

# APPRENTICESHIP WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:

## FINAL CASE STUDY

**Project Title – Improving the learning experience of online apprenticeship delivery for visually impaired learners**

**Organisation Name - Babington Business College**

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## Improving the learning experience of hybrid apprenticeship delivery for visually impaired learners

*Please note your case study should highlight the benefits of your Apprenticeship Workforce Development project to others, who are working to improve the quality of their apprenticeship delivery. It should include the impact on your professional practice, and your organisation, as well as demonstrating the impact for your employer partners and apprentices.*

Please complete and return final version to [awd@etfoundation.co.uk](mailto:awd@etfoundation.co.uk) by 02 October 2023

### About Babington

As one of the longest-established and largest apprenticeship training providers in the UK, Babington helps individuals unlock their potential and perform at their very best, developing their skills and realising their dream careers. We offer a range of Professional Apprenticeships programmes from level 2 to level 7 thus supporting individuals all the way up to the top of their profession. Find out more at <https://babington.co.uk>

### Project Overview

*Suggest this is a one-paragraph description of what your project is all about. This might include why you felt it was important to do an Apprenticeship Workforce Development Practitioner Improvement Project. What key issues or challenges were you aiming to address that would support quality improvement in your apprenticeship delivery?*

This report outlines strategies and recommendations for improving online learning experiences for individuals with partial sight or are registered blind. With advancements in technology and an increasing reliance on digital education platforms, it is crucial to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all learners, including those with visual impairments. By implementing the measures outlined in this report, we have focused on creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. We therefore felt it critical to assess the effectiveness of our current curriculum delivery model for visually impaired learners and evaluate their apprenticeship experience, ensuring that their diverse needs are catered for and that their learning journey is impactful. With online learning a prevalent mode of education, offering flexibility and convenience to our learners we have recognised that individuals with partial sight or those registered blind face unique challenges accessing our digital content, necessitating specific adaptations.

## Project Aims

*Use this section to describe your project aims. This might be a general description of how this relates to your organisation's strategy or quality improvement plans aligned to local skills improvement planning, followed by a bullet point or sentence for each aim you set out to explore. What were your intended project outcomes and outputs*

The aims of our project were to:-

- Adapt our curriculum where necessary and develop appropriate technology platforms to provide enhanced accessibility for individuals with visual impairments
- Use collaborative practice and high quality CPD to improve staff knowledge and skills so staff are better equipped to support learners with visual impairments who study online via online group and one to one workshops, tutorials and tripartite review meetings.

By building and managing learning resources and curriculum plans for inclusive delivery, we aim to:

- Continuously enhance our curriculum design, enhancing learning accessibility for learners with a visual impairment and increase learner confidence.
- Ensure that all learners benefit from our exceptional apprenticeship programme delivery.
- Equip all learners with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life, as well as set them up for future success in their subsequent endeavours.

## Focus of Activity

The primary objective of this research is to provide practical recommendations to enhance online learning experiences for partially sighted or blind individuals thus improving the quality of delivery for this specific cohort of learners with a disclosed disability. By addressing these challenges we aimed to attract a more inclusive diverse learner cohort, improve retention, raise achievement rates and improve our employer satisfaction rates. The original project plan was to research teaching, learning and assessment but in order for support to be impactful for learners we have identified the whole learner journey needed reviewing.

## Literature Review - Supporting Apprentices with Visual Impairment (VI)

According to the RNIB (1997) sight loss is one of the commonest causes of disability in the UK and ranges from no useful sight to partial sight. The majority of published literature focusses on supporting the teaching of VI students in primary and secondary education (Loveys, 2023). A number of studies (She, 2020; Oyebanji and Idiong, 2021, Hess 2019) consider the implications for Higher Education Institutions when supporting full time VI under graduates and Urban and Bucsa (2023) go on to consider the wider implications for an equitable educational experience, to enable visually impaired learners to fully participate and integrate into wider university life. Very little literature considers the specific requirements of vocational learners, or apprentices whose learning experience differs significantly from full time education either in school, or university.

The literature does reveal however key themes that are pertinent to all learners: working in partnership with the learner (Roy,2003,p41); the use of technology to assist in all aspects of the learning journey (Urban and Bosca,2023); the holistic analysis (including initial assessment) of the whole learner journey needs to be considered (Roy,2003 p 41) and staff training to ensure

that administratively and pedagogically relevant adaptations are made to the learning experience. (Griffin et al, 2023)

### **Working In Partnership with the Learner**

Students may be an expert on their own condition and be able to explain the nature of their sight loss, whilst others may still be undergoing investigation and be unsure about the etiology of their condition. Not all learners will be comfortable and confident to talk about their condition and Roy (2003, p 41) notes that some may resist disclosing the nature and even extent of their sight loss. This is particularly pertinent for apprentices and employed learners, who may not want their employer to know the extent of their sight loss for fear of adverse judgments begin made about their capability and capacity for work. It is important to listen to these learners experience so far, to understand the adaptations that they have used in the past, for example in school and their daily routine in order that staff and learners can work together to develop learning strategies that meet an individual's need.

Loveys (2023) asserts that each learner's experience is unique and distinct, regardless of their educational environment and that understanding this is "crucial in fostering inclusion for this group of students". There cannot be a "one size fits all" or "standard" approach to adaptations, as the nature and scope of the visual impairment will dictate the adaptation required, for example learners with no central vision can use large print text, whereas those with no peripheral vision would find this of no benefit.

Ultimately, learning is a collaborative effort between students and tutors. VI learners need to be supported to work out how they can make the most of the opportunities to proceed, (Roy, 2003, p42) and tutors need to facilitate an appropriate range of support mechanisms, such as "reading buddies" in class and extra time in exams (Oyebanji & Idiong, 2021). Self- advocacy for all learners acts as a motivating factor for social empowerment and for those with VI this is particularly powerful. (Hess, 2019).

### **Using technology**

The 2019 Covid pandemic provided an impetus for technology to be used more widely as a primary tool to support learning (Cadenas & Inga, 2021). However, both tutors and students need to be trained to use the technology to overcome potential resistance due to inadequate planning. Barriers are created where tutors do not understand how the technology works- such as the importance of using texts with photographs and pictures without voice over explanation. It is incumbent upon all education institutions to provide appropriate support and resources. Assistive technologies, such as screen reader software (e.g. Windots, JAWS (Job Access with Speech for Windows), Screen magnifiers for low vision, screen synthesis, voice recognition, information sonification are important to facilitate engagement (Urban and Bucsa, 2023).

By using technology to support all learners, pedagogical innovations, such as simulation and gamification can be used to engage and stimulate learning. This in turn can engage VI learners more effectively with their peers. (Cadenas and Inga, 2021).

### **Holistic Analysis of the whole learner journey**

Lovey (2023) suggests that a range of social and environmental factors limited VI learners inclusive activity and participation in both education and wider society. Learning about the subject – lessons/ seminars/ tutorials - is only one aspect of the interaction between learner and provider. In apprenticeships

in particular, there is significant interaction with elements of the learning journey, e.g. initial analysis of English, Maths and digital skills; “skills scan” for the initial and ongoing assessment of achievements of the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours ( KSBs) of the apprenticeship standard and the completion of documentation to record Tripartite Reviews and Off the job learning. All of the elements require the learner to interact with systems and software and thus must be capable of using adaptive technology to promote participation and parity of experience. Often when designing learning resources, these elements are neglected, with the primary focus being on the development of learning materials.

Urban & Bucsa (2023) note that an important element of inclusive education for students with disabilities is the “promotion of a learning environment that facilitates their participation and integration” into the wider elements of their learning journey. Whilst Urban and Bucsa’s context is Higher Education, participation and integration is equally valid for apprenticeships, whose remit goes beyond the academic, vocational and technical, to promote broader development and allow learners to develop wider interest and talents. (Ofsted, 2023).

Thus, all elements of the learner journey need to be analysed and considered considering the needs of VI learners. Cadenas & Inga (2021) broke down the stages of their learning process and analysed the challenges for their VI learners by consulting with them as experts. They then made adaptation to the processes, using adaptive technology where appropriate to ensure that VI learners could engage with the broad range of wider support opportunities available. For apprentices, it is important that at initial assessment they can engage with software systems, such as BKSB, that initially analyse and then provide ongoing support for the development of English and maths. Furthermore, it is vital that they can engage with e-portfolio software to provide evidence of progress and achievement against the KSBs of the apprenticeship standard.

### **Staff training**

An inclusive learning environment requires tutors and administrators to understand the challenges and barriers that VI learners face and, by working with the VI learners, strike a balance between good practice that covers a group of VI learners and a response to meet individual needs. (Roy, 2003)

Most students want written material made available in an accessible format and this can be achieved in a variety of different ways. It is considered good practice to have materials available in advance in all media, as some formats (e.g. Braille) need significant forward planning. Some learners indicate that 14 point, sans serif fonts are the optimum, but it is good practice to ask the learners about their optimum size and font type.

Tutors need to consider their pedagogical practice, and be aware of effective teaching strategies, tools and resources to use that support the whole student group, including VI learners (Griffin-Shirley et al, 2023). Cadenas & Inga (2021) suggest that tutors need to be trained to use a range of alternative tools and that “disciplinary didactic and pedagogic knowledge is insufficient” for learning to be effective for VI learners tutors need to incorporate technology to support learning and this technical knowledge should be an essential element of tutor training. Oyebanji & Idiong (2021) found that tutors were not sufficiently aware of the needs of their VI learners to adapt their teaching and the design of their learning resources. Hess (2019) provides an example, of adopting a constructivist approach to learning, with a focus on a series of group interactions. The tutor introduces a topic related to an authentic and relevant issue, which is followed by discussion, initially in small groups, then disseminated to the wider group. The tutor then supports refining



thinking and further group discussion is followed by individual reflection on outcomes. As a result, learners felt included and treated as equals, they were not reliant on visual information to be able to contribute to discussion.

Where formal lectures including visual information are unavoidable, they are recorded to enable the learners to listen back ensuring that very visual material, such as charts are described, either by the tutor or another learner. In such circumstances, learners need to be supported to make notes efficiently and effectively for them. Griffin- Shirley et al (2023) note that support VI learners benefit from learning about problem solving strategies to help learners to identify problems and opportunities to overcome challenges in a structured manner, both in academic and practical contexts to enable self determination and build motivation. They note that in their experience, learners benefit from a role model who is visually impaired , to increase their understanding and build their self-confidence.

## Summary

“Disability is an individual experience and should not be seen as a label for a person. Every person with a disability has their own needs, capabilities and aspirations, and should be treated with respect, equality and fairness” Urban and Bucsa (2023). It is incumbent upon all staff who interact with VI learners to understand these needs, by developing inclusive systems and processes, undertaking appropriate training and working with the learner to provide support that meets their needs. As a result learners feel empowered and motivated to engage within the learning community.

## Positive Impact and Expected Outcomes

*Use the qualitative and quantitative evidence from your project activity to share the positive impact you have already identified, and what you expect this to be over time. As a practitioner improvement project, the focus is on impact on your professional practice and your organisation's strategy through effective partnership working. It is useful to include quotes and endorsements that provide evidence of the impact shared*

### Outcomes :-

We originally envisaged that the off the job training status on our apprenticeship management software platform would give us a clear impact measure of the project. To really improve the online learning experience, it became very apparent very early into the project that we needed to take a holistic view of the whole learner experience and go right back to the start of the learner journey. By evaluating whether our current onboarding and enrolment conversations and documents were suitably adapted for blind or visually impaired learners we recognised that the project would be far more impactful for the learners taking into account all their online interactions with us. We therefore embarked on a complete review of the whole learner journey from our onboarding and enrolment processes was necessary rather than just reviewing the online teaching, learning and assessment strategies. In order to do this we revisited our programme launch principals:

1. Personalisation - We wanted to ensure that we were personalising the experience and using the skills gap analysis information gathered at the onboarding stage to inform planning of the curriculum ( this was only for those not already in progress) to meet the individual needs of each learner in this SEND cohort. Preparation for these meetings was key to ensure we were able to gather all the necessary details of prior learning and to build

a detailed bespoke learner profile.

2. Potential - We aim to start unlocking learner potential from day one. Having employer support and involvement during the initial onboarding conversations were crucial to shape the off the job hours support provided to the apprentice by the employer in the workplace. By outlining the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the apprenticeship standard to both apprentice and employer they were able to develop their competence and confidence immediately. We aimed for learners to leave each session with a sense of achievement and motivation to succeed. These are being followed up with monthly check in calls with the learners where we updated their support plans.
3. Performance - we set a project plan in motion to work towards enhancing our resources to ensure we provided our case study learner with the necessary tools that will enable them to turn learning into performance that delivers for them.

### **Learner analysis**

At the start of the project our learner cohort consisted of 18 visually impaired learners and 1 registered blind learner of which consisted of 10 female and 9 male learners predominantly of white ethnicity All learners were all aged 19+ (Appendix 1) studying on an apprenticeship programme ranging from Level 3 to Level 7. Each learner was at a different stage of their programme as we enrol on an ongoing basis and are not restricted to learners starting at the beginning of an academic year. The programmes included:

- HR Support Level 3
- Business Administration Level 3
- Assistant Accountant Level 3
- Associate Project Manager Level 4
- Coaching Level 5
- Learning and development Business partner Consultant Level 5
- Operations Manager Level 5
- Accountancy Level 7
- Retail Level 5

At the start the project our data showed that only 47% of this cohort were on track with off the job training. This has now increased to 60%. The breakdown of learner data during the 6 months of the project is as follows:

- 19 learners in our research cohort
- 5 learners have successfully completed their apprenticeship
- 1 learner has been Taped across to another ITP due to a business restructure mid project
- 1 learner has withdrawn from programme due to work commitments
- 2 additional new learners have started on programme throughout the project period
- 14 learners remain on programme



## **Gathering learner feedback**

Although our VI learner cohort is small we felt questionnaire responses could be low, making it difficult to measure impact. We consulted with our Customer Experience Manager who manages our survey processes and they advised that we conduct 121 interviews with each learner for optimum feedback. We received 62% response rate to participate in the learner interviews. These were all carried out in 121 phone calls and our Enrolment team conducted the meetings gathering feedback on a Microsoft form. The responses were as follows:

- 100% of our learners said the online learning materials met their needs.
- 81.8% knew who to contact if they needed any further support with their Apprenticeship.
- 63.6% have had a discussion with their Skills Coach about their personalised learning needs. are making good progress.
- 36.4% of our VI learners felt that would benefit from further support whilst on their apprenticeship programme.

Learner feedback quotes:

" My Skills Coach has been brilliant"

"I have received additional 121's and been offered extra 121's whenever required".

"I am happy with the support provided"

" I Would like more 121's as they have been a huge benefit to my progress"

## **Staff Training**

RNIB awareness training has been delivered for all staff that are involved with VI learners from our sales teams to enrolment and onboarding teams. RNIB provided staff with the knowledge and understanding required to provide the appropriate support for the learners. Following the RNIB training our staff now feel better equipped to plan and prepare effective teaching and learning materials for their sessions which VI learners attend. From a post training survey 100% of staff felt they had achieved their desired learning outcome from the training (Appendix 3).

## **Collaboration with EPAO's**

Early liaison with the EPAO for the learner in our case study was critical to ensure they can support appropriately when the learner enters gateway. Already recognising how much planning time has been required before our case study learner could start their programme we ensured we contacted the EPAO during the enrolment phase to ensure they fully understood the required reasonable adjustment options that would be necessary during end point assessment that also take into account any firewall restrictions for assistive technology (Appendix 7).

## **Learner Platform adaptations and developments**

Innovative approaches were adapted in order to bypass the diagnostic tool for this learner in order for them to access their learner account so as not to hinder their start of learning. Therefore, we are taking a far more holistic approach to the learners experience by including the start of learning within the research. 1 particular learner with total sight loss has been chosen for the case study within this research project where personalised learning is required and we have had to revisit the entire learner journey roadmap and make reasonable

adjustments at every milestone as well as the delivery of programme content in between those milestones.

## **Case Study**

We conducted a systematic analysis of the learner journey for a registered blind learner where significant work was undertaken including 121's, employer calls, regular staff meetings with an overarching project plan to track and monitor progress identifying specific adaptations required for the best start of programme experience.

- Early on in the project we identified that BKSB and BUD are not accessible for learners with VI.
- Working closely with the employer to ensure the learner has meaningful tasks at work that match the programme and the accessibility of software and wider support materials are readily available.

## **Case Study Evidence**

One of our learners with total sight loss agreed to support our research and act as a case study example to improve the learner experience for any future learners. This learner was only familiar with Google meet but can now use Teams as their live workshop learning platform which provides them opportunity to fully interact with their peers in all subject workshops.

Evidence of their prior learning was gathered in order to bypass the initial assessment diagnostic tool which we soon discovered was restrictive for a registered blind learner. We contacted the software provider who confirmed the platform didn't have a built-in screen reading function. They did inform us that they had conducted some trials with two 3rd party software companies. Fortunately, both our registered blind learners have been exempt from completing Functional Skills so this did not hinder their start of learning. However, the learner management platform is linked to only go live on completion of the initial assessment. Therefore, one of very first and swift adaptations required was to create a bespoke BUD account for the learner with a function to bypass the initial assessment.

Therefore, we recognised that taking a far more holistic approach to the learner's experience by including the start of learning within the research was essential to learners success. Following extensive and frequent discussions with our case study learner, we have revisited the entire learner journey roadmap to make the necessary reasonable adjustments at every milestone as well as the delivery of programme content in between those milestones.

## **Unintended outcomes**

In the instance of a blind learner starting the programme at the time we commenced our research we delayed their enrolment as a result of our early findings to ensure the learner had a positive start of journey experience. We have the infrastructure to swiftly respond to the required curriculum adaptations and the learner was still able join his peer group of work colleagues for the first live workshop delivery.

1. In the very early stages of the project we recognised the need to prioritise liaising with software designers from various learner platforms used to highlight accessibility for VI learners. In particular BKSB who provide English and Maths initial assessment and diagnostics for all our learners at the onboarding stage of their learning journey. One of our other key initial hurdles

was to also establish how a blind learner could overcome joining the remote sessions on Teams when they had only used Google meet before and using their accessibility software programme of choice that they were already familiar with that was not compatible with our learning platform software BUD.

2. We reviewed and adapted all our reasonable adjustment and support plan documents. This activity was being conducted as part of a wider project for all Babington learners but our research has raised awareness of the need for specific adaptations to be made within that particular separate project brief. The progress review documentation used on the Bud platform has also undertaken a full review so questioning is more explicit and clear for learners to capture the rich conversations taking place in tripartite reviews. These documents have been converted from PDF to word for compatibility with Jaws software that many of our VI learners use. We produced a guide for all staff (Appendix 2).
3. Our curriculum sequencing also required adaptations to meet the needs of the learners to ensure all learning opportunities are inclusive. Numerous trained conversations took place with the ALS Manager and VI trained staff to ensure the start of learning and subsequent learning experiences were positive and impactful. Sending out learning materials to the learners prior to the live learning workshop experience ensured opportunity for the appropriate pace to be maintained in the live workshops sessions. Any PDF learning materials had to be converted into word for the Jaws software to read the content.

## Project Outputs

*Please list **all** your project outputs, these may include videos, resources, toolkits, or case studies etc. Please note once outputs have been quality assured and reviewed ETF will upload them to a central location for ongoing sector access.*

It is currently too soon to measure how this work will have a long term impact on raising achievement rates as the cohort remains on programme until 2024 but we can see an improvement in retention and have minimised any risk of withdrawals. From our initial project activities we can see an increase in apprentice and employer satisfaction. A recent apprentice meeting took place where the Apprentice met with his Skills Coach who reported the learner has successfully completed his induction and had enjoyed the content of his first workshop and was happy with his support plan and the support being provided.

As a result, we have a much-improved relationships with the Employer. “We are very interested in the training provided to staff at Babington by the RNIB for own staff here at the Cabinet Office”

It is the intention that all project learning is widely disseminated with cross sector colleagues and wider stakeholders, as we work collaboratively to address government ambitions of increasing achievements rates to above 67%, in addition to achieving other quality measures as outlined in the Apprenticeship Accountability Framework and taking onboard Ofsted and Department for Education guidance on what constitutes high quality apprenticeship delivery.

- We have developed a guide for Coaches to support VI learners to use the Bud platform (Appendix 4)
- We have developed a learner self-assessment sheet to be used to guide enrolment and onboarding conversations which can be adapted for pre-class preparation. Creating a self-assessment guide for visually impaired learners involves providing the tools and strategies that enable learners to evaluate their own progress and identify areas for

improvement. The guide is accessible in various formats, such as braille, large print and digital versions compatible with screen readers to ensure it is usable for all visually impaired learners. (Appendix 5)

- We have worked closely with the case study employer to ensure the learner has meaningful tasks at work that match the programme and the accessibility of software and wider support materials are readily available.
- Our staff have completed RNIB training and now have more confidence in providing the appropriate support as a result of the RNIB training and resource review they conducted for us (Appendix 3).
- RNIB have assessed our learning materials and made advisory recommendations as they recognised the importance of the work being carried out.
- We have recruited another blind learner through word-of-mouth recommendation from the recent successful onboarding process since our project started.
  
- Our interviewing process for VI and blind learners is now far more robust enabling us to action feedback about their experience to compare at a later date when skills coaches have received further additional training.
- We have produced a checklist for delivering on line learning to visually impaired learners (Appendix 6).
- We have produced a guide for EPAO's taking into consideration the reasonable adjustments options for assistive technology usage in organisations where there are firewall restrictions (Appendix 7).

### **Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices**

The redesign and adaptations of the course on Teams, utilising a flipped learning approach, by sending slide decks and pre-workshop reading materials allowed students to take responsibility for their own learning and feel fully prepared for the workshop.

Staff have implemented learning tools and strategies shared by RNIB during the training to make the online classroom more inclusive. Staff confidence in using the appropriate tools has greatly improved with tutors becoming proficient in using the Teams platform and learning resources adapted to meet the needs of the VI cohorts in the groups. Members of the delivery team have collaborated to practice using online tools and team meetings have included mini-CPD sessions involving the sharing of tools and resources.

## Future Activity

*This section should follow on from the previous one. If you have identified positive impact, how will you build on this? How will you sustain any positive impact, or what will you do differently and in the future because of your learning and insights from the project*

- We plan to interview all employers about their experience of supporting VI learners in their workplace and Babington's involvement with their employees to assess need for further improvements.
- The future aim of this research would be to develop training aimed specifically at line managers in the workplace who are supporting learners with additional needs in the workplace.
- We will conduct a Skills Coach further training needs assessment to gauge their confidence of supporting VI learners to compare at a later date when further training has been conducted.
- We plan to utilise remaining grant funds to deliver further RNIB training to target any skills gaps for coaches identified in the training needs assessments.
- Deliver training focussed specifically on improving accessibility of all our programme resources via assistive to our learning design team and ALS Coaches with more tailored training for the immediate challenges we are currently facing.
- We have recently recruited 3 Additional Support Coaches to provide more robust support.
- Every learner disclosing an additional learning need or disability will have a conversation about their needs and further investigations and support provided where required. Develop a detailed initial assessment of needs template for in depth conversations to take place with the learner which is detailed on a form and uploaded to our learner platform for members of staff involved in the learners progress to contribute to. The support plan will then be created from this information.
- ALS Coaches to offer teaching and learning strategy support to staff but also 121 support to learners to develop their confidence and independence to enable achievement.
- All apprenticeship programmes are being assessed for accessibility and adapted to integrate with assistive tech software. RNIB have been asked to work on a proposal to assess our programmes following adaptation to reach the highest standards of approval. More work needs to be done with BKS and BUD to understand the accessibility issues learners report that they are facing. Initial contact has been made to raise concerns and request feedback and some progress has been made but further investigation into this is required urgently to support those learners who don't have evidence of GCSE maths and English.
- Website updates will include information regarding the support we provide learners with learning difficulties or disabilities and a commitment to learners that programme content is accessible to above industry standard
- We are conducting a review of our Accessibility Statement for publication on our website later this year.
- Our long term plan is to continue the development of banks of resources available for staff on our new dedicated SEND Internal SharePoint page with information and resources for everything related to Additional Learning Support, ideas for strategies related to various learning difficulties and disabilities and all processes within the business.

## **Recommendations for effective collaborative partnership working to address quality improvement in apprenticeship delivery.**

*Use this section to share your recommendations with other providers based on your learning from your project and partnership working. Try to ensure that your recommendations reflect what you've previously included in your report, so the reader has confidence that your recommendations are based on your project findings. This might be an opening paragraph and then bullet points.*

### **Recommendations:**

#### **1. Stay within the scope of the project**

The breadth and depth of the project was significantly increased, beyond teaching and learning, to capture the whole learner journey from onboarding to end point assessment and all the activities in between. It has been necessary to broaden the scope, as challenges with "operational systems" and administrative elements related to the apprenticeship can materially affect the learning experience and potentially hinder progress. We have identified from this project that the work done to date includes improvements for the entire learner journey. We are recognising we need to look not just at VI learners but all our SEND provision and note that every element of the learner journey should have the flexibility for appropriate reasonable adjustments to be made to meet the individual learner needs.

#### **2. Set out clear employer expectations**

- in terms of in work support where a coworker had intended to support the first live workshop but other work priorities hindered this from happening.

#### **3. Accessible learning Management Systems (LMS)**

During our first test run of accessibility functions the case study learner used the test pilot programme launch link instead of the live link for the first workshop this was swiftly rectified so as not to delay his programme launch start.

- Ensure LMS platforms are designed with accessibility features, including screen reader compatibility, high contrast options and keyboard navigation.
- technology available supports the learning platforms used by the visually impaired learners.
- Use checklist to enrol learners with significant additional needs and in particular who rely on screen reader software (Appendix 4)
- Start conversations regarding EPA adaptations early in the learners journey, especially overcoming firewall restrictions. (Appendix 7)

#### **4. Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Compliance**

- Ensure all online learning content, including text, images, videos, and interactive elements adhere to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards, particularly focusing on contrast ratios, alt text and navigation.
- Check all accessibility options within all the learner platforms are suitable for the range of visual impairment conditions.

## **5. Adaptive Technology Integration**

- Facilitate compatibility with adaptive technologies such as screen readers, magnification software and braille displays. Provide resources and training for users to effectively utilise these tools.

## **6. Clear and Consistent Navigation**

- Employ intuitive navigation structures, providing clear headings, labels, and descriptive links. Avoid cluttered layouts and ensure a logical flow of information.

## **7. Alternative Formats for Materials**

- Provide learning materials in multiple formats, including audio, large print, and electronic Braille, to cater to different preferences and needs.

## **8. Audio Description and Transcripts**

- Include audio descriptions for visual content in videos and provide accurate transcripts on for all multimedia elements that is accessible for screen reader software. This ensures that learners with partial sight or any other learning need or disability can fully comprehend the content.

## **9. Conduct Regular Accessibility Audits**

- Conduct regular accessibility assessments of online learning platforms and content, addressing any identified issues promptly to design with accessibility in mind so all future curriculum modelling will be designed with accessibility of content as a priority. Legacy and existing curriculum models are being updated to reflect a similar level of accessibility.

## **10. Gather User feedback and Involvement**

- Solicit feedback from partially sighted and blind learners and their employers regarding their experiences with online learning platforms. Use this input to make continuous improvements.

## **11. Training and Awareness Programmes**

- Conduct training sessions for instructors, content creators, and administrators on best practices for creating and delivering accessible content. Foster a culture of inclusivity within the educational institution.

## **Conclusion**

By implementing the above recommendations, educational institutions and online learning platforms can significantly enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of their offerings for individuals with partial sight or blind. These measures not only benefit this specific demographic but also contribute to a more universally inclusive learning environment, ultimately enriching the educational experience for all learners



## Where can colleagues find more information?

*Where can colleagues find more information and who could colleagues contact if they want to discuss the project further?*

- RNIB website [RNIB | Homepage of the Royal National Institute for Blind People](#)
- Contact our ALS team [ALS@babington.co.uk](mailto:ALS@babington.co.uk)
- **Guiding a Blind Person. 9 mins**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jqepQ8yASM>
- **Spectrum of Sight Loss. 2.5 mins**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IB7eqyc4-o>

## REFERENCES:

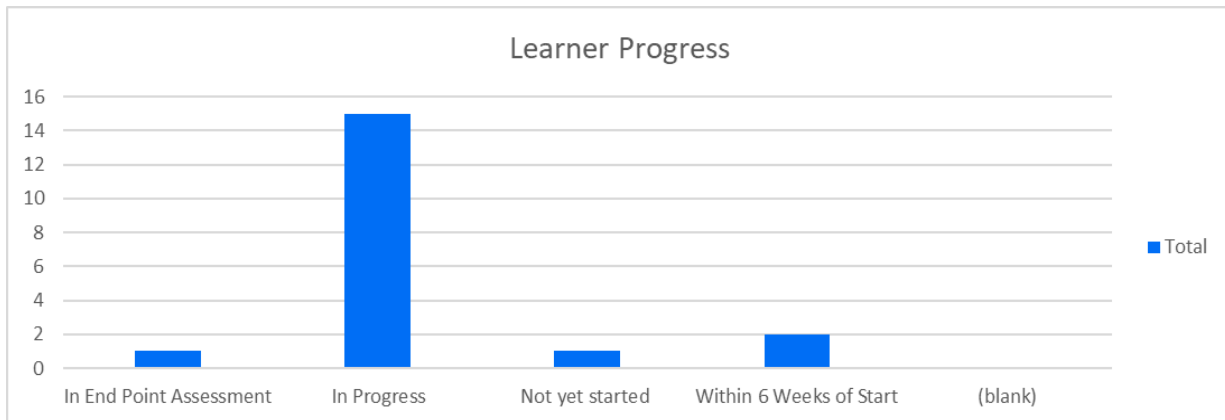
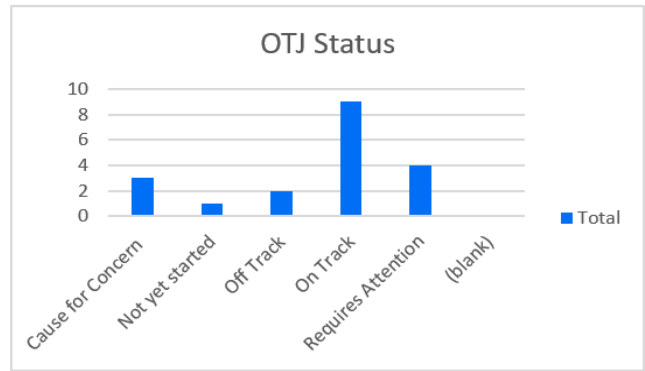
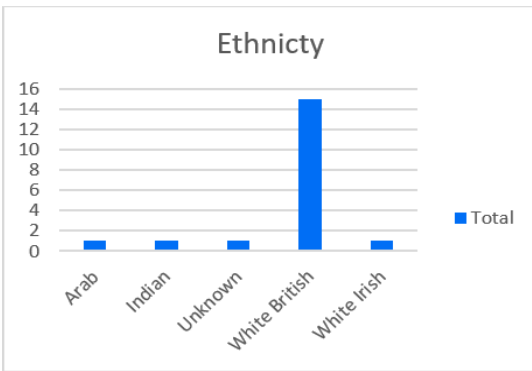
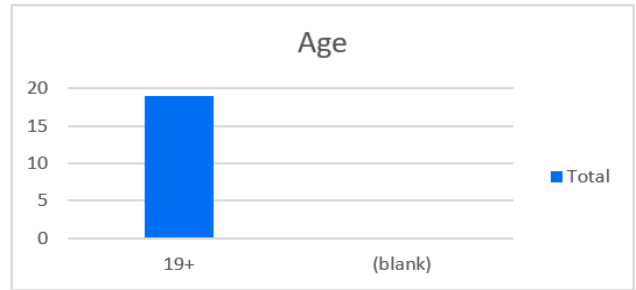
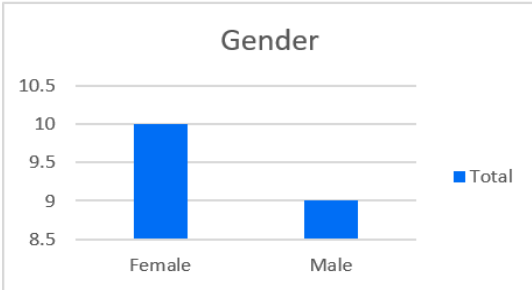
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# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### Data Tables March 2023

Data Tables of our research group:



## Appendix 2

### Supporting learners with visual impairments on bud

#### Bud – How to support learners to access content

Bud has evidence of not being very supportive for learners with accessibility needs, such as visual impairment. Some examples of challenges are:

- Clear understanding of progress and access to bud activities.
- Navigation of the bud platform.

In order to help learners who require support here are a few simple steps to help learners access their content and submit resources for submission.

#### Research & Considerations

1. Create a plan between the learner and Coach on the process of providing the activities as needed to complete and the communication for questions and submission.
2. Coach to access the bud programme, access the relevant activity and copy the 'Summary' and 'Learner instructions' and download any attached documents on the activity that needs actioning by the learner, and paste/attach these on to an email to provide to the learner.
  - i. Be clear and mention that in order to access any links it will ask them to log into bud first, but this will take them straight to the content or download resources needed rather than needing to navigate bud.
  - ii. Coach will need to manually note the submission timeframe that should be detailed on the learners account as well as the OTJ hours if required.
  - iii. If there are any issues with the content there will be a suitable alternative within the LEAD hub [content library](#) that any Babington staff can access. You will need to navigate to the programme the learner is on, ensuring you access the correct version if there are multiple versions of that programme. You can make a request in Faults to Fixes if unsure for support.
3. For submission, for any resources the learner needs to submit as part of a bud activity these will need to be emailed back to the Coach who will need to submit it manually to the corresponding bud activity.
4. Communication for any feedback this should be done on a call or via emails, this shouldn't be done in bud due to navigation challenges. Any email communication about activities, on feedback and support, should be copied and pasted into the bud activity 'Submission & Messages' in order to track for compliancy, once conversation has concluded for the activity.

#### Summary of guidance:

This guidance is to help Coaches to support learners with visual impairment needs and how to provide the agreed bud activities for them to learn and to submit resources that they would need to complete

## Appendix 3

### Staff feedback tables after completing RNIB training

ID	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	That sometimes it may be easy to make assumptions that a blind person automatically needs your help.
2	anonymous	the acronym SCULPT - to improve the accessibility of training materials
3	anonymous	Understanding how digital tools work and function with Screen Reading software and advice on how to best set these up
4	anonymous	During the training I learnt how to share experiences with an individual who is blind/VI. (During an enrolment meeting when asking the individuals line manager a question, the line manager nodded, I then said aloud "I can see you are nodding, thank you".

ID	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	More detail on assistive technology options and availability
2	anonymous	Nothing to add it was a brilliantly executed session, I was completely focused throughout which is kudos to

		the delivery from the teacher and the great session content. Well done !
3	anonymous	It was a fantastic experience. I think the only thing that could have been improved was extending the session to three hours and to do some of the activities in person; I understand this would be difficult to do, so for a virtual only session it was really educational and beneficial to do my job.
4	anonymous	I really enjoyed this workshop and cant see how this could have been improved. I enjoyed using the app that was discussed to see what a blind/VI individual may experience.

## Appendix 4

### Learner with screen reader software checklist for enrolment: example for registered blind learner enrolling

Action	Status	Next steps	Responsible
Request programme evaluation from accessibility from LEAD with actions and timeline		Continue to adapt resources for each month of learning	<i>ALS Manager and LEAD Director</i>
Offer needs assessment with ALS Coach for further detail. Plan to be created		Update monthly	<i>ALS Manager</i>
Request extension of programme from DM in line with ALS needs assessment		Monitor progress to ensure completion within time frame agreed	<i>Skills coach and Delivery Manager</i>
Ensure HOD, PC and DM are all aware of need and discuss with ST and SC before enrolment.		On-going discussions	<i>Skills coach, specialist trainer and ALS Coach</i>
Ensure evidence of GCSE maths and English as BKSB not compatible (researching this).		Evidence confirmed	<i>Programme enrolment consultant and ALS Manager</i>
Ask systems to create BUD account without BKSB.		None	<i>Learning Systems and ALS Manager</i>
Send skills scan to learner and line manager to review and complete prior to enrolment.		Update in reviews	<i>Programme enrolment consultant and Specialist trainer</i>
Confirm Programme Launch date with learner		Enrolled	<i>HOD, DM and Programme enrolment consultant</i>
Learner to have supported enrolment with RNIB trained member of staff.		None	<i>Programme enrolment consultant and ALS Manager</i>
Convert documents to sign from PDF to word using online converter. Once complete, open in word and use accessibility checker to ensure the document is fully accessible to the learner.		None	<i>Programme enrolment Consultant</i>
Send documents to sign via email for confirmation – signable not compatible		Learner confirms agreement	<i>Programme enrolment Consultant</i>
Hand over to ALS Coach to ensure support continues and is reviewed monthly		Claim LSF funding	<i>ALS Manager</i>

*Italic text for example purposes only*



## Appendix 5

### Visually Impaired Learner Self-Assessment guide

Welcome to the Visually impaired learner Self-Assessment Guide. This guide is designed to help you evaluate your own progress and identify area where you might need additional support. Remember, self-assessment is an essential skill for becoming an independent learner.

#### Instructions:

Record your answers to each of the following questions to discuss with your Skills Coach

**1. Advocacy and Communication:**

Are you comfortable discussing adaptations with us?

Consider how well you communicate your needs to peers, teachers and support staff

Share tips for advocating for yourself and seeking the appropriate adaptations where necessary

**2. Understanding your visual Impairment:**

Describe you specific visual impairment (e.g. low vision, blindness, colour blindness)

Describe how it affects your daily life and learning experiences

**3. Accessible tools and resources:**

Reflect on any assistive technologies or tools you currently use

Are you comfortable using screen readers, magnification software, braille devices or other tools?

**4. Share effective study techniques that work for you:**

Describe how you adapt to the online learning environments

**5. Reading and Comprehension:**

Are the study resources in the right format for you?

**6. Note taking:**

Are you using effective strategies such as audio recording, braille notes, or digital note taking apps?

**7. Understanding your learning goals:**

What are your short term learning goals for your educational development?

What has worked well for you this week?

**8. Reflect on your Time Management skills :**

How effectively are you managing your study time? Are you allocating enough time to study?

**9. Reflect on your Organisational Skills:**

Evaluate your organisational skills. Are you keeping track of your assignments, deadlines and resources effectively?

## Appendix 6

### Checklist for delivering online learning to Visually impaired learners:

Action	Status	Responsibility
Complete needs assessment for learner to understand their requirements for additional support		
Be aware of any assistive technology the learner uses		
Ensure compatibility with learner software and organisations online platforms		
Ensure all online learning content, including text, images, videos, and interactive elements adhere to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards, particularly focusing on contrast ratios, alt text and navigation		
Employ intuitive navigation structures, providing clear headings, labels, and descriptive links. Avoid cluttered layouts and ensure a logical flow of information as well as clear language and avoidance of abbreviations and jargon - use this guidance as a starting point <a href="#">Everyone can SCULPT for Accessibility   AbilityNet</a>		
Provide learning materials in multiple formats, including audio, large print, and electronic Braille if required, to cater to different preferences and needs		
For learners who don't use commercial screen readers but who may benefit from the options available – check accessibility settings in various programmes such as Office 365 - <a href="https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility">https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility</a> or download NVDA for free <a href="https://www.nvaccess.org/download/">https://www.nvaccess.org/download/</a>		
Conduct training sessions for delivery staff, support staff, content creators and administrators on best practices for creating and delivering accessible content and supporting learners. Foster a culture of inclusivity within the educational institution.		
Be aware of any firewall restrictions in the organization that may limit screen reader accessibility to organization platforms of remote exams		
Make sure EPAO is aware of learner accessibility requirements to ensure all resources provided are compatible with screen reader or there are other options available – last resort is to copy and paste content into word document		
Solicit feedback from partially sighted and blind learners and their employers regarding their experiences with online learning platforms. Use this input to make continuous improvements.		

## Appendix 7

### EPAO reasonable adjustments options for assistive technology usage in organisations with firewall restrictions:

#### Option 1 – Online - remote invigilation

- **Format:** Requires a personal device with Dragon software downloaded – this is your responsibility
- **Location:** Can be taken in any quiet place free from distractions without strong firewall eg, home
- **Invigilator:** Highfields provide invigilator
- **Reader and scribe:** Learner can use the software, but must know how to turn off reading features for reading exam and dictation features for writing exam – this will be checked by invigilator
- **Rest breaks:** Learner **MUST** remain in front of camera at ALL times. If learner leaves view of the camera, the exam can be invalidated

#### Option 2 – On line – in person invigilator

- **Format:** Requires a personal device with Dragon software downloaded – this is your responsibility
- **Location:** Can be taken in any quiet place free from distractions without strong firewall e.g., home
- **Invigilator:** Invigilator from your place of work **CAN** be used
- **Reader and scribe:** Learner can use the software, but must know how to turn off reading features for reading exam and dictation features for writing exam – this will be checked by invigilator
- **Rest breaks:** Rest breaks away from desk **CAN** be taken

#### Option 3 – On screen – in person invigilator

- **Format:** Requires any device that can access the assessment but **WONT** have Dragon software downloaded
- **Location:** Can be taken in any quiet place free from distractions eg, office meeting room or home
- **Invigilator:** Invigilator from your place of work **CAN** be used
- **Reader and scribe:** Learner to have a reader for the writing exam. Able to type answers, no scribe is required. Reader must **NOT** read any questions in the reading exam
- **Rest breaks:** Rest breaks away from desk **CAN** be taken

#### Option 4 – Paper based – in person invigilator

- **Format:** Traditional paper based exam
- **Location:** Taken in a quiet place free from distractions eg, office meeting room or home
- **Invigilator:** Invigilator from your place of work **CAN** be used

- **Reader and scribe:** In-person reader for the writing exam, and scribe for the reading exam to be provided by organisation – no training required – but must follow Highfields guidelines
- **Rest breaks:** Rest breaks away from desk **CAN** be taken

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