accessibility](#)

[UK Association for Accessible Formats](#)

[Sight Advice FAQ: how do I create accessible documents.](#)

# Digital inclusion and virtual learning

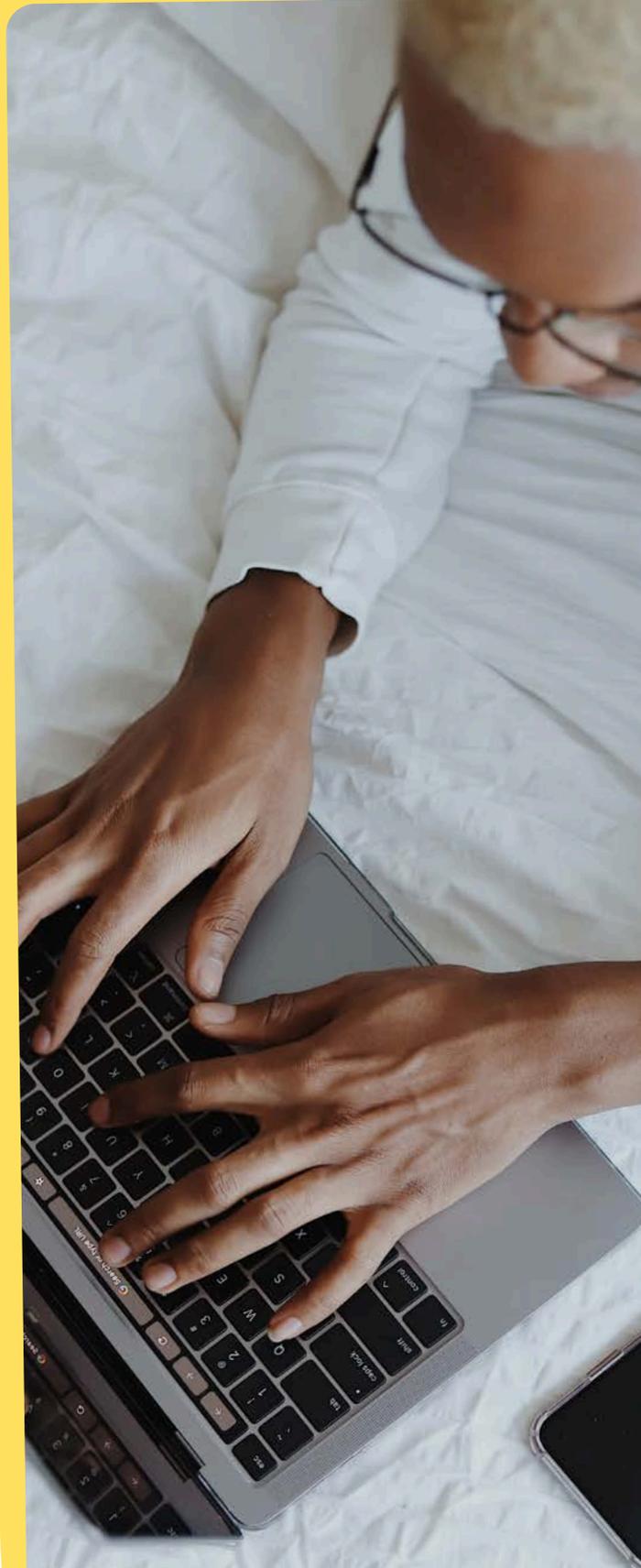
Covid-19 has undoubtedly impacted on the way that learning is delivered and received and has catapulted digital inclusion and virtual learning forward.

## Digital inclusion

With the Public-Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018, it is the right time to ensure that websites, mobile apps and online resources are fully accessible.

## Virtual learning

The moving of learning resources, lecture notes, papers and other information to online, has the potential to benefit and support blind and partially sighted students. However, simply transferring information online doesn't necessarily make it accessible. PDF documents aren't always compatible with accessible technology and video resources may not be appropriate if they depend on visual references to convey information.





## Checklist

1. Has an audit been conducted to check that all existing and newly uploaded PDFs are formatted as accessible PDFs?
2. Has an audit been conducted to check that all written notes follow a clear heading structure and that screenshots are available in an accessible format?
3. Can the student access all materials; including graphs, tables, equations etc?
4. Is the software and assistive technology the student is using compatible with the colleges platforms and course materials?
5. Is the student included in all discussions around their support needs? They will be able to help with identifying appropriate solutions that work for them. They are also best placed to test that something is working the way that it should.
6. If studying a practical subject, have steps been taken to ensure that the student can fully engage with any virtual simulations that are in place of lab time or practical learning? These alternative arrangements should not only be accessible, but also usable and compatible with any assistive technology used by the student.
7. Is the website and are any apps compliant with the Public-Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018?

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**References** [AbilityNet](#) has links to digital accessibility resources [Gov.UK](#) has guidance on understanding [accessibility requirements for public sector bodies](#).

# Assistive technology

Technology is a great tool to achieve the successful inclusion of blind and partially sighted students. For some students this may involve assistive technology, for example a laptop that can run screen reading and or magnification programmes.

The student may also have a preferred programme to use or may need to find the right equipment for them.

However, students may also benefit from mainstream technology to support their learning, for example the use of an iPad or tablet can be used to interact with existing interactive boards the college may already use, or the student can take pictures of white boards and then magnify to read.

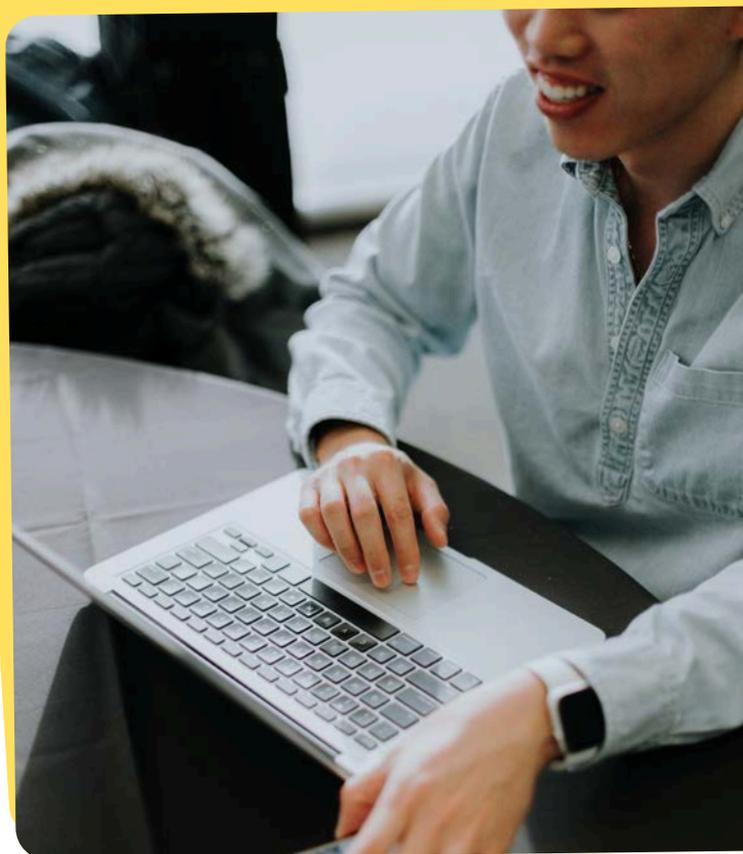
Each student will have their own preferred way of accessing technology that should be explored.



## Did You Know

Learners who read and write in braille might use a variety or combination of formats, e.g., braille and speech software, depending on the nature of the learning task and individual comfort and skill level?

Staff will need to know, or be willing to learn, braille as well as how to use specialist braille technology to create appropriate resources.



**References** [RNIB Technology support](#) provides a range of information and advice on technology in education, including a number of case studies. [Vital Tech](#) provides a guide through the world of assistive tech for blind and partially sighted people in the UK.

[The EdTech Demonstrator programme](#) launched in 2019 to offer peer-to-peer support on the effective use of technology in education. It currently focuses on helping schools and colleges to provide remote and blended education.

# Exams and Assessments

There are many areas that need to be considered when looking at what the right accessibility support could be. These may include:

- Plan ahead to make sure there is sufficient time to modify materials before the lesson.
- Ensure everyone knows exactly what is required by them and when.
- Consider producing materials for all learners in an accessible font size (at least 14 point) and typeface (e.g. Arial) to reduce the amount of modification needed. This will also help other learners, including those with dyslexia and/or specific learning difficulties.



## Checklist

1. What are the student's assistive technology needs and what equipment needs to be made available to enable independent study? How will this be maintained and/or repaired?
2. How will feedback on work and assessments be provided and can this be done electronically? The student shouldn't have to rely on someone to read their feedback to them.
3. What process is in place to ensure exams are accessible and that the student's reasonable adjustment needs are met?



# Getting around

College is not just about learning, but also about making new friends and exploring what it means to move into adulthood and to become more independent. This is no different for blind and partially sighted students.

## Orientation and mobility

The mobility and independence skills of individual blind and partially sighted students will be different. It can depend upon the level of mobility training they may have had in the past, their confidence level, their level of sight, familiarity with routes and surroundings, whether their sight is affected by light or dark – amongst other things.

The student will need some input and support from a trained mobility and independent living specialist, (known as a habilitation specialist), to become confident and familiar in a new setting. Habilitation is the one-to-one training of a young person, that starts with their existing skills to develop their mobility, navigation and independent living skills. Habilitation specialists work for local authority vision impairment services and should be involved in the transition of a blind or partially sighted young person to college.



## Checklist

1. Has the student received a tour of the campus? Do they know where all of the key lecture rooms, library, cafeteria etc are?
2. Have you spoken to the student about their confidence in getting around the campus and what support, training and adjustments could be put in place?
3. Has a referral been made for the student to have a local authority assessment from a habilitation/mobility specialist?
4. Has a risk assessment of the routes to be travelled within campus, as well as for travel to and from the setting, been carried out?

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**References** Guide Dogs' [My Sighted Guide](#) service partners blind and partially sighted people with volunteers to support with confidence and to participate in social, leisure and other activities.

[Guide Dogs](#) explains what habilitation support is, why it is provided and how it is delivered. [Habilitation VI UK](#) has useful information on its website about the role of habilitation and how it supports young people.

# The learning environment

An accessible physical environment can reduce barriers to participation and learning for blind and partially sighted students. It is good practice to carry out an audit of the campus well in advance of the student starting college. The audit can include things like

- Signage
- Whether stairs and trip hazards are contrasted
- Handrails
- Lighting and window blinds
- Well-maintained grounds, free of obstructions.



## Checklist

1. Has an environmental assessment of the facility been carried out?
2. Has an audit of the environment in the room where a learner is going to work been conducted?
3. Are walkways clear? Coats and bags can be stored or tucked away and the layout of the room should be consistent.
4. Are class resources consistently kept in the same place? Resources can be clearly labelled with tactile markers, if necessary.
5. Is there good ambient lighting in the study room? Can window blinds be adjusted for glare or is task lighting required in dull areas?
6. Is inclusive learning and inclusion promoted?

**References** The Exploring Access series are audit frameworks that can be used to check the physical learning environment of your setting. Exploring Quality can be used to assess the inclusivity of the learning experience offered. These resources are available at [RNIB Bookshare](#).

# Funding

Ensuring a college is accessible for all students through digital inclusion and inclusive practices will greatly benefit blind and partially sighted students.

However, this will not mean that students will not still need access to assistive or mainstream technology to access their studies.

The [Education and Skills Funding Agency](#) is responsible for funding education and skills for children, young people and adults. They are also responsible for the regulations of academies, further education and sixth-form colleges. There are a number of funding opportunities to support students including

- [16-19 Bursary Fund](#)
- [Exceptional learning support](#)

Local authorities have a duty to provide appropriate education and training for young people up to 19 (and up to 25 for those with a Section 139a Learning Difficulty Assessment).



# Further information

## **Thomas Pocklington Trust**

Our [Student Support Service](#) is here to provide one-to-one advice and support to blind and partially sighted students aged 16+ in, or wanting to enter into, study and to the professionals that support them.

We have a range of web-based resources or you can contact us on

[studentsupport@pocklington-trust.org.uk](mailto:studentsupport@pocklington-trust.org.uk)  
or 0203 757 8040

## **RNIB**

We're the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), one of the UK's leading sight loss charities and the largest community of blind and partially sighted people.

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

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

Helpline: 0303 123 9999





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