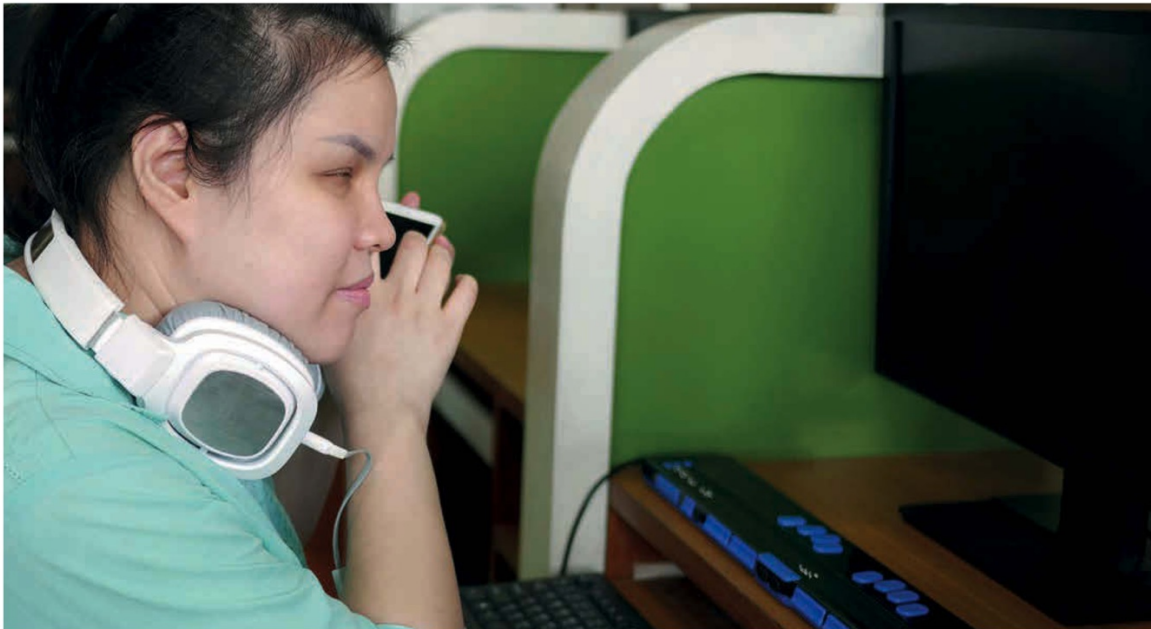


# IN FOCUS



## Seeing skills, not sight loss

**Andrew McClean** explores the findings of a report into unemployment among people who are blind or visually impaired and what can be done to improve their prospects

**A** Vision Foundation report has found an employment gap of 48% between people living with sight loss and the general population.

It said that employers saw the disability and not the skills of people who were blind or partially sighted.

There were two million people in the UK living with sight loss, of which 424,000 were of working age (18-64) with only one in four in employment from this age group.

The Vision Foundation's See My Skills report was carried out by the University of Birmingham's Department of Disability Inclusion and Special Needs.

The charity highlighted the statistics around unemployment and sight loss as well as its plan to improve opportunities.

It was commissioned to better

understand what factors contributed towards positive employment outcomes for blind and partially sighted people.

Lord David Blunkett, vice president of the Vision Foundation, said: 'The statistics are very dis-

found that 23% of employers say they are not willing to make adaptations to employ someone with visual impairment, despite legal obligations and the technological and other support available. We need immediate action from the

rising tide of unemployment for blind and partially sighted people.

'It's a tragedy for the individual because they're not getting to use their talents and become independent and it's a tragedy for society, as we're spending money propping people up when they could be propping us up,' Blunkett said.

The Vision Foundation's report found only 27% of working age people who are blind and partially sighted were employed compared to 51% of disabled people (excluding sight loss) and 75% of the general population.

Only 30% of employers were confident their recruitment processes were accessible to blind or partially sighted people and 90% of employers said it would be difficult or impossible to employ a visually impaired person.

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**"We need immediate action from the public, private and charitable sectors to change this shocking situation."**

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turbing. Unemployment contributes hugely to the costs of sight loss in the UK, which is estimated to be £28 billion a year; more than heart disease, cancer and stroke combined.

'Blind and partially sighted people are hidden victims of discrimination. Recent research

public, private and charitable sectors to change this shocking situation.'

Blunkett said it was about understanding what people can and cannot do, as well as the practicalities of giving people the tools so they can do the job. He added that UK employers must act to tackle